



# Teaching Christianly

Biblical Worldview Shaping and the Work of Christian Education

Bryan Smith | Biblical Worldview Sessions | November 10, 2017

The most natural way to integrate faith and learning in Christian education is to pursue this work as biblical worldview shaping. We should teach all of the academics from the perspective of a biblical worldview, and we should attempt to show students how that perspective gives meaning and direction to all of life.

In this document we will consider how to pursue biblical worldview shaping by making use of an analytical tool developed by BJU Press called the Levels of Biblical Integration.

This tool seeks to distinguish significant instances of biblical integration from less-significant instances. The logic behind these levels is degree of connection between the Bible and the subject matter being taught.

My thesis in this analysis is that if we are to do a good job of worldview shaping, we will need to focus on Levels 2 and 3.

### **Level 0: No Integration**

Level 0 inserts the Bible through devotionals, prayer requests, and non-academic counsel. Even if biblical statements are made, there are no clear connections to the academic matter. There is nothing sinful about making use of Level 0. Any devout teacher will do this regularly. The problem comes when a teacher does only (or even primarily) Level 0. Such a teacher is not teaching Christianly. She may be *living* Christianly before the students, but she is not *teaching* her subject Christianly. And a school that focuses on Level 0 is not really a Christian school. It is likely a college-prep school staffed by Christians. In order for a school to be truly Christian, the learning in the classroom must be distinctively Christian.

### **Level 1: Referencing the Bible**

On Level 1 the teacher integrates the Bible into the learning, but he does so in a way that is not deeply connected to the learning. There are two common ways of doing this.

**Level 1a: biblical analogies.** Here, a teacher notes that something in the academic matter is similar to something in biblical teaching.

1. *Science*: comparing insect metamorphosis with a Christian's growth in sanctification
2. *Math*: comparing a circle to God's love for His people
3. *English*: comparing the impact that an adverb can have on a sentence to the impact of *how* a person obeys has on the obedience itself

This kind of biblical integration can be useful, but it tends to become ineffective if it is used a great deal. If a teacher overuses analogies, he will employ (sooner or later) analogies that are not very analogous. Of course, not all biblical analogies are poorly drawn. Some are appropriate and useful. But even then, there are limitations. Biblical analogies will always be marginal to the instruction of the classroom.

**Level 1b: biblical examples.** On this level, a teacher locates instances of the academic discipline in the Bible.

1. *Science*: noting that Adam's naming of the animals was a kind of classification (Gen. 2)
2. *Literature*: locating dramatic irony in the Joseph-Judah story (Gen. 42-44)
3. *Math*: noting evidence of  $\pi$  in the building of the temple (1 Kings 7:23)

This kind of biblical integration has a tighter connection to the learning. But here too we find limitations. Level 1b is good at demonstrating relevance: it shows that the Bible is relevant to the students' learning. But, of course, we want to show students that the Bible *rules over* these subjects. To accomplish that, we have to move beyond Level 1.

## Level 2: Responding with the Bible

On Level 2 the teacher helps the student apply the subject to real-life situations using the Bible as the authoritative guide.

**Level 2a: serving with the discipline.** Here the teacher encourages the student to apply the academic matter to obeying the Creation Mandate (Gen. 1:28) and to loving his neighbor as himself (Mark 12:30-31). This will require the use of authentic learning together with the application of the Bible's moral teaching.

1. *Math*: applying linear functions to building a wheelchair access ramp (Gen. 1:28; Lev. 19:18)
2. *Literature*: writing poetry that helps people deal with the reality of death (Gen. 1:28; 3:19; Heb. 2:14-15)
3. *English*: writing a research paper that helps people see problems in the thinking of modern secularism (cf. Timothy Larsen's *Crisis of Doubt*)

This kind of biblical integration is much more deeply embedded in the teaching of the discipline. Every instance could be itself an objective on the *apply* level of Bloom's taxonomy. The students are applying their learning to an instance of the Creation Mandate guided by the Bible's teaching that we should love our neighbors as ourselves.

**Level 2b: worshiping with the discipline.** On this level the teacher shows students how to use the academic matter to declare God's glory. According to Romans 11:36, everything in this world exists, ultimately, to declare the glory of God. For this reason teachers should at regular intervals show students how to use the subject matter to appreciate and declare God's glory.

1. *Science*: keeping a stargazing journal that includes reflections on the glory of God (Ps. 19)
2. *Literature*: using skill in journaling to keep a prayer/praise journal (cf. Edward Taylor) (cf. Ps. 119)
3. *History*: researching how the gospel came to you so you can praise God for His mercy and grace

### Level 3: Rebuilding with the Bible

On Level 3, we rebuild the subject based on the teachings of a biblical worldview. To make use of Level 3, we must remember the impact of the Fall. Everything in this world has been damaged by our fall into sin. The human mind is no less fallen than the body. For this reason, each of the subjects we teach is a mixture of good and evil—good from the vestiges of God’s original good creation, evil because of the entrance of sin.

A Christian teacher should seek to give students the skill needed to distinguish good from evil. She should also show the student how to formulate a proper redemptive response.

**Level 3a: evaluating the premises.** Remembering the fallenness of the human mind, a teacher should help students call into question the assumptions of a given academic discipline and then evaluate them from a biblical worldview.

1. *Language arts:* rejecting the objectivity of truth and appreciated all texts and cultures (postmodernism)?
2. *Science:* affirming uniformitarianism?
3. *Social studies:* affirming early hominid development in East Africa?
4. *Math:* asserting that math is completely objective and certain?

**Level 3b: rebuilding the discipline.** On this level, we attempt to sanctify the student’s thinking within a particular academic sphere by helping him rebuild the discipline with premises derived from a biblical worldview.

1. *Language arts:* affirming the reality of revealed Truth and evaluating works of literature from this assumption (Rom. 1; John 17:17)
2. *Science:* affirming Creation and the Flood and using creation science (2 Pet. 3:3-6)
3. *Social studies:* affirming Genesis 1-11 as history and building on its philosophical basis
4. *Math:* affirming human limitations and using math to model God’s world (Eccl. 8:17)

Level 3 has the deepest connections of all. If it is done properly, it requires a series of objectives that are aligned with Bloom’s three highest levels: analyze, evaluate, and create. To distinguish the facts of a discipline from its underlying assumptions, one must engage in the cognitive process of analysis. To make a judgment (based on a biblical worldview) regarding a discipline’s assumptions, one must evaluate the discipline. And to rebuild a discipline based on biblical assumptions, one must create (or maybe we should say *re-create*).

When we consider these connections, we realize that biblical integration is not at odds with academic rigor. It is instead bound up with academic rigor. In the end, we are not seeking to teach in a way that is academically rigorous *and* biblically integrated. We are attempting to teach courses that are academically rigorous from a biblical worldview.