

## Chapter 10 [extract]

### Deeds Flowing From a Faith-Founded Worldview

*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

*But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."*

*Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.<sup>1</sup>*

Some years ago, John Hull wrote an article entitled in part: *Aiming for Christian education, settling for Christians educating*. Without wishing to add to any feelings of guilt or inadequacy, we may ask, however, are we Christians who are teaching, or are we Christian teachers teaching Christianly? In chapters 5 and 6 we looked briefly at what this might look like and in this final chapter this will be explored further from a number of different angles, but the question also is raised: Look like to *whom*?

We could say that in some ways, as has been indicated earlier, the, *What does it look like?*, question is the wrong question because the issue is primarily about *being* rather than only observable *doing*. We are to *be* God's redeemed and holy people<sup>2</sup> whatever we are doing, and our *doing* should flow from that *being*. The question focuses secondly on what teaching Christianly may *look like* to those watching: to God, our supervisor, to our students, to their parents, to the school board, . . . or perhaps to ourselves. The reason we ask this question is that there is a concern that, as dedicated followers of Jesus Christ, the right thing be done in the classroom, regardless of the observer, but there is uncertainty as to what observable practices may be undertaken. Frequently Christian teachers have either been trained by secularists, for whom the question is purportedly meaningless, or perhaps by Christian teachers or lecturers who have not been trained to think in these terms and therefore have not analyzed their own words and actions in order to provide an appropriate model. Most of us therefore have not undergone a discipling process in teaching Christianly: an approach such as watch what I do, you do it while I watch you, now you do it by yourself.

What follows includes some ideas of a practical nature but is not intended to be anything more than a jumping off point for what we must discover for ourselves and develop in community together. Teaching is a complex task with, it seems, more complexity is added each year. The question of Christian practice may be applied to any vocation and there is certainly a great need to a reduction of the Sunday/rest-of-the-week dualism that is often found. Serious consideration should also be given to what it may mean to keep accounts Christianly, to engineer Christianly, to serve takeaway food Christianly, to play a Chopin *étude* Christianly, and so on. To add to the weight of the problem for educators, we have the Scriptural references to teaching. Teaching in the New Testament is given a very high place as a calling and while some may say that the references are to Bible teaching, if we accept all truth as being God's and that the teaching/learning interface is fundamentally concerned with knowing and loving God and our neighbor, then classroom teaching in our schools should

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<sup>1</sup> James 2:14–18.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Pet 3:10–11.

align with biblical references. Teaching is represented in the so-called Great Commission<sup>3</sup> and Paul lists teaching as a gift God has given to his church—along with apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastors,<sup>4</sup> and warns of the implied responsibilities.<sup>5</sup>

In Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 Paul outlines his teaching regarding the leadership of the church and the leadership roles of elder, overseer and deacon. Paul mentions management of family and church and actions such as loving, encouraging, refuting heresy but the other things in the long list are all related to the essence of the person, of their “being” or character: be above reproach, be temperate, and so on. The situation in which the church leaders would find themselves could appear to be almost infinitely variable and Paul could not give instructions to cover every instance. He could, however, give instruction regarding the essence of being a Godly person in leadership—out of which would flow Godly decisions and Godly actions.

Given the significance and enormity of this God-given calling it is obvious that the practical outworking of it will not be a simple and straightforward thing. It will include a deep and close relational knowledge of God’s word and our places or roles in God’s great drama. It means thinking deeply about the world pictures and worldview assumptions that surround us, and that have informed the curriculum we teach and the lives of the students. This responsibility, if taken seriously, involves a degree of Scripture-informed self-reflection<sup>6</sup> while endeavoring to “have the mind of Christ”<sup>7</sup> so that the life we live before our students is worthy of following.

One of the most interesting passages in the Scriptures that we find that speaks to these ideas is found in Romans 12. The passage begins with Paul urging his readers to have renewed minds—we may say, transformed worldview assumptions. This paradigm shift through which we must go, results in change at the deepest worldview levels, producing a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). Paul then enjoins us to, be self-reflective, to “think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (Rom 1:3) but he immediately contextualizes this within the Body of Christ, the church. Finally, Paul considers the working out of gifting, including teaching, as deeds of service within the community of the Body of Christ.

