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**Advancing Biblical Higher Education
for Kingdom Impact**

Flourishing Institutions  **Missional Graduates**

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For this twentieth issue of the *Biblical Higher Education Journal*, we are pleased to offer the readers an unusually robust lineup of five articles and six book reviews. These contributions from faculty members and administrators at eleven different institutions promote the mission of biblical higher education by providing summaries of research and analyses relating to the issues, trends, opportunities, and challenges facing biblical higher education.

The first article, contributed by Walker Tzeng of Olivet University, offers timely reflections on incorporating generative AI in the study of historical theology. The second article, contributed by Michael T. French of Faith Bible College International, summarizes research into the integration of faith and learning at three ABHE colleges and offers three steps for promoting this integration. The third article, contributed by Seth L. Scott of Columbia International University, will be of special interest to those who teach counselors and desire to know how to develop a biblical worldview among the students. The fourth article, contributed by Justin M. Thomas of Calvary Chapel Bible College, considers the concept of perennialism as it was proposed by Robert Maynard Hutchins and its relevance for seminary education. The fifth article, contributed by John G. (“Jack”) Nill of Global University, focuses on the effect of mathemagenic devices on student learning.

The six book reviews in this volume cover a range of important topics and issues related to biblical higher education, including classifications and evaluations of institutions of Christian higher education, civility in discourse, philosophy of Christian higher education, the role of creeds in Christian faith and practice, critical race theory, and spiritual formation.

Members of the editorial board (Kevin Hester, Rob Lindemann, Brent Shaw, and LaTanya Tyson) evaluate submitted articles and offer helpful feedback to authors so that their final products can inform, inspire, and challenge the reader. I appreciate their willingness to invest their time in advancing the cause of biblical higher education. Aaron Profitt of God's Bible School and College, the Book Review Editor, assisted in preparing the book reviews for publication. And the editorial board expresses its appreciation for Carol Dibble, Chief of Staff and Director of Communications at ABHE, who annually produces this journal as a high-quality, attractive publication for ABHE constituents.

Gregory L. Linton, Editor
Vice President for Academic Affairs/Provost
Johnson University
Knoxville, TN

Contributors

Tyson S. Chastain, Director of Alumni Relations
Johnson University, Knoxville, TN

Nathan Deck, Adjunct Faculty
Word of Life Bible Institute, Pottersville, NY

Christopher N. Dickerson, Provost
Carolina College of Biblical Studies, Fayetteville, NC

Andrew Evans, Director of Youth Leadership
Summit Pacific College, Abbotsford, BC

Michael French, Dean of Academic Affairs
Faith Bible College International, Charleston, ME

Anna-Marie Lockard, Adjunct Faculty
Nazarene Bible College, Colorado Springs, CO

John G. (“Jack”) Nill, Vice Provost for Academic Support
Global University, Springfield, MO

Seth L. Scott, Professor of Clinical Counseling
Columbia International University, Columbia, SC

Justin Thomas, President
Calvary Chapel Bible College, Twin Peaks, CA

Walker Tzeng, Vice President and Chaplain
Olivet University, Mill Valley, CA

Frank E. Weller, President
Great Lakes Christian College, Lansing, MI

Editorial Policy

The articles in the *Biblical Higher Education Journal* reflect the opinions of the authors and reviewers and do not necessarily represent those of the Editor or the Publisher.

ARTICLES

- *AI and the Network Generation: Theological Discussions with ChatGPT on Historical Theology*
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AI and the Network Generation: Theological Discussions with ChatGPT on Historical Theology

Walker Tzeng

Abstract

The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its integration into theological discourse present both opportunities and challenges, particularly for the “network generation”—Millennials and Gen Z—who are digital natives navigating an ever-evolving technological landscape. This study explores the role of ChatGPT in biblical and theological discussions, drawing insights from a historical theology course. Through structured AI-driven conversations, students engaged with complex theological topics, reflecting on both the benefits and limitations of AI in theological education. The findings reveal that ChatGPT enhances accessibility, simplifies dense theological concepts, and fosters critical engagement while also exhibiting significant limitations, including factual inaccuracies, biases, and a lack of human-like relational depth. The study highlights AI’s potential to serve as an assistive tool in theological education but underscores the irreplaceable role of human interaction, spiritual formation, and discernment in faith-based learning. Ultimately, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on the responsible integration of AI in theological pedagogy, emphasizing the need for critical engagement, ethical considerations, and a Christ-centered approach to technological adoption.

Growing up in Silicon Valley in the 1980s and 1990s ingrained in me the impact of technology on young people, especially with the internet's rise in the early 2000s. This also coincided with the beginning of my faith journey at UCLA, where I transitioned from a non-believing student studying technology to a follower of Jesus Christ. I believed passionately that God would use young people, with the help of technology, to change the world for his kingdom. Decades later, with the advent of mobile phones, social media, and now AI, the impact of technology remains significant. AI's potential for transformative change, as even the White House (2022) notes, could impact "productivity, growth, inequality, market power, innovation, and employment." This potential extends to missions and ministry with innovative uses of AI tools becoming a crucial frontier for advancing God's kingdom.

This article analyzes how the "network generation" uses ChatGPT in biblical-theological discussions, based on observations from a historical theology course at Olivet University. The study examines the benefits and limitations of using AI in theological conversations, offering insights for missions, ministry, and education. While the research was limited to a small group of thirteen students, the paper aims to enhance understanding of how AI can enrich theological discussions and highlight potential challenges in its adoption. For this paper, I am using the term "network generation" to encompass Millennials and GenZ, since both generations share a constantly changing technological landscape.

An Overview of AI and ChatGPT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to technology that can perform tasks typically requiring human intelligence, such as speech

recognition and decision-making. AI has recently gained significant attention, particularly with OpenAI's ChatGPT, a form of generative AI that OpenAI (2023) described as a "language model trained to produce text" and optimized for dialogue. Generative AI represents a groundbreaking frontier, capable of creating text, images, and music by mimicking patterns in existing data. It works together with Large Language Models (LLMs), which Minaee et. al (2024) describes as "large-scale, pre-trained, statistical language models based on neural networks." The key innovation behind ChatGPT is the transformer, first studied by researchers Vaswani et. al (2017), and uses a self-attention mechanism to weigh words in a sentence relative to each other, enhancing natural language processing and improving the model's ability to understand and generate language. This process is crucial for predicting missing words and generating the next word, enabling the model to learn language structure and nuances through pre-training.

Pre-training AI uses a self-supervised learning approach with vast amounts of text data to help models predict missing words (or "masked language modeling") and generate the next word in a sequence, as researchers Devlin et. al (2019) outlined. This allows the AI to understand the full context of a sentence, despite missing words from the user. For example, a user request for a sermon on Matthew 4:18-22 should not be interpreted as a sermon on Matthew followed by numbers but a desire for biblical context and real-life application to the disciples' calling. Pre-training enables the model to predict the next word using predictive analytics, as researchers Radford et. al (2018) described. According to Brown et. al (2020), this is usually autoregressive, meaning the model is generating text one at a time based on previous outputs. Once trained on a large data

set of vocabulary, the LLMs can produce human-like text for tasks like creative writing and conversational responses. Interestingly, past AI models, like symbolic AI, attempted to “think” like humans using problem-solving theories such as those outlined by Newell and Herbert (1972, p. 1), but they failed to produce coherent text efficiently. Instead, this Generative Pre-Trained Transformer (GPT) technology, which simply generates the next word, excelled in its place. That is why ChatGPT is not the AI of movies, where it learns and grows like humans, a concept known as Artificial General Intelligence (AGI).

ChatGPT perpetually uses current information from the internet to generate responses (OpenAI, 2023). It has various applications including translation, summarization, Q&A, analysis, and more. If a user asks ChatGPT to write a 500-word essay on the Reformation, it will do so with extraordinary efficiency. It received a 1410 on the SATs and a score of 5 out of 5 on multiple AP tests (OpenAI, 2023). According to Choi et al. (2023), ChatGPT has passed multiple different college-level exams and is constantly improving with each upgrade. A survey in January 2023 reported that 89% of students surveyed had used ChatGPT for homework, while 72% of college professors surveyed were “concerned about its impact on cheating,” according to Study.com (2023).

Despite its impressive capabilities, ChatGPT has significant limitations. OpenAI (2023) admits that “ChatGPT sometimes writes plausible-sounding but incorrect or nonsensical answers.” ChatGPT will sometimes sound convincing but generates completely inaccurate information, otherwise known as “hallucinations.” OpenAI (2023) also admits that ChatGPT is “often excessively verbose and overuses certain phrases.” Another issue with ChatGPT

is its tendency to steer users towards mainstream perspectives, a bias inherent in the data set it was trained on, as researcher Emilio Ferrara described (2023). This has the benefit of steering users away from extreme viewpoints, but it has the drawback of overlooking minority opinions.

Considering the Network Generation

As mentioned, the term “network generation” encompasses both Millennials and GenZ, two generations that share a constantly changing technological landscape, as Pew Research president Michael Dimock (2019) outlined. The hallmark of the network generation has been the internet, which has created a globalized society with readily available information and instant communication. This is a generation of digital natives with a heightened sense of interconnectedness, more aware of diverse cultures and perspectives than ever before due to social media, according to researchers (Allen et al., 2014). The information overload also created challenges like echo chambers, which reinforce pre-existing beliefs, as researchers Cinelli et al. (2021) describe. Members of the network generation are early adopters of all technology, including AI, outpacing previous generations in usage (Nejame et al., 2023). They are integrating AI more swiftly into their everyday lives than older generations can anticipate or react to.

Beyond technological influences that the network generation can see are hidden influences of postmodernism from past generations. Stanley Grenz (1996, pp. 167-174) identified it as a generation that is post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic, and post-noeticentric of modernist ideals. For this generation, Ronald Michener (2007, p. 162) sees the need for an approach that is “whole-

person, relationally centered, dialogue-based apologetic which appeals to reason, human sensibility, emotion, and imagination.” Grenz’s framework and Michener’s analysis highlight the need to consider the postmodern influence on the network generation, where the relationship between the individual and the meta-narrative is nuanced. Unlike the modernist focus on the rational self within a fixed meta-narrative, postmodernism encourages individual self-discovery with metanarratives adapting to the individual. However, believers cannot ignore the overarching biblical-historical framework. For the network generation, faith involves balancing personal self-discovery with the metanarrative of God’s kingdom, emphasizing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ within the community of believers while acknowledging individualism within the broader story of the Kingdom.

These considerations of the network generation are fascinating in examining how ChatGPT inherently addresses these characteristics for theological discussion. As digital natives, the network generation seamlessly integrates ChatGPT into their lives. ChatGPT enables individualized and nuanced discussions while drawing from the existing body of theological knowledge. It provides well-informed responses based on Christianity’s history and tradition, facilitating personal engagement within the broader context of faith, the Church, and God’s kingdom. Thus, ChatGPT may serve as an intuitive bridge connecting the unique characteristics of the network generation to theological discussions.

Background on Student Conversations with ChatGPT

In Spring 2024, I taught a historical theology course to thirteen students at Olivet University, an institution of biblical higher

education. The historical theology course covered the period from the Early Church to the Reformation, and I tasked the students with having four one-hour conversations with ChatGPT. The subject matter was ideal for AI since there was ample information available on the internet. Students were instructed to have their conversations after listening to my lectures and doing required readings. Afterwards, I provided the students with suggestions for conversations with ChatGPT. I also told students to take conversations in whatever direction they wanted.

The following is a sampling of suggested guidelines I gave to students:

1. Ask ChatGPT to give a comprehensive summary of key topics from Lecture 1 (Hellenistic philosophy, Gnosticism, the Apostolic Fathers, and the Logos Doctrine). Use ChatGPT to seek further clarity for anything that is unclear.
2. Why was Gnosticism considered a threat to early Christian doctrine? How did the Apostolic Fathers respond to Gnosticism, and what measures did they take to protect the integrity of Christian teachings?
3. Can you provide biblical substantiation to support Augustine's theology in response to Pelagius? Please use the Bible to ensure theological accuracy and analyze how these Bible verses relate to the analysis.
4. Ask ChatGPT to provide a list of questions for personal self-reflection on the Trinitarian debates that impact your faith and theological understanding. Then, reflect on these questions and get feedback from ChatGPT.
5. Ask ChatGPT to provide a list of questions to ascertain whether you are more closely aligned with Bonaventure's or

Aquinas's approach to knowledge. Answer those questions and ask ChatGPT to analyze with whom you are mostly closely theologically aligned and why.

6. Ministry Application: Provide ChatGPT with background information on your current or future ministry work and ask for advice on how to incorporate the insights from Lecture 4 into improving your ministry, keeping in mind the historical challenges and developments in Christian thought.
7. Sermon ideas: Ask ChatGPT for sermon ideas, including Bible passages for preaching, based on concepts and ideas that resonated with you during the lecture.

Following their ChatGPT conversation, students wrote reflections and engaged in a one-hour discussion with me on the benefits, limitations, opportunities, and risks of using ChatGPT in theological discussion.

Reflections from the Network Generation

Students reported several significant strengths of ChatGPT in their conversations, particularly its ability to simplify complex information and provide clear, accurate summaries of course topics, which was especially helpful for non-native English speakers. Some students found ChatGPT's responses easier to understand than even my own lectures or challenging reading assignments like Paul Tillich's (1968) "A History of Christian Thought," given this book can be hard to navigate. Additionally, ChatGPT demonstrated the capacity to handle a diverse range of student backgrounds, accurately referencing specific cultural and theological contexts from America, China, Korea, and India. It also effectively addressed ministry application questions, offering personalized self-reflection prompts

tailored to each student's unique background. For instance, a Chinese student received questions related to traditional values, familial ties, and persecution in China. ChatGPT was also capable of integrating various topics, such as blending philosophical concepts like Plato's realism with Medieval Church history, while providing biblically rooted support. This versatility is likely due to the vast amount of information available on the internet, allowing ChatGPT to excel in personalizing content to meet individual needs and preferences across a wide array of topics.

Nonetheless, students also observed weaknesses in ChatGPT. As previously discussed, "hallucinations" by ChatGPT led to occasional inaccuracies on specific facts. For example, when discussing Tillich's historical theology book, ChatGPT consistently attributed material that was not in it but did align with Tillich's systematic theology. This is likely because there is significantly less information available on the internet about Tillich's historical theology, as compared to his systematic theology. Compounding this weakness is the fact that ChatGPT did not readily acknowledge inaccurate information. Instead of simply saying it does not know, ChatGPT constructed persuasive responses that students could not tell were inaccurate. Students believed Tillich wrote things ChatGPT said he did and did not realize he did not until I told students to re-read those sections in Tillich's book. In some other cases of "hallucinations," traditional internet searches were helpful for quickly distinguishing fact from fiction.

Looking forward, students agreed that AI and ChatGPT will play an important role in theological education. ChatGPT offers a highly accessible tool for substantive discussions, especially for those hesitant to burden others with their theological inquiries or those

who find it challenging to express their thoughts in English. One student noted that ChatGPT provides a conversational experience without the embarrassment or time constraints of involving others. Another appreciated its ability to simplify complex theological topics, boosting their confidence. Additionally, ChatGPT promotes critical thinking and deeper theological reflection by asking introspective questions, helping students refine their beliefs and understand diverse perspectives.

