ACSI Leading Insights

ACSI’s Leading Insights series highlights the latest thinking on best practices for Christian school educators in areas of key importance in their schools. Each monograph in the series draws on leading experts, as well as Christian school perspectives and voices, to share fresh ideas for advancing your school’s Christ-centered mission in an important area of focus.

This monograph, Biblical Worldview and Spiritual Formation, focuses on the core mission of Christian education—discipling the hearts and minds of students, and equipping them as ambassadors of Christ and reconcilers to God’s creation. With chapters by leaders, teachers, and researchers who have worked extensively in and with Christian schools, this edition shares valuable insights for fostering a school culture that is rooted in a biblical worldview and love of God and neighbor. Practical strategies and a culminating reflection guide will benefit readers in any role—whether in leadership, spiritual life oversight, classroom teaching, curricular planning, faculty professional development, or service-learning—as well as school teams seeking to grow in faithfulness to their Christ-centered mission.
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Introduction
Lynn E. Swaner, Series Editor

In their global research on today’s teenagers, Barna (2022) found this generation to display a remarkable openness to Jesus and the Bible, along with a generally positive view of both. At the same time, the research identified a considerable gap between the percentage of teens who identify as Christians and those who say they have made a personal commitment to follow Jesus. And even among teens who regularly engage with the Bible, many do not endorse the tenets of orthodox Christian faith or see the Bible as meaningfully informing their lives.

When it comes to closing the gap between teens’ openness and their commitment to a vibrant faith, there is good news: teens cite adults—whether parents, mentors, teachers, or youth pastors—as the primary source of mentorship and guidance in their faith development. The research concludes that to “bring this open generation to a place of deeper understanding and reliance upon the word of God will take a village” (Barna Group 2022, 14). Christian schools play an important role in this village square, not just for teens, but for children of all ages—importantly, the research “hints at the urgency and intentionality needed to plant young people in God’s word as early as possible” (29–31).

To this end, rather than a sprinkling of scriptures, doctrine, or spiritual practices, Christian schools seek to offer an education woven from the very fabric of their faith commitments (Hughes and Adrian 1997, 1). Biblical worldview development and spiritual formation, for both students and faculty, often lie at the heart of this effort. This monograph explores the ways Christian educators frame these concepts and consequently shape their pedagogy, curricula, and professional development in light of them.

Creating a Framework

Crucial to schools’ biblical worldview development and spiritual formation efforts is the creation of “a philosophical framework that accounts for the unrestricted interplay between faith and learning as implied by our vision statements” (Hull 2003, 212). There is consensus that such a framework should be Bible-based and Christo-centric, with both individual goals for student and faculty growth as well as corporate goals for cultivating Christian
community (Graham 2003, 205). However, there are diverse approaches to biblical worldview and spiritual formation in Christian schools which, though sometimes a question of semantics, can also result from influences like varying denominational theologies, emphases on particular spiritual practices, and interpretations of enlightenment thought (to name a few).

Put simply, there are no quick shortcuts to creating a framework for biblical worldview and spiritual formation. Schools and educators need to do the hard work of developing such a framework—with biblical faithfulness as the *sine qua non*—that is appropriate to their own contexts. This monograph is intended to help educators in doing so, with particular attention given in the first section, *Philosophy and Research*, to developing frameworks for biblical worldview and spiritual formation in Christian schools.

**Moving Toward Practice**

Importantly, this monograph was written by practitioners, for practitioners; thus, the second and third sections—*Christian School Perspectives* and *Programs and Practices*—are written with an eye toward developing coherent practice in classrooms and schools. In the second section, authors share from the perspectives of school leadership, classroom instruction, curricular development, and faculty training. In the third, authors share specific programs and approaches that have proved effective in the Christian school setting.

Across these chapters, readers will discern the need for a collective approach to biblical worldview development and spiritual formation in Christian schools. In other words, aligning philosophy to practice is not the work of a single individual or sole department. Instead, schools are in need of three things:

- **Shared language**—An essential component of any framework for practice must include a common language that is known and used by school leaders, teachers, students, and families. This should include definitions of key terms (like biblical worldview and spiritual formation), clear signposting of these terms in the school’s core documents, and regular use in communication to all constituents. Shared language is the starting point for developing coherent practice together and is essential for determining and assessing the effectiveness of that practice.
Shared practices—These are the approaches and strategies that are collectively developed and implemented throughout the school, with consistency and fidelity to the school’s philosophical framework. While this includes direct instruction on biblical worldview and spiritual formation, it also includes integrative framing and scaffolding of learning and development activities with a view to the same. Moreover, ACSI’s Flourishing Schools Research (Swaner, Marshall, and Tesar 2019) also identified the importance of applying knowledge through action; when present at a given school, constructs like community engagement, serving students with disabilities, and teachers’ best practice orientation are linked with higher rates of alumni reporting they are walking with God. While correlational and not causal, these findings suggest the need for students and faculty alike to have facilitated opportunities at school to “live out” the Gospel, by loving their neighbors, caring well for those with special needs, and striving for excellence in all they do (Colossians 3:23).

