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The Integration of Worldview and Vocation

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For centuries, the vast majority of human beings throughout the world have approached life by way of an integrated worldview. Whether Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, Christian, or other, religious adherents have taken their religious framework to be the very core of their entire way of thinking, seeing, and living. One's religion was not taken to be a piece of the pie; it was the leaven for the entire pie itself.

In contemporary western secular democracies, all that has changed. Today people lead fragmented lives. In particular, Christians have internalized a secular/sacred separation in which their Christian life is seen as a tack-on to a life defined in secular terms. For them, Christianity is another piece of the pie. They play, work, vote, and approach money the same way their non-Christian friends do. The main difference between them and those non-Christian friends is that they have an additional compartment—a spiritual compartment—that others lack, a distinctive set of Christian activities, jargon, beliefs, and behaviors that stay tucked safely away in that closet known as the spiritual life, except, perhaps, for a certain amount of moral leakage into the rest of the pie that is their life. It is not that most contemporary Christians are trying to let their Christianity be leaven for the entire pie, but they just fall short. No, apart from rare exceptions, they do not try because they have not been taught to do so.

If you think I am wrong about this, then consider two things. First, the church growth movement and seeker sensitive churches. No doubt, there is some good to these phenomena and, most certainly, its practitioners are well-meaning. But, to be frank, in actual practice if not in theory, these represent attempts to let unbelievers retain their secular ways of life with minimal adjustment and still “attend church” and be Christians. Second, consider Sunday School class. When was the last time you heard of classes offered for the quarter that were divided into things folk do for a living—classes for health care people only, business folk only, scientists, those interested in education, and so on? In addition, far too often, at Christian schools and colleges, academic subjects and majors are taught in the same way they are approached in secular contexts, except they begin and end class with prayer.

Our evangelistic, discipleship, enfolding, and educational practices in the body of Christ are continuing to foster the secular/sacred separation that remains an oddity when compared to most people in human history. In the 1960's and 70's there were Marxist history, literature, sociology, economics, and psychology professors. They did not teach their subjects just as others did except for adding a section in the course on Marxism. No, they were Marxist history

professors and so forth. Today we have Feminist literature professors, Lesbian sociologists, but where are the Christian physicists, historians, and so forth? Thankfully, there are some around, but compared to our numbers, they are the exception that proves the rule. Without intending to do so, the very way we evangelize and disciple folk produces fragmented believers who, without knowing it, are part of what keeps the Christian faith marginalized in the broader culture. The fact that we have to place such a major emphasis on evangelistic meetings (and these are good things in themselves) bears testimony to the fact that Jesus Christ and Christian worldview topics are not coming up as a matter of course in the hour-to-hour lives of Jesus' disciples as they interface with those who are part of their “secular” lives.

What can we do about this? Happily, a great deal. But for our purposes, it is important to see that, by its very nature, Christian schools are positioned in the body of Christ to lead the way towards a solution to the secular/sacred dichotomy. By gaining skills in worldview thinking and by recapturing the notion of vocation in place of the contemporary idea of a job, Christian faculty can shape the souls of a new generation of disciples, and impact no small number of parents in the process, towards the promotion of an integrated Christian worldview where Christ is Lord over all of life, instead of regent over one small compartment. In what follows, I hope to offer some insight about these matters. I shall begin by discussing the nature of a worldview in the contemporary context and finish with a description of vocation and the way worldview thinking relates to it.

Worldview Thinking in the Contemporary Context

What exactly is a worldview? *A worldview is the set of beliefs a person accepts, most importantly, beliefs about reality, knowledge, and value, along with the various support relations among those beliefs, the person's experiences and the person himself.* One belief P stands in a support relation with another belief or experience Q just in case one accepts P on the basis of accepting Q. For example, P could be the doctrine of justification by faith and Q the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Acceptance of the latter is what justifies one in accepting the former. The important thing here is to note that among the various beliefs of a worldview, some are more important than others in the sense that they provide support to large portions of one's worldview. Not all beliefs are created equally. In general, the more deeply important a belief is, the more one would have to re-adjust one's worldview if he or she abandoned the belief in question. Belief in the

existence of God is more deeply important to a Christian worldview than is, say, belief in a young or old earth.