Students also recognized ChatGPT's potential limitations, particularly its inability to replace genuine human interaction in theology. The AI lacks empathy, personal beliefs, and a moral compass, which are essential for meaningful theological discussions. As one student noted, ChatGPT cannot replicate the authenticity of a professor sharing his or her own theological journey and struggles. Additionally, students found ChatGPT's factual inaccuracies concerning, as the AI's persuasive tone made them initially trust its information. This experience highlighted the importance of approaching ChatGPT critically and verifying facts with external sources.

Analysis

AI appears to be a positive development for the network generation, particularly in theological discussion. As digital natives, they easily integrate AI into their lives and theological growth, using it to navigate the vast sea of information available online. Mark Graves (2023) noted that “these technologies can provide new tools for scholars to access and analyze vast amounts of theological literature,” allowing them to focus on key research aspects. Mushtaq

Bilal (2023) advised treating AI as “a research assistant not a supervisor,” a view echoed by University of Pennsylvania professors Mollick and Mollick (2023) who are studying how AI can be “a supportive tool.” In theological education, AI can similarly serve as an assistive tool to enhance learning.

AI also aligns with the postmodern influence of the network generation, particularly in addressing individual nuance within the grand metanarrative. James Hutson (2023) noted that “AI algorithms, with their ability to ideate, scrutinize data, and discern patterns, can streamline the creative process,” enhancing exploratory creativity. In theology, this means helping diverse and individualized believers find their place in the Bible’s metanarrative of God’s kingdom. Tools like ChatGPT enable individuals to articulate, defend, and substantiate their theological views while discerning counter-arguments, fostering self-discovery and a more well-rounded theological understanding.

Conversely, the network generation seems either naive or justifiably unconcerned about AI’s dangers, depending on one’s perspective. AI’s false information has led to calls for more transparency, leading to legislation such as the EU AI Act (2023). These concerns appear valid for the network generation, who struggle to discern accuracy. But these concerns might also be limited in impact. Historically, false information has often caused disruptions but eventually faded as truth prevailed. James McGrath (2023) noted that an error-prone AI will result in companies to “pay the price.” This reflects the biblical truth that what is false will be judged and what is true will endure (Eccl. 12:14; 2 Cor. 5:10). The network generation appears to accept corrections and seeks accurate

information, particularly in theology. They also value genuine learning, understanding the risks of cheating and plagiarism. Therefore, educators should consider responsible AI guidelines, as promoted by KU Leuven (2023).

The more significant limitation is AI's ability to replace genuine human interaction. In its current form, AI cannot offer genuinely original ideas as humans do. Ted Peters (2024) explored asking ChatGPT existential questions and remarked: "Existential questions are so personal they beleaguer us with puzzlement, dread, and fear." This lack of genuine creativity limits the depth of discussions with AI. Future AI may better mimic humans, but it will always be artificial and devoid of a genuine human experience. This is especially true for complex and nuanced theological subjects, which require a cultural, historical, or deeply personal understanding. ChatGPT may be adequate as a theological discussion tool, but there is no one who believes it is genuinely an actual human.

Finally, ethical concerns surrounding AI are complex, with a key issue being the tendency to "play god" (Lennox, 2020, p. 208), as people increasingly rely on AI rather than turning to God. AI's autonomous decision-making raises significant theological questions about the boundaries between human creativity and divine authority. Jason Thacker (2021, 8.60 Calibre) warns that AI could become "our new golden calf," highlighting the risk of idolatry as AI mimics human behaviors and capabilities. The ethical framework guiding AI should align with our Creator's values, as Dennis Hollinger (2021, p. 32) emphasizes the need for AI to respect human dignity and biblical teachings. However, John Lennox (2020, p. 24) questions how an ethical dimension can be built into algorithms lacking heart and soul, raising concerns about AI dehumanizing individuals.

Society at large must consider the importance of trustworthiness in AI, as Beena Ammanath (2021, p. 73) notes that trust will be crucial in our future with AI. The danger exists that over-reliance on AI could reduce humans to mere machines, risking humanity's well-being. That is why Jason Thacker (2021, 15.64, Calibre) cautions against viewing AI as a savior.

Conclusion

AI has made a tremendous impact on society, education, and theology, yet it remains a tool limited as we humans are. As Dorian Scott Cole (2023) notes, “Artificial intelligence knows nothing more than what humans have given it.” Therefore, it is crucial to view AI from a God-centered perspective rather than a human-centered one. AI may evolve to mimic or surpass human intelligence, as Brenden Lake (2023) suggests. But it will never know God who is beyond us, since the Bible teaches us that God is love, fully incarnated in Jesus Christ, and only humans, created in God's image, can truly know and form a relationship with him (Isa. 55:8-9; John 1:14; Gen. 1:27). Thus, while AI is a powerful tool, it will never replace the unique spiritual relationship humans have with God.

This paper explored the intersection of AI and theology, focusing on how the network generation can use ChatGPT for theological discussions. It highlighted ChatGPT's strengths in facilitating meaningful conversations but also acknowledged its weaknesses, such as factual inaccuracies and the lack of a human touch. The study faced limitations, including a small sample size and a focus on less controversial theological topics, which did not fully test ChatGPT's capabilities. Furthermore, the paper did not assess learning outcomes, suggesting that future research could compare traditional

and AI-assisted discussions. As ChatGPT continues to impact higher education, its potential to shift pedagogy towards a more discussion-centric model is evident, but it also brings challenges, including bias, privacy concerns, and the risk of overshadowing minority theological opinions. These issues require further exploration and scrutiny, particularly in the context of theological education.

Looking ahead, ChatGPT will likely play a transformative role in theological discussions for the network generation. To fully harness its potential, it is essential to balance AI's capabilities with the need to protect individual perspectives, privacy, and theological diversity. The impact of tools like ChatGPT goes beyond academia, promoting meaningful dialogue and thoughtful inquiry within God's kingdom. However, it is important to remember that while AI can enhance our conversations, it is our shared faith in God through Jesus Christ that ultimately makes these discussions fruitful and meaningful.



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Toward an Analysis of How ABHE And Other Faith-Based Accreditors Could Strengthen Faith Integration at Bible Colleges

Michael T. French

Abstract

In many institutions of biblical higher education, the fundamental aim is to incorporate faith into every aspect of their educational programs. However, these institutions commonly encounter challenges in effectively integrating faith into their curricula and demonstrating this integration through assessment and reporting to accrediting bodies. A review of assessments conducted at three distinct ABHE-accredited colleges unveils recurring patterns and constraints pertaining to the fusion of faith and learning. Based on this analysis, the author proposes three steps to faith integration in theological higher education that encapsulate curricular integration, faculty training, assessment methodologies, and faith-based accreditation.

Over the past century, Bible colleges and institutes have had a rich history of equipping individuals for church ministry by integrating faith into their curricula and keeping biblical knowledge and “training” for ministry central to their institutional educational objectives (McKinney, 2018, p. 14). While many of those institutions continue to integrate spiritual disciplines into coursework and often incorporate real-world ministry contexts into assignments, there is a risk of overlooking spiritual elements in certain subjects, particularly those focused on general studies such as Personal Finance or

Introduction to Psychology. Achieving a comprehensive curriculum that integrates faith and learning demands careful planning by the administration and faculty (Ferris & Enlow, 1997, p. 10).

Accreditation, on the other hand, is a vital form of quality assurance that ensures students receive education comparable to other institutions while preserving the unique spiritual experiences of their respective colleges. However, not all accreditors are the same with some national accreditors, such as ABHE, requiring institutions to integrate faith and learning, while others merely hold the institutions accountable for their claims. This paper aims to demonstrate how faith-based accreditation can help undergraduate ABHE colleges intentionally integrate faith across their campuses, regardless of subject matter.

The Essence of Faith Integration in Biblical Higher Education Accreditation

The concept of faith integration is vital to biblical higher education, although its definition can vary across institutions. It generally involves teaching the curriculum from a Christian perspective or infusing spirituality into various aspects of students' lives at the institution. According to Kaak's article (2016) on academic faith integration, all truth, including secular subjects, is God's truth (p. 192). Therefore, faith-based schools can connect the entire educational experience and curriculum to faith (p. 192), implying that faith should be seamlessly integrated into what students learn across all disciplines. These two distinct entities can be bonded together, forming one another, rather than remaining "separate but equal" (Hafemann, 1997, p. 79). Without this integration, a Christian college may risk losing its distinct identity as a Christian

institution and may become indistinguishable from secular colleges and universities (Estep, 2002, p, 35).

Faith integration entails Christian faculty members engaging in a meaningful dialogue between their professional or disciplinary knowledge and insights from the Christian faith. This process applies to research, teaching, and professional outputs, leading to disciplinary perspectives enriched by faith and vice versa (Kaak, 2016, p. 192). Put simply, “it is the integration of Word and world in the mind of the Christian into a unified perspective and approach to all life” (Estep, 2013, p. 12).

After establishing a working definition of faith integration, one should consider the role of faith-based accreditors in promoting it across their institutions. Instead of altering the institution’s fundamental ethos, accreditation serves as a mechanism for quality control, ensuring that the institution achieves its stated mission, complies with accreditation standards, and pursues ongoing institutional improvement (Association for Biblical Higher Education, 2024, p. 8). Even secular accreditors can assist in holding institutions accountable for their commitment to integrating faith and learning into their curriculum. For instance, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) criticized Azura Pacific College’s faith integration claims because they did not expect graduate students to maintain a commitment to Christ and Christian service while enrolled (Burtchaell, 1998, p. 766). This criticism demonstrated that even regional accreditors would hold religious institutions accountable, even in the absence of a specific requirement for faith integration within their accreditation standards (p. 766).

Many Bible colleges opt to utilize peer review processes conducted by members who have a better understanding of faith-based institutions' spiritual foundation and Christ-centered mission rather than relying solely on secular accreditation for quality control and integrity. Organizations like the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) not only provide rigorous accreditation standards for its membership but also have specific faith integration requirements and a well-defined understanding of faith (Association for Biblical Higher Education, 2024, p. 6). Since 1947, ABHE has accredited numerous institutions, and due to their original focus on Bible institutes and colleges, their mission statement is particularly robust in terms of biblical integration:

Higher education in which the Bible is central, and the development of Christian life and ministry is essential. A biblical higher education requires of all students a substantial core of biblical studies, general studies, and ministry formation experiences and integrates a biblical worldview with life and learning. An institution of biblical higher education offers curricula that fulfill its overriding purpose to equip all students for ministry in and for the Church and the world. (Association for Biblical Higher Education, 2024, p. 8)

Noteworthy is the ABHE's commitment to a core biblical curriculum with an additional ministry formation component. This emphasis on biblical training distinguishes it from other accrediting agencies, as all institutions must meet this standard, regardless of mission or purpose.

Of particular interest is the statement that the curriculum “integrates a biblical worldview with life and learning.” A claim of biblical or faith integration is one thing but applying it to secular subjects like Business can be difficult (Parcher, 2021, p. 31). ABHE emphasizes that the overriding purpose of the curricula is to “equip all students for ministry in and for the Church and the world” (2024, p. 8). There is an underlying expectation that all programs, religious and secular, devote resources to integrating faith into the curriculum. ABHE’s Standards for Accreditation reflect this intentional mission, which incorporates multiple components related to integrating faith in all aspects of the college curriculum:

1. A mission statement that focuses on biblical higher education (Standard 1).
2. An assessment of Bible and theology components (Standard 2).
3. Faculty involved in students’ academic, spiritual, and vocational development (Standard 4).
4. Every program must have a certain number of Bible classes, with the entire curriculum supporting the development of a biblical worldview through Bible engagement and theological reflection (Standard 7).
5. Services should show a commitment to the holistic development of students and should be consistent with the institutional mission and an educational community of belonging (Standard 9).

Upon evaluation, ABHE mandates a significant level of faith integration. However, institutions should know that these standards set the baseline for incorporating faith throughout their college

campuses. It is evident that institutions can fulfill these minimum requirements for accreditation and still encounter difficulties when integrating faith into many courses and programs.

Assessing Faith Integration at Bible Colleges: Case Studies

ABHE expects member institutions to demonstrate that they integrate faith and learning according to the above standards. However, merely meeting these minimum requirements for integration should not be the ultimate objective. With the danger of mission drift or secularization a constant threat, institutions of biblical higher education cannot afford to evacuate biblical thinking from the curriculum and slack on faith-learning integration (Ferris & Enlow, 1997, p. 10). Faith-learning integration is a constant piece of biblical higher education DNA (Estep, 2012, p. 37); therefore, institutions should aim to gather more actionable data to consistently enhance the integration of faith and learning across their campuses.

Many ABHE institutions recognize the significance of not only proclaiming the faith-learning “Shibboleth” (Estep, 2013, p. 11) but also actively ensuring its implementation in the curriculum through thorough assessment and strategic planning of the curriculum. Due to its importance, three ABHE-accredited colleges sought to evaluate the integration of faith and learning on their campus and subsequently published their findings in the *Biblical Higher Education Journal*. While the varying methods yielded different results, each gives insight into how biblical higher education can implement instruments of quality assurance within their God-given mandates.

Baptist Bible College (BBC)

Some institutions use recognized quantitative assessment tools to demonstrate spiritual integration. A researcher at Baptist Bible College used an instrument called a Spiritual Health Profile to assess the “spiritual indicators” that may contribute to spiritual transformation (Hall & Cooley, 2013, p. 31). Upon implementing the spiritual assessment survey to measure spiritual development, the ensuing results could better demonstrate fulfillment of its mission to develop students’ spirituality by measuring items like students’ agreement with doctrine, commitment to spiritual truths, and spiritual growth (Hall & Cooley, 2013, pp. 32-35). The survey’s results encapsulated the spiritual atmosphere across campus: “The mean score for the section of the survey that rated Bible College experience was 4.71 (SD=0.520) indicating that students think the Bible College experience does contribute to their spiritual growth” (Hall & Cooley, 2013, p. 36).

While the article noted that the sample size was small, the results indicated the survey would be a valuable tool for other ABHE colleges as well (Hall & Cooley, 2013, p. 37). An assessment survey like the Spiritual Health Profile is a strong starting point for establishing a baseline to gauge ABHE institutions’ effectiveness in meeting their students’ spiritual needs. However, relying solely on a single survey may not provide a complete picture. Many assessment instruments do not measure faith and learning integration in the curriculum, which creates difficulties in determining if students truly connect faith and learning or if the classroom education is separate from spiritual practices and growth. Hall and Cooley (2013) highlighted that such a study could be adapted to identify the curricular and extracurricular activities that significantly contribute

to and benefit students' spiritual development (p. 39). Such an adaptation may contribute toward a closer measurement of faith and learning integration across ABHE.

Lancaster Bible College (LBC)

It takes more than a course outcome or a student satisfaction survey to carry out mission statements or institutional goals aiming to integrate faith and learning into the educational process (Harbin, 2022, p. 11). Lancaster Bible College did a study investigating their institution's actual practices of faith and learning using multiple instruments of assessment to gain a fuller picture. They issued several institutional surveys annually between 2014 and 2018 to measure their effectiveness and student satisfaction (Harbin, 2022, p. 15). The data from LBC's surveys came from the Student Satisfaction Inventory (2014), the Ruffalo Noel Levitz Priority Survey (2015), the AICUP First Year Student Survey (2017), and the Student Thriving Quotient (2018) (Harbin, 2022, p. 15). Overall, the results pointed to students perceiving that their institution had a healthy Christian environment and that they were encouraged to practice spiritual disciplines (pp. 18-19).

