

Spinning Worldviews

Recently I listened to a radio debate between a prominent Christian and a prominent atheist. The Christian was someone with considerable experience as a church leader and as a lawyer. The atheist had also had some years of experience leading a church but had renounced his supposed faith and now vehemently proclaims an anti-God, anti-Bible, anti-faith message. Both men were able to express themselves well and both were very well versed in the issues debated.

The debate, however, was never going to go anywhere. Apart from a church background, which both of them shared, they were speaking from very different worldviews. For example, one of the significant issues was that of evidence for the views that each one held. When the Christian spoke of evidence, he was speaking as a lawyer of the sort of evidence with which a court deals. When the atheist spoke of evidence, he was speaking of the sort of empirical evidence that can only be produced by the technology in a science laboratory.

My own reflections on the debate wandered to the fact that the atheist seemed unable to see things from any other perspective—such as historical, psychological, or affective, let alone the metaphysical—having reduced everything that he thought could be known or experienced in the universe to laboratory quantifiable data.

At this time I was working on a revision of the National Institute's *Worldviews in Education* unit and I realised, yet again, how valuable the perspectives in this unit are for confronting the attacks of “evangelistic” atheists. These attacks, led by prominent people such as Professor Dawkins, are becoming more prevalent and more intense and there is an urgent need for us to be preparing the students in our schools to be able to handle the arguments they present.

One way that we have tried to do this is by an approach known as integrating the Bible into the subjects we teach.

Integrating the Bible

One of the key questions asked in Christian education has become, therefore, how *can* we integrate the Bible effectively into our classroom practice? Over the years we have seen many means by which this might be done. Most of these, however, are probably inappropriate or even harmful and David Smith's addresses in the Transforming conference in Hobart highlighted some of these. David's examples included the inappropriate use of the Bible as a grammar textbook and using verses out of context.

By contrast, we would want to see teachers living, writing curricula, writing programs and teaching out of a biblical worldview: educational activities flowing from a biblical perspective rather than having a biblical perspective tacked on.

But this does not consider a fundamental problem which we might call the *culture of the discipline* or *subject*. And culture is related to worldview, and worldview is related also to language.

Last century there were energetic debates over the relationships between language and culture or worldview. Noam Chomsky argued that the construction of language was universal but others, from von Humboldt in the 1800s, to Whorf, Wittgenstein in the 1900s and other more recent researchers, saw strong links between language and worldview. Personally, I would claim that one cannot understand a culture unless one is very proficient in the language of that

culture. And traditionally each subject or discipline in education has its own language and culture.

Throughout the early years of schooling, language and reasoning are relatively similar across the curriculum. This is especially the case as all, or most, subjects are taught by one person for a whole year.

In the senior years of High School, it might be expected that the language, the vocabulary and the logic structures used in a Science class, for example, would be quite different from that used in a History class. Yes, there would be some overlap, the same general vocabulary and perhaps even the addition and subtraction of numbers (formulae/dates), but the two disciplines involve quite different ways of looking at the world. Eventually we have the situation where an historian sitting in a postgraduate lecture on theoretical physics may find it impossible to understand or make sense of almost all of the terminology and reasoning used.

This is at least one reason why integration across the curriculum is such a difficult thing to achieve. It will only work if a lowest common denominator of language and reasoning is used in all subjects. Perhaps the application of constructivism was seen as being the means by which this may be achieved.

If mathematicians or scientists think differently and see the world differently from the way, for example, historians or Japanese teachers see the world, we can see something of the multi-cultural or multi-worldview context that High School students must negotiate each day.

Where classes exist in schools to teach “Bible” the same difficulties must be negotiated. A significant difference there is that while the culture that surrounds us is supportive of mathematical worldviews or historical worldviews, it is not supportive of biblical worldviews. The teacher therefore appears as someone teaching in a very foreign worldview context: using a different vocabulary and having a different way of seeing things.

Attempting to integrate a biblical perspective into what we do and teach places us in a similar predicament. Integrating a biblical perspective, as something that is imposed on a subject, runs the risk of teaching two worldviews, two perspectives, simultaneously. This can be confusing or it may simply appear to the students to be artificial when, perhaps even in mid-sentence, the vocabulary and logic or reasoning (worldview) may change.

The solution, the work of our lifetimes as Christian educators, is to find a way for our subject to *flow out of* our faith commitment to the Gospel. There is then only one vocabulary and only one reasoning method—one worldview—with which students must negotiate. This is not integrating the Bible into our subject but integrating the subject we teach into our biblically founded faith.

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