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Academic Discipleship: A Perspectival Clarification of "Christian Education" for Teachers, Leaders, and Administrators

Kelly Hayes

What differentiates Christian education from non-Christian education? Though evergreen, this question has been pressed into the spotlight by the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Christian schools are under pressure to communicate their value and distinctiveness clearly and winsomely. According to George Knight, "Many Christian schools have tended to offer something less than Christian education and have thereby frustrated the purpose of their existence."[1] Knight's argument that many Christian schools do not fulfill their central purpose requires that the concept of Christian education be clearly defined; the archer must see the target to effectively aim for the bullseye. However, defining the target has proved challenging. As Marie Valance, Jaliene Hollabaugh, and Thu Truong explain, "Even among scholars who purport to have religious faith there is no agreement over what role, if any, faith should play in the field of academia."[2]

Tertullian famously queried how Athens (secular learning) and Jerusalem (Christian belief and practice) could relate with one another.[3] His question has remained salient through the ages. Augustine concluded that faith and knowledge are indivisibly united and challenged Christians to bring faith to bear on their academic work.[4] In ensuing centuries, luminaries like Jerome, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin carried on the "deep and abiding interest the church… has taken in the intellectual life."[5] They worked to address the issues of their day, offering creed, catechism, scholastic insight, and songs of praise as educational service.

The conversation necessarily transformed as education became more industrialized. Against this backdrop, Benjamin Franklin and George Whitefield debated education's bullseye in the late eighteenth century.[6] Franklin believed that education should aim to develop virtuous people in this life, but Whitefield held that education should focus on preparing people for eternal life. Responding to Enlightenment influences on public education in the nineteenth century, A. A. Hodge contended that there could be no such thing as impartial, religion-free

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[1] George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 165.

[2] Marie Valance, Jaliene Hollabaugh, and Thu Truong, "St. Augustine's Learning for the Glory of God: Adapting 'Faith-Learning Integration' Terminology for the Modern World," *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal* 4, no. 2 (2009): 2. Retrieved from https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/icctej/vol4/iss2/5.

[3] Jeffrey C. Davis, "The Countercultural Quest of Christian Liberal Arts," in *Liberal Arts for the Christian Life*, eds. Jeffrey C. Davis and Philip G. Ryken (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 35–36.

[4] Valance, Hollabaugh, and Truong, "St. Augustine's Learning for the Glory of God," 4.

[5] Paul J. Griffiths, "From Curiosity to Studiousness: Catechizing the Appetite for Learning," in *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning*, eds. David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 103–104.

[6] Thomas S. Kidd, "Franklin, Whitefield, and Christian Education," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 17–29.

education because all systems of thought presuppose foundational beliefs and goals.[7] Hodge's contemporary, John Henry Newman, argued that since God created all things, all subjects are innately theological and must be studied as such.[8] In the second half of the twentieth century, Francis Schaeffer's work whetted many appetites for "culturally and intellectually engaged Christianity."[9] At the dawn of the third millennium, Glen Schultz proposed that the term *Christian education* had become so overloaded with diverse meanings that it should be replaced, at least in some contexts, with terminology better expressing its distinctives.[10] Speaking to those distinctives, cultural critic John Stonestreet contended that, while non-Christian education may aim to develop virtuous, successful people, "Christian education is a fundamentally different enterprise… [it] begins with Christian assumptions about life and the world, aims for Christian goals, and is governed by Christian methodologies."[11]

This conversation regarding the nature of Christian education continues in the legacy of Tertullian, Hodge, and the rest. Those thinkers worked to address the educational questions of their times and circumstances. Christians must rise to the occasion and do the same today. Ted Newell issues the challenge: "Effective Christian education demands that designers must revise and reconstruct a new education."[12] The aim is not to dismiss our forebears, but to imitate them by seeking to wisely respond to the issues of our moment.

One key question of this moment is: What is distinctive about Christian education? How are its methodologies, assumptions, and goals defined? Donovan Graham warns that "the use of Christian language can easily delude us into thinking that what we are doing is more Christian than it actually is."[13] Lynn E. Swaner and Beth Green point out that "Christian education faces a host of contemporary challenges."[14] Shifting cultural dynamics, demographic changes, and technological innovations require that schools articulate a compelling vision of Christian education. Kidd makes the case that Christian schools "won't have much of a future if we are not *intentionally, overtly Christian*."[15] There will often be "enormous cultural and bureaucratic pressures" levied against overtly Christian education.[16] As school leaders address a question that

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[7] A. A. Hodge, "On the Future of Education," in *Perspectives on your Child's Education*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (1886; repr., Nashville, TN: B & H, 2009), 121–124.

[8] Jeffrey C. Davis and Philip G. Ryken, eds. *Liberal Arts for the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 27.

[9] Charles E. Cotherman, *To Think Christianly: A History of L'Abri, Regent College, and the Christian Study Center Movement* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 15.

[10] Glen Schultz, *Kingdom Education: God's Plan for Educating Future Generations,* 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Lifeway, 2002), 23.

[11] John Stonestreet, "Announcing the 'Worldviews and Cultural Fluency' Professional Development Program for Christian Educators," BreakPoint, August 10, 2020, https://www.breakpoint.org/announcing-the-worldviews-and-cultural-fluency-professional-development-program-for-christian-educators/.

[12] Ted Newell, *Education: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 112.