Shared time—Nothing worth doing in schools is accomplished without shared time-on-task, in terms of both number of hours and regular engagement across the school year (or, more accurately, years). Developing a shared language and practices for biblical worldview and spiritual formation is not a one-and-done affair—just like growing in love, knowledge, and understanding as part of discipleship is a “more and more” proposition (Philippians 1:9–11). In truth, “Whatever we write down in our mission statements … how we invest our time and money is often an accurate reflection of what we actually believe as individuals and organizations” (Swaner and Wolfe 2021, 171). The investment of school resources, including precious instructional and professional development time, should match the degree to which biblical worldview development and spiritual formation are central to the school’s mission.

Although school approaches will differ in structure and format, these three factors—shared language, practices, and time—are essential to bringing
a school’s framework for biblical worldview development and spiritual formation to life, for both students and faculty.

Reflection and Action

Research shows that professional practice is most effectively transformed when adults engage in a cycle of reflection and action (Swaner 2016). In other words, educators need to reflect on what they have learned and strategize for intentionally putting that learning into practice. To this end, this monograph includes a final section that features a set of reflection questions on the relationship between the school’s philosophy, policy, curricular development, pedagogy, and constituent relationships with its approach to biblical worldview development and spiritual formation. Consider reading this monograph and engaging in these questions together with colleagues, either informally or through a book study.

In his letter to the Colossian church, the apostle Paul urges believers to let “the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16). When Christian schools intentionally craft their philosophy and practice for biblical worldview development and spiritual formation, they can better invite students and faculty alike into the richness of God’s Word, a deeper walk with Christ, and the beauty of Christian community. Regardless of the specific terms used, there is hardly a Christian school mission that would not resonate with these Kingdom aims. May you be abundantly blessed in your pursuit of them.
Part 1: Philosophy and Research
Biblical Worldview and Spiritual Formation: Frameworks and Definitions
Jerry Nelson, ACSI

Our worldview is an inescapable reality that colors everything we communicate. We are the products of where we are born and raised, by whom we were raised, how we were nurtured, our collection of experiences (for better or worse), and how these experiences shaped our temperaments. In other words, we bring an inescapable bias to the table that is a product of how the Lord crafted us and the time and place in which He chose for us to be born. Ultimately, the collection of ideas and understandings about our reality constitutes our worldview. And this worldview is a narrative that influences how we think, how we interpret things, and ultimately what we believe to be truth. This is true of every human being who has ever lived.

Yet there is still a more powerful factor that shapes our worldview. In Numbers 13, the Lord commands Moses to send out spies to explore the land He had promised to give them. Twelve leaders were chosen from each tribe for the reconnaissance expedition. After being sent out and spending forty days in the land gathering evidence Moses requested, they concluded that the land was indeed flowing with milk and honey. There was no dispute about what the land possessed and who possessed the land. Yet the twelve produced two different reports—two different interpretations of the experience. Same data, same evidence, two interpretations reflecting different understandings of reality. How is this so? What factor accounts for two varying interpretations? The difference maker was the condition of their hearts.

In this chapter, we will explore the question of “what is a worldview?” We will survey both God’s Word and key theologians and philosophers as we frame out an answer to this question. Because there are different kinds of worldviews, we’ll also examine what defines a biblical worldview, which is the worldview that Christian schools seek to develop in students. Finally, we will explore the ways in which the condition of the human heart
fundamentally shapes not only the development but also the living out of a biblical worldview—thereby drawing necessary connections between worldview development and spiritual formation.

What Is a Worldview?

A worldview is a collection of presuppositions, examined or unexamined, that inform a person’s view of reality. It has been described as a filter or a lens through which an individual interprets the world; how one conceptualizes reality; the representation of one’s total outlook on life; the mind’s desire to seek unity amid great diversity; or a set of beliefs about the most important issues of life. While worldviews are difficult to discern in a holistic way, they can be understood along three different poles: a person’s view of God, view of humankind, and view of truth.

If there is a consensus among theologians and philosophers, it is the idea that a worldview is the formation of a mental picture about reality and this mental picture manifests itself in a story. It is a story we tell about ourselves and the world around us—a narrative, communally absorbed and individually apprehended. Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of a worldview has been provided by David Naugle (2005) in Worldview: The History of a Concept:

[Worldview is] a semiotic system of narrative signs that creates the definitive symbolic universe which is responsible in the main for the shape of a variety of life-determining, human practices. It creates the channels in which the waters of reason flow. It establishes the horizons of an interpreter’s point of view by which texts of all types are understood. It is that mental medium by which the world is known. The human heart is its home, and it provides a home for the human heart. (330)

Naugle notes that the concept of a worldview is relatively new in the history of ideas. The first noted appearance of worldview or Weltanschauung is in Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Judgement; according to James Orr, it
was largely used as a technical term “denoting the widest view which
the mind can take of things in the effort to grasp them together as a
whole from the standpoint of some particular philosophy or theology”
(Naugle 2005, 7, 58). Kant’s philosophical thought was instrumental in
effectively severing scientific thought from its religious basis. It ushered in
a wave of hypercriticism of all religious or superstitious presuppositions.
This has contributed to the ever-present secular-sacred divide.

