

Training, Transforming and Transitioning:

A Blueprint for the Christian University

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Abstract

With respect to students, Christian universities have at least three interrelated missions or aims: training, transformation and transition. That is, their role is to educate or “train” students to be excellent in their field, to facilitate the “transformation” of students’ worldview and character, and to “transition” students into their vocational calling. This article briefly examines the dimensions of training and transitioning, and then looks more deeply at student transformation, since it may be the principal distinctive of a Christian school. The article then proposes six conditions necessary to enable the transformation process.

Keywords: education, university, college, school, transformation, spiritual formation, character, management, stewardship, leadership, faith-based, faith integration, discipleship, worldview, Christian, religious

Once upon a time, God created a nation and seeded it with 4,146 institutions of higher learning¹ —universities, colleges, seminaries and other post-secondary schools—to teach His children truth and how to apply it rightly. But some of these institutional seeds fell on a path and were stolen away by birds before they could ever take root. Some of the seeds fell on rocks and sprang up, but then withered for lack of moisture. Other seeds grew amongst thorns and were choked to death before they could flourish. Some of God’s seeds, though, fell on good soil and took root and grew strong, yielding a harvest 100 times what was planted.

Let me follow Jesus’ lead and explain the parable. The schools on the path are those that were founded as secular institutions—schools stolen away from God at their naissance and that have never attempted to educate people from God’s point of view. The schools on the rocks are those “church-related” or “historically-Christian” schools that were founded to honor God and that pursued this mission for awhile, but whose weak roots caused the original mission to die. Now they are indistinguishable from secular schools.

The schools amongst the thorns are those Christian schools that still have an overtly-Christian mission statement, but whose mission has been choked out by many things: fear that they will lose prospective students if they are *too* overtly-Christian, faculty trained in secular schools who cannot or will not to teach from a Christian perspective, open admissions policies that culminate in a highly-secular student culture, and so on. The thorns are as diverse as they are deadly.

¹ This is the total number of non-profit public and private colleges and universities in the United States (2007 database), according to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), National Center for Education Statistics (this database is publicly available at <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/pas/>).

Then there are the schools planted in “good soil”: Christian institutions fully-committed to honoring God in all they do, where there is a primacy of spiritual formation and education from a Christian perspective, and where faculty members endeavor to teach and write from this same posture. As a result, these institutions develop students’ heart and minds toward the end of graduating students who are more like Jesus than when they first enrolled. The legions of alumni from these “good soil” schools are, in their various vocations, serving people and leading change in ways that please God, as are the faculty through their scholarly, popular press, artistic, volunteer, and practitioner work. Indeed, these schools are yielding a harvest 100 times what God sowed.

Now admittedly, this is an imperfect analogy because it implies that only one category of university bears any fruit. That is where the analogy breaks down since this is clearly not the case. But the main point of the parable is that *God calls certain institutions to develop people to engage the world with penetrating, Christian minds and with pure, loving hearts*. More specifically, God invites His postsecondary schools to prioritize what has for years been called “faith integration” or “faith and learning integration” (that is, cooperation with God to teach all subject matter from a Christian perspective),² as well as

² I use the term “faith integration” with caution in this article, recognizing that in some circles it has been misused in an epistemologically-arrogant manner. As Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen show, some suggest that “faith has the right, and indeed the duty, to critique learning but learning has no authority to critique faith” (*Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 23. See also Perry Glanzer’s critique of integration language in “Why we should discard ‘the integration of faith and learning’: Rearticulating the mission of the Christian scholar,” *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*, 12:1 (2008), pp. 41-51.) Notwithstanding, I am inclined to agree with Duane Litfin that “integration” remains an appropriate way to conceptualize our task, because we are, in fact, simply re-integrating what Enlightenment thinkers separated, namely the Christ-centered unity of all knowledge (*Conceiving the Christian College*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), pp. 128-129.) Moreover, Julie Reuben uses similar language to close her formidable study of how morality was severed

“spiritual formation” (that is, cooperation with God to help people love what God loves and to become increasingly more like Jesus). Along the way, God cautions His schools to protect their “roots” and to circumvent the myriad “thorns” that can threaten or even thwart their distinctively-Christian identity.

This article proposes a framework for becoming the kind of “good soil” university that returns to the Master Sower the greatest possible harvest. I do not by any means offer these ideas as the “one right way” to achieve that end; neither do I offer these ideas as a comprehensive treatment of the Christian university’s role in the world. Rather, my intention is to present one Biblically-informed conceptualization of that role, as well as several practical guidelines for how to pursue it faithfully.

I. Three Missions of the Christian University

With respect to students, their primary constituents,³ Christian universities have at least three interrelated missions or aims: training, transformation and transition. That is, as depicted in Figure 1, their role is to educate or “train” students to become well-rounded individuals who are excellent in their field of specialization, to co-labor with God to “transform” students worldview and character—to shape them to think Christianly and to