[13] Donovan Graham, *Teaching Redemptively: Bringing Grace and Truth into Your Classroom* (Colorado Springs, CO: Purposeful Design Publications, 2009), 3.

[14] Lynn E. Swaner and Beth Green,"Introduction," in *Mindshift: Catalyzing Change in Christian Education*, ed. Lynn E. Swaner, Dan Beernens, and Erik Ellefsen (Colorado Springs, CO: Association of Christian Schools International, 2019), 8.

[15] Kidd, "Franklin, Whitefield, and Christian Education," 28.

[16] Ibid.

is simultaneously urgent and ancient, they must clearly articulate what makes Christian education Christian.

Goals and Methodology

In the ancient world, Socrates posited, "The beginning of wisdom is the definition of terms."[17] Kevin Allen, writing for *Harvard Business Review*, points out that crafting "a stable of rich language" helps motivate people and clarify an organization's purpose.[18] In light of that reality, my goal is that this article will equip Christian school leaders with concise and meaning-rich language to communicate how their institutions stand out in the educational marketplace. Likewise, I aim to assist teacher leaders within primary, secondary, and tertiary Christian institutions in understanding what can make classes and courses stand out in the marketplace of ideas. My intention is not to provide novel lexical adjustments, but to develop a definition of *Christian education* that is both valuable and portable. This paper is intended to rigorously investigate Christian education in order to understand it rightly, speak about it more clearly, and practice it effectively. Christian educators need to know what success looks like. Clarity can increase cohesion, communication, and cooperation.

As its methodology, this article adopts John Frame's triperspectival system, specifically informed by his theological contributions related to knowledge and Scripture. Frame is a proponent of Reformed theology and this article leans heavily on his theological and philosophical work. However, the topic of this study is education, situated within practical theology, rather than a more traditionally sectarian theological arena. Frame articulates three key commitments which undergird this article: "To be committed to Jesus Christ is to honor his word, above all other words… the word of Christ, the word of God, is to be found in the Holy Scriptures, indeed that the Bible *is* the Word of God."[19] As such, readers possessing "personal allegiance to Jesus and devotion to the truth about Jesus—as revealed through the Holy Spirit and recorded in Holy Scripture"[20] will, perhaps not without occasional tension, find this work edifying.

Frame's triperspectival system identifies three specific viewpoints that can help one understand the truth in any given context; these are the normative, situational, and existential perspectives. The normative perspective examines God's authority, the situational perspective demonstrates his control over all things, and the existential perspective looks to God's presence in the world.[21] Perspectivalism is both intuitive and powerful. It is intuitive because one can naturally grasp that observing anything from multiple vantage points will increase understanding. Consider how a televised sporting event shows viewers multiple angles of a single occurrence. The

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[17] Dave Policano, "The Beginning of Good Data is the Definition of Terms," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, August 6, 2018, https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_beginning_of_good_data_is_the_definition_of_terms.

[18] Kevin Allen, "How Language Shapes Your Organization," *Harvard Business Review,* July 24, 2012, https://hbr.org/2012/07/how-language-shapes-your-organization.

[19] John M. Frame, "Appendix A: Antithesis and the Doctrine of Scripture," in *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010), 339.

[20] James R. Estep, "Faith Development and Christian Formation," in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, eds. James R. Estep & Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2010), 197.

[21] John M. Frame, *Theology in Three Dimensions: A Guide to Triperspectivalism and Its Significance* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2017), 22–23.

broadcasters offer additional perspectives because this provides powerful clarity. Watching a pitch or serve from multiple angles gives the viewer a more accurate understanding of reality.

Triperspectivalism is an especially suitable "pedagogical approach"[22] for studying philosophy of education because each perspective marries seamlessly with a traditional philosophical locus. To illustrate, Martha MacCullough's book, *By Design: Developing a Philosophy of Education Informed by a Christian Worldview*, elegantly aligns with Frame's perspectival categories.[23] Frame and MacCullough's systems both emphasize epistemology, metaphysics, and axiology.[24] Epistemology asks questions like, "How do we know?" and "What are the nature, sources, and validity of knowledge?"[25] The goal is to "determine the ultimate criteria of truth and falsity."[26] This is the normative perspective, and it is concerned with authoritative truth. Metaphysics asks questions like, "If God exists, what role does He play in human affairs?" and "What is the nature of the external world and the universe?"[27] The aim is to understand "the environment we share with God and creatures."[28] This is the situational perspective, and it is concerned with what is truly real. Finally, axiology asks, "What is of value?" and "How do we determine right and wrong, good and beautiful?"[29] Axiology seeks "to understand the values by which we live."[30] This is the existential perspective, and it is concerned with what is truly valuable.

The Normative Perspective: What Is Authoritative Truth?

When considering the nature of education, the starkest difference between Christian and non-Christian models, especially those controlled by materialistic commitments, is found in their divergent normative perspectives on knowledge and truth.[31] Frame's definition of theology can be used as a guide to demonstrate this distinction. According to Frame, theology is "the application of Scripture, by persons, to every area of life."[32] His definition is triperspectival in that it "correlate[s] norms (divine rules for life), situations (to which the rules must be applied), and persons (who do the applying)."[33] Using this definition as a model, materialistic education could be defined as the investigation of every area of life, by teachers and students, in light of autonomous reason. Christian education, conversely, could be defined as the investigation of every area of life, by teachers and students, *in light of the authority of Scripture*. The difference is whether the authority of Scripture is recognized as the normative standard. The norm is

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[22] Ibid., xiv.