Two things should be kept in mind as one teaches about worldviews. First, we should be very careful not to characterize a worldview as a set of presuppositions. I cannot go into detail here about the nature of a presupposition, but often, when people talk about presuppositions, an air of arbitrariness is associated with them. The impression is given that different worldviews are merely different presuppositions, different presuppositions are merely different starting points, and different starting points must simply be chosen, perhaps, chosen by blind faith. Perhaps one reason for giving this impression is the mistaken notion that a worldview is all encompassing in the sense that it determines all facts, interpretations, reasons, etc. such that there is nothing outside the worldview that could, in principle, support it and be used to adjudicate between competing worldviews. If, at the end of the day, adopting one worldview over another comes down to a blind faith commitment, an arbitrary choice, then we are all in trouble insofar as we attempt to be reasonable and truth-seeking in our worldview considerations. I also think it is a lazy man's way out to boil everything down to a presupposition. If we can get away with saying that atheistic evolutionists and Christian creationists differ ultimately in their presuppositions, then we are spared the job of digging into the details of the issues.

Second, we should be careful not to communicate to people that, somehow or other, they are trapped behind their worldview and can't get out to see the way the world is. This is sometimes put by saying that a worldview is like glasses and we see things *through* our worldview. In this sense, there is no direct confrontation, no immediate experience with facts; there are only interpreted facts. This line of thought leads almost directly to postmodernism or to some other form of relativism and it should be avoided. In the definition above, I left room for a person's experiences to play a support role in one's worldview. It is on the basis of a sensory experience that I am justified in believing my computer is in the room. It is on the basis of a first person introspective experience that I am justified in believing I am in pain. It is on the basis of a rational intuition that I am justified in believing the law of non-contradiction is true. And so forth. We do have direct access to reality by way of experience and, in fact, various forms of experience—note, not simply sense experience—are more basic to us than concepts or beliefs. Experiences provide direct access to facts and, thus, provide a source of evidence for adjudicating between competing worldviews. So while a worldview strongly affects, shapes, and directs what we see, it does not determine what we can see in some absolute sense such that we are trapped behind our worldviews.

In sum, when we teach worldview considerations to students, we do not want to communicate to them that worldviews are, in some sense, arbitrary, irrational leaps rooted in a choice of the will, unaided by the resources of one's various sensory and rational faculties.

Currently, there is a three-way worldview struggle in our culture among ethical monotheism (especially Christianity), scientific naturalism, and postmodernism. I cannot undertake here a detailed characterization of these worldviews, but I want to say a word about them and their role in shaping the task of the Christian teacher.

First, scientific naturalism is the view that the physical cosmos that science studies is all there is. Scientific naturalism has two central components, one metaphysical and one epistemological. Metaphysically, scientific naturalism implies that everything that exists is composed of matter or emerges out of matter when it achieves a suitable complexity. Epistemologically, it implies that physical science is the only, or at least, a vastly superior way of gaining knowledge.

For the Christian teacher who is sensitive to worldview issues, these two components must be met head on. We must show our students that there are a number of things that exist that are not physical: God, the souls of men and beasts, consciousness, virtues such as love and kindness, aesthetic beauty, various kinds of normative judgments, the laws of logic, mathematical numbers, theories (yes, theories are mental entities in people's minds!), and so forth. We must also show that there is knowledge to be gained outside the hard sciences. *Immaterial reality and non-empirical knowledge are two key items of focus for the Christian teacher who is sensitive to worldview struggles.*

Today, there is a decided pecking order between science and the humanities. This has to stop. Science is one way to gain knowledge. But, today, people have the idea that it is the only way, with the result that art, theology, history, literature, etc. are viewed as disciplines that provide mere opinions and not knowledge. We must work hard to elevate the humanities and other disciplines outside the hard sciences to the level of those sciences in our view of them as sources of knowledge and truth.

The second worldview is postmodernism. This is a very complicated set of ideas and no short characterization of it would be entirely adequate. Still, it may safely be said that postmodernism is a form of cultural relativism. According to postmodernism, truth/falsehood, real/unreal, right/wrong, rational/irrational, good/bad are dichotomies that are relative to different linguistic communities. What is true, real, and so forth for one community may not be so for another.