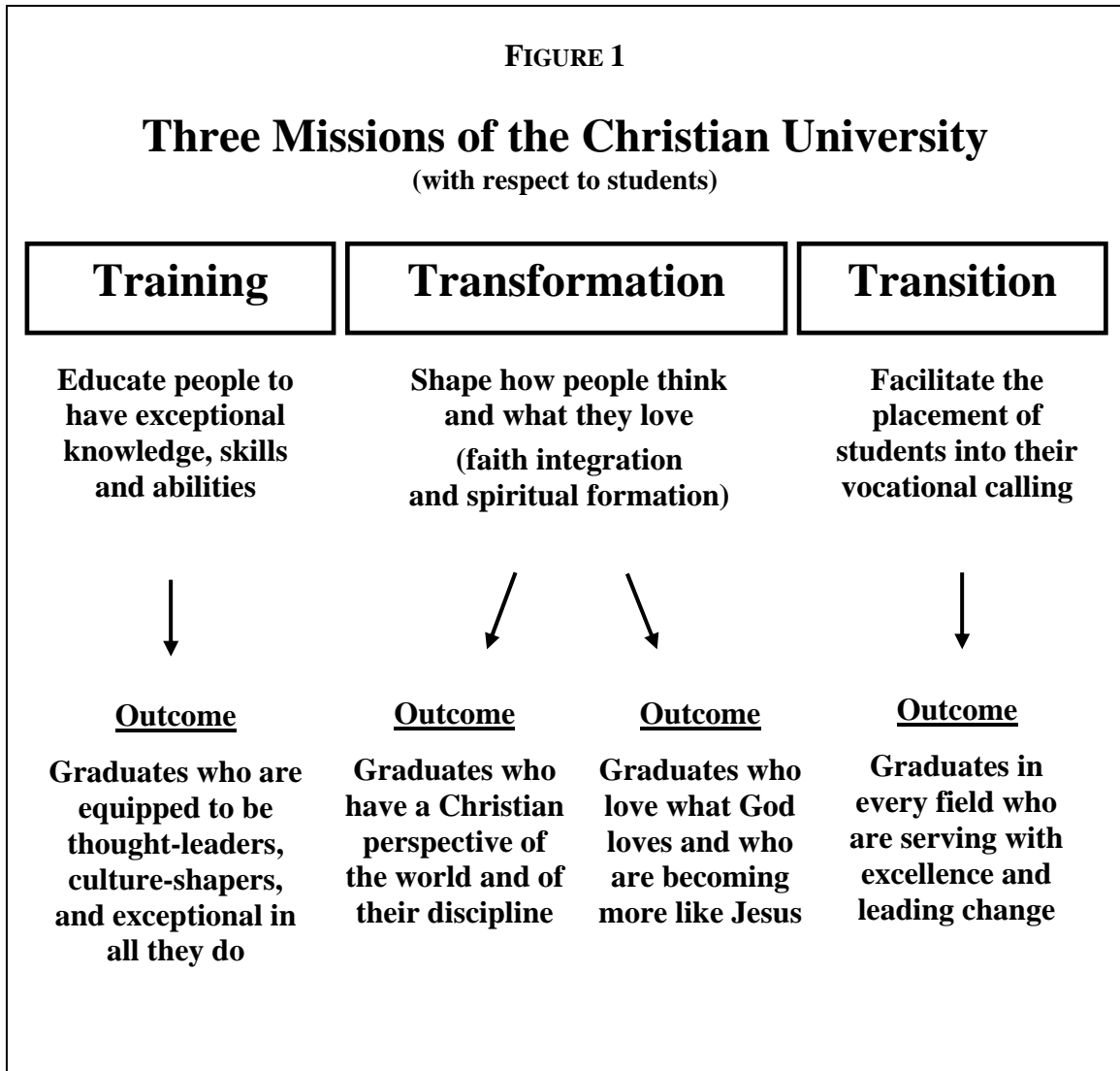
from the realm of knowledge in U.S. higher education: “Scholars hoped that the distinction between fact and value would lead to more reliable knowledge ... (but) [s]ince it has proved impossible to completely separate fact and value, we should begin to explore ways to *reintegrate* them” (emphasis mine; Julie Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 269.)

³ Christian universities have many stakeholders, of course, from students, to donors, to alumni, to employees, to the local community, to the broader society in which they operate. As such, they have important purposes beyond the development of students. However, my discussion in this article will be limited to how Christian universities fulfill their mission with respect to students.

“desire the kingdom,” as a recent framing describes it (Smith 2009)—and to help students “transition” into their vocational calling. I will examine briefly the dimensions of training and transitioning, and then look more deeply at the student transformation process, since that may be the principal distinctive of the Christian university.

A. The Mission to “Train” and “Transition” Students

The first and third dimensions of the model are reasonably self-explanatory. Regarding *training*, there is, in essence, an implicit contract between universities and their students (and the students’ parents or other benefactors, if they are the actual paying customers): In exchange for all of the time and money invested, the university experience will yield a reciprocal return in the form of exceptional knowledge, skills, and abilities, as well as employability (or admission to graduate school) and a promising career trajectory. By their very nature in the marketplace, universities serve as a primary training ground for the effective development of people.



But for the *Christian* university, this aspect of its mission is more than just a reciprocal obligation. It is more than just an economic exchange. Rather, the responsibility to educate or “train” people well is better conceived as a divine mandate, deriving from the Biblical theology of stewardship. God entrusts students to His universities and calls the trustees, administrators, faculty and staff to be faithful stewards—to equip students to serve with excellence in the vocation to which God calls them.

In fact, quality should permeate everything that Christian graduates do, since they confess with Paul that “whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31, cf. also Colossians 3:23-24). As a result, Christian higher education should produce exceptional⁴ journalists, exceptional teachers, exceptional medical professionals, lawyers, business people, social workers, counselors, scientists, and so forth. How could it be any other way, since Christians—and the universities that develop them—simply have no business doing *anything* with mediocrity? The “training” mission, therefore, has a theological basis, not merely a pragmatic or economic one.