[23] Martha E. MacCullough, *By Design: Developing a Philosophy of Education Informed by a Christian Worldview* (Langhorne, PA: Cairn University, 2013).

[24] MacCullough, *Philosophy of Education*, 18; Frame, *Theology in Three Dimensions*, 75.

[25] MacCullough, *Philosophy of Education*, 18.

[26] Frame, *Theology in Three Dimensions*, 75.

[27] MacCullough, *Philosophy of Education*, 18.

[28] Frame, *Theology in Three Dimensions*, 75.

[29] MacCullough, *Philosophy of Education*, 18.

[30] Frame, *Theology in Three Dimensions*, 75.

[31] Ibid., 8.

[32] John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 8.

[33] John M. Frame, *John Frame's Selected Shorter Writings* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 2:61.

foundational because it defines the rules and obligations that must be applied situationally and experienced existentially. As Amy Crider notes, "If Scripture fails to define the field, something else will."[34] This epistemological difference is categorical, showing that Christian education is built on a unique academic framework.

Institutions are only as similar as their epistemological commitments allow them to be. Consider the opening words of Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?" God's words are true, and they place authoritative requirements upon his mortal creatures. Biblical beliefs must affect one's understanding of truth and knowledge. Karl Bailey relates this concept to education, saying, "Christian educators… must judge—and even redeem and reconstruct—their pedagogy by the criteria of Christian principles and practice."[35] The question emerges: How can the normative criteria of distinctly Christian education be constructed and communicated?

Christian education, as a term, has been used profitably, but not perfectly, to describe the academic endeavors of believers. The issue is that, without further clarification, the term can carry so many diverse meanings, even contradictory meanings, that it is difficult to use with precision in a practical sense. To illustrate, the Atlantic Ocean touches Europe, Africa, and the Americas. However, each coast is unique, and the Atlantic changes in nature from the depths of the Puerto Rico Trench to the tide on a Puerto Rico beach. The term—Atlantic Ocean—must be clarified if it is to be used practically. If a ship is able to contact help while imperiled at sea, the crew will need to be more precise than to say, "We are in the Atlantic." Likewise, Christian schools need more precision regarding the term *Christian education*.

Pursuing precision, experts continue to investigate the question, "What makes Christian education Christian?"[36] The syntactical and grammatical structure of the term is a logical place to begin.[37] James Estep states, "The use of the word *Christian* as an adjective requires a judgment or assessment to be made about the subject in question,"[38] that is, education. In order for education to be Christian education, it must be informed theologically by the convictions of the Christian faith.[39] Christian theology operates under the authority of Scripture. Therefore, as noted above, Christian education must first recognize the ultimate authority of the Bible; if the Bible is truly the Word of God, it changes everything. Those who believe in the accuracy of Scripture should also submit to the authority of Scripture.[40] The Bible governs all other knowledge. Frame acknowledges

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[34]Amy Crider, "A New Freshman Composition Pedagogy for Christian Colleges and Universities," EdD Diss, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018, 50.

[35]Karl G. D. Bailey, "Faith-Learning Integration, Critical Thinking Skills, and Student Development in Christian Education," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 21 (August 2012): 153.

[36] See James R. Estep, "What Makes Christian Education Christian?," in *A Theology for Christian Education* 2nd ed., eds. James R. Estep, Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2008): 25-43; and Richard A. Riesen, "What Makes Christian Education Christian?," in *Piety and Philosophy: A Primer for Christian Schools* (Chicago, IL: ACW Press, 2002): 83-102.

[37] Howard Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives: Seven Proven Ways to Make Your Teaching Come Alive* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 1987), 75–76.

[38] Estep, "What Makes Christian Education Christian?," 25.

[39]Ibid., 26.

[40] Frame, "Appendix N: No Scripture, No Christ," in *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 563.

that this may be laughable in non-Christian schools,[41] but it is precisely what makes Christian education distinct because "the Christian worldview must be shaped and tested by scripture."[42]

If the Bible shapes how all things are to be understood, then the Bible shapes education. This shaping authority is Christian education's first distinction. Scripture must be the epistemological foundation of the Christian academic enterprise. What language could be employed to concisely and precisely communicate this submission to Scripture? My suggestion is *academic discipleship.* The word *discipleship* conveys operation under the normative authority of Scripture while the word *academic* denotes the particularly educational means by which this is accomplished. Some may question the use of the term *discipleship* here, but John Laska's widely accepted definition of education as "the deliberate attempt… to *control* (or *guide*, or *direct*, or *influence*, or *manage*) a learning situation in order to bring about… a desired learning outcome (*goal*)," demonstrates that it is indeed suitable.[43] *Discipleship* adds clarity as to the nature of the desired learning outcome and is a familiar term for many Christians.

Frame explains how God's authority impacts education, saying, Jesus "is Lord of all, nothing less. Therefore, he calls us to seek out *his* wisdom about history, biology, politics, economics, philosophy."[44] Dealing with this array of subjects is academic by nature. Pursuing wisdom from the authoritative Lord is discipleship. It follows, then, that *academic discipleship* is a term that can help clarify the distinctive nature of Christian schools.