Using a mixed-methods approach, Harbin (2022) determined a few primary findings relevant to this article. One thing he noted was broadly used instruments such as the Thriving Quotient and other student success-oriented surveys are helpful but lack context and orientate toward traditional undergraduate experiences. Another limitation Harbin (2022) observed was the quality and depth available in those student responses. While using a variety of both quantitative and qualitative measures should provide a holistic view of students, institutions tend to either pursue what is convenient data to collect or simply replicate what other institutions do, even if it is

at odds with the institution's mission (p. 23). Harbin (2022) pointed out that LBC and other ABHE institutions could benefit from creating and disseminating shared instruments to use "as a norm reference or comparison both to understand individual success or challenges and the health of biblical higher education as a whole" (p. 24). Custom assessment instruments, particularly measuring levels of faith integration in the curriculum shared between like-minded institutions or across the ABHE, are more likely to gather relevant data than standardized student satisfaction surveys.

Emmaus Bible College (EBC)

Like many ABHE institutions, Emmaus Bible College has several secular programs with some level of faith and learning integration due to the institution's accreditation and mission. One professor who oversaw the Business program at the college wanted to ensure that the required business classes integrated faith and learning. From 2017 to 2019, Parker (2021) evaluated faith integration in the Business program to measure students' grasp of service, character, knowledge, and behavior in light of intentional faith integration methods employed in those classes (p. 33).

Parker (2021) developed a questionnaire that categorized data into the four categories of service, character, behavior, and knowledge and began collecting the data annually but was disappointed by the results (p. 37). He hoped to find evidence that certain faith integration exercises in the classes resulted in correlations (p. 37). However, the instrument could not demonstrate a relationship between the answers business students gave and the classes they were taking, regardless of whether it was a self-evaluation or peer evaluation (p. 37).

While the results were disappointing, a discussion between Parker (2021) and the president of ABHE, Philip Dearborn, led to two conclusions. First, there were limitations to statistical analysis, which made it hard to capture all the variables in the data influencing the study (p. 38). Second, it is not the responsibility of any one program (or assessment) to integrate faith and learning (p. 38). Parker (2021) observed: “If the Business and Bible departments do not work together on curriculum enhancements, even if those changes are only in my curriculum, the impact will be limited” (p. 38). Also, “measuring the effects of knowledge growth is far harder than measuring knowledge growth itself” (Parker, 2021, pp. 38-39). Due to the difficulty in obtaining accurate measurements and the limited time between implementing faith integration methodologies and conducting exit assessments, it was challenging to make a definitive decision on the data results (p. 38). The task for ABHE colleges will be to develop suitable assessments to measure levels of faith and learning integration that provide useable data institutions can add to their strategic plan to make curricular improvements.

Analyzing the Limits of Accreditation in Faith Integration

Religious accrediting organizations, like the Association for Biblical Higher Education, acknowledge the importance of embedding faith in the pedagogical framework. This approach ensures that upon graduating students possess proficiency in contextualizing Scripture within the complexities of everyday life. Therefore, “faith-learning integration is indeed part of the education vision of the Bible college movement and the Association of Biblical Higher Education” (Estep, 2012, p. 38). It is worth noting that, even though religious accreditors recognize the significance of integration, its widespread implementation remains a challenge. The

difficulty in measuring integration makes it difficult for accreditors to hold institutions accountable. Furthermore, integrating faith and learning, particularly in the classroom, does not happen organically. It requires intentional efforts from both the instructional staff and administration (Estep, 2012, p. 43).

While faith and learning integration is a popular topic among Christian higher education, claims of success often lack substance unless there is a clear vision and adequate training for implementation. Ralph Enlow (2017) emphasized that not all faculty have backgrounds in biblical or theological studies. He highlighted the need for formal preparation if institutions expect faculty to integrate faith and learning. While accreditors like ABHE require spiritual formation and faith integration in the curriculum, faculty and administrators need to learn how to satisfy these requirements to create effective change (Enlow, 2017). Allen and Badley (2014) illustrated this challenge by referencing an anonymous college that mandated the incorporation of a Bible passage in every lesson plan. According to their account, even Genesis 27:11 was deemed satisfactory if printed on the day's lesson plan (p. 36).

Estep (1998) discussed how accreditors and institutions often evaluate the Christian distinctiveness of colleges based on criteria such as administrative control by the denomination, the presence of Bible courses and chapel, and the spiritual atmosphere on campus (p. 2). However, this approach can marginalize faith to specific leaders, classes, and environments, potentially leading to the fulfillment of accreditation requirements without a genuine integration of faith and learning across all academic disciplines (Estep, 1998, p. 2). The author emphasizes that authentic integration of faith and learning must span across all fields of education and curricular instructions

for students to connect their faith with their areas of study (Estep, 1998, p. 2).

Three Steps of Faith Integration in Higher Education

If the administration and faculty believe that integrating faith into the curriculum is essential to their institution's ethos, they need to develop a strategic plan for implementation. One way to begin is by creating a three-step process for integrating faith and learning. This process should include:

1. Planning and assessing the curriculum.
2. Equipping faculty to shift the learning culture.
3. Selecting an appropriate accreditor that can both keep it accountable and enhance faith integration across campus.

When all three steps are executed successfully, faith integration can truly become a reality within the institution.

For Step One of faith integration, intentional integration begins at the source of learning. To infuse faith into the curriculum, careful planning, support, and evaluation are necessary. Effective integration requires strategic planning and assessment of the curriculum (Figure 1). Allen and Badley (2014) state: "Anyone suggesting curriculum is where integration happens obviously assigns a good share of responsibility for the outcomes to those who plan the curriculum" (p. 37).

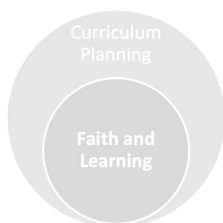


Figure 1

Those who oversee the curriculum have the greatest responsibility for faith and learning integration. Simply relying on Bible classes to illustrate how God's Word relates to society, philosophy, sciences, mathematics, language, and history is insufficient. There must be strategic planning to ensure that all classes incorporate faith into general, professional, and biblical studies (Allen & Badley, 2014, pp. 37-38).

After incorporating faith into the curriculum, the institution must assess its effectiveness for both quality assurance and fulfillment of reporting requirements to its accreditors. One strategy to achieve this is to incorporate assessment instruments into the curriculum to measure the integration of faith. Despite a limited number of standardized resources on faith and learning integration, utilizing a variety of instruments like the ones used above (Spiritual Health Profile, custom questionnaires, or standardized inventories) on a planned cycle can provide a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of faith and learning integration.

For Step Two of faith integration, professors play a crucial role in guiding their students to effectively integrate faith and learning (Figure 2). Ferris and Enlow (1997) observed that, more than any other single factor, faculty are the key to reinvigorating integration of biblical truth throughout the curriculum (p. 5). Allen and Badley (2014) sum up faculty responsibilities:

We believe that the professor's classroom work can be summarized in a simple formula. We plan curriculum, we instruct, we engage in ongoing assessment, we revise our curriculum and instruction—for next time—in light of the assessment. Those three fundamental activities can be abbreviated with the letters *CIA* (easy to remember but perhaps carrying unfortunate

connotations). Think of curriculum, instruction, and assessment as the CIA rope. The sheath or mantel of that rope is the classroom ethos or atmosphere, which we build day by day and semester by semester as we carry out the core activities of teaching. (p. 39).

If this is where the responsibility of faith and learning falls, what must the faculty do? Professors must remember that what is essential is not what they do as a teacher but what the learner does because of their guidance and instruction (Hendricks, 1987, p. 39). It is necessary to spend time developing course outcomes, refining instructional methods, integrating faith and learning in assessments, incorporating meaningful times of prayer, and ensuring that time is spent with the students both inside and outside the classroom. Ultimately, the professor is the best person to assess whether students are learning to apply faith and learning.

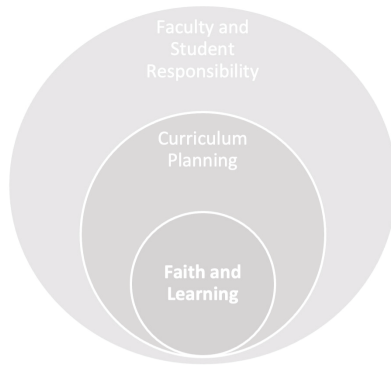


Figure 2

It is also important to consider the role of students in the integration process (Figure 2): If integration does not happen in their understanding, is it happening at all? Students are required to complete their homework and demonstrate faith in some way to graduate. If students are the focal point of integration, it would

behoove faculty to study learning styles, expand teaching strategies, and learn more about how to engage students in an ever-changing cultural landscape with multiple distractions (Allen & Badley, 2014, p. 39). By effectively preparing students to apply faith and learning, institutions can achieve better outcomes.

However, while faculty are experts in their fields, they may not have formal training as educators. Integrating spiritual practices in the classroom can be challenging for professors who have never been taught to do so. To address this issue, institutions should budget for faculty training at conferences or webinars. Another lower-cost option could involve colleges utilizing faculty members who have training as educators to equip their colleagues. Regardless of the method, it is crucial to ensure faculty receive the necessary training to seamlessly integrate faith into their lessons.

Step Three of faith integration involves faith-based accreditation, which has the potential to enhance faith integration at colleges by providing accountability, frameworks, and resources for integrating faith throughout the institution (Figure 3). It achieves this by establishing standards for faith integration as outlined in ABHE's mission statement (2024, p. 8).

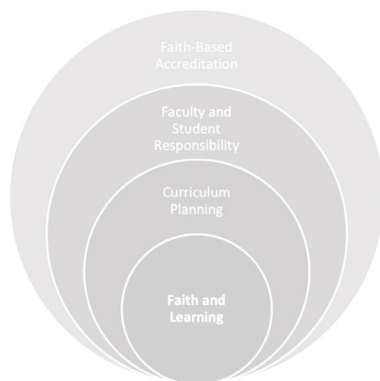


Figure 3

While some aspects of faith-based accreditation, such as requiring a faith statement, may already be in place, there must be an assurance that faculty members are spiritually qualified to integrate a biblical worldview into the curriculum and student services.

Accrediting bodies could also provide more examples of effective processes tailored to institutions' needs to evaluate faith and learning integration across their campuses. Another way could be to promote peer-reviewed and standardized assessments that effectively measure faith and learning integration, which may incentivize institutions to ensure that faith is integrated into every aspect of students' education, including general studies. Additionally, accrediting bodies could expand faculty development opportunities to facilitate meaningful dialogue and guide faculty on how to practically integrate faith into courses, even those who teach secular courses. Since the faculty are in the best position to measure the faith integration of their students, faith-based accrediting bodies should have invested interest in ensuring that faculty are well-equipped with this knowledge.

Conclusion

The integration of faith is fundamental to biblical higher education, and faith-based accreditation can greatly enhance this integration across campuses. Affiliation with accreditors like ABHE offers more than mere recognition and sound ethical policies. They provide frameworks and standards that encourage colleges to infuse faith into every aspect of their educational mission. By upholding faith integration standards and encouraging its peer-reviewed assessment, ABHE can ensure the integrity of Christian higher education, offering students a transformative educational experience.

This accountability and support help institutions maintain their spiritual identity and commitment to holistic education, integrating spiritual, intellectual, and personal growth.

Looking ahead, it is essential for ABHE and its membership to prioritize faith integration in both accreditation processes and institutional practices. ABHE should continue to refine its standards and offerings to promote faith integration more effectively while its members consistently infuse faith into their operations, including instructional assessments and faculty training. If ABHE institutions master the assessment of faith and learning, the broader Christian higher education community can learn from their example how to incorporate faith integration at their institutions and assess it, ensuring that future generations receive an education that prepares them for their various disciplines and equips them to lead Christ-honoring lives grounded in faith and purpose.



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The Implications of Context-Dependent Learning for Worldview Formation in Counseling

Seth L. Scott

Abstract

Context-dependent learning demonstrates that the application of knowledge and practice from training is retrieved and demonstrated most effectively when the two environments are similar (Hackel et al., 2022). Producing counselors and counselor educators who can integrate their faith through an immersive worldview lens is critical for promoting hope and change within the counseling field today. Still, the literature promoting faith integration in counseling has predominantly focused on the cognitive elements of integration with limited agreement regarding the intended outcome of an integrative counselor (Scott, 2018; Scott, 2019). This article explores the necessity for training faith integration through a worldview immersion lens, immersing students within a biblical worldview through which all content is understood and explored. Immersion provides a comprehensive worldview lens for understanding the world, matching the context and environments between training and future counseling for improved integration practice.

Most faith-based graduate counseling programs promote their distinction as providing faith integration within the counselor training process (French, 2023). They promote the holistic development of counselors to effectively incorporate their faith into their professional identity while remaining ethical by addressing a client's faith without imposing their values onto the client (Barto,

2018; French, 2023). However, the degree of graduate capacity for effective integration of Christian faith in future counseling practice directly connects to the level and practice of intentional and robust integration within their counselor training (French, 2023; Loosemore, 2021; Scott, 2019; Scott, 2020).

For future counselors to effectively integrate their faith into their professional identity and address the faith and values of their clients, counselors must recognize the function of their worldview as an immersive experiential lens by which all values and beliefs are flavored and established, both for them and their clients (Merrell-James et al., 2019; Onosu, 2020). As Erdvig (2021) explains, “Christianity is a worldview” (p. 38), and, as a result, this worldview profoundly changes a person’s understanding of themselves, their relationships, the world, and their meaning and purpose in the world. Christians operate from an alternative reality that orients their focus and action differently from those around them (Entwistle, 2021).

A worldview is more than knowledge, though that is one part. A worldview includes what is known about self and the world consciously and unconsciously, but the additional two parts of what a person desires and how they behave or act drive one’s worldview (Moreland & Craig, 2017; Smith, 2009). A person’s worldview is expressed through their behavior and developed through the cultivation and expression of their desires, regardless of their stated beliefs (Sire, 2004; Smith, 2016). While a worldview lens is more accessible to measure and evaluate in the knowledge and cognitive domain, like the classic cognitive-behavioral triangle, a worldview includes the equal balance and contribution of a person’s desires or inclinations, actions, and truth claims (Erdvig, 2021; Smith, 2016). As Warren (2017) explained, regarding responding to issues of

injustice, awareness must be engaged in action “because to know is to do” (p. 18). Being proximate to a situation moves the knowledge through a person’s heart and desires to promote action. Christ models this proximity through the incarnation with Christ becoming proximate to us, leaving his glory and taking on flesh to die on a cross and rise again, resolving our brokenness and the distance sin created in our relationship with him, ourselves, one another, and creation in this process (John 1:14; Phil. 2:5-11). A person’s view of the world changes based on their range and context of viewing. Worldviews develop from personal experiences and a person’s life context to cultivate the beliefs that drive their values, purpose, and behaviors (Anderson et al., 2017).