This was indeed a revolution, given that the primary assumption held in
Europe at the time was that God is the center and the ultimate determiner
definition of reality (Hoffecker and Currid 2007). Although the concept of a world-
view was prevalent amongst German thinkers, it was largely concentrated
in academic philosophical circles. It was not until it began to make its
way into the natural science, and more prominently in the social sciences
(notably Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx), that the threat to Christianity
was most prominently felt. This new understanding of reality produced by
the Enlightenment thinkers ultimately led to a crisis in Christian thought.

As such, it was necessary for Christian thinkers who encountered
these philosophical challenges to answer them in a credible way, which
required immersion in the world of philosophical discourse. What emerged
was a group of Christian thinkers who began to conceive of Christianity
as a comprehensive worldview, in its own right, to demonstrate that it
met all the challenges levied against it. Naugle (2005) is quick to note that
Weltanschauung carries with it philosophical baggage since its emergence
did not originate from God’s Word, and as such it must be examined for
its “illicit content” and replaced with “licit content” (289); in other words,
Naugle believes Weltanschauung can be redeemed and adopted as a concept
to meet the philosophical challenges of our day.

Defining a Biblical Worldview

The development of a Christian Weltanschauung, or conceiving Christianity
as a worldview, did not formally make its way into the English lexicon
until its introduction by James Orr. It was then popularized by Abraham
Kuyper in his Stone Lectures, based on Calvin's Institutes. Philosophers,
theologians, and apologists such as Gordon Clark, Carl F.H. Henry, Herman Dooyeweerd, and Francis Schaeffer further developed the concept of a Christian worldview. Christianity as a worldview is robust enough to meet the philosophical challenges brought on by the Enlightenment as well as the social challenges of our post-truth/post-Christian paradigm.

If a worldview is a set of narrative signs that influence how we think, interpret, and categorize knowledge of the world, then a biblical worldview is thinking, interpreting, and knowing, with a heart converted to God with His Word as the final rule in faith and practice (Williamson 2004). So, then, what narrative signs do the scriptures clearly communicate? The biblical narrative has been expressed in four acts, movements, or epochs: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration (Plantinga 2002).

- **Creation:** In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God created people in His own image. God saw all that He had made, and it was good (Genesis 1). As image bearers we are personal (we have deep longings), rational (we have understanding), volitional (we are able to make choices), and emotional (we have feelings) (Crabb 1987). There are implications for bearing God’s image. Those include caring for creation, using our creativity, communing with others, conforming to the image of Christ (through renewing our mind), and contemplating the goodness and glory of God, His creation and activity within it (Plantinga 2002).

- **Fall:** We were created for wholeness, for harmony, for perfect fellowship with God. But our self-centeredness and desire for autonomy—essentially our rebellion—dissolved the fabric of that fellowship (Genesis 3). Sin breached the relationship between God and humanity. When this relationship was broken, it uncoupled every relationship connected to it: people with people (wars, murder, discrimination, prejudice), man with woman (divorce, abuse, broken families), people with nature (alienation, pollution, species extinction), and people with themselves (guilt, shame, fear).
• **Redemption:** Deep down we long for renewal, for redemption. Jesus—God incarnate—lived a perfect, sinless life and died on a cross to pay the penalty for our sin. And, three days later, He rose from the dead, demonstrating His power to rescue us and our world from sin, death, and brokenness. Only He can give us true freedom and mend our relationships with God, others, ourselves, and all of creation. Redemption is found through faith in Christ alone, by grace alone (Colossians 1:13–14; Ephesians 2:8–9).

• **Restoration:** The Bible paints a very bright picture of the future for the people of God. All God's children will be restored into perfect relationships—people with people, people with themselves, people with creation and most importantly, people with God: the Creator, Redeemer, and Restorer (Revelation 21). Until this time, believers are to engage the world as Christ’s ambassadors, through sharing the gospel, loving their neighbors, and doing the good works that God has appointed (2 Corinthians 5:20, Matthew 28:16–20, Matthew 22:36–40, Ephesians 2:10).

While a key component to the biblical worldview is this narrative, there are also philosophical, theological, apologetic, and ethical factors to consider in its development. I will suggest some key questions to consider in the development of a robust biblical worldview for each.

**Philosophy**

J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, in *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, write that philosophy is “the most foundational of all other disciplines, since it examines the presuppositions and ramifications of every discipline …” (n.d. 2017, 3). They define philosophy as “the attempt to think rationally and critically about life’s most important questions in order to obtain knowledge and wisdom about them” and assert that “philosophy can help someone form a rationally justified, true worldview” (3). This has been critical over the last two hundred years as Christianity has most often been attacked on the grounds of its underlying presuppositions. The biblical
worldview passes, comprehensively and coherently, any and all philosophical tests (Nash 2010). A sound philosophical foundation is necessary for a sound ethic. Key questions in developing a sound philosophical foundation are:

- What is ultimate reality?
- What is good?
- What is of value?
- What is beautiful?
- What is truth?
- How do we know what we know?

**Theology**

Medieval educators believed that the study of philosophy was necessary to effectively engage in theology. Philosophy aids theology in at least two ways: it provides a foundation for interpreting and systematizing scripture, and it aids theology in the task of integrating God’s Word into every aspect of life (Moreland and Craig n.d. 2017). With about 75 percent of scripture being in some form of narrative or poetry (BibleProject 2023), moral truths must be extracted and organized to present a unified testimony of God’s nature, activity, and purpose for creation. Systematic theology (or Bible doctrine) is the discipline of organizing these truths in an accessible way. It is particularly helpful for those who are young in their faith development to having some basic truths to hold on to as they navigate through scripture.