We must resist postmodernism like the plague that it is. There are two things central to Christian teaching in light of the threat of postmodernism: the nature of truth and the

objectivity of rationality. First, we need to teach students what truth is. A biblical and commonsense understanding of truth will include what is called a correspondence theory of truth according to which truth is when things are the way one takes (thinks, says, believes) them to be. Truth is a relationship of correspondence between a proposition (sentence, statement, belief, etc.; hereafter, simply proposition) and reality. The proposition “Grass is green” is true just in case things really are the way the proposition says they are, namely, if grass is actually green. “Unicorns live in Montana” is true just in case unicorns actually live in Montana.

The notion of absolute truth has two different nuances today. The first one simply places emphasis on the fact that a proposition is true and not relative, that is, not made true for an individual or group by virtue of the fact that the individual or group accepts the proposition. In this sense, to say “Grass is green” is an absolute truth is just to say it is true, nothing more, nothing less (except to emphasize the point that the statement is not to be taken in the relativistic sense).

A second notion of “absolute truth” is a dangerous one. In this sense, a proposition is true just in case it both corresponds to reality (and so fits the first nuance) and is something about which a person has absolute, 100% certainty. This second nuance should be rejected because it confuses what it is for something to be true with one’s certainty that it is true. For example, there is a difference between whether or not it is true that Smith committed a murder or that God exists on the one hand, and one’s certainty in light of the evidence that it is actually true. The former had to do with whether or not the proposition corresponds to reality; the latter involves the status of the overall evidence for the proposition. When we teach students the correspondence theory of truth and go on to assert that certain things are true, we are making no claim about our degree of certainty or about the status of the evidence for the assertion. Taking something to be true is one thing, assessing the grounds for the assertion is another, and we want to be clear about the differences when we teach students the nature of truth itself. *Whether or not a proposition is true has nothing at all to do with our evidence for the proposition. It is simply a matter of whether or not the proposition corresponds to reality. Evidence figures into the situation when it comes to assessing the rationality of the alleged truth. It is irrelevant to what it would mean for the proposition to be true in the first place.*

The second notion currently under assault by postmodernists is the notion of objective rationality. It often happens in secular contexts that when a Christian takes a position on something, say the resurrection of Jesus or a prolife stance regarding the unborn, the response is that the Christian is biased, not objective, and thus, disqualified from claiming the support of evidence and reason for

his/her stance. If this move is correct, it would have the effect of cutting off at the knees any attempt by a Christian to support with argumentation anything that follows from a Christian worldview. What can be said about this issue?

As a first step towards a solution, we need to draw a distinction between psychological and rational objectivity. Psychological objectivity is the absence of bias, a lack of commitment either way on a topic. Do we ever have psychological objectivity? Yes, we do, typically, in areas we have no interest in or we have not thought about. When I went to seminary I was psychologically objective about a number of important theological topics because I did not have a clue about the issues. But note carefully two things about psychological objectivity. For one thing, it is not necessarily a virtue. It is if one has not thought deeply about an issue and has no convictions regarding it. But as one develops thoughtful, intelligent convictions about a topic, it would be wrong to remain “unbiased”, that is, uncommitted regarding it. Otherwise, what role would study and evidence play in the development of a one’s approach to life? Should one remain “unbiased” that cancer is a disease, that rape is wrong, that the New Testament was written in the first century, that there is design in the universe, if one has discovered good reasons for each believe? No, one should not. For another thing, while it is possible to be psychologically objective in some cases, most people are not psychologically objective regarding the vast majority of the things they believe. In these cases, it is crucial to teach students that a lack of bias does not matter, nor does it cut one off from presenting and arguing for one’s convictions. *Why? Because a lack of psychological objectivity does not imply a lack of rational objectivity and it is the latter that matters most, not the former.*

To understand this, we need to get clear on the notion of rational objectivity. One has rational objectivity just in case one can discern the difference between genuinely good and bad reasons for a belief and holds to the belief for genuinely good reasons. The important thing here is that bias does not eliminate a person’s ability to assess the reasons for something. Bias may make it more difficult, but not impossible. If bias made rational objectivity impossible, then no teacher—atheist, Christian, or whatever—could responsibly teach any view the teacher believed on any subject! Nor could the teacher teach opposing viewpoints, because he/she would be biased against them!