Educators can find precision in transposing these concepts because the educational process of schooling (academic) is used to modify the normative, defining term (discipleship) rather than vice versa. Nouns are normative by nature because a noun defines while an adjective modifies. Adjectives serve their nouns; they cannot rule them. *Christian education* as a term, allows *Christian* to be governed by *education*. Therefore, whatever it means to be Christian cannot outdistance the generally understood concept of education. Juxtaposing the noun and adjective— understanding *Christian education* as *academic discipleship*—provides clarity because it acknowledges biblical authority, maintains academic focus, and clarifies the mission.

Christians are not alone in operating under epistemological authority. While secular education assumes allegiance to the authority of autonomous reason, Christian education assumes allegiance to the authority of Scripture. Therefore, Christian institutions would be wise to utilize terminology that highlights their commitments. This clarity and transparency can help educators embrace and communicate the responsibility and freedom that comes from seeking truth in the light of Scripture. Christian schools are doing something special: academic discipleship. While some instructors might be hesitant at being identified as disciple-makers, Knight explains that the distinct nature of Christian education requires it:

> The major difference between the roles of pastors and teachers in our day has to do with
> the current division of labor. In twenty-first-century society, the Christian teacher may be

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[41] Frame, "Appendix A: Antithesis and the Doctrine of Scripture," in *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 345.

[42] Valance, Hollabaugh, and Truong, "St. Augustine's Learning for the Glory of God," 8.

[43] John A. Laska, *Schooling and Education: Basic Concepts and Problems* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1976), 7.

[44] John Frame, "Back to School," *The Works of John Frame & Vern Poythress*, May 21, 2012, https://frame-poythress.org/back-to-school/.

seen as one who pastors in a "school" context, while the pastor is one who teaches in the "larger religious community." It should and must consciously be realized that their function is essentially the same, even though by today's definitions they are in charge of different divisions of the Lord's vineyard.[45]

Therefore, acknowledging the authority of the Bible as the normative perspective clarifies what Christians schools aim to be and accomplish. As Jesus said, disciples are made by "teaching [people] to obey everything [He has] commanded" (Matt 28:18–20). Christian schools stand out because they practice academic discipleship. How, then, does this epistemological commitment affect metaphysical inquiry? How does the Word control teaching about the world?

The Situational Perspective: What Is Truly Real?

The normative perspective relates to authority and epistemology, whereas the situational perspective is about control and metaphysics. In order to understand their work, Christian educators must grapple with the relationship between norms and facts. Facts speak to what is true, but norms speak to what is right. Norms govern one's understanding of the facts. Epistemology shapes metaphysical understanding. Frame describes the relationship, saying, "God creates the facts of the world so that they can be understood only by his norms. He reveals the norms by his Word, his revelation."[46] Without the supernatural Word, humans will not rightly relate in the natural world. If the Bible is true, every academic endeavor and every accurate interpretation of data will align with the teachings of Scripture. But what does this look like in practice? How can Scripture control sciences, arts, or skills?

While academic disciple-makers recognize the truth of the Word of God, they do not contend that truth is only found in the Bible.[47] While sufficient, the Bible is not exhaustive. Crider helps again, saying,

The Bible does not, for instance, specify the best methods for teaching a freshman composition student to avoid split infinitives or use commas correctly, but Scripture has much to say about language itself—the means by which God forged mountains, sculpted cedars, ignited stars, melded molecules, and captivates the souls of men.[48]

The Bible does not replace an academic textbook, but, in the Christian school context, it must control the textbook. Scripture provides the framework, underlying principles, and goals for all fields. In *Nature's Case for God*, Frame strives to "understand nature in a biblical way," and "tell readers what they can learn from nature on the basis of what Scripture says."[49] This is strong wording for what academic disciple-makers aim to do in every area. The Bible (the authoritative, normative perspective), controls how these educators go about investigating and interpreting the world within any given academic discipline (the situational perspective). This is not an

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[45] Knight, *Philosophy & Education*, 11.

[46] Frame, *Theology in Three Dimensions*, 48.

[47] Frame, "Appendix B: Rationality and Scripture," in *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 348-349.

[48] Crider, "A New Freshman Composition Pedagogy," 51.

[49] John M. Frame, *Nature's Case for God: A Brief Biblical Argument* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 9.

abandonment of rational inquiry, but the practice of informed rational inquiry which functions in submission to Scripture.

Submission to Scripture's controlling power relates to at least two elements: commands and permissions. These may be explicit or implicit. For example, the command to love God fully is explicitly communicated in the Bible (Mark 12:28–34). However, the command to believe in God as Creator is implicit in Genesis 1:1. The Bible teaches this fact as truth; therefore, Christians are commanded to believe it. Frame elaborates on this idea with an example from computer science.[50] The Bible, as an ancient book, makes no mention of modern technology. However, the Bible provides the principles needed to understand that this is "a rational world suitable for computing."[51] Scripture imposes no restrictions on computing specifically, but God's general commands and permissions do apply. Therefore, computing should be pursued for good, just purposes and lead to God-honoring ends. This example illustrates biblically controlled rationality.