It goes without saying that knowing God’s Word is at the core of a biblical worldview. While there are many doctrinal categories by which to organize the revelation of God (i.e. soteriology, eschatology, ecclesiology, pneumatology), all teachings should be framed within the history of salvation. Key questions in developing a sound doctrinal formation are:

- What does scripture say about the purpose/significance of God revealing Himself to humankind?
- What does scripture say about the intent of this revelation being codified in the Holy scripture?
- What does scripture say about who God is? What is His nature? What has He revealed?
Philosophy and Research

- What does scripture say about what it means to be human? What is our responsibility to God? What is our responsibility to creation?
- What does scripture say about what can be known? What is truth? What is the ultimate source of knowledge? What is our responsibility with knowledge and truth?

Apologetics

The discipline that deals with the rational defense of the Christian faith is known as apologetics. It is aided by both philosophy and theology. Philosophy provides the tools for developing a reasonable response, and theology provides the systematized content to facilitate a response. Apologetics is concerned with answering those who criticize the historicity, authenticity, and coherence of scripture. It is not that scripture needs human affirmation to be true; however, we are commanded to give a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). We are also commanded to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. As Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe (2004) note in *When Critics Ask*, “Part of our loving duty to Christ is to find answers for those who criticize God’s Word” (9).

Apologetics involves the development of a framework for analyzing all worldviews against a biblical worldview. It also may include processing life experiences (specifically those that negatively impact us) in light of the truths in God’s Word about His sovereignty and providence. Apologetics done rightly should contribute to greater assurance of salvation in Jesus Christ. Key questions that arise in apologetics include those related to:

- The scriptures; for example, is the Bible a reliable source?
- The Incarnation; for example, is Jesus Christ the Son of God?
- The Resurrection; or, did Jesus Christ truly rise from the dead?
- The problem of evil; for example, if God is good why is there so much evil in the world? Why do bad things happen to good people?
Ethics

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14–15, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all.” For Paul, it was the knowledge of God that spurred him on as a minister of reconciliation. James 2:14 asks the question, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works?” In Mark 10:45, Jesus defined what it means to be great in the kingdom of God—servanthood. In scripture, there is a clear call to action. What we “ought” to do is clear.

The study of ethics (also known as moral philosophy or moral theory) is the study of what we “ought” to do. It is concerned with the rightness and wrongness of human conduct. The study of ethics assumes objectivity—there is a standard on which to judge human conduct. This standard rests outside of humankind. As such, Christian ethics is morality founded on, framed, and informed by the Word of God. While scripture doesn’t speak specifically to every issue, it is nonetheless the final rule in faith and practice, superintending every thought and action of a follower of Christ. Christian ethics is the outward manifestation of a sound biblical worldview. True Christian ethics is action that exhibits Christlikeness. Key questions that can frame a biblical view of ethics are:

- What does the Bible clearly state to be right and wrong?
- How do we determine right and wrong regarding a situation for which there is no specific command in scripture?
- What pattern of “right living” does the Bible set forth?
- What does it mean to live faithfully according to the pattern of Christ in our present moment?
- What should be the Christian’s disposition about culture (the zeitgeist or the spirit of the age)?

The categories above are suggestive of a spiritual trellis on which a believer’s faith can grow. However, it is important to note that the study of philosophy, theology, apologetics, or ethics in a formal sense is not necessary for faith in Christ. The thief on the cross was not given a systematic theology test to gain entrance into heaven. Naugle (2005) offers wise caution:
It is possible for Christian worldview advocates to cultivate an immoderate enthusiasm for their biblical systems with their cultural and apologetic potential and to become forgetful of the God who stands behind them. It is a grave mistake to confuse or substitute a proper relationship with the trinitarian God for the crafting and promulgation of a Christian Weltanschauung. A rightly ordered love both divine and human ought to be the ultimate outcome of all our actions, including that of biblical worldview development. It would be a mistake, however, to so focus on the coherent organization of such propositions as to neglect the personal God they present. No systematic, biblical Weltanschauung ought to usurp the primacy of Truth and the ultimate end of agapic love. (338)

It is to the question of “rightly ordered love”—or the relationship between biblical worldview and spiritual formation—that we now turn.

The Condition of the Heart

The Israelites’ exodus from Egypt provides for us one of the earliest case studies of worldview development (Hoffecker and Currid 2007). In fact, the episode of the twelve spies’ reports helps shine light on Naugle’s definition. Consider what the Lord says to Moses concerning the bad report: “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?” (Numbers 14:11, NIV).

Two questions emerge from this: what were the signs God performed among them? And what was God’s purpose in producing the signs? The ten plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, the manna and occasional quail, water from the rock, hearing the voice of God, and the other miraculous interventions in the wilderness storyline all were meant to communicate to these former captives that the Lord is God, that He is one, and that He chose Israel to be His conduit of salvation for mankind. The issuing of the Ten Commandments—outlining
the standard for people’s relationship to God and their relationship to each other—pointed to and painted a narrative of God’s providential and sovereign rulership. This grand narrative of God’s activity in His creation and relationship with His special creation—human beings—effectively formed the foundation for the rest of the scriptural narrative.