### **Classroom practice foundations**

James tells us that faith without deeds, or actions, is dead<sup>8</sup> and one may argue that while the essence of teaching Christianly is *being*, if that does not result in *doing* then one may wonder about the nature of the *being*. It is by our “fruit”<sup>9</sup> that we are known: our speech and our actions.<sup>10</sup>

### **1. Living in the drama**

Above and in chapter 3 we saw the importance of living in God’s story, of acting out our role in his grand drama. Our specific actions in this regard will depend on many factors that will be pertinent to your particular classroom and school situation. The important thing is authenticity—rather than the wearing of masks (*hypocrites*) as in the Greek dramas. The

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:20.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4.

<sup>5</sup> James 3:1.

<sup>6</sup> Much has been written concerning reflective practice in education but we must be wary of reflection by fallen human beings on themselves and hence the importance of biblically informed and Christ oriented reflection.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:16.

<sup>8</sup> James 2:26.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 7:16, etc.

<sup>10</sup> In the final analysis, the “fruit” of teaching Christianly will be seen in the lives of those we have taught, though we may not see that for some time if ever.

wearing of masks by Greek actors was a convenient device that allowed them to take on character roles by presenting a different face to the audience. While we all do this to some extent, it is a practice that requires thoughtful monitoring.

The Russian dramatist, Constantin Stanislavski, last century developed a training method for actors that became known as Method Acting and has been used by many famous actors. There are several features of Method Acting that are applicable to the Christian teacher in his or her classroom situation. On the negative side, we might note that Stanislavsky taught that actors should not “over act” or act in a way that the audience could see was inauthentic, over the top or exaggerated. An actor should not simply go through motions or act mechanically to the script, but have consciously considered the reasons for their words and actions.<sup>11</sup> As children have quite an ability to see through falseness in adults, overacting will be taken as involving a degree of deception. Stanislavski’s actors were to know the character they were acting intimately, knowing how they feel, think and behave, just as Christian teachers are asked to know their Lord intimately. Also, actors should know the script well and become involved with the script story as well as with the role they are called to play. In doing this they should not allow themselves to portray on stage anything that they have not personally experienced. Within a Christian teaching context this implies the importance of knowing the (God’s) story so far, knowing the role to which he has called us, and knowing how the story ends.

## **2. Powerful prior beliefs**

We can teach worldview assumptions in the sense that we can teach students to recognize the clues that will indicate something of the metanarrative basis, or foundational assumptions, that a piece of communication yields. For example, obviously, most television commercials arise from, or are intended to appeal to, a consumerist worldview and they can be analyzed so that their origin is seen. In the same way, pieces of written, spoken, or other forms of communication can also be analyzed. Our students should be taught to critically analyze the worldviews around them, the assumptions beneath what the culture throws at them—including the education culture.

We may speak of demonstrating to a student the worldview assumptions that someone else may have by listing the clues that are evident in their speech and action, but that does not give the student that worldview or those assumptions. They would merely have a set of facts about the products of them. As worldviews are birthed from lifeworlds, often through cultural contexts, by desire, this requires a different approach. Rather than teaching a biblical worldview as a set of facts or concepts, in order that our students eventually have a biblical worldview, the provision of a biblically framed lifeworld for students that encourages a feedback action, and the building of desire towards God and his word, can be a powerful way to “teach” towards an outcome whereby a student has a developing set of worldview assumptions that are biblically grounded or sourced.

An interesting finding with regard to how this might best be done in educational lifeworld situations is seen in results from research by the physicist Richard Hake involved over 6500 students in 62 first level physics courses.<sup>12</sup> Before and after their physics courses the students were given a diagnostic survey that had been designed to assess whether people’s thinking was pre-Newtonian or post-Newtonian (or pre-Enlightenment/post-Enlightenment). Regardless of the *quality* of the teacher, those students who were taught in 21 of the courses by traditional methods (lectures, recipe laboratory work, right/wrong quizzes and tests)

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<sup>11</sup> Stanislavski’s first book was titled *An Actor Prepares*.

<sup>12</sup> Hake, “Interactive-engagement Versus Traditional Methods.”

showed very little change in their beliefs over the course. Despite the teaching of modern science and the giving of correct answers in exams, the students actually persisted in thinking in pre-Newtonian (or pre-Enlightenment) terms (the language of appearances).

In 41 of the courses where students were taught using problem solving methodologies, hands-on approaches with immediate feedback, and discussion with lecturers and peers, the level of change, or paradigm shift, was much higher. This has implications for us in terms of the pedagogies we use that will facilitate paradigm shifts or worldview change. Just like the physics students, because of our upbringing and enculturation, we, and our students, may have a particular cognitive response to the biblical narrative and our places in it while some part of us remains dualistic—effectively a form of syncretism with secular humanism and we need to think about how we might address this.