Christians rationally pursue truth because those who seek truth want to know God's world as it is. Investigating the world is, in Framean terms, observing an object through the situational perspective. Situational avenues are key pathways in the quest to know and teach truth. However, a problem arises when rationality is pursued apart from the Bible's normative authority. God's world cannot be rightly taught while separated from God Himself. Everyone leans on some norm to regulate their understanding of various data. Academic disciple-makers lean on the presupposition that God has spoken authoritatively concerning how things are and ought to be. Likewise, these disciple-makers must recognize that rejecting God's authoritative perspective damages one's ability to rightly interpret reality. Rather than disqualifying God's special revelation as epistemological foundation, educators would be wise to take it into account as the controlling force as they interpret data collected through situational means in order to understand metaphysical realities. Rather than teaching nature's laws apart from its Lawmaker, teachers should be committed to "elucidating and explicating the structures of reality which God has created."[52] Geoff Beech and Elizabeth Beech seem to concur, saying,

> We need to practice blending God's truth as revealed in his Word with his truth as revealed in his Creation… While not equating our perceived revelation in Creation with the revelation of the Scriptures, this practice draws together God's revealed truth in the Creation-oriented curriculum areas and demonstrates its embeddedness in a biblically-grounded metanarrative. This requires a depth of understanding of God and his purposes through a knowledge of his Scriptures and faithful obedience to his calling.[53]

That kind of biblically informed instruction is academic discipleship and it is accomplished through the practice of biblical worldview integration.

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[50] Frame, "Appendix O: In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism," in *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 595.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Vern S. Poythress, "The Structure of Truth: SDS and the Harvard Establishment," (1969), 2, https://frame-poythress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/1969StructureOfTruth.pdf.

[53] Geoff Beech and Elizabeth Beech, "An 'Integrality' Model for Teaching," *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal* 14, no. 1 (2019): 2. https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/icctej/vol14/iss1/3.

    Biblical integration, *worldview integration*, *faith integration*, or *the integration of faith and learning* are related terms used in writing about the nature of Christian education. There has not been widespread consensus about what the terms mean or how they should be implemented,[54] but the language of integration has been utilized, debated, and refined for over fifty years.[55] As standard terminology central to conversation on contemporary Christian education, the language of integration, though imperfect, is useful in this context. Additionally, varying understandings on how integration should be understood allow for a flexible sort of precision when using the term. The idea is precise enough to communicate that some form of intentional Christian activity is necessary in teaching, but flexible enough that those with varying views can practice integration in accordance with their comfort and conscience. Since MacCullough's work in educational philosophy introduced Frame's triperspectival system, her term, *biblical worldview integration*, will be employed here.

    MacCullough introduces the concept of integration, saying, "Integration is the concept of bringing together into a larger whole. More often than not, it is a process that connects or contrasts incoming knowledge with prior knowledge."[56] Therefore, as a student learns new information about any content area, that information must be integrated with what they already know. For example, if a three-year-old child learns not to lie when speaking, but at age six learns to coherently communicate through writing, the previously acquired knowledge about lying and truthfulness must be integrated with the new knowledge of written communication. MacCullough reveals the Christian foundation of this idea:

> Worldview integration in a school setting addresses the whole person in a unified way that leads to a person of integrity (wholeness) who can impact his or her world for Christ. The word "integrity" comes from the same Latin root word, *integritas*, as does the word "integration."[57]

Biblical worldview integration is not the artificial, forced addition of Christian ideas to a subject; it is fitting truths together in the mind according to God's design as revealed in Scripture. Disintegration is the condition that necessitates integration. Philip Ryken makes this case, saying that he speaks "of reintegration because faith and learning were never intended to be separate… faith and learning belong together—not merely juxtaposed, but integrated."[58] Integration is needed because integrity, wholeness, in education has been lost.

    Biblical worldview integration is seeking to understand all things with active recognition of God's character, nature, and work as revealed in Scripture. It is teaching from and toward the reality and glory of God. It is not creating biblical connections, but noting, investigating, and

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[54] Kenneth Badley, "Clarifying 'Faith-Learning Integration': Essentially Contested Concepts and the Concept-Conception Distinction." *Faculty Publications - School of Education* 61 (2009),https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/soe_faculty/61; Perry L. Glanzer, "Why We Should Discard 'the Integration of Faith and Learning': Rearticulating the Mission of the Christian Scholar." *Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2008), 41-51.

[55] Valance, Hollabaugh, and Truong, "St. Augustine's Learning for the Glory of God," 1.

[56] MacCullough, *Philosophy of Education*, 194.

[57] Ibid., 195.

[58] Ryken, "A World Servant in Christian Liberal Arts Education," *Themelios* 35, no. 3 (2010): 433.

celebrating the connections that already exist through Christ. Riesen states that Christian instructors must grasp the biblical worldview carefully so that they "can articulate it with precision, and [know]… how it works itself out in [one's] own discipline."[59] Making this point, Donald Opitz and Derek Melleby present an "academically twisted" rephrasing of Colossians 1:15–20:

> Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him every discipline of the university was created, disciplines visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all disciplines have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all disciplines, and in him all disciplines hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in every discipline. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself every discipline of the university, by making peace through the blood of his cross.[60]

The heavens declare the glory of God (Ps 19:1). Everything belongs to him (1 Chron 29:11). In him, humans live and move and exist (Acts 17:28). From him, through him, and for him are all things (Rom 11:36). To teach creation apart from its Lord is akin to teaching *Macbeth* apart from Shakespeare. Not only does situational adherence to the biblical norm make Christian schooling distinct, but it also makes the education offered more accurate and complete. Materialistic academics can only speak to the material; naturalistic science can only speak to the natural. These worldview commitments categorically eliminate the ultimate truth: God. Vern Poythress brings clarity to the limits of this belief system, saying,