The focus of faith or biblical integration training has traditionally targeted a person’s cognitive framework or lens, seeking to provide a system for defining and explaining beliefs without first seeking to capture the affections or desires that inform those beliefs and values (Entwistle, 2021; Sire, 2004). As Erdvig (2021) notes, calling the process of biblical worldview training *integration* suggests that “the state of things before integration happens is disintegration” and that “the truth contained in academic subjects is separate from a biblical worldview, and that is not accurate” (p. 23). Because everyone has a worldview, all desires, behaviors, and truth claims flow from a worldview lens, with some elements of truth from a biblical worldview evident in most systems (Scrivener, 2022).

Many people, even many Christians, act as if the context of their learning from childhood forward is neutral and that they can adapt or adjust to a biblical framework to improve their outlook and align their beliefs with the Bible. This assumption of neutrality comes more from Locke, Rosseau, and an Empirical assumption

of being good or a blank slate than from Scripture (Wilson, 2023), highlighting just the matter at hand that people are conformed to their culture through the mainstreaming of their contextual learning more than they imagine. As Wilson (2023) explained, the cultural context of the Western world is “WEIRDER: Western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic, ex-Christian, and romantic” (p. 8). This context matters because this article argues that the context in which people learn shapes their worldview (desires, actions, and truth claims) (Smith, 2016). When this context does not align with a biblical worldview, the process of training for effective faith integration requires the creation of a new immersive context that aligns the beliefs, values, desires, purpose, and practice with a biblical view of the world (Merrell-James et al., 2019; Onosu, 2020).

With the scope of this consideration in mind, integration may only be the proper term when training for the implementation of an effective biblical worldview will require dis-integration—the unlearning and uncoupling of a person’s beliefs, values, purposes, and actions from the existing cultural mainstream context to one aligned with a biblical view of the world. Nothing is value-neutral, and the secularist worldview lens of our cultural mainstream seeks to conform people to a view of the world that God is appropriate for their personal life and faith but irrelevant and impotent in the practical world of everyday life (Erdvig, 2021). This separation of the sacred and the secular, which Francis Schaeffer (1981, as cited in Erdvig, 2021) called a “two-story house” view of the world, is prevalent within counseling practice and training today, even what is deemed faith integration counselor training. Because every aspect of desire, behavior, and knowledge persists within a worldview framework

(Smith, 2016), training counselors to integrate their faith without immersing them within a new biblical context for learning and practice assumes the validity of the secular lens for the “integrated” materials, which functions at odds with the purpose and practice of a biblical worldview integration model because the pragmatic lens of our contemporary cultural worldview is secularism, or “there is no God” (Erdvig, 2021; Fikkert & Kopic, 2019).

This issue of worldview identification and training is critical for counselor training as our models of training and practice aim to impact the world for Christ using a biblical worldview (Columbia International University, 2024). As Erdvig (2021) described, “a biblical worldview can be summarized in four keywords. They are chronological in nature and provide meaning for all our experiences: *Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration*” (p. 10), or even simpler “*ought, is, can, and will*” (p. 11). This distinction means that the world is not as it *ought* to be (*Creation*) because sin came through the *Fall*, leaving the world as it *is*. However, through Christ’s birth, life, death, and resurrection, how the world is is not how it has to be and *can* (*Redemption*) be different even now as we wait and hope for the return to how it was (*Creation*) through how it *will* be (*Restoration*). A counselor trained to view the world through this biblical lens can provide hope and care to clients who are or are not aligned with this view because seeing the world from this vantage point is not negated by the context or perspective of another. Insight into the context and culture that influence a person’s worldview only improves their capacity to refine and develop the alignment of their worldview from beliefs to behaviors more accurately (Lynch et al., 2006).

The application of learning occurs most effectively when the context of training closely matches the context for practice, triggering both mind and body to action from the repetition of the environment (Hackel et al., 2022). Letrud and Hernes (2016) suggest that active participation and practice through direct implementation or teaching of others seems to produce the greatest recall. Active learning models demonstrate that counseling training programs intending to train effective counselors within a biblical worldview must also consider the context of their learning within their training program and provide the practice and process of effective integration at each stage aligned with context-dependent learning responses for future counseling applications.

Faith Integration through Worldview Immersion

While counseling has sought to integrate faith with content for decades, recent literature recognizes that integration is most effective as a holistic, relational process of embodied training between a teacher or mentor and the student (French, 2023; Loosemore, 2021; Scott, 2020). The intent and purpose of learning counseling content must feel authentic and connected to the life and needs of the student presently and in their future practice as counselors. Because everyone has a worldview, every aspect of counselor training is functionally integrative. Counselor educators form students to emulate (or reject) the person and practices of the educator, intending the concepts that stick from training through future practice to be caught more than taught (Palmer, 1998). As French (2023) highlighted, “If we hope to prepare future Christians to practice counseling in such a way that the integration of their faith and learning is done well, and with competency, then we must pay special attention to what is occurring in the training process beforehand” (p. 1263).

The context of training informs and is replicated through the embodied person and practice of the counselor educator to the student. Faith integration must be experienced relationally and practically during the training, transmitted through the life and practice of the counselor educator through an authentic relationship with the student (French, 2023; Scott, 2020). Effective learning occurs when students see the world through the eyes and experiences of their instructors, becoming like their instructors and experiencing growth and formation within the professional greenhouse of the counseling training program (Watson, 2018). French (2023) states:

Students best learn how to integrate faith and learning (in counseling and clinical psychology) when they have educators who can vulnerably, openly, and humbly share themselves, their ‘inner landscapes,’ and ultimately, give insight into their processes of relating to God and others (questions, doubts, struggles, and all). From the ‘songs’ of these faithful professors, students ‘hear and learn their “song” – rather than simply sing[ing] the dominant culture’s noise they are immersed in. (pp. 1269-1270)

Everything exists within a worldview, and we live immersed within our experiential worldview lens (Anderson et al., 2017). For counselor educators to transmit a new view of the world and to learn content from within a new worldview lens, counselor educators must adjust the context and content of the student’s present world by inviting them to see the world from within their lens, inviting the student not just to understand as they do but to live, breathe, and experience the world through their lives (Merrell-James et al., 2019; Onosu, 2020). This invitation to worldview formation through immersion requires counselor educators to live within this immersed biblical worldview experience authentically, be able and willing to invite students into this relationship and connect this experience of

the world to the intended life and practice of the student as a future counselor (French, 2023).

Everyone lives immersed within a worldview, formed and informed by our past experiences, defined by our desires, and evidenced through our behaviors (Erdvig, 2021). For many Christians, this worldview is an amalgamation of concepts informed by Scripture, family, relationships, culture, and experience to form fluid through which we engage the world. While we might hope, as Christians, that our worldview is based solely on the Bible as our source of truth and authority, all these same factors influence our interpretation of Scripture, and our worldview does not exist apart from the culture within which we live (Duvall & Hays, 2021).

Du Mez's (2020) description in *Jesus and John Wayne* evidences the difference between a worldview formed through cultural mainstreaming and a biblical worldview. Du Mez asserts: "Despite evangelicals' frequent claims that the Bible is the source of their social and political commitments, evangelicalism must be seen as a cultural and political movement rather than as a community defined chiefly by its theology" (pp. 297-298). We are all immersed in a reservoir fed by the streams and contexts of culture to form the desires, behaviors, and beliefs that make up our worldview (Smith, 2009; Smith, 2016). The context of our formative learning experiences imprints unconscious beliefs that direct our desires and behaviors throughout life. Early experiences form patterns and habits to command unconscious beliefs, desires, and behaviors triggered by repeated exposure to related contexts. Breaking these patterns requires awareness of their existence and redirecting the routine through practice within a new context (Duhigg, 2012).

The habits we practice are functional expressions of our worldview, as our behaviors express our true desires and beliefs (Smith, 2009). Training future counselors to practice using a biblical worldview requires changing their worldview. Changing a worldview requires changing the thoughts, desires, and behaviors from what they are currently to those aligned with “God’s thoughts, desires, and actions as revealed through Scripture” (Erdvig, 2021, p. 10). Because God created us as relational beings (Gen. 1:27), this formation occurs best by mirroring the lived practices of an exemplar, creating new routines through emulation of the person and practice of the counselor educator (French, 2023).

Worldview Immersion and Practice through Context-Dependent Learning

To produce counselors who can effectively counsel from a biblical worldview, we must train counselors by immersing them within a biblical worldview. This immersion must occur throughout the training process. Faculty must embody the worldview and personal traits for students by teaching the content and skills through holistic, transparent, and relational practices to create disciples who counsel, and not just counselors. Memory formation consolidates best for application to recall and practice when the application or recall closely matches the learning context (Gisquet-Verrier & Riccio, 2019; Lynch et al., 2006; Ruitenberg et al., 2011).

Because counseling occurs within the context of a relationship between counselor and client, the behaviors, beliefs, and desires that inform the practice of effective counseling may be best learned within a similar relational context between educator and counseling student. If future counselors are to practice from a biblical

worldview within the counseling relationship, the most effective training approach would immerse counseling students in a similar relationship with their peers and faculty to practice this worldview approach (French, 2021). Context-dependent or state-dependent learning suggests people will learn and practice new content based on their ingrained and established mainstreamed worldview patterns (Hackel-et al., 2022).

Students entering counseling programs intending to train them to counsel from a biblical worldview may struggle to overcome the existing worldview lenses and assumptions they hold when learning new content. They may also fail to internalize the counseling content effectively through a biblical worldview. Because everyone holds a worldview, unless this existing worldview is acknowledged and intentionally challenged and replaced, new content is coded through the existing lens and assumptions, aligning the new material with the existing beliefs, values, desires, and behaviors to create congruence. Ruitenberg et al. (2011) discovered that the initial context of learning creates filters to determine what information is relevant when performing an established task. This finding within the context-dependent learning field reinforces the reality that context-dependent learning is a worldview-formation process, establishing habits and lenses through practiced repetition within a particular environment.

The concern for training future counselors at the graduate level through a biblical worldview lens is that it will usually require new learning within this new context to establish a new worldview. Context-dependent learning research suggests that repeated practice within a new context can overcome existing patterns (Ruitenberg et al., 2011), creating a precedent for establishing a context within

graduate counselor training that immerses the student within this new biblical worldview through their counseling training to form their patterns of ideas, beliefs, convictions, and habits in alignment with Scripture and God's view of the world. As many have recognized, however, creating the correct context for forming a biblical worldview must start with the person of the counselor educator (French, 2023; Hall et al., 2009; Loosemore, 2021; Scott, 2020).

Context-Dependent Learning for Counselor Educators

Effective context and worldview training of future counselors through modeling and mentoring requires that the mentors are also effectively trained in a biblical worldview lens. Training counselor educators to teach and counsel from a biblical worldview requires them to personally develop their biblical worldview and transmit this developing identity to their students through modeling, mentoring, and academic training (Scott, 2018). The biblical worldview of the counselor educator is both developing and not developed, because even if they can demonstrate their worldview by responding to the big ontological questions of life, “they [still] had a long way to go in learning how actually to live out the implications of those answers. They are still learning to shape their desires to willingly and joyfully choose to live out those implications” (Erdvig, 2021, pp. 14-15). Creating the context for the practical biblical worldview training of future counselors must begin with the training and preparation of the person of the educator. As Staton et al. (1998, p. 348, as cited in French, 2023) emphasized,

From the student's point of view, the most salient dimension to contribute to their integration was how well they could determine that a given professor had an authentic, lively, and

growing relationship with God, coupled with the professor's non-defensive, emotionally unguarded, and even vulnerable relationship with students. (p. 1263)

Creating the cultural context for effective training of future counselors begins in the context of preparation at the doctoral level. While many master's-level students will be slightly outside the critical stage for worldview development (18 to 23 years old, as cited by Erdvig, 2021), doctoral students will almost certainly be outside this developmental stage. So, while the focus at the doctoral level is often primarily on creating scholar-practitioners (Limberg et al., 2020), creating counselor educators who can model biblical worldview immersion within the graduate training process must experience this personal spiritual formation and worldview transformation in preparation for personifying this critical quality through embodied integration with their students (French, 2023).

Erdvig (2021) suggests that active worldview development requires immersive experiences within a biblical framework that people actively and deeply process to initiate the process of developing an effective biblical worldview. Aligning with Erdvig's (2021) five principles for active worldview development, counseling programs that desire to train counselor educators in developing biblical worldviews should incorporate content or assignments that (1) promote self-awareness and assessment of the impact of life experiences on their worldview; (2) require consideration, processing, and peer discussion regarding worldview beliefs, values, desires, and behaviors; (3) provide contexts for comparing personal worldviews to biblical worldview explanations and perspectives through individual and cooperative processing and practices; (4) encourage opportunities for "new experiences with people, places,

and ideas that both support and challenge their worldview” (Erdvig, 2021, p. 84); and (5) require holistic practices that provide a margin for the continued development of biblical worldview beliefs, intentions, and practices.

Context-Dependent Learning in Counselor Training

If the counselor educators are developing their biblical worldview, their authentic and transparent embodied exemplification of this worldview creates the context for counseling students to be immersed within this new cultural mainstream and begin forming a corrective biblical worldview. The training context must be immersive. The corrective context is not simply academic but provides a forum for the spiritual formation of the students through a relational connection with their professors that “lives out” the reality of a biblical worldview personally and professionally (French, 2023).

Context-dependent learning requires experiential and active learning over passive or lecture learning (Hackel et al., 2022). Biblical worldview immersion training is context-dependent learning, using this relational, embodied formation method of worldview development to create this “crucial space in which integration can be modeled, taught, and learned in real and meaningful ways that exceed propositional instruction and content alone” (French, 2023, p. 1266). Immersion within a biblical worldview creates the context to support and foster students’ spiritual formation, allowing them to safely unpack and disconnect the existing cultural mainstream influences on the worldview and begin developing a mindset aligning with God’s view of the world as outlined in Scripture. A biblical worldview must be persistently and consistently flooded on

the students to saturate their view of the world and to fill their lenses with the framework of Scripture's view of the world.

Counseling training requires significant self-awareness and a willingness to learn and grow to prepare to become a counselor (Kern, 2014). Developing the dispositional characteristics of commitment, openness, respect, integrity, and self-awareness required to build an effective presence as a counselor (Spurgeon et al., 2012) is problematic in and of itself, but adding an expectation for developing a personal relationship with God through spiritual formation may be too much for some students. Many counselor educators view the addition of spiritual formation evaluation as being outside the bounds of counselor training (Scott, 2020). However, this assumption demonstrates alignment with Schaeffer's two-story house approach and is not a viable option for programs that intend to create counselors with a biblical worldview. Bracketing or separating spiritual formation or worldview elements in the training context from the "counseling content," either in skills or theory, dangerously ignores the reality that everyone has a worldview.

The context and the content are not neutral but exist within a worldview schema. As French (2023) explained, integration is not something you do; it is who you are. To effectively integrate faith through a biblical worldview, the person must fully immerse themselves within that worldview and become the type of person who views the world from within that worldview context. "Integration [is] deeply (and inseparably) rooted in their 'life in God and God in them'" (French, 2023, p. 1265). The reality of a biblical worldview acknowledges that while we remain in this world, we are not of this world (John 15:19; 2 Cor. 5:16-20). A biblical worldview consistently recalculates our visual context, viewing the world and

the things in the world from a kingdom perspective, embracing the work of the Holy Spirit as He transforms, and renewing our minds against the default conformity to the mainstream mindset of this world (Rom. 12:2).

