The Christian Professor’s Disciplines: Assumptions – Worldviews

Synopsis All study begins with presuppositions. Christian belief begins with the assumption that God is eternal. Everything temporal—reality, knowledge, ethics—comes from Him (Isa 44:24; 45:7; John 1:3; Acts 7:5; 14:15; 17:24; Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 8:6). Since God is The Creator of all things (Prov 16:4; 26:10; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16; Heb 2:10; Rev 4:11; 10:6), humans do not create but simply discover truth. All things are created through, by, and for God (Ps 8:6; John 13:3; 1 Cor 15:27, 28; Eph 1:22; Phil 3:21; Heb 2:8). Assumptions then form the foundation for a worldview, the faith and trust that a person places in a person, idea, or thing, whether consciously or unconsciously. The person’s commitment to that belief then creates the lens through which a person will see their world. The Hebraic-Christian worldview begins with The Personal Eternal Triune Creator Who has spoken through the prophets and apostles in the Bible, the authority upon, by, through which believers interpret reality.

Context *A brief overview of how a topic is currently experienced in the culture as a whole or in educational practice will be presented here.*

Everyone believes something. That belief will drive their lives. Many will be glad to explain what they believe. What they often miss, however, is the foundation from which those beliefs arise. Two basic assumptions exist. Either you believe matter is eternal or God is eternal. The first assumption produces naturalism, materialism, and pragmatism. The second assumption produces supernaturalism, acknowledgement of a Transcendent source of authority, and prudent decision making while caring for people. Commitment to the five senses without the “sixth sense” will only focus on the here and now. However, to accept an authority from outside us gives purpose and meaning to the natural world. Naturalism (what you see is what you get) must steal its ethics from supernaturalism. Otherwise, calls for inclusion, care, equality, or love – all ideas that have nothing to do with the five senses – have no basis in a world that is committed to materialism (matter is all that matters).



Philosophy of, “Why?” *The significance or meaning of ideas is essential in any university discipline. The three questions everyone asks (including students) are, “So What?!” “Who cares?!” “Why am I listening to you today?!” “Academic readings” and “Subject Matter Experts” (SME) will be found in this section.*

If we are simply evolved creatures, dependent upon luck and chance, then we take what we can get when we can get it, without thought to a transcendent ethical system which cares for our standing before God and man.

Many philosophers and sociologists begin with the assumption that human reason is a sufficient source of knowledge. Social experience, scientific experimentation or physical evidence is thought to form the basis for truth and authority. But human corruption warps all educational systems. A biblical grid is necessary to sift bias, misrepresentation, prejudice, and deceit for proper understanding of all things. [See the K.L.A.I.M. process under “Professor’s Approaches”]



Foundations for “What?” *Biblical, doctrinal bases for any topic can be found here. Biblical content from narrative, law, history, wisdom, song, prophesy, parables, and letters intersects with academic data and dialogue.*

1. The personal, eternal, triune Creator, who has revealed Himself in His Word, His world, and His works, prompts the passion of the researcher to learn (Eph 1:15-23; Phil 1:9-11; Col 1:9-10). Those who study Scripture ponder what God has done (Ps 64:9), stand in awe of His wonders (Ps 65:8), benefit from all His works (Ps 66:5), all of which cause a fear of Him to spread throughout the earth (Ps 67:7).
2. Any Bible study must begin with an acknowledgement of human limitation: the fallen, finite, fragile state of human understanding. The finite cannot define the infinite; the imperfect cannot fully comprehend the perfect. God can be known but human knowledge of God and His work is necessarily incomplete (Job 26.14; 28).
3. God is the source and unity of His creation, therefore all truth is God’s Truth wherever is found, from whomever it is stated (Ps 119:152, 160; 1 Kings 3:1-15; 4:29-34; 10:1-9) based on the person of God through the Word of God.
4. Humility is the essence of knowledge. The one who studies Scripture remembers how much is unknown (Job 11:7; Isa 55:9-11; Phil 2:1-4).

Isaiah 40:13-14, 28—God’s knowledge is infinite, unsearchable

Jeremiah 9:23-24—boast in knowing God

Job 11:7-8—what can you know of God?

