

The Place And Role Of The Bible In The School

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The Bible functions in a three-fold way in Christian education.

1. It has a perspectival function.

Scripture as living Word of God serves as the abiding religious norm which undergirds the total educational enterprise, giving direction to the entire teaching-learning process and shaping all the activities of the school. The Christian character of the school depends most fundamentally upon this perspectival function of the Bible. The fidelity of the Christian school depends upon how fully and consistently the Bible is brought to bear upon the total operation and allowed to function comprehensively in shaping the entire educational enterprise. The Bible is the dynamic, overarching standard which governs the life of the school in a comprehensive way. The basic convictions upon which the school is founded and the religious perspectives within which it operates are anchored in the Scriptures. Its fundamental articles of faith as formulated in principles of education arise from the Biblical teachings concerning God, man, and the world.

Accordingly, it is in the light of Scripture that we must seek to understand the school's assignment within the larger calling of the Christian community and thus the place of learning within life as a whole. Biblical guidelines must mold the entire conduct of the school, from the association of Christian people which sponsors and supports the school, through the school board, the administration, the teaching staff, the student body, the curriculum, the lesson plan, even to any extra-curricular activities. The Christian character of the school as a whole depends upon the faithfulness of all participants to the Word of God as it holds for education. Both in theory and in practice, the philosophy of education guiding the school must be true to Scripture.

2. It has a cultic function.

The Bible functions as the focal point for worship within the school community, whether in daily devotionals or in chapel services. As teachers and students gather in these worship settings the opening of the Scriptures serves to deepen, strengthen, and enrich them in their common commitment to serve the Lord in the school. Such listening together to God's Word, singing, praying, and unitedly confessing their faith should take on an academic form as a liturgy for learning. These convocations should not be regarded as spiritual "mountain-top" retreats from the mundane realities of the classroom, but as communal rallying-points, summoning students and teachers together to renewed dedication to the tasks at hand. Bible-centered worship is not an escape from books, but a spiritual eye-opening experience for returning to reading, writing, arithmetic with renewed vision. It is a time for putting on the spectacles of Scripture anew so that in its light we may see light more clearly in every branch of learning.

The fidelity of the Christian school does not stand or fall with school-time devotions. Nor does the practice of communal worship in the school itself guarantee Christian education. Chapel services, though very important, do not continue the essence of sound Christian education. A good Christian school is even conceivable apart from daily devotionals, given a strong and healthy home and church community. In the long run, however, dropping worship services from the Christian school program would mean the loss of an important ingredient for communal worship. It plays a very substantial supportive role in Christian education as spiritual reinforcement for the work of the classroom. And the work of the classroom contributes a distinctively academic slant to the cultic function which is usually thought of as belonging to the church and the family altar at home.

Therefore devotional activities should not be viewed as academic integrating centers for fusing faith and learning. If they are, then worship activities overstep their bounds, invade the classroom, and fail to respect the integrity of Christian academics. Biblically-founded, faith-directed learning is the calling of all teachers and students in every discipline. If we depend on chapel and daily devotionals to integrate faith and the teaching-learning process, we will be guilty of contributing to the secularizing of the classroom. As sabbath worship is unto life service, so school worship activities are unto the classroom. They ought to reset our sights in facing the academic enterprise. In our Biblical studies we can then engage in a systematic study of the Scriptures within the framework of a revitalized faith commitment.

3. It has an academic function.

The Bible as Word of God has a trans-historical dimension. It is therefore unique, like no other book in the world. It is the Book among all books. It stands in a class all by itself. In the scriptures the Word of God comes to us in lingual form, as literature, in the format of a book. It is a coherent library of sixty-six volumes which underwent its own history of canon formation, and is stamped accordingly on every page with the cultural benchmarks of the life experiences of ancient Israel and the early Church. Therefore the Bible can also function as a field of inquiry, an object of study, and a subject for careful reflection in Biblical studies. This cannot mean that we should try to place ourselves above the Bible in an attempt to gain intellectual mastery *over* it. Our analysis of its meaning must always proceed from a faithful submission to it as divine revelation. Our study of the Scriptures as a book must always be carried on within the framework of our commitment to it as the Book. Our analysis may not belie our confession. Dealing with the books of the Bible in terms of canonical issues, questions of historical background and setting, authorship, and literary composition, must always be expressive of our Canonical commitment, that is, our commitment to the Bible as Norm for faith and life, including learning,

Academically speaking Scripture is Word of God in the words of men. It is fully and truly divine, and, at the same time, fully and truly human. It is the inspired narrative of the mighty saving acts of God in Jesus Christ, the infallible record of the history of redemption. It speaks with all the authority of its divine Author. In it we meet Christ who is the unifying theme of the Scriptures in all their rich diversity. Yet its message is thoroughly anthropomorphic, that is, in it God speaks to us in human, down-to-earth concepts and languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek). The many human authors employ various genres of literature in penning their message: historical narrative, legal documents, poetry, words of wisdom, parables, epistles, symbolism, etc. As such the Bible is open to academic use in the form of carefully planned analyses of the texts of Scripture, surveys of salvation history, theoretical reflection on the teachings of Scripture, and academically oriented responses by students.

Though this academic use of the Bible is a peculiar strength and prerogative of the Christian school, good Christian education is conceivable apart from Bible courses. That is, the Christian character of the school is not dependent upon the inclusion of any particular course, including the Bible course. The number of Bible courses and the amount of emphasis placed upon Biblical studies is not the measure of good Christian education. Biblical studies is neither the queen of the curriculum, nor its stepchild, nor in itself more

holy, more Christian, more sacred than other courses. It stands in a co-existing and pro-existing relationship to the other disciplines, as a partner with them in the common calling of Christian education to nurture young people academically for Kingdom living. Therefore, dropping Biblical studies is not a course of action which Christian educators ought to pursue. Biblical studies makes a unique contribution to the overall cultural mandate of the school to equip students for living the Christian life.