Moreover, this training component should equip students to engage the culture at large—to become thought-leaders and culture-shapers, to affect their workplaces, their professions, their neighborhoods, their communities, and their churches in ways that honor God. As Andy Crouch (2008) expresses it so well, Christians must be taught not to be condemners, critics, consumers or copiers of culture, but “makers of culture.”⁵ The metaphors he suggests—gardeners and artists—are well-worth considering as we assist students to develop a godly posture toward the organizations and societies in which they will work and live. Also valuable in this regard is Niebuhr’s classic, *Christ and Culture* (1951), and, in a somewhat different direction, the most recent work of James Davison Hunter (2010), who advocates a shift from political theologies of the Christian Left and Right in favor of a cultural engagement theology of “faithful presence”—cooperation

⁴ By “exceptional” I simply mean that these are highly-capable individuals who, as stewards themselves, are deeply committed to performing to their potential in everything they do.

⁵ I thank an anonymous reviewer for reminding me of this resource.

between individuals and institutions to make disciples and serve the common good, rather than to “change” the culture *per se*.⁶

Inextricably linked to this aspect of student development, indeed flowing from it, is the Christian university’s mission to “transition” people—to facilitate their segue from school to vocation, ideally, into positions of leadership. This too finds its impetus in scripture. We do not put a light under a bushel; we do not train up an army to patrol unimportant territory; we do not cultivate ambassadors and then confine them to their own country (cf. Matthew 5:13-16, Matthew 28:18-20, 2 Corinthians 5:20). Rather, there is restorative work to be done in the world. God invites His people to do this work in schools, businesses, government, the media, the arts, courtrooms, and of course, in our churches—to be agents of His common grace by sustaining and renewing the institutions He created, bringing them into closer alignment with His will. This is what some have called our “cultural commission.”⁷

A practical outworking of this “transitioning” role entails fully-resourcing the university’s internship and career services function, and including its leader—for all intents and purposes, a “dean”—on the university executive team. This is not primarily

⁶ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Modern World*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), 2010, especially pp. 238-254. His premise is that “the dominant ways of thinking about the culture and cultural change are flawed, for they are based on both specious social science and problematic theology” (p. 5).

⁷ Cf. Genesis 1:28, Genesis 9; See also Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from its Cultural Captivity*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005); and Charles Colson and Nancy Pearcey, *How Now Shall We Live?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999). For more about the philosophical and theological underpinnings of Pearcey and Colson, see the work of Francis Schaeffer, especially *The God Who Is There*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Publishers, 1968) and *Escape from Reason*, (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Publishers, 1968). However, these resources stand on different and sometimes-competing premises than does the work of Andy Crouch, which is itself sometimes at variance with the thrust of James Davison Hunter. As such, one might do well to consider all of these resources in juxtaposition.

for competitive advantage reasons (though a strong placement system will surely serve that end quite effectively). Instead, Christian universities should prioritize career placement so that their graduates are in roles where they can serve people and be a positive influence in their organizations, their communities, and in society generally. The “good soil” university embraces God’s redemptive mission in the world, implementing it, in part, by helping students and alumni secure meaningful positions where they can contribute and lead.

B. The Mission to “Transform” Students

As elemental as “training” and “transitioning” are to the Christian university mission, they are not the core distinctives. One can think of them as necessary conditions for a Christian university to grow in “good soil,” but surely not sufficient conditions since institutions from many worldview dispositions pursue these same two purposes. Instead, the central distinctive of the Christian university is the extent to which it is wholeheartedly committed to “transformation” of its students—the extent to which the university takes seriously its mission to renew minds (Romans 12:2) and reform hearts (e.g., Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 22:37-39). Faithful, effective Christian schools (and this applies to primary, middle, and secondary schools as well) are those that engage in *systematic faith integration* and *systematic spiritual formation* in their curricular and co-curricular activities, developing people to see the world from God’s perspective and increasingly to have the heart of Jesus Christ.

The abandonment of this purpose, intentional or otherwise, explains why so many “historically-Christian” schools are now indistinguishable from their secular counterparts, and it further explains why some of the schools that actually do retain Jesus in their mission statement tend to crowd-out Jesus from their curriculum and co-curriculum (this is akin to the seeds that fell on “the rock” and “amongst thorns” in the opening parable). The former schools no longer embrace Christian formation of students; in fact, many actively eschew this on the grounds of “diversity,” “inclusion,” and “tolerance.” And the latter schools pay mere lip service to the development of a Christian worldview and spiritual formation. Though such ends sometimes appear in the forefront of their advertising and Web sites, they are relegated to the periphery of students’ educational experience.

Though these objectives often overlap, I will, for clarity, address the faith integration and spiritual formation elements sequentially, rather than simultaneously.

1. Faith Integration to Develop a Christian Mind

For some Christian schools, including some members or affiliates of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), the task of integrating faith and learning amounts to little more than faith and learning “interaction,” in the words of Arthur Holmes (1987),⁸ or “pseudo-integration” in the words of David Wolfe (2004).⁹ These

⁸ Arthur Holmes, *The Idea of the Christian College, Revised Edition*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), p. 45.

schools largely consign the development of a Christian worldview to the co-curriculum—to chapels, Bible studies, missions trips, and special events—and to mere pre-class prayer or devotional time, if a professor chooses to do so. It is not, however, integral to the educational process itself. Professors teach economics, for example, without real scrutiny of the secularized assumptions that permeate the field. The same is true with psychology, history, management, English and other subjects.