Toward the end of last century, researchers working on the *A Private Universe* project asked graduates and staff of Harvard university questions regarding such things as the cause of seasonal change, why there are phases of the moon and how plants grow. The graduates had all experienced a high level of education and some of them had studied a range of science subjects at university level. What was found was that while the students were able to answer test questions and give appropriate, modern science, correct answers, their fundamental beliefs were still very much based on simple, personal observation and logic (for example, believing that winters were colder because the Earth was further from the sun).<sup>13</sup>

Despite all of their science training in school and university, there were also students who stated beliefs that trees were made of water and minerals from the ground and that the Earth's orbit is highly elliptical. Somehow, fundamental pieces of knowledge (e.g., plants use sunlight and carbon dioxide to produce much of the substance of their structure) had been overridden by underlying assumptions from early childhood based on observations of plants<sup>14</sup> and exaggerated drawings of the Earth's orbit.

This is a very important piece of research for us to consider. For Christian educators this begs the question, what fundamental pieces of information are important in early childhood so that students will grow to have a realistic and biblical world picture and worldview? The perceptions of God that are given in the very earliest years of education will persist. For those teaching in pre-school and Kindergarten years, care must be taken that in the telling of Bible stories truths about God and the Gospel message, while expressed in an appropriate manner for the age group, are not reduced such that they create incorrect impressions that the student may carry with them for the rest of their life. Even though in adulthood, the student may be able to explain the grace-gift of salvation, if they have been given in early childhood an economist view of God—God gives in exchange for—then that thinking could still color their unstated understanding of God. For this reason, historically, the church endeavored to instill the basics of theology through memorized catechisms and creeds.

Of course, something similar may be said of the secularist assumptions we gained as young children. Research with Christian teacher trainees by Brickhill found that while many teacher trainee students demonstrated a commitment to faith-based practices, but their underlying worldview assumptions remained strongly secular humanist. Brickhill suggested that this resulted from religion-based knowledge and practices being isolated from the application of scripture to real life situations. She went on to say that her study suggested that because of

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<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, this belief must have included somehow the assumption that the Southern Hemisphere experienced the same seasons as the Northern Hemisphere!

<sup>14</sup> For those particular university students, one can imagine that they would not be particularly concerned regarding the planting of trees for the sequestration of carbon from the atmosphere if they do not believe or understand that plants are carbon-based.

this, Christian education is failing in its task of adequately equipping the next generation with the knowledge and intellectual skills and biblically aligned assumptions they will need to make an impact for God's Kingdom in the world.

While Brickhill at times used a different understanding of the term worldview, she found that school, at least in her research, was not as strong an influencing factor as the home in terms of worldview change. Some implication for possible action by Christian teachers she gave as:

Christian educators need to begin worldview-based instruction in elementary school and continue it through all grade levels.

Christian educators need to broaden the application of scripture throughout the curriculum.

Christian educators need to assist parents in developing a biblical worldview and teach them how to facilitate a scriptural view of the world in their children.

Christian educators need to develop and use worldview-based curricula in the classroom and provide worldview training and assessment to teachers.

Christian educators must cultivate the Christian mind by promoting critical thinking and reasoning skills.<sup>15</sup>

Brickhill's definition of worldview here is slightly different from the one we have been using but, again, the changing of worldview assumptions is no simple task. We assess the effectiveness of our teaching of a child from not knowing to knowing that a sentence has a subject, or that 3 x 12 equals 36, or that the polar regions are cold, etc., by testing. If a student responds incorrectly, and if that response is handled well by the teacher, the psychological impact on the student should be minimal. These areas in teaching involve a level of change in the student's world picture (*Weltbild*). *A paradigm change, however, is much more substantial and implies a high impact change being made to one's self definition and changes the way the world looks to them.*

It should be noted here, however, a concentration, or over-emphasis, on education-as-evangelism for worldview change, or paradigm shift, greatly restricts our task as Christian educators. We do want to see spiritual transformation and worldview assumptions changed but we also want to see *world picture* assumptions changed. This change is part of "normal" education (as in the teaching of the phenomenon that water turns to steam when heated enough) but for the Christian teacher there is also the need for the knowledge to be considered from a biblical perspective as we saw in chapter 8.

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<sup>15</sup> Brickhill, *A Comparative Analysis*, 77–79.