

Insight

Our Vital Christian Mission: Preparing Kids for the War of Ideas

A post-Christian culture in crisis

“A long life in journalism and around Washington D.C., has taught me not just that ideas have consequences, but that *only* ideas have large and lasting consequences.” George Will.

Where shall we begin if we hope to restore Christian values in our culture? As Christians, we are called to preach the gospel, minister to the poor, and disciple young believers. But as we’ve focused exclusively on these things, we’ve lost sight of the power of ideas.

Love your enemies; God’s grace covers sin; our purpose is to love the Lord our God and our neighbor; God became man and dwelt among us. These are all ideas that changed the world. From the time of Christ to the present, these ideas and countless other biblical truths have progressively shaped our culture. That is until 20th century culture embraced a set of conflicting ideas for the first time since Rome fell.

These ideas originated in the 19th century and said something different. They said that the individual was supreme; that our purpose was what we make it; that “right” is relative; that the material world around us is all that is; that man can create utopia; and that God is dead. In the 19th and early 20th century, these ideas were seedlings. Not until the 1960’s did they take root and become cultural weeds.

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By the end of the 20th century, the cultural “wheat field” was, in fact, more appropriately called a “weed field.” Postmodern ideas far outnumbered the Christian ideas in our culture.

As we begin to cast the seeds of Christianity in the 21st century, lasting influences will again come from ideas. Every Christian has been unknowingly affected by the culture.

To reverse this effect, the ideas inherent in our culture must be intentionally addressed and countered with Christian Truth. This

is where a Christian Worldview enters as a vital integration of intellect and culture.

Why culture matters: Worldview

The concept of “Worldview” simply acknowledges a foundational truth about man: What we believe is defined as much by the social culture in which we live and the underlying beliefs it instills, as it is by our conscious choices. As Christians, we may read the Bible and attend church regularly, but we cannot escape the influence of the culture around us. What’s worse, we don’t realize the affect it has on us. One of the Enemy’s most powerful tools is our own ignorance. Without perspective, our minds will easily be molded to the shape of our culture.

Reclaiming the worldview of our youth is essential for the long-term restoration of Christian ideas and their positive influence on our culture.. **“Young believers also need a ‘brain’ religion... to equip**

them to analyze and critique the competing worldviews they will encounter when they leave home. If forewarned and forearmed, young people at least have a fighting chance... Training young people to develop a Christian mind is no longer an option; it is part of their necessary survival equipment.” Nancy Pearcey, Total Truth. This is much easier said

than done. We now have the swift current of post-modern culture as a powerful influence on youth. How can this be countered? It must be countered at its root-- with ideas.

Recently, “Christian Worldview” has become a buzz word

used by countless ministries. Some teach classes in “Worldview” in which comparative religious views are discussed. Others attempt to train students how to apply the Christian Worldview in their lives. Still others attempt to distill biblical principles from the Bible and apply them to history or modern life. While each of these have some value (we use some of these methods), we believe that Classical Christian education does a much better job because it focuses on “ideas”—the genesis of a worldview.

How does Classical Christian education instill a Christian Worldview better than other educations?

First, we teach history, literature, philosophy, theology, art, music, math, science, language, and all other subjects differently. We don’t just teach names, dates, facts, and skills-- we attempt to place students in the minds of those cultures which have led to ours. We also help them walk the philosophical paths in history that developed our current postmodern worldview. Understanding how postmodernism arose through history helps our students to appreciate what it really teaches and gain perspective. It also helps students be aware of its insidious influence in their lives.

Secondly, A feature of postmodernism is to create compartments—one for the natural, one for the supernatural; one for the natural man, one for the spiritual man; one for God, one for man. Compartments distort our worldview.

Through subject integration, our students grow to understand that God’s world is interconnected. Creativity expressed in literature, music, and art is

also evident in man’s mastery of science and philosophy. Truth, as it is discovered in math and science is equally relevant in art and music. God’s influence spans all matter and all thought.