Conclusion

The difference between knowing about God and knowing God is a relationship (Smith, 2016). Through Christ, we have a relationship with God (John 14:6-7). The body of Christ, the church, remains in this world as representatives and ambassadors of God's kingdom, which is a kingdom with a difference that addresses our actual and created needs and desires and provides explanations for the ultimate issues of life through truth claims that give meaning and purpose (Erdvig, 2021).

Effective counselor training provides a context for personal and professional development that allows the student to unpack their hurts and vulnerabilities safely and practice the tools and skills of counseling in an environment similar to their future setting (Watson, 2018). Students will become more effective counselors when the training context accurately mimics the future practice context through active learning (Hackel et al., 2022). This same concept applies to the addition of worldview development within the counselor training process. Many faith-based graduate counseling programs express biblical worldview formation or faith integration as an intended outcome for counselors from their program but fail to produce students who develop biblical worldviews (Barto, 2018; Watson, 2018). The breakdown seems to be due to the lack of awareness or consideration of the worldview context within the training process. As Palmer (1998) explained, students become like their teachers,

so if the students graduating from faith-based counseling programs lack an integrated or immersive biblical worldview lens, it may be because they are emulating the context and disposition of their training.

A worldview is pervasive and absorbs everything around it, conforming reality to match its assumptions and perspectives (Anderson et al., 2017). Training future counselors to effectively integrate their faith as a biblical worldview lens in their lives and clinical practice requires a program that has immersed all their content, students, and faculty within this biblical worldview framework so that this reality permeates all within its context. Professors must model their relationship with God in its struggle, story, and practice within humble relationships with their students, transmitting a formational identity aligned with a kingdom of God reality (French, 2023). We will become like those with whom we spend time, absorbing the beliefs, desires, and behaviors of those within our proximity, transformed through immersion in a shared context (Smith, 2016). Smith (2016) observes: “It is a question not of *whether* you long for some version of the kingdom but of *which* version you long for” (p. 12). The context of our counselor training forms and conforms future counselors through imitation and practice. However, it must be intentional if the desired direction of our affections is to be God’s kingdom and not this world.



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Perennialism and Theological Education

Justin M. Thomas

Abstract

This article seeks to present a different model for Seminary education. Instead of drawing from modern philosophies of education, it aims to learn from perennialism the value of looking backward for a solution. Specifically, this paper looks at the writings of Robert Maynard Hutchins to introduce perennialism in its critiques, philosophy, and practices, especially his emphasis on the Great Books and the Great Conversation. We then apply his approach to the modern seminary, advocating for a focus on the intellectual development of theologians and making the important theological works of church history central to the curriculum.

The state of seminaries today is concerning. Declining enrolment, critiques from the churches they serve, and the challenging context of a radically shifting culture lead to calls for significant reform. On the other hand, theological education is more important than ever as modern ideologies are diluting and distorting the Christian message and much of ministry seems to take its cues from business, psychology, and marketing. The necessity of reform is visible to all, but what type is necessary?

One suggestion comes from Kenton C. Anderson and Gregory J. Henson. In *Theological Education*, they argue for a competency-based education, or CBE, approach. They see the primary problem as rooted in the growing separation between the church and

seminaries (Anderson & Henson, 2024, p. 22). Beyond separation, the church and the seminary have become distrustful and resentful of one another. The church feels like the seminary is more interested in ivory-tower scholarship than producing the leaders it needs and thus has turned to creating them itself. However, without a solid theological foundation, their approach has been rooted in “the traditions and practices of corporate America” (Anderson & Henson, 2024, p. 18). The byproduct is churches that run like businesses and metrics that do not reflect the Kingdom’s values. They suggest that the seminary should reclaim its purpose as “the development of leaders who can demonstrate competency to pursue productive missional ends” (Anderson & Henson, p. 25). Seminaries must see their mission as subservient and participate in the church’s mission, no longer as merely an external servant of the church but a facet of the church, putting the church in the driver’s seat shaping the program and curriculum for their needs and context. Anderson and Henson (2024) assert: “It is the embrace of the mission of the church by the heart of a servant” (p. 30). The seminary will secure its future by humbly reintegrating into the church.

Perry Shaw, who was the Academic Dean of Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, also sees theological education as in need of reform. His concern is not the relationship between seminaries and the church but theological education and the following ministry. Shaw (2022) states: “In the traditional approach to theological education, students are trained through a relatively fragmented curriculum, the assumption being that it is the student’s responsibility to bring the pieces together once they graduate” (p. 4). The result is graduates who cannot contextualize but “become simply a reflection of the societies in which they live” (Shaw, 2022, p. 4). Pertinent to Shaw’s

approach is the creation of graduates equipped for theological and contextual reflection. His model seeks to be “integrated, holistic, and missional” (Shaw, 2022, p. 28). Integration requires the eradication of silos that separate disciplines. For education to be holistic, it must focus on training fully formed graduates with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary for faithful ministry. Missional means that seminaries aim for students who understand their place in the mission of God.

Both approaches call for radical reform in how schools see themselves, their curriculum, and their teaching methods by drawing from modern approaches to education. Anderson and Henson utilize the approach of CBE, and Shaw draws extensively from Jane Vella and Benjamin Bloom (Shaw, 2022, p. 28). These approaches are valuable and insightful. Still, because they stem from modern frameworks, they become critiques not of current practices in theological education but of the entire history of theological education. They are not restorations but innovations. Thus, it is worth providing a counterbalance by exploring a philosophy of education that is not a call for something new but a return to something old, one that is not rooted in modern discovery but forgotten history—namely, Perennialism.

The History of Perennialism

In 1930, the University of Chicago appointed a new president. At 30 years of age, Robert Maynard Hutchins had already become an impressive figure as Dean of Yale Law School. In just over 20 years at the helm, he became a central but controversial figure in American higher education. Understanding his contribution requires considering his friendship with Mortimer Adler, whom he met during

his Yale years. Adler had been captivated by the great books seminar of John Erskine and sought to enlist Hutchins to a new cause: the significance of the Western canon or *The Great Conversation* in general education. In Hutchins, this became the central component for a call for genuinely liberal education: a universal general education for all baccalaureate students.

Despite countless books, a powerful speaking persona, and the attention of all higher education in America, Hutchins's campaign had only limited victories. He could never convince his Chicago faculty to adopt the philosophy, and American colleges broadly rejected his proposal. Nevertheless, a handful of modern colleges bear the imprint of Hutchins's design, including St. John's College, Thomas Aquinas College, Kings College, and the Torrey Honors College at Biola University (Ricketts, 2019). Most value Hutchins primarily for his critique and questions; however, his solution still has value as a unique model for the university.

The Educational Philosophy of Perennialism

The foundation for the Perennialism approach to education is that which is universal and proven. Perennialists “advocate a return to the absolutes and focus on the time-honored ideas of human culture—those ideas that have proven their validity and usefulness by having withstood the test of time” (Knight, 2006, p. 114). As such, it is both a response to progressivism and is rooted in Neo-Scholasticism. Central to perennialism is the return to the liberal education tradition that reigned in Western education from Greece to the Middle Ages. Liberal education focuses on what it means to be human rather than on vocational pursuits and emphasizes cultivating the mind, viewing rationality as the defining trait of

human beings. There is also a universality to perennialism. Hutchins (1936) asserted: “Education implies teaching. Teaching implies knowledge. Knowledge is truth. Truth is everywhere the same” (p. 66). All of this is evident in Hutchins’s writings.

The Critique of Higher Education

It is helpful to understand what Hutchins views as the primary causes of the state of higher education in America. Beyond common critiques like the role of money and public opinion (Hutchins, 1936, p. 13), there are three primary culprits that Hutchins returns to repeatedly. They are professionalism, scientific specialization, and the lack of a philosophical center.

In Hutchins’s post-Great Depression world, university vocational training increased dramatically. Colleges were primarily seen as the means to a career and thus strove to provide vocational programs that would equip workers with the necessary skills. To Hutchins, this was a confusion about the purpose of a college. Although he valued trade schools and vocational training, he believed they had no place in the university, which is a specialized institution focused on pursuing truth. He maintained that the school could not do both. He also maintained that a university was poorly equipped for vocational training because the “tricks of the trade” were best learned in the trade, and only in active practice would you learn the current tricks (Hutchins, 1936, p. 47). The college was a poor laboratory and an outdated one at that. Instead, a college must focus on “the general principles, the fundamental propositions, the theory of any discipline” (Hutchins, 1936, p. 48). Students needed to understand the science underlying the field rather than relying on a “cookbook method” (Hutchins, 1936, p. 57), which provided precise recipes to

follow. Students need to study not the skills of lawyers but the study of law (Hutchins, 1936, p. 38). His complaint was not that college lacks value; rather, modern America has overlooked the unique and essential benefits that college can and should offer.

Hutchins was also concerned about scientific specialization. His critique was not about the scientific method but how that method had crept into other disciplines. Hutchins (1936) concluded: “The final victory of empiricism was won when the social sciences, law, and even philosophy and theology themselves became empirical, experimental, and progressive” (p. 26). Because science leads to more and more specialization, the university has become fragmented into more and more disciplines, each specialized to the degree that communication between the professors, let alone the students, is no longer possible. Specialization was not the problem; as Adler (1998) put it many years later, “Our society needs specialists, but our specialists must also be generalists. That is generally educated human beings” (p. 72). Thus, there is a need for foundational liberal education, and the university’s goal is to be a “specialized institution for unspecialized men” (Hutchins, 1972, p. 46). Laying the foundation was something only universities could do, and they had forsaken their calling.

Hutchins’s final critique may be his most important: the lack of a philosophical center. A democratic society, the university, and what Hutchins in *The Higher Learning* (1936) called Learning Societies all required a common language and shared values. He compares the modern university and its departments to an encyclopedia, with entries connected only by an alphabetical index (p. 95). Hutchins knew why the approach of the university model inherited from the Middle Ages

and the Reformation no longer worked: Its philosophical center was theology. Theology could no longer be the center of our “faithless world” (p. 97). Still, he reminds us that the Greeks built their center not on religious revelation but philosophical metaphysics. He was not urging the embrace of all the ideas of ancient Greece but rather advocating for the revival of a metaphysical center. Only then can we develop our ability to think deeply and engage in meaningful dialogue as the Greeks did.

The Philosophy and Practice of Perennialism

For Hutchins, every other educational approach “treats men as means” (Hutchins, 1977, p. 20) instead of seeing the goal of education to create true human beings. Although much of Hutchins’s philosophy is already apparent in his critiques of contemporary models, it is worth making it explicit. Education is “the single-minded pursuit of the intellectual virtues” (Hutchins, 1936, p. 32). The university exists to promote the pursuit of truth and to make democratic citizens capable of discussion by cultivating the skills of reading, writing, thinking, speaking, and mathematics. However, what is unique to Hutchins’s vision is the role of the Great Books. Here, he felt he had found the necessary center in his quest for philosophical unity. As the title of his introduction to the Great Books (1977) implies, he saw these books collectively as the *Great Conversation*. It is not just that they contained the great ideas of the Western Tradition, but that

A deeper unity exists in the relation of all the books to one tradition of common themes and problems.... All the works are significantly related to one another, and that, taken together, they adequately present the ideas and issues, the terms and topics, that have made the western tradition what it is. (p. 41)

Joining this conversation would help students find the shared vocabulary and values. Through thinking with these thinkers, they would learn to think for themselves. For Hutchins, although each author had earned his place in the tradition, the conversation itself made the tradition worthy of perpetuating through liberal education. In the words of Abraham Kuyper (2019), progress requires that every century “is prepared to continue spinning the thread as it slips from the falling hands of the dying century” (p. 122). Trying to escape this continuity with appeals to modernism and science (or, in our day, relativism) cannot escape proceeding “from a position that others have found. With this difference only, the position on which we take our stand bears the stamp of centuries, whereas they adjust their kaleidoscope almost every decade” (p. 124). This emphasis on history and tradition should find a comfortable home in a Christian institution (2 Thess. 2:15).

Joining *The Great Conversation* also requires a unique method of perennialism: Socratic Dialogue. The students are to read these works and, under the guidance of a teacher, discuss them. Again, the goal is not that they adopt these ideas nor that they adopt the teacher’s views. Such discussions both strengthen the Liberal Arts (reading, writing, thinking, listening, reasoning, and speaking) and teach students “how to analyze their minds as well as the thoughts of others, which is to say it engages students in disciplined conversations about ideas and values” (Adler, 1998, p. 30). For Hutchins, this was the only education upon which America could place its desire for progress, “which involves scientific and technological advance, but under the direction of reason; of true prosperity, which includes external goods but does not overlook those of the soul; and of true liberty, which can exist only in society, and in a society rationally

ordered” (Hutchins, 1936, p. 119). Socratic Dialogue is needed because it does more than equip students; it shapes them.

Critiques of Perennialism

Hutchins received swift and robust reactions to *The Higher Learning in America*, including an ongoing debate with John Dewey, the father of progressivism. One of his strongest detractors was a member of his faculty, Harry D. Gideones (Gardner, 2019). Gideones’s primary concern centered on who would decide which metaphysics should serve as the unifying foundation. He saw this as a threat to democracy and as nothing less than thought control. Inevitably, this would not lead to the freedom of faculty that Hutchins presented but their imprisonment. He also saw Hutchins as downplaying science to enthrone metaphysical “Truth,” which moved back into the pre-scientific dogma that the world had so recently escaped (McArthur, 1987). Contemporary responses followed a similar tack. McArthur (1987) complained: “Hutchins’ call for metaphysics beyond all else violates the modern temper” (p. 25). For many, a backward move could never serve a forward motion.

It is not hard to see that modern critiques would follow this same track. Postmodernism would see Hutchins’s approach as misguided or even totalitarian. Postcolonialism would take extreme umbrage with his ethnocentric elevation of the Western Tradition, concluding that “oversimplified appeals to a common heritage” (Grant, 2008, p. 321) cannot create a common culture. Simply adding minority voices does not resolve this critique. Instead, it demands the recognition of multiple traditions. Critical Pedagogy would see Hutchins’s Liberal education as maintaining the status quo to benefit the oppressing

majority. Even a Christian response, although resonating with the universal truth assumed by perennialism, would be best to recognize the cultural aspect of what we identify as universal. Apart from revelation, the flaw of perennialism is that it is backward facing, looking for what is transcendent in fallen culture by looking back to a past tense reference instead of a future tense consummation and judgment. It is groping in the dark and looking for truth when truth incarnate has come to judge the world (Acts 17:27-31).

These critiques carry substantial weight, prompting us to question whether the liberal education model is the most effective way to educate humanity. However, this does not preclude our learning from perennialism in theological education. There is a potential overlap between Hutchins's University and an ideal Seminary. Seminaries can effectively apply Hutchins's model not by incorporating The Great Conversation of the Western world but by focusing on the theological conversation of the Christian church.