> Strict materialists believe that matter and motion are all that is or ever can be. But that is a philosophical postulate, not the inevitable product of scientific reasoning. If science deliberately restricts itself to the material dimension, its conclusions will necessarily speak about the material dimension. The conclusions may be impressive and insightful. But it is a fallacy to think that they establish that the material is all that there is. The fallacy overlooks the human choice of a restricted standpoint at the beginning.[61]

Christians should recognize that allowing the Bible to control the situational perspective on knowledge presented through observation makes their academic project stronger rather than weaker. If the Creator has spoken, his words must control the educator's understanding of creation. Likewise, biblical truth must control teaching. Academic discipleship is not accomplished by the mere presence of Christian teachers, though there is value there, but through active application of the Creator's words to the subject through biblical worldview integration.

Academic disciple-makers use biblical worldview integration to bring the normative to bear on the situational. Frame contends, "Surely there is something primal, something utterly basic,

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[59] Riesen, *Piety and Philosophy*, 87.

[60] Donald Opitz and Derek Melleby, *The Outrageous Idea of Academic Faithfulness: A Guide for Students* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 110-111.

[61] Vern Poythress, "Can Science Answer Ultimate Questions?," *The Works of John Frame & Vern Poythress*, May 17, 2012, https://frame-poythress.org/can-science-answer-ultimate-questions/.

about our confession that God is Lord of *all* areas of human life."[62] Christians historically affirm that God has revealed himself in at least two categorical ways—general revelation (the situational perspective) and special revelation expressed, especially, through the Bible (the normative perspective). Therefore, educators who seek knowledge only by examining God's general revelation are missing a complementary perspective on the world. They are practicing an artificial disintegration of reality.

General revelation speaks loudly, but special revelation speaks clearly. The Bible offers necessary clarity about the world and the one who made it. Integrated teaching combines volume and clarity for optimal learning. Imagine trying to hear a program on FM-radio frequency 95.5. No matter how much the listener increases the volume, the program is only found by the proper frequency tuning. Biblical worldview integration is the frequency tuner that applies the control of Scripture to the academic subject.

Biblical worldview integration is not standard academic practice, not because Christians are artificially adding biblical ideas to the world, but because an unnatural disintegration has occurred in academia. There is an understanding in the larger academic community today that Christians must uncouple their work from special revelation. Glanzer and Alleman summarize the modernistic, materialistic ideal as one who "attempts to study nature, society, history, and so forth by separating one's professional work from the influence of personal identities and the narratives, beliefs, practices, and traditions associated with them."[63] The goal is to "seek *objective* knowledge." Frame explains that this Enlightenment-informed methodology arose rapidly without proper consideration:

> There was no academic debate on whether it is right for human beings to exercise reason without the authority of God's revelation. There was not much argument about whether the universities should change their time-honored commitments to divine revelation. Rather, major figures simply began teaching from the new point of view, and there was no significant resistance.[64]

According to Frame's argument, this change undercut the possibility of truly Christian education; if the Bible is not authoritative and "if human reason is autonomous, the God of the Bible does not exist, for his very nature as the Creator excludes the autonomy of his creatures."[65] Clearly, this position is untenable for Christians. Rather than autonomy, those who are controlled by biblical authority have access to a window into God's own knowledge. Some scholars deny the availability of a "god's-eye view" of reality,[66] but Christians understand it does exist (because God exists) and that it is accessible (because God has made it so). Anderson summarizes, saying,

> Since God's knowledge is comprehensive and determinative, it is *constitutive* of objectivity for humans. Our multiple, finite perspectives are like small windows onto God's unified,

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[62] Frame, "Appendix O: In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism," in *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 593.

[63] Perry L. Glanzer and Nathan F. Alleman, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Teaching* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 28.

[64] Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 19.

[65] Ibid., 20.

[66] Glanzer and Alleman, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Teaching*, 36.

consistent, all-encompassing perspective on reality. This observation... suggests a distinctively Christian theistic alternative to the autonomous pretensions of… modernist epistemologies (which hold that pure objectivity is both attainable and desirable).[67]

In other words, those who hold allegiance to the authority of the Bible will have a more objective, more accurate view of reality. To be controlled by truth is to be free to seek knowledge. Those who practice biblical worldview integration will teach that more objective, accurate view of reality because they are teaching according to God's view.

Therefore, Christian schools can define their distinctiveness further by describing their work as *academic discipleship through biblical worldview integration*. They offer accurate academic content because their pursuit of truth is controlled by the Word of truth (John 17:17). If the Bible is the Word of God, teachers in Christian schools should be passionately pursuing academic discipleship through biblical worldview integration. The next section of this article explores how this reality radically transforms the practice of teaching and brings the distinctive nature of Christian schooling into even sharper relief.

The Existential Perspective: What Is Truly Valuable?

The final perspective in Frame's triperspectival methodology is the existential perspective. The normative perspective, as it bears on Christian education, relates to the authority of Scripture, the situational perspective relates to the controlling power of the Bible in forming worldview, and the existential perspective relates to how the presence of scriptural truth, as authoritative control, affects the educational experience.