Not surprisingly, in fact inevitably, students are graduated from these schools thinking *dualistically*, since God has been sequestered to particular non-academic times and places, segregating Him from students' intellectual pursuits. Is it any wonder that many alumni maintain a sacred-secular dichotomy, a dichotomy that infects their work, their marriages, their parenting, their consumption habits, their leisure activities, and almost every other area of daily life? Stunningly, and scandalously, their Christian alma mater has (I think, unintentionally) encouraged these people to reject, or at least ignore, a central pillar of Christian theology: God's lordship over all things.

By contrast, "good soil" Christian schools pro-actively address and eradicate dualistic thinking. They instill in their students that there are not two truths, the first a sacred, Sunday morning reality, and the second governing the other six days. Instead, these schools seek to eliminate any Sunday-Monday gap in their students' thinking *by how they teach each discipline*—that is, by teaching all subject matter from an intentionally-Christian perspective.

⁹ David L. Wolfe, "The Line of Demarcation between Integration and Pseudo-Integration," *The Reality of Christian Learning*, Harold Heie and David L. Wolfe, editors. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004), pp. 3-11.

Notice that in this paradigm, faith is embedded within the curricular DNA, not estranged from it. A Christian worldview emphasizes that God has a particular point of view about sociology, law, accounting, and so forth, and God invites us to embrace that view. He has revealed it through both the “special revelation” of His Word and the “general revelation” of our study of creation (e.g., our scientific discoveries). So in any given class or chapel or student affairs program or athletic contest, the leader’s integration task is to bring together these two types of revelation in pursuit of one unified truth—to teach a theology of nursing, a theology of political science, a theology of resolving roommate conflict, a theology of sportsmanship.

Stated differently, faith integration is the practice of giving students theologically- and academically-sound mental models and then helping them to see how those models apply in ordinary life. This is primary to the role of renewing minds, and it is a role that significantly differentiates the most effective Christian schools from all the others.

2. Spiritual Formation to Develop a Christian Heart

No less essential to this “transformation” mission is for schools to create an environment that positively affects students’ hearts—their desires, their love for God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39), and manifestly, their character (qualities like humility, compassion, gratitude, forgiveness (Colossians 3), and the “fruit of the Spirit” virtues (Galatians 5:22-

23)). Stated more simply, it is the role of the Christian university to graduate people who love what God loves and, as such, are increasingly becoming like Jesus Christ.

The current scholarly debate about the objectives of Christian education underscores this priority. For example, James K.A. Smith (2009) argues that Christian education must, of course, develop what students know (e.g., historical facts, music theory, engineering formulas), but more basically, it must develop what students desire or love. To quote Smith:

What if education wasn't first and foremost about what we know, but about what we love? ... [E]ducation is not primarily a heady project concerned with providing *information*; rather, education is most fundamentally a matter of *formation*, a task of shaping and creating a certain kind of people. What makes them a distinctive kind of people is what they love or desire—what they envision as “the good life” or the ideal picture of human flourishing. An education, then, is a constellation of practices, rituals and routines that inculcates a particular kind of vision of the good life by inscribing or infusing that vision into the heart by means of material, embodied practices. (emphasis in original) ¹⁰

Many scholars affirm Smith's perspective. The framing of formation over information seems to have struck a chord, though with some gentle reminders (including from Smith himself) that this does not mean we should devalue the intellectual task of the

¹⁰ James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 2009, pp. 18, 26.

university.¹¹ The point for our purposes is that the model in Figure 1 is a “both-and” proposition. It conceptualizes Christian education as including *both* the development of the mind (the “faith integration” component) *and* the development of the heart (the “spiritual formation” component—e.g., Smith’s position that Christian education must shape students’ habits and desires), though without insisting on a primacy of one over the other.¹²

In the same way that development of the mind has a Biblical basis (e.g., Paul’s beseeching that we “be transformed by the renewing of your mind,” Romans 12:2), so too the development of the heart has a Biblical basis. For example, Proverbs 4:23 says “Above all else guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” Pharaoh is said to have resisted freeing the Israelite slaves because of his “hardened heart” (Exodus 4:21, 7:3-4, 14:4). And perhaps most notably, Jesus Himself speaks directly about the connection between our “heart” and our actions: “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander” (Matthew 15:19; cf. also Mark 7:18-23). Accordingly, in light of the heart’s centrality in spiritual formation, its renovation seems to be within the purview of all Christian education, whether in the home, in the church, in the K-12 school, and, germane to our discussion here, in the post-secondary institution.

¹¹ See, for example, the dialogue about Smith’s work in *Christian Scholar’s Review*, Volume 39, number 2 (Winter 2010), pp. 217-232. Smith also clarifies early in his book: “I am not advocating a new form of pious dichotomy that would force us to choose between *either* the heart *or* the mind. Rather, I will sketch an account of the priority of the affectivity that undergirds and makes possible the work of the intellect” (footnote 2, pp. 17-18).

¹² In this respect, I agree with Perry Glanzer that Smith’s contention that there is a primacy of the heart over the head is not “Biblically necessary” (Perry Glanzer, “The Thinking Heart,” *Christian Scholar’s Review*, 39:2 (Winter 2010), p. 219).