The power of these narrative-forming signs and wonders performed by God was that it served to cleanse the Israelites of four hundred years of immersion in Egyptian cultural and correct their understanding of reality. Hoffecker calls this one of the earliest “Revolutions in Worldview.” To codify these signs and wonders for all eternity, the Lord directs Moses, by the Holy Spirit, to record them. The Torah codifies the Israelites’ view of God (triune, infinite, personal), human beings (made in the image of God, fully dignified, fallen, redeemable), the ultimate source of truth (revelation by God for salvation, and through nature by discovery), and the purpose of creation (to bring glory to God). It would provide the framework for which they would think, interpret, and understand the world around them. It provided them with a worldview centered on God and their relationship with Him.

Each of the twelve spies had access to this information—seeing the miracles with their own eyes, knowing the story of their origin and their unique place in history—yet they did not view things the same. This story, and others throughout scripture, provides a clear understanding of the core factor determining a worldview—the condition of the heart. Generally speaking, there are only two conditions of the heart, as Naugle (2005) asserts: “a heart converted to God or a heart averted to God” (26). Either the heart is a slave to righteousness or a slave to sin (Romans 6:15–23). As Naugle notes, “The diversity and relativity of worldviews, therefore, must be traced to the idolatry and the noetic effects of sin upon the human heart” (276). Those hearts that have not been transformed by the Holy Spirit have been “given over” to the lust and the passions of the flesh (Romans 1:18–25). Therefore, we can conclude that a biblical worldview, in its most
basic sense, is a heart that is converted to God’s view of Himself, reality, humankind, and truth. This worldview continues to grow in terms of its application in believers’ lives, in proportion to the growth in their knowledge of and relationship with Him.

The account of the twelve spies should also serve as a warning to us lest we think we are the prime cause of transformation. God provided the best-possible curriculum for spiritual formation and transformation, yet ten of the twelve did not believe. We must remember that many did not believe Jesus’ message after they saw Him perform miracles (Mark 2). We serve God as He calls out those whom He has chosen, but we don’t cause transformation. That is exclusively the work of the Holy Spirit. The Christian educator’s responsibility then is to cultivate the soil to aid the transformation process. This is not an either-or proposition; this is a matter of priority. It is the curriculum behind “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18–20).

Biblical worldview development ultimately serves spiritual formation. If a biblical worldview is ultimately a matter of the heart, then the Holy Spirit will manifest itself in a Caleb-like declaration: “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it” (Numbers 13:30, NIV). Caleb’s was a heart converted to God with a desire to know God and be vigorously obedient to His will. To our knowledge Caleb didn’t have a formal course in philosophy or theology as we understand it today, but he and the Israelites were presented with the signs and symbols that pointed to God’s existence and will for His creation. If this is true, then it may be said that the responsibility of the Christian educator is to faithfully present the signs and symbols of the existence, providential care, and sovereign rule of God and to be visible testimonies and representations of Jesus Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to do the rest (2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:24).
We can thank God every day for taking our hearts of stone and replacing them with hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 11:14–21). For whatever our circumstances were at the time of birth and whatever they are now, we should see them new and afresh with the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5). And as Christian educators, we can intentionally equip our students with the tools to deepen and defend their faith, as we tell the story of God’s love and faithfulness in the way we live.
The Faculty Development Perspective: Training Teachers for Biblical Worldview and Spiritual Formation
Annie Gallagher

If Christian school faculty are qualified to teach and are Christians, do they need professional development in biblical worldview and spiritual formation approaches? To answer this question, let’s consider Jesus, the Master Teacher, who provided professional development to His handpicked leadership team of twelve followers. These men worshiped in the Jewish temple and celebrated the Passover meal and other Jewish feasts with Jesus. Some worked alongside John the Baptist. Some were recognized for their strong faith in God. Yet even with their background, the disciples needed a growth plan with learning experiences and specific training in knowledge, attitude, and skills for the nuances of fulfilling the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Jesus’ professional development plan included three years of strategically planned events to train up future leaders. The expected outcome, or the mission, was to make fishers of men (Matthew 4:19, 28:19–20). This training was to prepare leaders to seek, teach, and save the lost (Luke 19:10, Mark 2:17), and equip others to do the same (1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Timothy 2:2).

The background of the twelve is not dissimilar to the background of many faculty members. Faculty members might have a strong Christian testimony, attend church, and participate in Bible studies. However, can they articulate a biblical worldview and explain how to influence biblical worldview development and the spiritual formation of a child? Similar to the mission set for Jesus’ team of twelve, the mission of Christian education “must have as its primary goals the salvation and discipleship of the next generation” (Schultz 2021, 28). Faculty members, as followers of Jesus, are also disciples with the mission to share the gospel message and make disciples through their vocation. Therefore, they need to learn how to positively influence the spiritual formation and worldview development of their students.

And just like in Jesus’ example, faculty members need a well-designed path for continued training and development to fulfill the mission of Christian education.
The “How” of Faculty Training and Development

When a school leader or leadership team plans for professional development efforts, especially those related to biblical worldview development and spiritual formation, there are important steps to take. Planning professional development is a sort of reverse engineering process. One imagines and considers the final product or expectation and then takes it apart, bit by bit, to determine the necessary building blocks. Four of the key building blocks are as follows.