We teach students to think. Our students do not simply respond with published answers, they have to demonstrate that they have wrestled with the great ideas. As they read and compare the great ideas of history, they do so through the lens of Scripture—the source of the greatest ideas.

Those who have visited our Letters courses, particularly in the high school, note another key difference. We teach students to think. Our students do not simply respond with published answers, they have to demonstrate that they have wrestled with the great ideas. As they read and compare the great ideas of history, they do so through the lens of scripture—the source of the greatest ideas.

Why we teach “Great Ideas.”

“Great ideas” are the intellectual concepts that have shaped human history—including those in scripture. Of course, by “Great” we don’t mean Good. Karl Marx was considered “Great” though he was not good.

Mortimer Adler, one of the 20th century’s most learned classicists, compiled the most famous collection of Great Books, which contain one definitive list of Great Ideas. In his work with Encyclopedia Britannica, he together with over 40 of his colleagues compiled the essential writings of the greatest men in Western history. *The Great Books of the Western World* series comprises 443 works by 74 authors including Homer, Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Archimedes, Virgil, Putarch, Tacitus, Kepler, Copernicus, Augustine, Aquinas, Dante, Chaucer, Hobbes, Machiavelli,

Rabelais, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Gilbert, Galileo, Bacon, Descarte, Milton, Pascal, Newton, Locke, Hume, Swift, Rousseau, Smith, Gibbon, Kant, Madison, Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton, Mill, Hegel, Melville, Darwin, Marx, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Freud, to name a few. Our students read most of these authors before they graduate. From these books, Adler distills the “Great Ideas”. Examples from his “Great Ideas Synopticon” include the ideas of Cause, Being, Beauty, Education, Good and Evil, Immortality, Knowledge, Original Sin, Life and Death, and Love. Our students discuss most of these ideas in depth.

In themselves, these works describe both the folly and the triumphs of man’s mind. When compared with Holy Scripture, they can be compared to an absolute standard of Truth. Our student’s main goal is to rightly divide the Great Ideas by reading them in the light of Scripture.

When they are through, they will have thought deeply about the human experience and will have worldviews that are influenced not by the lyrics of a popular song, or the plot of the latest blockbuster film, but by the enduring discussion of some of the greatest minds in God’s creation.

Our students are practiced in arguing for and against the great thinkers in history, so their college professors will not likely be able to sway them with a simple challenge, accusation, or “new” idea.

From this crucible of learning in our Letters course, students come out with a Christian worldview that can stand the test of any intellectual calling. Most importantly, they can live in the service of God and man with an accurate sense of gratitude and respect for Almighty God.

The consequence of a life based in God’s ideas

Lasting ideas have lasting consequences. The mystery of a poor Jewish carpenter whose ideas had a greater influence on human history than all

other kings, emperors, priests, and prophets combined illustrates the power of ideas. Christ led no earthly army; he was no politician; he had little money. Yet he was called a “teacher.” Teachers deal in ideas and He taught the greatest idea of all time—the Truth of the Gospel.

As teachers following in the footsteps of Christ, the Academy shows our students that the Gospel is not confined. It does not live in a “spiritual” compartment. It is not just a formula for salvation. The Gospel message is an idea that applies to all

creation, in every area of life. God’s universe resounds with the Gospel in every corner. When a student learns to discern the

application of the Gospel throughout the great ideas of history, his mind can do best what it was made to do—to love the Lord God and glorify Him forever. With this perspective restored, the whole man can once again unite his spirit and his mind. The battle between the two subsides and he lives in peace and wisdom.

The depth of your life is related to the depth of “your” gospel. If you believe the gospel is just for salvation, you will have good fire insurance as you go on living your life. If you believe the gospel saves you and convicts you of sin, you will live a life of assurance and conviction as you go on living your life. If you believe that the Gospel relates to all spiritual truth, you will have a spiritual experience as you go on living the rest of your life. Only when you recognize that the Gospel reveals Total Truth, relevant to everything, will you live an undivided life of fulfillment and joy.

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