This leads us to the methodological question: What does the spiritual formation process entail? One contemporary thinker has helpfully summarized an enormous amount of the canonical and historic thinking on the subject, while interjecting many useful insights of his own. Dallas Willard’s “golden triangle of spiritual growth”¹³ (Figure 2) describes with both simplicity and lucidity three essential components of the formation process. To quote Willard:

(The triangle) is designed to suggest the correlation in practical life of the factors that can certainly lead to the transformation of the inner self into Christlikeness. The intervention of the Holy Spirit is placed at the apex of the triangle to indicate its primacy in the entire process. The trials of daily life and our activities specially planned for transformation are placed at the bottom to indicate that where the transformation is actually carried out is in real life, where we dwell with God and our neighbors. And at the level of real life, the role of what is imposed on us (“trials”) goes hand in hand with our choices as to what we will do with ourselves.¹⁴

Beyond its theological elegance, the value of this model for our purposes is that it maps out one way a Christian university can develop its own “curriculum for Christlikeness,”

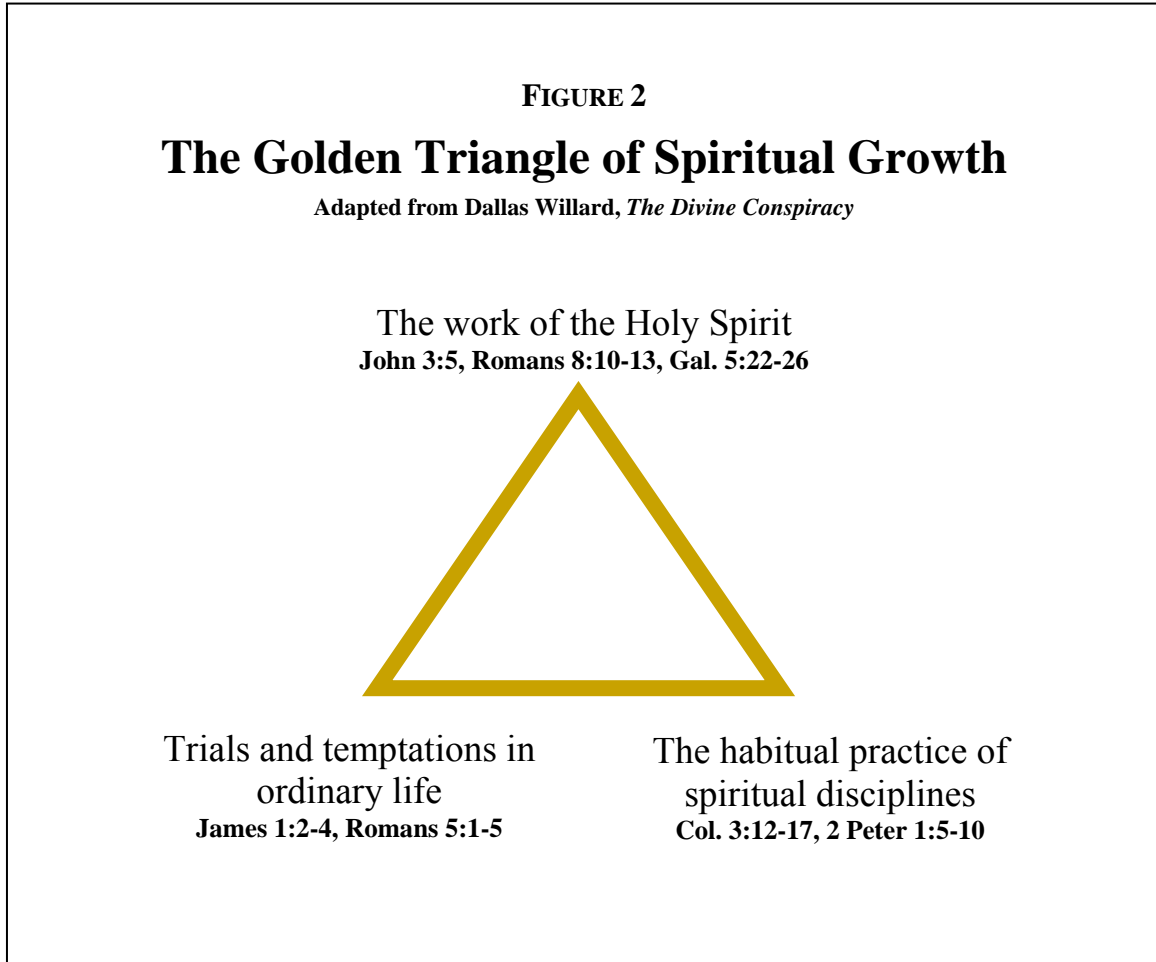
¹³ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1997), p. 347.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* It is worth noting, pertinent to the heart-versus-head debate described above, that Willard conceptualizes this transformation approach as affecting both what one loves (i.e., one’s heart) and how one thinks (i.e., one’s mind). As such, the triangle model may be best understood as contributing to both spiritual formation and faith integration. This is consistent with the pervasive Old Testament theology that conceptualizes heart and mind synonymously (cf., e.g., Deut. 8:5 “Thus you are to know in your heart...”). In fact, the Hebrew word for “heart” (*lēb*, לב) is also translated as “mind” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Merrill F. Ungar and William White, Jr., eds., (Nashville TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 1996, p. 108).

as Willard calls it. The “golden triangle” provides a methodology for a university’s formation initiatives (or those of a local church or Christian K-12 school or Christian camp, for that matter), advising the leadership how they can focus their efforts in this area of incalculable importance. Co-curricular activities like chapels, service projects, residence hall programs, Bible studies, and faculty members’ spiritual mentorship—activities that are already a priority and a core competence in many Christian universities—no longer need be discrete elements that are disconnected from one another, but instead, can become a more synergistic and more effective discipleship system.