Set Goals

First, create a clear picture of the expected end goal by defining terms and describing the expectations. After presenting and promoting the goal in clear terminology, determine the subskills needed on the learning path and the instructional methods that will allow the subskills to be practiced throughout the professional development process. Finally, plan how the ideas, skills, and attitudes learned during training will be preserved as a “way of doing” biblical worldview development and spiritual formation at your school (Taylor 2018).

The desired expected outcome or set of outcomes needs to be articulated, presented, and promoted to keep every stakeholder focused and moving toward the same end. Schools that have well-articulated expected student outcomes or portrait-of-a-graduate statements that include spiritual maturity might find those useful in creating an ongoing professional growth plan for faculty in biblical worldview development and spiritual formation. The final goal is not achieved by what the teachers can do, but instead by how what the teachers do affects the students. Professional development includes activities designed to equip educators with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that, in turn, will improve student learning (Guskey 2002). Designing professional development plans for biblical worldview development and spiritual formation requires an understanding of the sequential hierarchy of concepts and skills needed to reach the expected outcome. What concepts, skills, and experiences do students need in order to influence their development of a biblical worldview and spiritual formation? What then do teachers need to know or be able to do in order to teach those concepts and skills and provide students with those experiences?
Finally, articulate these goals and the activities designed to meet them through the professional development plan. This plan creates the learning path for faculty which will ultimately affect the path of student learning. For example, if the expectation is for students to be able to read and comprehend what they read, the learning path for professional development needs to consider what the teachers and the students need to know and be able to do in order to meet the end goal. The path of professional learning, or the “how,” is most successful when the plan scaffolds teachers from simple to complex, and from known to unknown. At the same time, the instructional methods and experiences used to grow teachers’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, and spiritual maturity should align with best practices for adult learning. Professional learning is considered successful if the innovation becomes part of teachers’ regular classroom practice or active repertoire.

Prioritize Relationships

“Be fishers of men” was the end goal of the three-year professional development plan implemented by Jesus. Jesus kept the goal in front of the disciples at all times. All learning experiences were provided to achieve the overall mission or learning goal. The learning experiences had to instill the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to cast the gospel message as a net and patiently wait to see if there would be a catch. Importantly, this required the disciples to know how to relate to all sorts of people, understand the human condition, and stand firm when encountering opposition. And most importantly, they had to not simply know about God, but needed to know Him intimately. Knowing God empowered them to cast the gospel net confidently and then sort the catch in order to identify who would be the next people to become disciples. All of the learning had to provide opportunities within personal relationships to observe, gain knowledge, and practice skills needed to achieve the end goal. Professional development plans for biblical worldview development and spiritual formation thus must incorporate a relational element.

Similarly, partnership principles (Knight 2007) will help move adult learners toward independent implementation of new ideas and methods. The partnership principles require that during professional learning all participants are treated with equal value, are given opportunities to dialogue
about their opinions, and are able to make choices about their professional learning activities. Additionally, participants should have time for real-life practice and reflection on the skills and ideas they are learning. These principles are all evident in Christ’s delivery of professional development.

**Use Varied Approaches**

Along these lines, the Master Teacher used a variety of instructional techniques to grow the future leaders’ understanding, heart attitudes, and actions. Jesus modeled for the team members how the various aspects of the job were to be completed with thoughtfulness, humility, compassion, and intentional action. What was it that the disciples saw, heard, were taught, and experienced as they participated in His learning plan? The list is rich. They witnessed Jesus’ teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel, healing, and casting out demons (Matthew 4:23–25, Mark 1:39). The disciples saw and personally experienced how Jesus conveyed the value of each individual in how He related to all sorts of people (Mark 10:13–16; John 4:27). The disciples were taught how to pray (Luke 11:1–4). Much was learned as the group spent time together building relationships with one another as they learned how to achieve the goal to be fishers of men.

Yes, instruction and information were sometimes provided directly to individuals and in small groups (Matthew 5:1–2; 7:28–29). At the same time, questions were posed to the team members to build reflective thinking about circumstances and context (Mark 8:27–29). These reflective questions fostered the disciples’ ability to determine truth and appropriate responses. Jesus completed the professional growth plan by providing opportunities for practice; the disciples put into action what they had learned in terms of right thinking, attitudes, and skills as they were sent out in pairs to practice what they witnessed from Jesus (Mark 6:7–12; Matthew 10:1; Luke 9:1–7). Finally, after three years of Jesus’ modeling, direct instruction, questioning, and guided practice, the disciples were ready to continue the mission on their own.

**Consider Coaching**

Jesus used a coaching model to provide a series of learning opportunities all focused on a single expected outcome that was understood by the disciples. The disciples were actively engaged in the learning process. Professional development for the disciples did not take place solely by “sit and get” methods
of instruction, though there were certainly times when Jesus had His students sit and listen. Jesus taught with a balanced variety of instructional methods and in a sequence that was sensitive to the spiritual, emotional, and cognitive conditions of the disciples. And throughout the Old and New Testaments, many examples of coaching are evident—like Elijah and Elisha, Jethro and Moses, and Paul and Timothy. In these examples, one can see elements of modeling, questioning, and providing feedback with guided practice. Most of the biblical coaching examples included long-term and strategic efforts focused on clear expected outcomes. These efforts were successful because they were enveloped in caring and honest personal relationships.