Hutchins's Critiques and the Modern Seminary

Hutchins consistently focused on the Liberal Arts University, but seminaries did not escape his critiques. Hutchins criticized colleges that got caught up in consumeristic aims. When financial considerations led to generating a diversity of offerings that would appeal to the market, Hutchins called foul. Christian education, and even seminary education, is not immune to such temptations. Seminaries can avoid this mission drift only by maintaining a clear sense of their aim—that is, what makes them a specialized institution. Directly correlated to this consumeristic approach is the exponential diversification of electives and programs that may no longer share a unified core. We tend to emphasize the diversity in the

parts of the body of Christ, but Hutchins would ask what makes the body whole. Focusing on creating specialists prohibits adaptation to needed roles and limits communication between graduates.

Hutchins's concern about professionalism is closely related to this. Alongside secular colleges, seminaries have moved from strictly theological education to heavily emphasizing praxis. Hutchins (1936) addressed this trend in seminaries and was not a fan:

The institutional church, religious education, and the various types of "leaders" for religious, semireligious, or nonreligious organizations occupy more and more of the attention of the divinity schools. How to Conduct a Business Men's Forum on Public Affairs may shortly be a more important section of the curriculum than theology. Theology has now been degraded to the bottom of the educational hierarchy. (p. 102)

Hutchins's comment here may only apply to liberal seminaries that have neglected their theological purpose for humanistic ends, but the whole of his critique is more challenging to avoid. For Hutchins, empiricism and vocationalism had won the day and recreated all seminaries in its image.

All Christian graduates should, of course, possess essential skills. Just as the Liberal Arts emphasizes reading, writing, and arithmetic, Christian education emphasizes hermeneutics, Bible study, and Bible teaching. However, those skills achieve their purpose and perfection through theologizing, a tool that helps perfect the Christian Mind. As we shall see, engaging in dialogue with the church's great theologians best accomplishes that deeper goal.

At this point, it is worth stating that Hutchins had no problem with trade schools and that the church does need a way to train its leaders. The question is whether the seminary or the church should fulfill this role and whether Christian colleges can effectively provide such training within their confines. As we saw in our introduction, both these challenges are recognized and directly addressed by the CBE approach of Anderson and Henson, which puts the church in the driver's seat and relies on field mentors and hands-on experience in ministry. However, Hutchins would question whether this CBE approach truly constitutes theological education. At the very least, a school following this model could be valuable while still not eliminating the purpose or necessity of seminaries. For Hutchins, the church as an institution and an educational institution like a seminary are separate and should not be combined or confused (Hutchins, 1956, p. 85).

A seminary that Hutchins would approve of creates graduates capable of thinking theologically. As an institution of formal education, it sees this task as primarily intellectual, cultivating the intellectual virtues for theological pursuit.

The unique function of the education system would appear to have something to do with the mind. No other agency in the community sets itself up, or is set up, to train the mind. To the extent to which the educational system is diverted to other objects, to that extent the mind of the community is neglected. (Hutchins, 1977, p. 20)

If developing “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16) is part of the church's mission, then seminaries must play a unique and vital role.

A Great Books Approach and Theological Education

Like the Liberal Arts with its Western Tradition, the church can point to a rich theological heritage. United not only by a common humanity or a common culture, these theologians are united in confession; they are part of the apostolic and Catholic Church. As Paul says, they share one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Eph. 4:5). We can add to this that, within orthodox Christianity, they all hold to the authority of Scripture. Although they have lived in different places, cultures, and times, the questions they have faced are about universal principles, and their problems are human problems. To read and discuss their works is to learn from the great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1) and join the great theological conversation. Through engagement with these works, we learn more than what to think; we learn how to think as Christians. We discover more than just the solutions they presented to their problems; we learn how to solve the problems of our day.

The suggested approach is for students to read the great books of Christian theology and come together for discussion. These discussions would enhance their understanding of the works and their implications for life and ministry. In this approach, the teacher serves primarily as a facilitator, not a lecturer. An evangelical context would require the conclusions to incorporate three horizons. The first is the horizon of Scripture: Students need to weigh the thinking of each work against the teachings of the Bible. The second is the horizon of historical context: understanding the works in their original setting. Finally, there is the contemporary horizon: Students must connect the works and their context. In other words, the discussion should be biblically vetted, historically conscious, and

contextually relevant. The discussion is valuable in training students to read, think, and converse theologically.

Conclusion

The challenges of the modern world, the contemporary church, and Christian higher education are numerous and continue to grow. While training individual Christians for unique callings requires specialization, seminaries must preserve their own unique calling throughout the process. What is needed most today are Christians capable of thinking theologically in a way that is conversant with the historical church and adaptable to the day's needs. It may well be that the church's future depends on us drawing from the deep riches of its past. By training students to join the great theological conversation, we can ensure it continues to the glory of God.



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Mathemagenics and Embedded Learning Support Devices: An Overview and Implications for Print-Based Instructional Development

John G. (“Jack”) Nill

Abstract

This paper discusses the relationship between mathemagenic devices used in print-based teaching and learning materials and their effect on student learning. It specifically looks at the instructional design used by Global University, an accredited distance learning Bible and ministerial training institution, and makes recommendations based on student perceptions of the facilitative nature of those mathemagenic factors in instructional design. The conclusions of this paper will help instructional designers and teachers using print-based instructional materials to apply mathemagenic devices effectively, leading to improved learning outcomes. The research is based on one institution’s instructional design, but the principles are applicable to any print-based instruction.

The term *mathemagenics* is derived from two Greek words: *mathemain* (“that which is learned”) and *gineisthos* (“to give birth”). Thus, it literally means “give birth to learning.” It refers to a broad category of learning activities and most particularly used in print-based educational materials. These activities involve “student action that is relevant to the achievement of specified instructional objectives” (Wolk & Svoboda, 1975, p. 2). *Mathemagenic devices*

is the term most often used in the literature to refer to any learning activity that is mathemagenic in nature. *Mathemagenic activities*, a term coined by Ernst Rothkopf in 1970, is another phrase often found in the literature, perhaps because it emphasizes the active nature of the learning process.

In biblical higher education, as in every other level and domain of education, we live in an age of increasingly digital teaching and learning, possibly leading some to think that print-based materials are now passé. That would be an incorrect assumption. Gohil (2021) writes: “Although there is no question that digital learning is playing a bigger role in education than ever before, printed materials remain critical to learning.” She goes on to state that “because there are pitfalls associated with digital learning, today’s educators must ensure that any technology-based learning strategy is coupled with a continued investment in print.” She also asserts that “in the classroom, color-rich, personalized lesson materials that are printed and can be held in the hand are often more impactful than documents that are scrolled through and viewed on a laptop or mobile device.”

Gottschalk (1995), based on Misanchuk (1994), discusses the advantages as well as the limitations of printed educational materials and suggests guidelines for designing instruction for print. An Internet search of terms such as “print-based learning” yields a comprehensive list of books and articles spanning the educational age range from elementary grades to adult education and covering virtually all subjects.

The Terminology of Mathemagenics

Mathemagenic devices are often referred to as “adjuncts to text,” a reference to the fact that they are extrinsic to the content

to be learned while still being a critically determining factor of that content. Gagné (1978), for example, distinguishes between *intrinsic content*, which is “directly relatable to the performance that learning is designed to bring about,” and *mathemagenic content*, which is related to the support of the learning process (p. 3). Research on mathemagenic activities is overwhelmingly positive, showing that such activities do enhance learning (Wilson & Koran, 1974; Kirschner & Hendrick, 2020).

Mathemagenic activities can be sub-classified into two categories: (1) *gross or overt activities*, those which are readily observable and that “bring learners within physical reach of the instructive information” and (2) *covert mental processes*, which are “hypothetical mental processes that are characterized by their functions, such as selection, representation, collation, elaboration, and integration of information” (Orimogunje, 2012, p. 208). The first category includes gross body movements that students make when engaging with information (whether print, video, tactile, or another format). Think of kinesthetic learning activities and interactive lessons that allow students to act out new concepts or engage in role play. The second category includes mental processes such as reading, selection, analysis, and interpretation. The key point for educators to realize is that mathemagenic activities can control the way students transform printed information into learned knowledge during the educational experience.

Embedded support devices, or ESDs, is a term found under the general heading of mathemagenics. The term itself refers specifically to the way these mechanisms are inserted or embedded in printed text. ESDs are “a set of activating, structuring and motivating extras in study materials that are supposed to support

the individual study process” (Valcke & Martens, 1992, p. 44). They are elaborations inserted in the learning materials and designed to “take over the supportive role of a teacher who is normally present” in a traditional face-to-face classroom setting (Martens, Portier, & Valcke, 1995, p. 1). ESDs include schemes, illustrations, examples, pre- or post-questions, margin texts, and other such devices. ESDs can be classified into three groups: (1) those that facilitate *access to content* (overviews, margin texts, etc.); (2) those that facilitate the *processing of content* (advance organizers, activities, examples and illustrations, pre-questions, etc.); and (3) those that facilitate *evaluation of mastery* (embedded questions, test-items with feedback, etc.).

It is obvious, then, that mathemagenic activities, including ESDs, play a crucial role in print-based instruction, particularly printed autodidactic materials such as those used by distance learning institutions and particularly by Global University’s Independent Study Textbooks (ISTs) and Study Guides (SGs). For the course writer and the instructional development specialist (IDS)/editor, the selection, wording, and placement of mathemagenic activities are immensely important because of the function of these activities in facilitating learning within the correspondence and online models. Since course writers tend not to be familiar with the concept of mathemagenic activities, it becomes even more essential for IDS personnel to be acquainted with the concept, its usefulness, and its application.

Overview of Research: The Effectiveness of Mathemagenic Activities

Numerous studies show the positive facilitative effect of

mathemagenic devices, including ESDs, in educational delivery (Felker, 1974; Wolk & Svoboda, 1975; Rodriguez, 1977; Poelmans, Martens, Daal, Valcke, & Dochy, 1992; Martens, Valcke, Poelmans, & Daal, 1996; Martens, Valcke, & Portier, 1997; Nill, 2001). The Nill study surveyed U.S. students enrolled in English-language print-based correspondence undergraduate programs with Global University and reported student perceptions of the effectiveness of the various mathemagenic devices and instructional development factors in helping them reach course learning outcomes. Other studies mentioned above report higher scores by students who study course versions with ESDs (as compared to those who study course versions without), including increased incidental recall and learning and higher achievement of specified instructional objectives.

Mathemagenic activities and ESDs occupy an extremely important place in the text's influence on the learning process. Stewart (1989) states: "For the instructional designer, the reconsideration of adjunct aids as verbal cuing devices within a cognitive perspective of the reading process provides a defensible framework and challenges the designer to implement on a basis of principle rather than practice" ("Abstract"). Glynn and Britton (1984) argue that, since text comprehension is cognitively demanding work, authors, instructional design specialists, and others involved in distance learning design must be sure that text design supports those processes of text comprehension such as identification of important ideas, organization of ideas, integration of ideas with existing knowledge, and so forth. For example, simply adding the mathemagenic device of advance organizers activates prior knowledge in anticipation of new knowledge and serves as an excellent verbal cue for text organization.

Stewart also related graphic organizers to the development of typographical cues. Stewart explains: “It is because a graphic organizer can depict the structure of ideas in text, in the way that the author intended them to be related, that the graphic organizer is worthwhile adopting in practice” (Stewart, 1989, p. 6). Stewart argues for implementing high-level objective statements and using high-level inserted questions to compel deeper processing on the part of the student.

Narrowing the Focus: Three Effective Mathemagenic Activities

This section focuses attention on three mathemagenic activities that are worthy of emphasis in Global University’s (or other institutions’) undergraduate instructional design: goal-descriptive directions, embedded support devices that facilitate processing of content, and adjunct questions.

Goal-Descriptive Directions

Goal-descriptive directions are statements of intended learning outcomes (course or lesson objectives) that help the learner find the appropriate learning material in the text. These statements are related to David Ausubel’s concept of advance organizers, in which preparatory materials are presented before the actual lesson content to help students prepare for what they will be learning. True advance organizers help connect information already known to new, unknown information. Such statements of intended learning outcomes are based on mathemagenic selection. Learners discriminate instructional elements that line up with the goals or outcomes that were identified in the goal-descriptive directions. Rothkopf (1970) sees such outcomes statements as part of the functional view of

mathemagenic activity: “They determine the nature of the effective stimuli in experimental or instructional situations. The character of the effective stimuli, in turn, determines what is learned” (p. 326). In fact, even the relatively simple act of recognizing that a sentence contains information related to a learning objective may be a sufficient mathemagenic activity that results in learning.

Embedded Support Devices for Facilitating Processing of Content

For the purposes of this paper, the focus will be on embedded support devices (ESDs) such as illustrations and examples used in the text to explain or enhance content, which often includes difficult concepts that the course writer wants to convey. This kind of ESD does not require the reader to suspend or interrupt the reading of the text since examples and illustrations are integrated directly into the text. It seems to me that this kind of ESD can and should be used as often as necessary to clarify difficult concepts. Some feel that it has the added benefit of improving the readability of particularly difficult text.

This category of ESD can also include activities (i.e., some action, whether mental or kinesthetic—or ideally, both) that the learner completes and that will help the learner better understand the content, often through an application exercise. A game involving the information being learned or a mini case study are examples of effective application exercises. They require that the learner interrupt or suspend the reading of content to complete the suggested activity and then return to the reading of the content once the activity is concluded. This kind of ESD could be used every so often but not as regularly as illustrations or examples mentioned earlier.

Adjunct Questions

Adjunct questions, sometimes referred to in the literature as *supplementary questions* or *supportive questions* and known in Global University undergraduate courses as *study questions* or *interactive questions*, are questions inserted into printed teaching text to draw learner attention to important information. Such questions can perform several functions. If the question occurs *before* the information is presented, it alerts the reader/student to what to pay attention to in the following text. If the question occurs *after* the information is presented, it requires the reader/student to recall information or to go back and re-read the information most recently presented. Both approaches have been proven to enhance learner comprehension of printed information materials and have been shown to improve test performance. Adjunct questions strengthen memory, provide context for future recall, and aid in the transfer of learning.

Two additional points about adjunct questions are worth noting. First, they can convey to the student that “someone cares” about their learning. Some research shows that “social questioning” is more effective than “inanimate questioning” (Ozuem & Lancaster, 2015). How to make adjunct questions sound more “personal” is, frankly, a challenge. Perhaps instructional development specialists could brainstorm ways to approximate the sound of “social questioning.” Second, as one might expect, adjunct questions that can be answered from trivial processes depress the effectiveness of mathemagenic activities. Therefore, adjunct questions should be based on essential information.

Here is one final general note in thinking about adjunct questions, goal-descriptive directions, and embedded support devices: Mathemagenic activities are useful both from an intrinsic and an extrinsic perspective. Intrinsically, mathemagenic activities particularly give students a sense of how they are doing in learning the information being presented. Extrinsically, mathemagenic activities can encourage learners if there is some kind of recognition and praise for their accomplishments. This is loosely related to the “social questioning” concept mentioned earlier. Is there a way to approximate that in print materials? I believe so. Further discussion and brainstorming in this area are needed.