Moreover, within the curriculum itself, spiritual formation ought to be deliberate and systematic, gradually shepherding students to adopt for themselves the habits described in Willard’s model.¹⁵ In my leadership courses, for example, students regularly raise the issue of how a “faithful leader” would make a particular decision. Ultimately, many come to realize that our decisions are an outward sign of an inward reality—in a Christian sense, a manifestation of our disposition toward God (what we love), more than they are a choked-down choice we make after glancing at a WWJD bracelet (what we know). Going deeper, then, we as a class jointly explore how one might become the type of leader from whom godly decisions more naturally flow, drawing heavily on their general education curriculum and their co-curricular activities. In this way, curriculum and co-curriculum work collaboratively toward the objective of ongoing spiritual formation.

¹⁵ Consider James Smith’s (2009) seeming affirmation of Willard’s focus on the spiritual disciplines like worship, confession of sin, Eucharist, and prayer: “The ... ‘hearts and minds’ strategy (of transformation) trains us as disciples precisely by putting our bodies through a regimen of repeated practices that get a hold of our heart and ‘aim’ our love toward the kingdom of God. Before we articulate a worldview, we worship... Before we theorize the nature of God, we sing his praises. Before we express moral principles, we receive forgiveness. Before we codify the doctrine of Christ’s two natures, we receive the body of Christ in the Eucharist. Before we think, we pray.” (pp. 33-34)



II. Some Conditions for Pursuing Student Transformation

The practical issue remains: *How do we get there?* More specifically, how does the Christian university, or any Christian school for that matter, implement its central distinctive, the mission to co-labor with God to transform how students think and what they love? What are the key drivers of success in this area? Let me suggest six.

A. A Mission Statement that Identifies Student Transformation as a Central Goal

Mission statements are more than public relations documents, more than advertising slogans, more than tools for securing students and faculty and donor dollars. Though we use them for those purposes, and often rightly so, their primary function is to identify the overarching organizational goals and to keep the organization on course toward those goals.

As senior leadership manages the university, they invariably encounter tempting opportunities—especially potential growth or new revenue opportunities—that may actually be *distractions* from the university’s core purpose. A well-crafted mission statement helps leaders separate the wise from the unwise pursuits. More to the point for this article, if that mission statement includes “student transformation” as part of the university’s *raison d’être*, it is more likely to pursue transformation in earnest and avoid distraction from it.

This kind of mission language will also enable the Christian university to deal with a second threat to its transformational purpose. Some influential constituents, perhaps many (faculty, prospective donors, disgruntled students and parents, some accrediting bodies, members of the Board, and so on) will resist faith integration and spiritual formation as relevant ends. A clear mission statement that includes “student transformation” (and somewhere else defines it clearly) will authoritatively remind university leaders, even empower them, to stand firm in the face of such criticism. Stated

differently, the mission statement can be an indispensable filter to help leaders to make decisions, especially the difficult decisions, based on purpose rather than peer pressure or pragmatism.

B. A Curriculum that Educates from a Christian Perspective

As indicated above, the Christian university should design its educational process to be both academically-rigorous and faith-based. Indeed, the school should interweave these objectives, but unless universities are vigilant and proactive, market forces in a secularizing culture may influence the school to marginalize the latter in an effort to attract more students.

Among the many ways to embed the Christian perspective in the curriculum is to adopt the classic “cornerstone-capstone” approach as a curricular inclusio, with the cornerstone (i.e., first) course covering the basics of Christian, secular, and other worldviews, and the capstone (i.e., last) course challenging students to a broad-scale application of what they have learned throughout the program. In between these two courses, the general education core, the major core, and the elective courses build off of the cornerstone content to teach each subject from a Christian point of view.

This is, quite obviously, one of many possible structures, but regardless the pedagogical approach, this goal transcends: The school will design a curriculum that encourages students (1) to see the world through the eyes of God, (2) to recognize that knowledge is

incomplete when it excludes a Biblical perspective, (3) to understand not just orthodoxy but orthopraxy, and (4) to have the intentionality and acumen to be effective ambassadors for Jesus Christ, wherever God leads them.

C. A Faculty that is Qualified and Motivated to be Transformational

In addition to the mission and the curricular design, the success of “student transformation” will also depend on what happens in the classroom. The faculty not only designs and delivers the product in a school, the faculty *is* one of the products. As such, independent of the official governance structure, the dispositions, qualifications, and motivations of the faculty significantly affect student learning and discipleship outcomes.

We can go even further than this, though. It may not be an overstatement to say that the university faculty is the *de facto* driver of the university strategy. Senior administrators and trustees may be charged with the task of strategic management, and they often do quite well to develop strategic plans and processes, but in any organization, those *allocating the resources* determine the de facto strategy. In particular, Joseph Bower and Clark Gilbert (2007), writing for *Harvard Business Review*, report that:

What we have found in one research study after another is that how business *really* gets done has little connection to the strategy developed at corporate headquarters. Rather, strategy is crafted, step by step, as managers at all levels of a company ... commit resources to policies, programs, people and facilities.

Because this is true, senior managers might consider focusing less attention on thinking through the company's formal strategy and more attention on the processes by which the company allocates resources.¹⁶

This may explain why there is sometimes a chasm between administrators' strategic intentions and university outcomes. The faculty members are the primary gatekeepers of academic learning, even in environments where they have virtually no authority over budget or personnel matters. What they do control—their time—is by far the greatest university expense and an overriding determinant of learning outcomes. Though faculty members are not “middle managers” in the classic sense described by Bower and Gilbert, the operational dynamic is similar: Since they control the resource, they largely control the strategy.