By way of application, a Christian can lack psychological objectivity regarding the existence of God, the resurrection of Jesus, and so forth, and still have and present good reasons for the empty tomb, the reality of God and the like. Rational objectivity is possible even if psychological objectivity is not present and this is what makes civil debate, rational dialog, and the development of thoughtful convictions possible! When a Christian tries to present objectively good reasons for a position and is greeted with

a claim of disqualification on the grounds of bias, the proper response is this: Tell the other person that he have changed the subject from the issue to the messenger, that while the Christian appreciates the attention and focus on his inner drives and motives, he thinks that the dialog should get refocused on the strength of the case just presented. Perhaps at another time they could talk about each other's personal motivations and drives, but for now, a case, a set of arguments has been presented and a response to those arguments is required.

It is time for Christians to stop being bullied in the public square and we can help train non-defensive ambassadors for Christ by clarifying for our students the nature of truth and the objectivity of reason. The current worldview struggle demands that we target these in our teaching. I now turn to the issue of worldview and vocation.

Worldview and Vocation

A Christian school is not a place where academic subjects are taught the same way that a secular school teaches them, the only difference being that the Christian school adds a set of Bible classes, chapel, and a behavioral code. No, the Christian school is deeply committed to teaching its subjects from a distinctively Christian point of view. Moreover, the Christian school is preparing students for Christian vocations, not jobs.

As a student grows, he/she learns to see, feel, think, desire, believe, and behave the way Jesus does in a manner fitting to the kingdom of God and the disciple's own station in life. With God's help, I seek to live as Jesus would if he were I, e.g., if he were a philosophy professor at Biola University married to Hope and father of Ashley and Allison.

Two important implications flow from the nature of discipleship. For one thing, as I have already noted, the Lordship of Christ is holistic. The religious life is not a special compartment in an otherwise secular life. Rather, the religious life is an entire way of life. To live Christianly is to allow Jesus Christ to be the Lord of every aspect of my life. There is no room for a secular/sacred separation in the life of Jesus' followers.

Further, as a disciple of Jesus, I do not have a job, I have a vocation and if I go to college, I go to find and become excellent in my vocation, not simply to find a job. A job is a means for supporting myself and those for whom I am responsible. For the Christian, a vocation (from the Latin "vocare" which means "to call") is an overall calling from God. Harry Blamires correctly draws a distinction between a general and a special vocation:

"The general vocation of all Christians—indeed of all men and women—is the same. We are called to live as children of God, obeying his will in all things. But obedience to God's will must inevitably take many different forms. The wife's mode of obedience is not the

same as the nun's; the farmer's is not the same as the priest's. By 'special vocation', therefore, we designate God's call to a man to serve him in a particular sphere of activity."¹

What is often neglected in our models of discipleship and education, and thus, that upon which I wish to focus is the notion of a special vocation which, hereafter, I will refer to simply as a vocation. A vocation includes a job but it is much, much more. It is the specific role I am to play in life and it includes the sum total of my natural talents, spiritual gifts, and historical circumstances providentially bestowed on me by God.

An important part of a believer's vocation is his subject of major in college or his main form of work as a career. If we are to be integrated, holistic Christians who make an impact on the world, we need to learn how to be Christian doctors, school teachers, lawyers, business persons, and so forth. However, if a student waits until college to begin to think about academic subjects in this way, it may be too late.

This means that one of the chief advantages of going to a Christian school prior to college is that the student will already have a chance to study various academic subjects from a distinctively Christian point of view and with an eye on what it would look like to choose a vocation related to those subjects. Of course, this means that Christian schools must teach their various subjects with these two things in mind:

1. How can this subject matter be presented from a Christian perspective?
2. How can this course be presented in such a way that it envisions students to consider the topic as a possible calling from God?

Unfortunately, this approach to academic subjects is seldom made available to people. Awhile ago I talked to a recent college graduate who had been heavily involved in a parachurch ministry in college. His major was cultural anthropology. After discussing his college studies with him for about thirty minutes, I quickly saw that his professors were extremely hostile to Christianity in the way they trained people in their department. This person was committed to sharing his faith, to sexual purity before marriage, and to having a regular quiet time. But some of the things he believed—including moral relativism regarding the nature of sexuality and the permissibility of same-sex marriage—were simply not consistent with a life of dedication to Christ. The model of spiritual growth he had followed in college was not holistic and Jesus was not the Lord of his vocation. This type of thing should not happen to someone as devoted to Christ as was he. His problem was not a bad heart, it was a misinformed picture of commitment to Christ.