At the start of *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, Frame introduces the key experiential factor that comes from engaging Scripture: "God's speech to man is real speech. It is very much like one person speaking to another. God speaks so that we can understand him and respond appropriately."[68] This point is essential when considering how academic discipleship through biblical worldview integration impacts the act of teaching: when God's Word is present, his voice is present. God teaches when his Word is taught and, as Elihu rhetorically asked in Job 36:22, "Who is a teacher like him?"[69] Followers of Christ can experience not only general and special revelation, but also existential revelation. Frame defines this type of revelation as "God's revelation in our person… by which we appropriate the other forms of revelation."[70] When believers interact with the Word of God and the world of God, they experience the presence of God.

God is an omnipresent spiritual being. He authoritatively controls all things in all places. Therefore, he is, in one sense, present in all places. However, he is made especially present through his words. According to Frame, "If God performs all his actions by his powerful authoritative

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[67] James N. Anderson, "Presuppositionalism and Frame's Epistemology," in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. John J. Hughes, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 438.

[68] Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 3.

[69] Roy B. Zuck, *Spirit-filled Teaching: The Power of the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 160.

[70] Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 331.

speech, then his speech is never separated from his personal presence."[71] He created through speech, saves through speech, and will return with a sword coming out of his mouth. God exercises the power of his presence through his words; "What the word does, God does, and vice versa."[72] This means that teaching that is filled with, and informed by, the Word of God is filled with the presence of God.

Jerry Bridges defines ungodliness as "living one's life with little or no thought of God, or of God's will, or of God's glory, or of one's dependence on God."[73] In that narrow sense, classes taught without consideration of God are characterized by ungodliness. However, Christian education embraces the controlling authority of Scripture over all academic content. Engagement with God's Word, as it relates to the academic topic being taught, is engagement with God's voice and, therefore, his presence.

Academic disciple-makers, in the vein of Micah 6:8, call students to humbly walk *with* God. Therefore, the axiological aim of academic discipleship is not that students would know about God, but that they would know God and relate rightly to Him. The aim is godliness. A summary of God's commands can be found in the *shema*: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children" (Deut 6:5–7). These commands apply to all areas of life, including education, showing how one should live in God's presence. However, those who serve in Christian schools are not alone in providing axiological aims for students. Note the following from California Education Code, Section 233.5(a):

> Each teacher shall endeavor to impress upon the minds of the pupils the principles of morality, truth, justice, patriotism, and a true comprehension of the rights, duties, and dignity of American citizenship, and the meaning of equality and human dignity, including the promotion of harmonious relations, kindness toward domestic pets and the humane treatment of living creatures, to teach them to avoid idleness, profanity, and falsehood, and to instruct them in manners and morals and the principles of a free government.

The language of impressing truth upon the minds of students is symmetrical with biblical commandments. Additionally, the content itself, in this case, overlaps. The difference is that the aim of Christian education is godliness: the active consideration of God and dependence on God. Godliness without God is an impossibility. Does this mean that Christian education cannot occur outside of a Christian institution? No, there are many Christian teachers working in non-Christian schools who are able to teach their students well and point them to God and godliness. However, the Christian schooling experience is unique. The major difference is that the mission and methods of Christian teachers in a Christian school are in greater alignment, allowing these educators to teach in an explicitly Christian fashion.

Christian teachers serving in non-Christian schools must often teach in ways that are only implicitly Christian. This does not mean that they cannot share biblical truths, but, depending on

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[71] Ibid., 66.

[72] Ibid., 67.

[73] Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2007), 54.

the situation, they may not be able to do so as openly, directly, or consistently. This is an advantage for Christian schools. However, there is a unique opportunity for Christian teachers working in non-Christian schools as well; they often have much greater proximity and relational connection to non-Christian students and teachers. While those who teach in Christian schools spend their efforts on academic discipleship, those who teach in non-Christian schools may invest more in what might be called academic outreach—the first step of academic discipleship. In many cases, academic outreach through biblical worldview integration will be impeded,[74] but the difficulty of the task does not undermine its importance. Academic outreach is vital. Christian teachers, in any environment, can be faithful and fruitful, but those entrusted with Christian school leadership should seize their opportunity for alignment by encouraging an academic experience characterized by academic discipleship.

Academic disciple-makers in the Christian school setting must strive to teach the content of God's world to enhance the students' relationship with him by bringing them into the presence of his Word. What good is it if students earn passing grades, demonstrate exceptional skills, or even win Nobel Prizes, but lose their souls?[75] This is not to say that academic competence does not matter. Academic discipleship should be academically excellent, but it cannot only be academically excellent. Academic competence alone is not success for Christian schools. Instead, the aim is informed godliness. Academic content is important so that students can better understand the glory of God and better serve Him in the world. Students who are more academically informed are in a better position to love God and others in regard to that content area. Minimally, students who see God more accurately will reverence Him more deeply. Donald Oppewal illustrates this concept by contrasting how a physicist and a child perceive the power of God while observing a thunderstorm:

> The physicist sees God in the workings of the thunderstorm, while the child experiences only light, noise, and dampness. The child's vision of God's power and might is hampered by his lack of insight into the pattern, the system, the structure of weather. To the extent that he sees and experiences no laws or is aware of no pattern, he knows not God in general revelation.[76]

Academic disciple-makers use their content areas to bring their students from "light, noise, and dampness" to a greater fear of the Lord. They do this by inviting God to be present through his Word. Does he have nothing to say about business ethics, mental health, physiology, or art? Instructors invite students to experience the presence of God through his voice in conjunction with specific academic content so that they can walk with him in, and out, of the classroom.

