



Looking Like Christ, Seeing Like Christ

Christian Spiritual Formation and Biblical Worldview Development
in the Christian School

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Spiritual formation and worldview development are two concepts often cited by Christian schools as primary reasons for their existence. Unfortunately, there is a lack of clarity surrounding what they are, how they relate to one another, and how students can be nurtured in them. Ongoing discussions about these concepts are crucial if we are to improve at the task of equipping young Christians to be exceptional leaders.

Biblical worldview development is not a single event that occurs in a worldview class. Rather, it is a lifelong process.

Christian Spiritual Formation

Christian spiritual formation is the shaping of a person's spirit—that part of a person that is eternal, and which, when rightly formed, will resemble Christ. According to Dallas

Willard (2002), the spirit is the control center of a person. It is the place from which a person lives life, and is synonymous with the biblical term "heart."

Christian spiritual formation is an inner work of transformation resulting in Christlikeness (Meye 1994; Mulholland 1993), which is ultimately exercising one's will to choose behaviors that faithfully reflect Jesus' ways. Biblical worldview development is not a single event that occurs in a worldview class. Rather, it is a lifelong process of learning to understand and relate to one's external world in ways that reflect God's sovereignty over all reality. Proper worldview development results in *shalom* with the created order, and its goal is thinking and acting consistent with how things really are (Lockerbie 1989).

When Christian spiritual formation is happening, students will increasingly look more like Christ. A key verse for Christian spiritual formation is Galatians 4:19, where Paul refers to his

Galatian friends as, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” Christian spiritual formation happens when young students are guided to control their tongues and see the impact of speaking words of life to their friends, or when teenagers take active steps to implement a daily quiet time with the Lord.

Biblical Worldview Development

Biblical worldview development is the process by which individuals grow in their active commitment to, and understanding of, a perspective on reality and life that is shaped by the Bible (Pearcey 2004; Phillips, Brown, and Stonestreet 2008). Immanuel Kant was the first to examine the concept of worldview in a systematic way (Naugle 2002). He likened a person’s worldview to a “supersensible substrate” (Kant 1790/1987), an unseen networks of ideas that provide foundation and nourishment to a person’s life. These ideas include a person’s conclusions concerning such questions as, “What are humans?” “What is ultimate reality?” “What is the meaning of history?” and “What is the ‘good life?’” A biblical worldview is a substrate saturated with God’s Word, so that one’s answers to these questions (and others) are consistent with God’s written revelation of the way things really are.

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When biblical worldview development is happening, people will increasingly see things like Christ sees things. A key verse for biblical worldview development is Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Worldview development happens when a teacher helps a second grader understand that God put the stars in their places and that He holds all things (including the stars) together. It happens when a high schooler learns biblically affirmed solutions to the real problems in the community.

Christian Spiritual Formation and Biblical Worldview Development

Through my research on worldview development in emerging adults, I’ve come to understand Christian spiritual formation and biblical worldview development as distinct but closely related processes. They involve looking like Christ and seeing like Christ: experiencing the progressive transformation of one’s internal reality while having one’s perception of external reality transformed to be consistent with the way things really are. In speaking with dozens of emerging adults, I have found that the two concepts are so intertwined that one can hardly answer a question about one without also referring to the other.

Christian spiritual formation occurs as a person engages the loving overtures of God, embracing the shaping force of His grace through proper response to trials and temptations and through training via the spiritual disciplines (Willard 2002). Biblical worldview development occurs when one studies God’s revelation through Scripture and creation in order to understand and respond to reality as Christ did, aided by a community of like-minded peers and mentors who model living, moving, and having their being from a God-saturated substrate (Garber 1997).

Education is about shaping and creating certain kinds of people (Smith 2009), and we ought to be giving significant attention and energy to both of these developmental processes in our students, helping them live in conscious, willing alignment with God’s sovereignty in both their inner and outer universes. These are lofty ends, and require means that are not often discussed in any thoughtful manner in our schools. A helpful starting place would be to examine our philosophies of education, our pedagogies, and our school cultures and structures to make them more favorable to the transformation of our students’ spirits and perspectives. Major effort will need to be expended toward these ends if we intend to become more effective at nurturing students who actually look and see like Christ in a culture that is shaped by ungodliness and which views all reality through false and deceptive philosophies.

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