Professional development provided through a coaching model leads to more frequent practice and skill with new strategies, more appropriate implementation, and longer retention of knowledge than through traditional methods of professional development (Joyce and Showers 2002; Knight 2007). What does the coaching process look like in practice? Bruce Joyce and Beverley Showers (1982), considered to be among the founding experts of peer coaching, frame the coaching process using the elements of teaching. Successful implementation of an innovation (defined as anything new to the learner, whether a new method, tool, or new term) is brought about through the following elements of teaching: 1) study of the why and what of the innovation; 2) demonstration of the innovation by an expert; 3) practice with the innovation while providing feedback in protected conditions; and 4) coaching one another to work the innovation into regular practice.

When analyzing the course of professional learning provided by Jesus to the disciples, the elements of teaching are evident. Jesus articulated the goal, taught and modeled ways to achieve the goal, provided practice with feedback, and coached through relationship how to make their knowledge, attitudes, and skills become part of their everyday way of doing things.

The “When” of Faculty Training and Development

Discipleship and professional learning are ongoing processes. A workshop here or there will not suffice in helping teachers to develop their own worldview and related teaching skills. Research has shown that sufficient duration and frequency of professional development are key to teacher outcomes (Swaner 2016). So from the beginning of a training program, systemic processes
ought to be established in order to preserve and build upon the result of the training. Support, accountability measures, and reflection opportunities are needed to continue and maintain professional growth.

Provide Support

Support comes in the form of planned collaboration time for faculty related to the desired outcome, a collection of resources, exemplars for teachers and administrators, and coaches who serve as resident guides for the new innovation. These kinds of support require both human and tangible resources, for which school leaders must plan and budget. Yet without these supports, efforts to train and develop faculty in these areas will ultimately fail to take root in the school’s instructional culture. Ongoing support ensures that the school’s investment in professional development, focused on biblical worldview development and spiritual formation, will pay dividends over the long-term.

Provide Accountability

Accountability occurs through the attention given to the continued implementation of the skills, attitudes, and experiences provided for students. Upon completion of the training program, two steps can be incorporated into the life of the school to foster continued accountability. The first step is to establish a timetable that stipulates the frequency of implementation with the expected outcomes and the corresponding time to reflect on the implementation. The second step is the use of criteria that paint a picture of the expected outcome and can be used to provide feedback. The timetable for implementation and reflection, along with the descriptive criteria, should be included as part of the practice phase of training to build the habits needed for full implementation and to build a common language to communicate expectations and feedback. Without support and accountability, the results of professional development efforts will soon fade away.

Provide Onboarding

Finally, onboarding is often overlooked as a requirement for preserving the thinking, attitudes, and skills learned during professional development. The teachers and administrators who completed the current professional development plan may do well with implementation, but what about the new hires for next year? How will they get up to speed with what other
faculty members are regularly implementing? There are at least two ways to answer this question. First, abbreviated components of the professional development program can be included as part of the onboarding process for new teachers and administrators. Second, similar to a long-term learning plan for current faculty and administrators, a new teacher training program that takes place over several months or even the first two years has the potential to help preserve the school’s instructional culture, while also applying best practices of professional learning.

The “What” of Faculty Training and Development

As you do the reverse engineering for biblical worldview development and spiritual formation, ask yourself, what do you want teachers and students to do related to a biblical worldview? What do you want teachers and students to demonstrate with spiritual formation? The following steps will help in answering these questions.

Define Terms

The answers to these questions require that the constructs of biblical worldview development and spiritual formation be defined. A definition of each needs to be first grounded in scripture and then articulated, presented, and promoted, so that all stakeholders have a shared understanding from which to develop practices. Both biblical worldview development and spiritual formation are lifelong processes that are influenced by one’s surrounding community. With respect to a biblical worldview and spiritual formation, these constructs are similar and intertwined, but not the same thing.

A worldview can be described as a “pattern of ideas, beliefs, convictions and habits that help us make sense of God, the world, and our relationship to God and the world” (Noebel and Myers 2015, 10). A biblical worldview is one where a person’s ideas, beliefs, convictions, and habits align with the Bible. It involves seeing and responding to the world as Christ would. Worldview assumptions are generally unconsciously held but affect how we think and live. Worldview reflects the academic and cultural community in which one lives and resides (Scott and Magnuson 2006). The beliefs, convictions, and
habits that help us make sense of God, the world, and our relationships to God and the world are heavily influenced by the ideas we are exposed to and think about, the relationships we maintain, and the activities in which we engage. Biblical worldview development begins at birth and is influenced early on by interactions with primary caregivers. As a child grows, the weekly family routines, the nature of faith practices of others with whom the child interacts, and the exposure to ideas through literature, media, peers, and education influence and shape the child’s worldview. In other words, worldview continues to be developed by one’s academic and cultural surroundings (Cosgrove 2006, Smith 2016).