One Investigation of the Use of Mathemagenics in Printed Study Materials

Global University is an accredited, world-wide distance-learning institution affiliated with the Assemblies of God. The 2001 Nill study asked Global University undergraduate, directly-enrolled U.S. students to rate the helpfulness of instructional development factors in their courses. Students overwhelmingly ranked study questions inserted in the text as the most helpful factor. This was followed in the rankings by self-tests, the answers to the study questions, and the Unit Progress Exams (UPEs). All four of these activities are associated with formative evaluation. “This agrees with existing research on testing and measurement which emphasizes both the achievement of course objectives and the assessment of educational quality” (Nill, 2001, p. 243). These factors are also related to feedback and review of course content and, ostensibly, prepare the student for the final exam. As previously mentioned, the study questions (and the answers to study questions) are Global University’s version of adjunct questions, discussed earlier.

Three factors that classify as content organization, introduction, and presentation were consistently ranked in the middle of the pack: lesson outlines, lesson objectives, and lesson openers. Their purpose is to prepare the student to encounter the course material. Nill (2001) states: “Research, particularly on Ausubel’s advance organizers, points to a facilitative effect, albeit small, on learning” (p. 244). Several of these factors are related to the concept of goal-descriptive directions, which were discussed earlier.

Three instructional development factors consistently received the lowest rankings by every demographic category, indicating that they were the least helpful of all the mathemagenics: graphic art, typographical features (boldface, italics, font size, etc.), and lesson artwork. Interestingly, these are all associated with the visual enhancement of text and ideas. Existing research shows that, to be effective, typographical factors must enhance the learning process and motivate the learner and that, for artwork to be effective, it must present information in a visual form that increases comprehension or serves as a mnemonic aid. As a conclusion of the study, evidently GU’s use of typographical features, artwork, and graphic representations is not fulfilling the function for which they are designed, i.e., to increase comprehension.

Implications for Instructional Development

The success of any mathemagenic activity depends on what the students do with it: whether they attend to it, process it, or ignore it. This simple concept is particularly crucial to printed distance learning materials. The secret seems to be to develop mathemagenic activities that are so “attractive” to learners that they will want to pay attention to them or engage in them.

Applying this success strategy specifically to the concepts of adjunct questions (study questions), goal-descriptive directions (learning objectives), and embedded support devices such as activities and illustrations or examples, we are forced to rethink how we write all of these. Adjunct questions need to focus on important concepts and avoid trivia and should “draw the student in” so to speak, invite the student to think and craft an answer, and somehow have a social or personal “sound” to it. Writing study questions is both a science and an art. Although Global University’s instructional development specialists are trained in test-item writing skills, there would be benefit from additional study. The Internet contains numerous resources (many of them mediocre, however, in my opinion) posted by universities, and books are available for study. Should the instructional development specialists wish to read and study more on the subject, the university would do well to subsidize those studies. However, it is probable that much of this cannot be taught. Instructional development personnel over time and with experience develop a sense of what works and what does not.

Statements of learning objectives must be supported by in-text information. There must not be a disconnect between what the course states the student will learn and the information presented to the student. Even more, the objectives must be related directly to the study questions as well as the testing vehicles used throughout the course. “Surprise” test questions should not happen. The advance organizers used at the beginning of each lesson in undergraduate courses should include keys and clues to the learning that is about to take place and as much as possible should link previous learning to the new learning about to be presented. I believe this is the key to the effectiveness of advance organizers: that they show the students

that something they already know will help them learn what is about to be presented. Writing learning objectives is also an area that GU's instructional development specialists have been trained in, but additional study should also be of benefit.

Embedded support devices such as examples, illustrations, and activities should be used to explain, clarify, enhance, or enrich the text. Written examples and illustrations obviously should be inserted into the text in such a way that the learner understands what the illustration is trying to explain. Such illustrations could also include graphics such as charts, maps, or tables, particularly in explaining numeric data or geographic information. Written ESDs, including activities, should use interesting and appealing language designed to attract or engage the student and compel him or her to read the example or perform the activity.

The conclusion seems to be, then, that instructional development specialists and/or teachers should try to develop mathemagenic activities that require students to focus on the course text and interact with it, processing the information as deeply as possible. Inserting study questions that require the student to work at higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy is good practice. Adding illustrations and examples from real life is also a useful idea. Activities that personalize the information or that ask the student to apply or relate course content to his or her social context, including case studies, are also a compelling addition to the content. A university should engage in pilot-testing or field-testing of courses before releasing them for general study. Students could be asked to comment on specific areas of instructional design such as the study questions, goals and objectives statements, and illustrations and activities in

the course. This kind of feedback should prove invaluable to course development and instructional design improvement.

Conclusion

It is impossible to study mathemagenics or instructional development factors in isolation from one another. Even if it were feasible, it would make no sense since students do not rely on a single or isolated activity or device in the learning process. They tend to learn in response to multiple factors present in the educational environment. Therefore, it is far more logical to consider instructional development elements such as mathemagenic activities and embedded support devices in “packages” or groups of factors (using a statistical approach such as cluster analysis, for example) in actual print-based learning settings, such as the Nill study references.

If that is true, then it would make sense for instructional development specialists and teachers to approach the use of mathemagenic activities in course development from a holistic or comprehensive approach with each piece of the instructional presentation supporting the others (as much as possible) and all working toward the same instructional goals. Certain mathemagenic activities may be more appropriate for certain kinds of courses, and course developers should select the activities that will best help students achieve the learning objectives for that course. A collaboration between the course writer and the instructional development specialist, coupled with student feedback through pilot-testing, might be the most workable and comprehensive approach to course development.

If within the biblical higher education community, our desire is high-quality outcomes, particularly graduates who are well-educated and prepared for ministry and leadership positions in local churches or faith-based contexts, the inferences of this paper could benefit both classroom and distance teaching and learning that rely on print-based learning materials. Whether an institution is primarily distance learning in some form or classroom-based, printed materials are critical to the teaching-learning process, and the lessons learned from this discussion of mathemagenics should be helpful in preparing the printed materials used.



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BOOK REVIEWS

- *Christian Higher Education: An Empirical Guide*
Perry Glanzer, Theodore F. Cockle, and Jessica Martin
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- *Learning to Disagree: The Surprising Path to Navigating Differences with Empathy and Respect*
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- *Spiritual Formation As If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community (2nd ed.)*
James C. Wilhoit
Reviewed by Andrew Evans

Christian Higher Education: An Empirical Guide

Perry L. Glanzer, Theodore F. Cockle, and Jessica Martin

Abilene Christian University Press

Abilene, TX, 2023

Reviewed by Frank E. Weller

President

Great Lakes Christian College, Lansing, MI

Perry Glanzer is Professor of Educational Foundations at Baylor University and Resident Scholar with the Baylor Institute for Studies in Religion. He and his Baylor colleagues Theodore Cockle and Jessica Martin are the authors of the 2023 publication *Christian Higher Education: An Empirical Guide*. I learned of the book when I stumbled across his Operationalizing Christian Identity Guide (OCIG) webpage, which lists the institution I serve as having the fifth highest OCIG score of the 546 institutions of higher education in the study. These 546 colleges and universities all have their roots in Christian identity.

With 27 possible points, the OCIG rubric denotes the extent to which colleges and universities founded in faith operationalize that Christian identity institutionally. The OCIG score is determined by factors such as how Christ-focused an institution's mission is; the rhetoric on an institution's website; whether a commitment to Christ is required for administrators faculty, staff and students; the required number of Bible and/or theology classes students take; and whether students are required to attend chapel.

The authors' study included institutions with roots in Mainline denominations, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Catholic Colleges and Universities, Evangelical Universities in Multidenominational Coalitions, Independent Low Church Protestant Colleges and Universities, and one Eastern Orthodox College.

Their research indicated that HBCU and Mainline denomination-affiliated schools are less likely to operationalize their Christian identity in their administrations and academic programs. Conversely, Catholic institutions and nondenominational Evangelical institutions are much more likely to do so. Independent Low Church Protestant institutions are most likely to operationalize their Christian identity.

Twenty-nine of the 546 institutions included in *Christian Higher Education* are either associated with or accredited by ABHE. These colleges and universities averaged just under 21 points on Glanzer's 27-point OCIG scale. Institutions affiliated with ABHE but not noted in the book would generally align with the nondenominational Evangelical institutions or Independent Low Church Protestant institutions.

Noting that "Christian universities do not always stay Christian" (p.12), the book is intended to assist parents and students in determining the degree of Christian influence that best fits students for their educational experience.

Like any other study, this research is impacted by time. Though only a few years old, the study included several institutions that have since closed. Educators with roots in specific faith traditions might find themselves quibbling with the authors' designations.

For instance, I noticed that institutions with close similarity to the one I serve were sometimes classified differently. Administrators of ABHE schools might also criticize the exclusion of ABHE-affiliated colleges and universities from the study, correctly assuming they would score highly on the OCIG. The authors anticipated such criticism, noting that the study “did not include Bible colleges which do not offer majors in at least two distinct areas of study beyond Christianity or church vocations” (p. 14). In correspondence with this author, Glanzer noted that the study continues, and a revised publication is planned. With ABHE institutions expanding their offerings, it is likely that more ABHE-affiliated colleges and universities will be included in the second edition.

The book concludes by detailing three distinct approaches to Christian higher education: “Christ-assumed, Christ-added, and Christ-animating administration” (p. 130ff.). Since ABHE’s mission of institutional flourishing mandates that member institutions foster a Christ-animating approach to Christian higher education, this may be the most beneficial section of the book for administrators, faculty, and staff working in ABHE institutions.

The authors note:

The major difference between Christ-added and Christ-animating administration is that Christ-added administrators merely add a Christian goal to a list of other goals that one would find at a secular university. In contrast, Christ-animating administrators place all the goals for an institution within the context of the Christian story. (pp. 132-133)

The book should be read by all who are concerned by the potential for institutions to stray from their roots and thus become Christian in name only.

The list below includes institutions accredited by or associated with ABHE that are included in *Christian Higher Education*. Their OCIG scores (out of a possible 27) are listed along with their classification by Glanzer, Cockle, and Martin.

*Independent Low Church Protestant Colleges and Universities
 #Evangelical Colleges and Universities in Multidenominational Coalitions
 +Historically Black College or University

American Baptist College – 14.5	Johnson University# – 21
Arlington Baptist University* – 24	Kansas Christian College* – 16
Asbury University# – 18	Kentucky Christian University# – 19
Baptist University of the Americas* – 20	Kuyper College# – 22
Barclay College – 14	Life Pacific University# – 25
Bethesda Christian University* – 18	Oak Hills Christian College* – 25
Briarcrest College – 25	Ozark Christian College# – 25
Cairn University# – 25	Pillar College* – 20
Calvary University* – 23	Simmons College of Kentucky+ – 22
Columbia International University# – 21	Southeastern University# – 23
Dallas Baptist University# – 16	Summit Christian College* – 17
Dallas Christian College* – 25	The King's University – 16
Ecclesia College* – 22	Welch College# – 22
Grace Christian University# – 21	
Great Lakes Christian College* – 25	
Hope International University# – 17	

Learning to Disagree: The Surprising Path to Navigating Differences with Empathy and Respect

John Inazu

Zondervan

Grand Rapids, MI, 2024

Reviewed by Tyson S. Chastain

Director of Alumni Relations

Johnson University, Knoxville, TN

In *Learning to Disagree*, John Inazu explores the common causes of disagreement that are present in our world of frequent incivility. Using his annual academic teaching load as a framework for the book, the author considers some of the more significant moments of instruction within his classes from August to May. As a law school professor, Inazu strives to help his students find nuance within the law through which his students can find an empathetic way to engage in civil discourse without compromising personal convictions. Living in a diverse national and global society, people must learn to cope with the complex and engage in disagreements with compassion.

Through the sharing of classroom stories and experiences outside the classroom, Inazu weaves a tapestry of illustrations that reveal several challenges common in the human experience. People are complex, and circumstances are diverse. Looking at people and circumstances through two-way mirrors obscures the complexity and inhibits understanding. Through these stories, the author strives to help readers discover empathy while struggling to determine

what is fair, moral, and right when confronting circumstances where there are no easy answers. The author is not out to make friends of adversaries. Rather, Inazu is interested in helping his readers move toward understanding their adversaries. He wants his readers to avoid dismissive attitudes toward the arguments of others because such attitudes inhibit understanding these arguments and why they are being made.

For readers interested in understanding some of what our legal professionals go through in preparation for a career in law, this book demonstrates how lawyers learn the art of unbiased empathy and understanding. Every chapter is a reminder for the readers to speak charitably while expressing honest opinions that may not be held in common. What one person considers as fair, right, or true might not be obvious to others, and this premise permeates the book. The author consistently reminds readers that notions of fairness derive from someone's personal stories and experiences. Because of differences, people live with clashing values that make compromise difficult to achieve. Inazu emphasizes that, when compromise is not possible, the best a person might do is strive to understand "what's at stake in a disagreement and why others see things differently" (p. 50). Though emotions have a way of hijacking our process, engaging in challenging conversations offers the opportunity to learn. Therefore, the author thematically pushes forward with the assertion that mankind needs these challenging conversations and the best way to get started is by finding common ground and building off that shared piece of real estate.

The author identifies himself as a Presbyterian and shares his legal perspective that there are few neutral answers at the intersection of law and religion. While it is easy to conflate wrong and evil, these

are not necessarily equal concepts. Contextual differences make it nearly impossible to draw lines. People can hold reasonable and sincere beliefs that are in complete opposition to one another. Still, Inazu reiterates the need to find commonality, seek understanding, and treat others with empathy and compassion. Embracing grace and nuance will, according to the author, improve our own abilities to see and overcome personal blind spots. It is in these recurring themes that this work offers its greatest contribution. Interpreting law and making sense of the complexities inherent in human experience lead Inazu's students to grow in their empathy, compassion, and ability to operate within a world of nuance.

One helpful feature the author offers at the conclusion of the book is a reflection guide. This guide includes a series of questions that will help readers go deeper in their understanding and application of the concepts presented throughout the book. These questions are useful for college professors teaching courses with civility or worldview-related outcomes. In combination with other resources, this book and the accompanying reflection guide would be a valuable addition to augment the process of helping students confront their personal biases as they navigate a polarized world in need of greater respect for nuance, empathy, and compassion.

While participating in the learning experience of Inazu's law classroom is a helpful exercise leading to growth in the graces of learning to disagree, the novelty of the classroom quickly becomes tiresome. The book could have been much more succinct and still effectively made all the important arguments. If readers have an interest in this topic but don't want to spend the time necessary to read the entire book, readers can quickly gather and digest the main

principles by simply reading the last couple of paragraphs of each chapter.

The premise of the book and the process of learning to disagree are easy to embrace by those who clamor for a more respectful dialogue in the public sphere. However, for those convinced that their perspective is the only valid perspective, this book's incessant message of nuance and the need to navigate mutually exclusive truth claims with grace and compassion may be difficult to accept. Still, this is the lesson the book hopes to teach all readers. Life is full of hard questions for which there are no easy answers. But, with a little empathy, humanity can learn the art of respectful disagreement.



Foundations for Lifelong Learning: Education in Serious Joy

John Piper

Crossway

Wheaton, IL, 2023

Reviewed by Christopher N. Dickerson

Provost

Carolina College of Biblical Studies, Fayetteville, NC

Why *do* education? That's an oddly worded question but consider it briefly. Why do we do this enterprise known as education? John Piper submits: "Education is the process of growing in our ability to join God in [his] ultimate purpose to glorify Jesus Christ" (p. 2). For Piper, education is the lifelong process of magnifying Jesus Christ in all things. As we study his word and his world, we enlarge our ability to glorify God.