If we are to be Christians in our vocations we will have to develop a Christian mind in and about those vocations and we must train our students with the same mind set. To understand what I mean here, we need to draw a distinction between *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* issues in one's vocation. An extrinsic issue is one that is part of one's general Christian vocation but which has nothing specifically to do with one's particular career or station in life. We evangelicals have done a decent job at working on these extrinsic issues. For example, we have sought to train people to share their faith at work and to be godly examples in the way they conduct themselves. But note carefully that neither of these—evangelism nor godly living—has anything specifically to do with, say, being a physical education teacher as opposed to being a therapist. What we desperately need is a renewed commitment to training people about intrinsic issues: learning to think and live Christianly regarding issues specific to what I do in my career.

Here are some examples of the need to develop an integrated world view about issues intrinsic to different fields of study or careers:

1. A biblical exegete becomes aware of how much her own cultural background shapes what she can see in the biblical text, and she begins to wonder whether meanings might not reside in the interpretation of a text and not in the text itself. She also wonders if certain hermeneutical methodologies may be inappropriate given the nature of the Bible as revelation.
2. A psychologist reads literature regarding identical twins who are reared in separate environments. He notes that they usually exhibit similar adult behavior. He then wonders if there is really any such thing as freedom of the will, and if not, he ponders what to make of moral responsibility and punishment.
3. A political science or history teacher reads John Rawls's *Theory of Justice* and grapples with the idea that society's primary goods could be distributed in such a way that those on the bottom get the maximum benefit even if people on the top have to be constrained. He wonders how this compares with a meritocracy wherein individual merit is rewarded regardless of social distribution. Several questions run through his mind: What is the state? How should a Christian view the state and the church? What is justice, and what principles of social ordering ought we to adopt? Should one seek a Christian state or merely a just state?
4. A counselor learns of specific correlations between certain brain functions and certain feelings of pain,

and she puzzles over the question of whether or not there is a soul or mind distinct from the brain.

5. An missionary notes that cultures frequently differ over basic moral principles and wonders whether or not this proves that there are no objectively true moral values that transcend culture.
6. A businessman notices that the government is not adequately caring for the poor. He discusses with a friend the issue of whether or not businesses have corporate moral responsibilities or whether only individuals have moral responsibility. He also wonders what the Bible says about capitalism and how capitalism differs from consumerism.
7. An engineer learns Euclidean geometry and some of its alternatives and goes on to ask if mathematics is a field that really conveys true knowledge about a subject matter or if it merely offers internally consistent formal languages expressible in symbols. If the former, then what is it that mathematics describes? If mathematical entities exist and are timeless, in what sense did God create them?
8. An education major is asked to state his philosophy of education. In order to do this, he must state his views of human nature, truth, how people learn, the role of values in education, and so on. He wonders how his Christian convictions inform these issues.

In each of the cases listed above, there is a need for the person in question, if he or she is a Christian, to think hard about the issue in light of the need for developing a Christian worldview. I now want to suggest five different intrinsic issues that we Christians need to address as we attempt to think through our vocations in light of our Christian worldview.

Before I do, however, it is important to realize that not all fields of study or career paths are equally in need of thinking Christianly. For example, a Christian psychologist, history teacher, or doctor will need to be more carefully integrated as a Christian than, say, a Christian civil engineer or truck driver. I am not saying that it is unimportant for Christian truck drivers to seek to live and think Christianly in their line of work. But different vocational areas do not interact with a Christian worldview in the same way. A good rule of thumb is this: *The more a field is composed of ideas about the nature of ultimate reality, about what we know and how we know things, about moral values and virtues, about the nature and origin of human beings, and about other issues central to mere Christianity, the more crucial it will be to think carefully about how a Christian should integrate His discipleship unto Jesus with the ideas and practices in that field.*

1. *Five specific areas.* Having said this, here are five specific areas of integration relevant to Christian discipleship in a vocation:

- What are the ethical issues involved in my vocation and how do they relate to my ethical beliefs as a Christian? As a business person, what is my view of corporate moral responsibility? Do corporations as wholes have moral responsibility or do only individuals (e. g., the CEO) have moral responsibility?
- What does my field say about what is and is not real, about what is true and false and how do I understand that as a Christian? For example, should a Christian counselor believe that the mind is really the brain and that moral behaviors are determined by our genes? Should a Christian scientist be a theistic evolutionist?
- What does my field say about the nature and limits of knowledge? If I am an engineer, should I believe that the only thing we can know is what can be measured and tested in a science laboratory? If I am a parent, should I be supportive of values clarification in the public schools? Doesn't values clarification communicate that we really don't have moral knowledge, only moral opinions such that what is really relevant for a student's moral development is not that his or her moral views are correct but that he or she sincerely expresses his or her own feelings?
- What methodology for gathering data does my field require before someone is allowed to assert his or her views about something? For example, we are often lead to believe that if we do not have a scientific study on something, we just cannot claim to know anything about the topic in question. But can't someone also use common sense, scripture, or other forms of reasoning besides a scientific study to justify a position on some topic. Does your field tend to limit proper methodology in a way you find unreasonable as a thinking Christian?
- Are there any specific virtues that seem to be especially relevant to your work?

2. *Specific examples.* Here are some examples of more specific questions for certain vocations:

- **Health Care Professions:** What is the nature of medicine? Are certain virtues and values part of the very nature of medicine so that if professionals are not trained in these virtues and values, they are not practicing medicine but only technology? What is the purpose of medicine? What is the nature of the patient/professional relationship (a covenant or a contract)?

- **Sports and Coaching:** What is the difference between play/recreation and entertainment and what is the difference between a celebrity and a hero? In what sense are and ought sports figures to be heroes? Why should we value health and what value should we place on it? Should winning be the main or at least an important goal for sports participation at various ages?
- **Business:** What is the purpose of a corporation and do corporations have moral responsibility? What is the justification for and limitations on capitalism? What is money? How should we think about employee rights, conflicts of interest (whistle blowing, loyalty to the firm vs. other loyalties), truth and disclosure in advertising, responsibilities to the environment, affirmative action?
- **Blue collar work:** What role should beauty play vs. practicality, efficiency, economic frugality in building something? How does a theology of the body, the Incarnation itself, and Jesus' vocation as a carpenter compare with a Greek view of the mind/body distinction (where mental activity is more important than working with one's hands) and how does the Christian view impact the dignity of blue collar work?
- **Homemaking/child raising:** What are the different learning styles exemplified by children and what are the processes of childhood development? Are these descriptive (they merely describe what usually is the case) or normative (they prescribe what ought to be the case)? What is the value of self esteem and how should it be developed? What role should self interest play in motivating a child to achieve? Arguably, being a teenager is a modern Western phenomenon. If this is correct, then it is probably not a normal or necessary part of maturation. What are the implications of this for child raising? What is the purpose of education? What should be the state's role in teaching values/virtues to children in the public school?

These questions are not easy and there is no guarantee that we will all agree about how to answer them. But we need to do a better job of making these kinds of issues central to our educational training. If "X" stands for my vocation or college major, then my Christian duty and privilege is to develop an articulate, well-informed philosophy of X that serves as a basis for my living as a Christian X and for penetrating X with a Christian worldview. Thinking though these issues will be difficult, but we have no other choice. And we need to remember that even if we do not achieve total competency in this regard, if we make any progress at all, it will be better than if we had not tried to address worldview and vocational issues in our teaching. And we have a God who is used to

multiplying loaves and fishes beyond what they can do by themselves. In light of this, who knows the impact of Christian schools on the world and the church in the next twenty years? In my opinion, it will be greater than any of us could ask for.

- 1 Harry Blamires, *A God Who Acts* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1957), p. 67. Not everyone agrees that there is such a thing as a special vocation. While I am on the side of those who accept such a calling, my presentation to follow does not require acceptance of a special vocation. All my points require is that one agrees with the idea that a Christian should try to live and think Christianly in every aspect of life, including what he or she does forty or more hours a week. ■

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