Christian instructors desire that students grow in godliness through schooling. Teachers are, in a sense, academic worship leaders. They point students to the glory of God while employing Scripture to engage with the presence of God and instructing them in a right response to God. Regardless of the field, the aim is that students will walk humbly with God. Whether students

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[74] Beech and Beech, "An 'Integrality' Model for Teaching," 1.

[75] See Mark 8:36.

[76] Donald Oppewal, "Toward a Distinctive Curriculum for Christian Education," *Reformed Journal* 7, no. 8 (September 1957): 23.

graduate to be painters, parents, physicists, or physicians, Christian schools intend to inform and form them in the powerful presence of God's authoritative Word. The experience of academic discipleship necessarily includes God speaking authoritatively regarding the world he controls. The teacher operating under the authority of Scripture must employ Scripture.

I am not suggesting that all classes should become Bible classes. On the contrary, this experiential element of academic discipleship cannot be fully accomplished in a Bible class. Churches are equipped to teach the doctrines of the Bible and to disciple people in that context. However, churches are not equipped to demonstrate the integration of God's Word and God's world through the laws of physics, the genius of God in the gift of language, or the wisdom of God in mathematics to the same degree as schools with broad curricula. Dockery and George contend that "[advancing] the Christian intellectual tradition" requires "serious Christian thinking and scholarship in all disciplines, not just theology, biblical studies, philosophy, and history."[77] Therefore, Christian schools are uniquely positioned to offer the experience of bringing God's Word to bear on specifically academic or specialized arenas of his creation. Perry Downs summarizes, saying, "The intellectual task of Christian education is the engagement of every field of study, to influence its use for the glory of God and the good of all mankind."[78]

If the Lord is the creator and sustainer, his voice should be heard in regard to every subject. This is not a surrender of any discipline or an evacuation of academia. According to Crider, "The Bible is a Christian's authority; it infuses every academic microfiber with life and purpose, but it does not micromanage the disciplines' technical language, areas of study, or questions."[79] Just as a pastor applies Scripture to life in preaching, the teacher applies Scripture to specialized areas of life in teaching. The majority of any sermon is not the text of the Bible, but that sermon would not be a Christian sermon without the Bible. In the same way, the Bible does not replace academic teaching, but "infuses" it. God's world shouts his glory (Ps 19:1–6). However, God's Word explains how to live rightly in the presence of the glorious God (Ps 19:7–14). The instructor calls students to investigate what it looks like to be a godly dentist, chef, or counselor. Therefore, the experience of Christian education should never be characterized by a pursuit of cool-headed neutrality, but by an authentic pursuit of knowing and honoring God by applying and obeying his Word. Informed godliness cannot exist without the axiological commitment to "press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of [his people]" (Phil 3:12).

Teachers who place the Word of God in the null curriculum, wittingly or unwittingly, may dampen God's voice and distance their course and, worse, their students, from his presence. However, academic disciple-makers embrace the aim of informed godliness because they invite him to speak about his world in his classroom for his glory. In other words, Christian education is *academic discipleship accomplished through biblical worldview integration for the purpose of informed godliness.* In this framework, the concept of neutrality is rejected while explicitly Scripture-driven aims are embraced. Academic disciple-makers teach for godliness.

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[77] David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student's Guide* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 92.

[78] Perry G. Downs, "Theology and Education," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 696.

[79] Crider, "A New Freshman Composition Pedagogy," 51.

Students receive more than information from instructors; they also are presented with the teacher's framework and biases. They inherit the normative and situational perspectives as a part of the course experience. They learn—in the Christian school—to walk with God and to treasure him. Students become like their teachers (Luke 6:40). Doug Blomberg says it another way, "Schools should evidence that education is ultimately not about information, but transformation, about discipling rather than disciplines."[80] If the teacher consistently invites Scripture to speak authoritatively in a class, students are more likely to invite Scripture to control the rest of their lives. Therefore, the unique experience of Christian education can lead to a uniquely Christian experience of all of life.

Conclusion

Frame's triperspectival methodology clarifies that academic disciple-makers teach students to think under the authority of God's Word, to learn under the controlling power of Scripture, and to work in the presence of God manifested through the Bible. In other words, *Christian education is academic discipleship accomplished through biblical worldview integration for the purpose of informed godliness.* This is not the final word on the matter; it is not meant to be. Instead, in the tradition of Tertullian, Augustine, Luther, and Newman, this is a contribution to the ongoing conversation that is meant to speak to unique contemporary challenges. My prayer is that it is timely and useful. To that end, teacher leaders and school administrators are invited to utilize this definition. Since it is not populated by new ideas, but it is formulated in such a way that veteran ideas richly describe the uniqueness of what Christian schools seek to be in a new way, school leaders can more easily communicate and cultivate the unique elements that set Christian schools apart. Both succinct and solid, my prayer is that schools that make use of this definition will find themselves better understanding, enacting, and communicating their distinctives for the good of their students and the glory of God.

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[80] Doug Blomberg, *Wisdom and Curriculum: Christian Schooling after Postmodernity* (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2007), 178.