Spiritual formation for the Christian, on the other hand, is “the Spirit driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes the inner being of Christ himself” (Willard 2022, 12). Evidence of one’s spiritual formation can be seen in three dimensions: the cognitive dimension, or thinking; the affective dimension, or relational; and the volitional dimension, or actions (Hollinger 2005). While spiritual formation begins and is matured by the work of the Holy Spirit, it is influenced by one’s desire for transformation, the practice of spiritual disciplines, and a nurturing community of faith and love (Teo 2017, Willard 2002). Spiritual formation begins when the Holy Spirit convicts a person before salvation and transforms after salvation within a faith community and by the influence of God’s Word (Willard 2002, Teo 2017). The Holy Spirit begins to shape a person from the inside to become Christlike. The Spirit’s work moves more quickly if the person has an openness to transformation and seeks growth through God’s grace.

It should be noted that the definition of these constructs varies even within Christian education. Therefore, although definitions are offered throughout this monograph and in the paragraphs above, it is important for Christian school educators to do the necessary study required for properly defining these terms for themselves and their schools. This process of study itself can be part of a development program for both leaders and faculty, as it will lead to deeper understanding of the concepts, which will in turn inform their practice.
Plan Holistically

As mentioned, biblical worldview development and spiritual formation both are holistic processes. The people and culture in which we live the moments of our day contribute greatly to how our spiritual experiences are interpreted and understood. Therefore, children's experiences in the Christian home, school, and church will nurture worldview development and spiritual formation by providing examples of what is valued in faith and how to do it (Fowler 1981; Scott and Magnuson 2006). Understanding how biblical worldview development and spiritual formation are shaped and influenced enables educators to take intentional steps to form a school culture that nurtures the shaping process. Thinking opportunities, relationships, and actions are strong shaping and influencing dimensions. So, it makes sense for educational institutions to promote opportunities for students to think critically about worldview ideas, build relationships with other Christ followers, and participate in experiences that provide guidelines and examples of Christlike living and draw them into a saving relationship with Jesus.

The three dimensions of thinking, relationships, and experiences can be simplified with the terms head, heart, and hands, respectively. Hollinger (2005) explains that complete faith involves thinking, spirituality, and mission or action. These dimensions nurture each other and are dependent on one another. They are not standalone entities. Complete faith is understood, felt, and lived out. These dimensions of faith align with the components of a worldview: beliefs, convictions, and habits. The head dimension is primarily a thinking aspect that centers on beliefs and understandings. The heart dimension includes affections, passions, and deep spiritual experiences that come through relationships and interactions with Jesus and others. The hands dimension involves actions or experiential activities.

Given the three dimensions of faith—head, heart, and hands—Christian schools can attend to these same dimensions when building a culture intended to shape students’ worldviews and influence spiritual formation. Therein lies the definition and means for biblical integration. Biblical integration must be seen as a holistic shaping process that takes place through thinking, relationships, and actions. Biblical integration methods and models can consequently be classified according to their primary focus: to foster thinking
habits, to build relationships, or provide application experiences. Again, it is important to remember that the three dimensions are not discrete from one another. However, sometimes it is necessary to focus teacher training for biblical integration more on one dimension—depending on what requires the most improvement, be it to develop the thinking, relational, or experiential learning opportunities for students.

It has been established that worldview development is shaped by ideas we think about, relationships with others, and experiences in which we participate. Spiritual formation is similarly influenced. Thus, the culture of a Christian school should promote and practice head opportunities for thinking about ideas presented in subject matter from a biblical perspective using biblically integrated instruction in the classroom. The culture should also promote and practice heart opportunities to build relationships with other followers of Christ, and Christ Himself through such programs as chapel, retreats, and small groups. In addition, the culture should promote and practice hands opportunities to participate in experiences that exemplify Christlike living such as service-learning (see chapter 9 of this monograph).

**Putting It All Together**

Each school can examine its school culture to determine which dimension—head, heart, or hands—requires improvement. First, define what the end result of biblical worldview development and spiritual formation should look like. What will a well-functioning school culture that practices opportunities for thinking biblically, building relationships with Christ and others, and experiences that exemplify Christlike living look like? This end goal for each dimension needs to be clearly defined, not just talked about. Creating a visual picture of what each fully functioning dimension looks like will enable the school to communicate the criteria for success. The clear visual picture will also facilitate reverse engineering of the building blocks needed to create the end result, which include the concepts and skills needed, as well as specific training experiences that will provide direct instruction, modeling, guided practice with reflection, and coaching.

* To learn more about Transformed PD and the PAQ Method, a biblically integrated instructional approach designed to equip teachers to reveal Christ and worldview principles in every subject, visit [https://transformedpd.com/the-paq-method/](https://transformedpd.com/the-paq-method/).
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This monograph, *Biblical Worldview and Spiritual Formation*, focuses on the core mission of Christian education—discipling the hearts and minds of students, and equipping them as ambassadors of Christ and reconcilers to God’s creation. With chapters by leaders, teachers, and researchers who have worked extensively in and with Christian schools, this edition shares valuable insights for fostering a school culture that is rooted in a biblical worldview and love of God and neighbor. Practical strategies and a culminating reflection guide will benefit readers in any role—whether in leadership, spiritual life oversight, classroom teaching, curricular planning, faculty professional development, or service-learning—as well as school teams seeking to grow in faithfulness to their Christ-centered mission.