In his book *Foundations for Lifelong Learning: Education in Serious Joy*, John Piper unpacks this idea of lifelong learning in the context of Bethlehem College and Seminary. Institutions of biblical higher education will find his insights encouraging and perhaps challenging. He states the book's aim this way:

Our aim is to help you grow in the habits of mind and heart that will never leave you and will fit you for a lifetime of increasing wisdom and wonder through all the sweet and bitter provisions of life. The well-educated person is not the one with degrees, but the one who has the habits of mind and heart to go on learning for a lifetime. Specifically, to go on learning what we need in order to live in a Christ-exalting way for the rest of our lives—whatever the vocation. (p. 12)

The book unpacks these “habits of mind and heart” to help us achieve this aim. Piper’s vision for Christian education moves beyond mere academic achievements to a life of deep and abiding joy in God.

Lifelong learning seeks to instill the following six habits of mind and heart. It begins with *observation*, using our senses to accurately and thoroughly study God, his Word, and his world. Next is *understanding*, “the mind’s grasp of how things fit together and to lead to a valid conclusion” (p. 47). *Evaluation* is making sound judgments about the truth and goodness of what one has observed and understood. Piper states: “Lifelong learning means growing in the habit of mind and heart that seeks not only to observe carefully and thoroughly, and to *understand* accurately, but also to *evaluate* fairly and correctly” (p. 90, emphasis original).

The fourth of the six habits is *feeling*. Feeling refers to developing a proper emotional and spiritual response to what has been observed, understood, and evaluated. Piper argues that lifelong education should form the heart as well as the head (p. 91). *Application* puts knowledge into practice through wise and useful actions. This habit turns the prior habits into “action for the sake of the glory of God and the good of others” (p. 117). Finally, *expression* cultivates one’s ability to communicate what has been learned through written or spoken words. As the lifelong learner develops these six habits of mind and heart, the result is a life of serious joy.

The book’s strength is its holistic approach, addressing both intellectual and spiritual aspects of learning. Piper emphasizes the importance of logic and critical thinking while also acknowledging the role of the Holy Spirit. Additionally, the book’s focus on lifelong learning is valuable, encouraging readers to develop the six habits

throughout their lives instead of limiting it to their formal education alone. The writing style is clear and easy to read, making even the more complex ideas simple to comprehend. Throughout the book, Piper laces Scripture and practical suggestions to help readers apply the concepts to their own lives.

For administrators, *Foundations for Lifelong Learning* serves as a reminder to cultivate a culture of lifelong learning throughout the institution, from faculty to staff to students. Administrators should frame education as a joyful pursuit that glorifies God more than merely a pursuit of a degree or career. This approach to education may help shape the marketing tactics of the institution, as well as casting its vision. Most importantly, Piper's philosophy is a timely call to ensure that institutional missions remain focused on spiritual formation, not just academic success. We must uphold the rigors of higher education. However, we must never miss Piper's goal of fostering "serious joy" in our students and staff. One possible way forward is to integrate spiritual metrics into student learning outcomes, assessing not only cognitive development but also spiritual growth over time. While such metrics are difficult to assess at the course level, they do fit the overall focus of "biblical" higher education.

Faculty can also apply Piper's ideas by weaving biblical themes into their curricula and creating environments where students can encounter God through both subject matter and classroom culture. Faculty can model lifelong learning as they demonstrate the six habits in their courses as well as teach critical thinking skills as students learn to observe, understand, and evaluate. Staff may also benefit from a focus on "serious joy." Residence hall staff, student services, and student life staff could develop programming and activities

that foster spiritual community and engagement with God outside of the classroom and chapel. Students, likewise, are challenged to approach all aspects of their education (curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular) with a desire to find their ultimate joy in magnifying God. The six habits of mind and heart are transferable across different subjects and see all truth as God's truth. In the end, students who approach their studies with this mindset will come to know and glorify God more fully.

John Piper's *Foundations for Lifelong Learning: Education in Serious Joy* provides a profound theological vision for education that emphasizes the integration of faith, learning, and joy. This thought-provoking book will challenge both the academician and the everyday Christian alike to view all of life through the eyes of lifelong learning. Education is a God-glorifying endeavor, and Piper's philosophy of education will help cultivate a rich and meaningful approach to lifelong learning. Piper's work serves as a crucial reminder to pursue knowledge that leads to joy in God, integrating faith and learning in a meaningful way.



Crisis of Confidence: Reclaiming the Historic Faith in a Culture Consumed with Individualism and Identity

Carl R. Trueman

Crossway

Wheaton, IL, 2024

Reviewed by Nathan Deck

Adjunct Faculty

Word of Life Bible Institute, Pottersville, NY

Stale, formulaic declarations of faith are things many evangelicals relegate to the cold corridors of cathedrals and dusty alcoves of seminary libraries. Carl Trueman in *Crisis of Confidence* sets out to prove that this sentiment could not be further from the truth. He makes the case that the historic creeds and confessions of the faith are vital for the church, both in the present and continuing into the future. The perennial refrain of “no creed but the Bible” sounds good on the surface but can actually lead to instability among a congregation and its leadership. The solution, Trueman posits, is to reclaim the ancient creeds to continue building on the foundation laid in history for stability into the future.

Trueman begins by explaining the cultural case against the adoption of creeds and confessions. He outlines the four presuppositions that underlie confessional Christianity, including the fact that humanity is accountable to someone outside of themselves, the relevance of history to today, the use of language to communicate, and the authority of the church as an institution that can enforce the

communal adoption of a creed or confession. Trueman then goes on to illustrate how these four presuppositions are in direct opposition to modern cultural forces. At the forefront of these forces is the antiauthoritarian nature of expressive individualism. He argues that the seemingly honorable statement of “no creed but the Bible” is actually an appropriation of this expressive individualism because one who makes such a claim is giving preferential treatment to his or her own personal interpretation of Scripture over that which has been held by the church throughout history.

With this groundwork, Trueman draws on both Old and New Testament examples to make the case for the adoption of creeds in the church. Chief among these is Paul’s command in 1 Timothy 1:13 to “Follow the pattern of sound words...” (ESV). The pattern of these words both forms the basic units of doctrine that are passed from one generation to the next, as well as provides a groundwork for solid, theological vocabulary by which believers can discuss concepts about the Scriptures. Together, these examples underlie the case in favor of creedal adoption. All this talk of the traditions of creeds and confessions may lead one to wonder what role the Scriptures play alongside the creeds. Trueman makes clear that the Scriptures are the final authority and the standard by which the creeds and confessions are normed. Those creeds and confessions, however, are the “concentrated deposits of tradition” that summarize and explain the Scriptures accurately.

With the biblical case well articulated, Trueman then turns to the practical benefits a church can receive by adopting creeds and confessions for use within the congregation. While he details many points of usefulness, and even devotes an entire chapter to a

variety of these, two stand out above the rest: the pedagogical and doxological uses. Pedagogically, the creeds and confessions outline the essential doctrines the church should teach, and the resulting catechisms that developed over the years allowed for practical material in the education of church members. Doxologically, the use of confessions in the worship service serves to turn the hearts and minds of parishioners to the wonders of God and his plan to redeem sinful humanity.

In analyzing Trueman's *Crisis of Confidence*, it is clear that this was written for a general audience while maintaining highly academic standards. A layperson can follow the arguments and understand the thrust of the book without prior training in church history. Pastors will also find this book challenging their beliefs about creedalism and the resulting practices they institute in their churches. This book would also fit well as required reading in a seminary course on ecclesiology or church history to help students grapple with the usefulness of the material they are studying.

While Trueman does not hide his denominational affiliation, his writing does not come across as pushing any one specific denomination or its particular creeds. In the chapter on classic Protestant creeds, Trueman analyzes documents from the Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran traditions while also briefly mentioning the Baptist Confession. If there is one complaint that could be made, it is that not much space is given to the practical hurdle a non-confessional congregation would need to overcome if it were convinced of Trueman's argument. An independent Baptist church may adopt the Nicene or Apostles' Creed, but it would not hold to the Westminster Standards in their entirety. Providing direction for situations such as this would have strengthened the book's case.

Overall, Trueman does well to articulate the historical and practical significance of attending to the classic confessions. This is a needed updated edition over his 2012 *The Creedal Imperative*. The world of 2024 is much different from that of 2012 and therefore warrants a new edition. Trueman does an excellent job of interweaving up-to-date references to culture while retaining the core arguments and illustrating the importance of attending to the historic creeds and confessions of the faith. All believers, whether members of a confessional or non-confessional church, will find their presuppositions challenged and their faith strengthened in reading Trueman's work.



Untangling Critical Race Theory: What Christians Need to Know and Why It Matters

Ed Uszynski

InterVarsity Press

Downers Grove, IL, 2024

Reviewed by Anna-Marie Lockard

Adjunct Faculty

Nazarene Bible College, Colorado Springs, CO

Ed Uszynski's thought-provoking book attempts to untangle facts from fiction about Critical Race Theory (CRT). Arguably, CRT is one of the most controversial issues of the day, and one on which many Christians have heated opinions. The book highlights the concerns with responsible answers. What CRT asks us to think about is complicated and multi-layered. Importantly, the author notes that it is impossible for a single book or article to capture CRT's range of topics, theories, genres, or camps (p. 87). Nevertheless, the author unpacks scholarly frameworks in understandable terms, which he carefully measures against biblical notions of righteousness and justice.

Importantly, the author highlights ways in which Christianity and Critical Theory conflict. He begins by defining the term "theory" in the context of CRT: It refers to intentional, thoughtful human attempts to make sense of what is going on in society. In the hands of academic scholars, theories function as interpretive lenses, as ways to describe how societies function. They are educated ways to explain why things are the way they are (p. 47).

What is CRT? What can Christians learn from CRT since CRT is rooted in Marxism and states there is no God? Critical theorists believe transformation of society begins with the deconstruction and renewal of political and economic society, whereas Christians believe that transformation begins with the deconstruction and renewal of the heart and mind (p. 68). Critical theory puts humans at the center and demands we adjust to progressive ideas. Christian theology puts God at the center.

Given the author's background with a Ph.D. in critical theory and Marxism, he often views CRT through a more liberal lens. This view may disappoint and cloud the beliefs of conservative religious readers. Moreover, the author contends that CRT is useful in Christian discussion than how it is usually portrayed by Christian critics.

The author notes that he is not writing with an academic audience in mind. Nevertheless, I believe he has done a remarkable and thorough job of “untangling” an often misunderstood Critical Race Theory. I believe it is one of the most widely referenced issues of the day. Biblical higher education faculty could use the book effectively as a text for cross-cultural mission classes.



Spiritual Formation As If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community (2nd ed.)

James C. Wilhoit

Baker Academic

Grand Rapids, MI, 2022

Reviewed by Andrew Evans

Director of Youth Leadership

Summit Pacific College, Abbotsford, BC

In his book *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, James Wilhoit argues that “the church exists to carry out Christ’s mission in the world, and accomplishing this spiritual formation must be a central task of the church” (p. 9). He maintains that, historically, the church has not placed a significant enough priority on spiritual formation. Wilhoit’s work is not directed toward any particular denomination; instead, he addresses the broader evangelical church of North America. He offers a framework for developing a curriculum for spiritual formation without prescribing its specific content. The central focus of Wilhoit’s work is the exploration of four categories of spiritual formation, which encompass an intentional instructional plan for Christian spiritual formation.

The first category of spiritual formation that Wilhoit proposes is the posture of receiving. He argues that “a receptive stance requires corporate and individual humility and spiritual openness... so that we will be receptive to the Spirit’s work of formation” (p. 64). This openness is fostered through a recognition of our own brokenness and the transformative work of God’s Spirit in response

to it. Wilhoit contends that by identifying the sinful and idolatrous ways we try to quench our internal yearnings, we are able to accept that we are broken. He suggests that our understanding of our own brokenness is the pillar of true community formation. Our brokenness leaves us in need of God's grace, and spiritual formation is the intentional, continuous receiving of God's grace through spiritual practices such as prayer, confession, and repentance.

The second category of spiritual formation that Wilhoit proposes is the posture of remembering. He posits that there are two means of remembering for Christian spiritual formation. First, we need to guard our "hearts from thoughts and dispositions that pull us away from God" (p. 114), and to do this, we need to spend time in individual and communal internal reflection. This will open our hearts as we cultivate "trust, surrender, and vulnerability to God" (p. 116). Second, we need to ground ourselves in the gospel, which "requires the integration of anointed teaching and careful curriculum development" (p. 137). This teaching should incorporate methods that remind us of the good acts God has done in our lives and in the lives of fellow believers. Consequently, spiritual formation necessitates our taking time for personal and corporate testimony, reflection, and remembrance.

The third category of spiritual formation that Wilhoit proposes is the posture of responding. Christian spiritual formation should foster and nurture a deeper desire for Christians to love each other more fully. It is through acts of service that the people of God are transformed, thus "equipping the priesthood of all believers for spiritual service must be at the heart of the church's formational ministry" (p. 170). When we see spiritual formation merely as behaviors to be avoided, we become passive in our formation. Wilhoit argues throughout his book for an intentional and active

participation in the process. It is the teaching and preaching ministry of the church that must help Christians to develop “a way of viewing life that supports a compassionate response to ourselves and those around us” (p. 180). He argues that it is imperative that Christians learn how to engage with the brokenness of the world and discern God’s plan for their response within this brokenness.

The fourth category of spiritual formation that Wilhoit proposes is the posture of relating. He asserts that we need to “seek out spiritually enriching relationships of love and service.... We need to invest in community” (p. 190). While the importance of community is a recurring theme throughout the book, it is through the posture of relating that Wilhoit clarifies this concept. He contends that, by intentionally cultivating deep spiritual friendships, we can find hope and healing as we participate in authentic community. According to Wilhoit, this community is more than interpersonal connection: There is an emphasis on learning to follow the wisdom of Jesus within the context of community, often structured through a “community rule of life.”

One of the strengths of Wilhoit’s book is his emphasis on the foundational philosophy underlying Christian spiritual formation as well as on the practical demonstration of this philosophy within a community of believers. Although the text does not concentrate on the specific content for a teaching curriculum, Wilhoit does provide a robust framework grounded in his philosophy and principles of spiritual formation. This framework empowers pastors in developing a flexible and contextually relevant curriculum for spiritual formation.

Though Wilhoit’s work is practical in nature, one of its limitations is the lack of specifics. The reader who might be

seeking more defined guidelines for a curriculum or examples of what a communal rule of life entails may find this aspect disappointing. Therefore, this book would serve as a valuable text for a graduate course on spiritual formation or for pastors who have experience with spiritual formation in ministry. Rather than following the traditional approach of listing and explaining various spiritual disciplines that contribute to spiritual formation, Wilhoit seeks to explore the topic in a more holistic manner. He establishes the foundational categories for spiritual formation—receiving, remembering, responding, relating—that enable pastors to guide their congregations in posturing themselves for spiritual formation. Wilhoit’s book provides an insightful exploration of the importance of these postures and how to accomplish them.