Romans 16:25-26—knowledge of God in Scripture

Colossians 2:3-4—Jesus holds knowledge treasures

1. Joy can be the result of both the opportunities and outcomes of study (Ps 111:2; Ecc 5:18-20).
2. Thankfulness should pervade the spirit of the person who studies Scripture, who knows that it is by The Spirit’s work within the person and creation that allows any opportunity in this life. God has crowned humans with honor, who then reflects all glory back to God for His works and His work in the researcher (Deut 8:11-20; Ps 8:5; 115:1; Rom 11:33-36; Eph 5:20; 1 Thess 5:18; 1 Tim 6:17).
3. Listening to people (all ethnicities, all experiences) is imperative. Some Christians believe Scripture is their sole source of authority in life. Other Christians believe that Scripture is the final authority in life but also accept Christian tradition (writings of other believers in Church history), human reason controlled by Revelation, and experience (prompted by The Holy Spirit or Providential movements) as valuable adjuncts to biblical teaching (Mark 9:38-41).
4. The Church fulfills Jesus’ great commandment through Bible study: loving God means loving others by sharing truth that is discovered (Mark 12:30-31). The research of creation is a direct response to loving God (Gen 1:28). Vocational commitments – all can study, some have giftedness toward research – because of The Spirit’s gifts to God’s people allow the practice of research. This shows love for others.
5. The Church and its leaders bear the responsibility of defending those who cannot defend themselves through Bible study that counteracts cultural error and deception (Prov 2:1-6; Col 2:8; 2 Tim 2:24-26; Titus 1:9; Heb 5:11-14; 1 John 4:1).
6. The Holy Spirit – third person of The Trinity – is responsible to help with Bible study in the following ways:
	1. Transmission (delivery, communication) of Scripture is The Spirit’s Role (2 Sam 23:2; Neh 9:30; Ezek 2:2; Zech 7:12; 2 Pet 1:21).
	2. The apostles depended on The Spirit’s role in their teaching? (John 14:26; 15:16; 16:13).
	3. Christians depend on The Spirit to understand Scripture (1 Cor 2:13; 1 John 2:20, 27).
	4. Indwelling of The Spirit changes a Christian’s mindset of Scripture (Rom 8:5-9).
	5. The Holy Spirit’s role is different from the human spirit in teaching (2 Cor 3:5; 4:7).
	6. The Spirit imparts creativity for service based on biblical instruction (Ex 28:3; 31:1-5).



Hermeneutics about “How?” *Interpretation of a field of knowledge is this section’s focus: ideas to critique, worldviews to compare, no matter the department.*

* ***Frames*** are ASSUMPTIONS people make about their IDEAS, pronouncing, “This is WHERE belief begins for me.”
* ***Facts*** are EVIDENCES of ideas people point to telling, “This is WHY I believe.”
* ***Faiths*** are beliefs or WORLDVIEWS for which people declare, “This is WHAT I believe.”
* ***Feelings*** are the EMOTIONS or reactions people express about their beliefs shouting, “This is HOW I believe.”

Questions concerning “When?” *Essential interrogatives – both for the professor’s and students’ consideration – will be offered that could allow for reflection about and meditation on various ideas in fields of academic study.*

**Eight Worldview Questions that Everyone Asks** Human history records the search for answers to questions that hold interest for all people. Christians must be able to show the commonality of our humanness and effectively communicate Biblical responses to the following:

1. WHO IS GOD?

2. WHO ARE HUMANS?

3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE AND MEANING OF LIFE?

4. WHAT IS THE BASIS OF KNOWLEDGE?

5. WHAT IS THE BASIS FOR ETHICS?

6. WHAT IS REAL?

7. WHICH VIEW OF HISTORY IS CORRECT?

8. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?



Transformation inside me “Who?” *Here, the professor will encounter ideas that could broaden current understanding or imply ideas that could deepen Christian growth.*

Recognizing our knowledge limitations we will:

* Recognize our weaknesses
* Be honest about our assumptions
* Express humility in our knowledge
* Live with charity toward others
* Defend worldview ideas in the face of disagreement or persecution



Examples within Disciplines “Where?” *As I live my life before God, do I consciously make myself aware of potential intersections of Christian thought with my studies?*

Comedy. Drama. Plays. Discuss the assumptions being made in any television sit-com. Secure a copy of *Seinfeld's* 100th episode. [Show the four-minute segment from "Ambitions" through to the phone call to the apartment from Van De Lay industries.] Watch for vocabulary, people, situations, objects, etc. that are necessary to understand the show and make it funny. In this case, something is funny because the comedians expect people to have knowledge that makes them laugh.

Books. Texts. Literature. What did the author desire to say? How did he/she say it? How did the characters, events, dialogue, or word choice lend themselves to communicating the author's view of life? What assumptions about the world is the author making? What phrases or sentences did you note that communicated the author's point of view? Write them down word for word. Summarize the main idea of this article in your own words. Compare it with a Christian worldview. How do the two compare? Be specific.