Accordingly, if the faculty is not on-board with the idea of “faith integration” or “education from a Christian worldview,” it simply will not happen, at least not very well. And if that were not enough, even if the faculty do buy-in, there is still the *capability* issue. Few faculty members have ever been taught how to integrate faith and learning, since their graduate training typically comes from secular universities (e.g., Hasker 1992). Moreover, even when their graduate work has been done in a Christian setting, as we have said, that too may be highly-secularized in its orientation.

¹⁶ Joseph Bower and Clark Gilbert, “How Managers’ Everyday Decisions Create—or Destroy—Your Company’s Strategy,” *Harvard Business Review*, (February 2007), p. 74.

So to pursue faithfully the mission of transformation, the Christian university must ensure that the frontlines of faith integration are strong and willing. Briefly, that would entail alignment of at least the following systems:

- *The faculty hiring system:* No one is qualified for a teaching position unless he or she is academically and spiritually qualified, as well as willing to embrace faith integration and student discipleship as central to the job.
- *The faculty training and development system:* We learn faith integration *by doing* integration, more so than by hearing about it, reading about it, or by watching it (though these latter approaches are essential supplements). If faculty members are to learn faith integration well, the university might consider *an experiential approach*. In practice, that means beyond learning about a Christian perspective of their field, faculty members should wrestle with the concepts for themselves, articulate them in written and oral formats, and do integration work in their classrooms (perhaps beginning their second semester on the job), even though they may not feel fully qualified to do so.

Other practices are effective as well, including (1) a mentorship program where exemplary faculty members coach those who are just beginning the endeavor and (2) regular professional development opportunities that focus on the faith-learning nexus.

- *The promotion and tenure (P&T) system:* As with employees generally, faculty members tend to do what the environment incents them to do. Consequently, they pay particular attention to the P&T system. If the university makes faith integration in

teaching and writing a *sine qua non* for P&T, then integration is more likely to happen.

One possibility is for faculty members to average at least one written faith integration piece per year, possibly published through a university's own online journal. Such a resource creates an automatic outlet for the research, as well as a formal mechanism for intra- (and inter-) campus communication and collaboration regarding faith and learning.

- *The performance management system*: The P&T system is part of the broader performance management system of the university. To motivate faculty to make faith integration a consistent priority, a university could consider the following: (1) regular evaluation from one's department chair or dean regarding progress in faith integration, (2) meaningful merit pay (or some other reward that is valued by the faculty member) for outstanding performance in this area, and (3) faculty grants specifically earmarked for faith and learning projects. There are, of course, many other practices that may align faculty activities with the mission of student transformation; these are just a few.

D. Spiritual Formation Activities that are Systematically Coordinated

Student transformation, as we have said, entails not just shaping students' minds but their hearts as well (what they desire, what they love, who they are when no one is watching).

For the latter to be most effective requires coordination across the myriad formation initiatives, led by passionate, committed believers who are discipling based on a Biblical paradigm.

Willard’s “golden triangle” is one such paradigm. Indeed there are others. The point, though, is that the fiduciaries of formation—faculty, campus ministry leaders, residence hall directors, coaches, and so on—should have a guiding theory that informs maturation activities, rather than permitting spiritual formation to be what it too often becomes in Christian schools: A plethora of uncoordinated events and opportunities. Though many of these opportunities are quite excellent, there is far too much at stake to permit formation to remain an unsystematic process.

E. A Student Culture that is God-Centered

Universities take great care in faculty selection and development because faculty quality is such an important determinant of student outcomes. Notwithstanding, faculty effects may be dwarfed by peer effects.¹⁷

What I mean is this: Typical full-time undergraduates are with faculty members for about 15 hours per week. They also invest about 50 hours per week sleeping, leaving them with approximately 100 waking hours each week doing other things, most of it with other students. Stated differently, in any given week, students may spend up to 700 percent more time with their peers than they do with faculty. Beyond that, there’s the similarity effect. A formidable body of research demonstrates the *enormous* power of “social

¹⁷ See, for example, Professor Richard Light’s ten year study of more than 1,600 undergraduates across 90 campuses where he found that students were shaped more by their living arrangements than by their classroom experience (*Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001)).

evidence”—how people similar to us have a profound effect on our values, attitudes, and behaviors (see Cialdini 2009 for an overview). So in college, not only is there vastly more time for students to be shaped by their peers than by faculty, students are vastly more amenable to adopt the values of their peers in the first place.

The point of all this is, I hope, straightforward: If a Christian university is serious about student transformation, hiring Christian faculty members and developing a faith-based curriculum are not enough. The school must enroll enough students whose values and worldview tend toward the ideal. In practical terms, the school must consider an applicant’s faith and spiritual maturity as part of its admissions criteria. That does not mean that the university should enroll only devout Christians; it does mean, though, that the university should enroll a critical mass of spiritually-mature believers—probably in excess of seventy-five percent—who are eager to grow toward God and to pursue His calling on their lives. It must also consistently and courageously extinguish nefarious behaviors that do not comport with the school’s mission. In doing these things, it deliberately builds and sustains a culture of faith commitment that in turn has a positive influence on the spiritual growth of all students.

There are many other related practices that serve the same end, like a peer mentorship program to further develop Christian values, or edgy, student-led worship services that are so good that students actually look forward to going. But whatever it does, this much is true: Christian schools must be *intentional* about cultivating a student culture that advances its transformational mission. Few initiatives will matter more.

F. A Senior Leadership Team that Can Execute the Strategy

Aligning all of the above is an executive team that is dedicated to the transformational purpose of the Christian university and to the effective execution of the strategy. This may seem like common sense, but it may also be uncommon practice. Even many of the best managers in the world struggle with execution.¹⁸

In colleges and universities, strategies seldom fail for want of well-developed plans; there are plenty of those. More typically in these settings, *distraction* undermines the pursuit of the most important results. Many senior administrators (and this too applies to schools at all levels) have a burgeoning schedule, with job responsibilities¹⁹ ratcheting-up regularly. This is especially true as budgets tighten and institutions attempt to do the same amount of work (or even more work) with fewer people.

Beyond that, the emergence of email, cell phones, text messaging, social media, and other technologies has made administrators more accessible than ever, further exacerbating their work load. Consequently, vital strategic issues, like the permanent improvement of faith integration and spiritual formation, can get perpetually deferred, pushed aside by

¹⁸ This is the case for business leaders as well. After examining dozens of CEO failures over a two decades, researchers for *Fortune Magazine* concluded that: “[m]ost unsuccessful CEOs stumble because of one simple, fatal shortcoming ... It’s bad execution. As simple as that: not getting things done, being indecisive, not delivering on commitments” Ram Charan and Geoffrey Colvin, “Why CEOs Fail,” *Fortune Magazine*, June 21, 1999, 68-78. In this regard, see also Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan, *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, (New York, Crown Business, 2002).

¹⁹ For a helpful overview of the many roles and responsibilities of Christian college administrators, see Kim Phipps, “Campus Climate and Christian Scholarship,” in Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, editors, *Scholarship and Christian Faith*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 171-183; and Robert Benne, *Quality with Soul*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), pp. 188-191.

day-to-day concerns that bully their way to the front of the line. Eventually, the strategic issues morph into an annual faculty retreat topic, only to be again asphyxiated once everyone is back in the office. In contemporary parlance, the urgent crowds out the important.

But in the end, priorities are what we do. If systematic faith integration and spiritual formation are becoming tangential in a Christian university, they are not priorities, at least not relative to what actually does get done: thick accreditation reports, the flashy college viewbook, the innovative capital campaign, recruiting an all-conference quarterback, the countless meetings, and so on. Many of these other tasks are critical, of course, but in the same way that we ask students to examine their vocation from God's perspective, school leadership must do the same. Do our priorities match God's priorities? Do our calendars match His calling? And overall, do our outcomes match His desires?

In Christian higher education, student transformation—the cultivation of students' hearts and minds—is *ultimately* the purview and charge, indeed the stewardly privilege, of our trustees, presidents, vice-presidents, deans and directors. To succeed requires a well-conceived strategy, executed with excellence. One way to enable that is for school leaders to simplify their work system, scaling back ancillary responsibilities so that they have time to focus on the outcomes that matter the most.²⁰

²⁰ For a detailed review of how “simplicity” guides the work design and improves execution in some of the world's best-run organizations, see Ron Ashkenas (2007), “Simplicity-Minded Management.” *Harvard Business Review*. pp. 101-110.

III. Pleasing the Master Sower

The subtitle of this article is “A Blueprint for the Christian University,” but in fact, the article has been, paradoxically, both broader and narrower than that subtitle indicates. It is broader in the sense that much of what has been said here applies not only to Christian colleges and universities, but to other Christian schools as well. The model of “training, transforming and transitioning,” for example, may capture the purposes of Christian secondary, middle, and primary schools, especially since faith integration and spiritual formation are so essential to these schools’ missions (some might even argue that these objectives are *more essential* in the earlier years than they are in college).

At the same time, this article’s content has been narrower than the subtitle implies. For example, the transformational aspect of the Christian university’s mission is more multifaceted than is discussed herein. I have limited this piece to an examination of the university mission *with respect to students*, setting aside for the time being its mission to contribute to society through faculty scholarship, extension programs, community outreach, and so on. Indeed, transformation occurs through the university’s engagement with many important constituencies—alumni, the local community, the academy, society at large—not just with current students.

My framing, therefore, is less-than-perfect, but I hope that does not detract from my principal goal in this article: to invite Christian postsecondary institutions to pursue more intentionally and more boldly their unique, imperative role in the postmodern era.

Mounting relativism and a socially-reinforced readiness to ignore God make it more urgent than ever to develop influential ambassadors of the faith, people of excellence and integrity who will be thought-leaders, culture-shapers, compassionate servants, and living witnesses who inspire others to return to God. None of God's other institutions—not the family, not the local church, not the media, and not the state—are better positioned to fulfill this role.

Despite that pivotal opportunity, many Christian universities still pursue an incomplete mission that might be characterized as “academic excellence in a safe environment,” garnished perhaps with some assistance for post-graduation placement. Their business and educational models remain satisfied with the partial purposes of *training* and *transitioning* students, largely neglecting their most fundamental purpose to co-labor with God toward the *transformation* of students. That purpose, tragically, is being choked off in many universities by the thorns of cultural conformity.

The “good soil” Christian universities, by contrast, distinguish themselves through their transformational purpose; two telltale manifestations are systematic faith integration and spiritual formation. On the sacred, fertile ground of these universities, education from a Christian perspective—the cultivation of a Christian mind and heart—are the paramount priorities. And as a result, these schools can yield the Master Sower a bountiful harvest: When their graduates walk out the university gates, they “walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6).

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