Philosophy. Journalism. Reading. Identify and compare examples (i.e. from online magazine or newspaper articles, movie plots, television programs, etc.) of similar characters, themes, or ideas from multiple sources. What examples, statements, or assumptions can the Christian accept as completely true or largely true? Which cannot be accepted as true? Why or why not? Can you state the Christian position (in contrast to the one presented) without using "chapter and verse" or "Christianesque" language? Write down specific statements that you believe to be doubtful, faulty, or totally wrong. Write down ideas that trouble you: either because you have never heard them before or because you don't know whether or not they are true.

Cytotechnology. Forensic linguistics. Finite math.

The discussion was anything but typical.[[1]](#footnote-1)

I had to ask her if she would type out cytotechnology to me on my cell phone. I had not heard of it before even though I had seen its effects in medical research.

“Does your professor ever talk about origins, where things come from in your study?” I began.

“No,” she shook her head, “We don’t discuss ideas such as creation or evolution. Evolution is a given.”

“Let me ask a different question. Does your professor ever use the words ‘awe,’ ‘beauty,’ ‘wonder,’ or ‘amazement’ when talking about human cell structure?”

“Oh, yes! All the time! He will say things like, ‘If the molecular structure changed a fraction or the cell structure shifted ever so slightly in this direction the immune system would not work’.”

She paused. Then she said, “You know, now that I think about it, my professor assumes design all the time! He will use the word and I will think to myself, ‘How can you use that word if you believe in evolution?’”

“And there it is!” I declared, looking around the table. “No one – Christian or non-Christian – can operate in their respective fields of study without depending on concepts that come from outside themselves.”

I looked at the young mathematician sitting across from me. “I bet your math courses suggest that one of the ways a math proof is identified as true is if the equation is beautiful.”

He agreed, shaking his head up and down, “Mathematical computation depends on beauty.”

The student who has fallen in love with forensic linguistics concurred, “We depend on the framework of logic as we investigate law. We assume logic as the basis for our study.”

“Do you see?!” I exclaimed, “The Christian worldview provides the presuppositions for everything! Humans assume beauty, logic, and wonder as results of any investigation without giving a thought about where those ideas originate.”

Our discussions around the lunch table continued over a myriad of topics.

But we were all reminded again that our scholastic lives are governed by The One who has designed, sustains, and enjoys all things in His creation.

One in our group told of a conversation she had overheard in her department. “You can hear everything from where I sit,” she explained, continuing, “Two accomplished PhD professors were musing aloud saying things like, ‘After all our accomplishments, publications, and credits, is *this*all there is?’”

“I wish I could have had the liberty to engage that conversation. Maybe they should talk with us over lunch.”

Assumptions. Questions. Teachers and students all assume

* **an origin for our study** which makes us ask, “Where did that come from?”
* **boundaries for our schoolwork** questioning, “Why are limitations built into the world?”
* **exploration in our field of research** suggesting, “What else is there to learn?”
* **delight as we pursue creative alternatives** thinking, “How can I make this better?”
* **a lack of fulfillment** in our discoveries unless we can answer, “When will I feel satisfied?”

All Disciplines. Analysis. Assessment.

Analyze each statement to understand the assumptions. Then ask, “Can this viewpoint be lived out in real world situations?” Groups will be assigned to each statement below to give an oral report on as to their findings. Each report should be 2-3 minutes in length clearly identifying assumptions, possible practicality, and a Christian response to each individualized truth claim.

 TRUTH CLAIMS TRUTH CRITIQUES

"There are many truths." Assumptions:

 Real World:

"Truth is what you make it." Assumptions:

 Real World:

"Truth is moral and requires a Assumptions:

commitment to a moral life

defined by honesty, fairness,

courage and respect for others." Real World:

"Truth is determined through Assumptions:

knowledge, reason, life

experiences, and common sense." Real World:

"What is true today may not Assumptions:

be true tomorrow."

Real World:

"What is true for me may not Assumptions:

be true for you."

Real World:

"I know it's true in my heart." Assumptions:

 Real World:

"I cannot impose my truth Assumptions:

on another or say that

someone's truth is wrong." Real World:

"Truth is harmony with nature." Assumptions:

 Real World:

"Taboos are the result of

knowing truth and falsehood." Assumptions:

 Real World:

Movie. Apologetics. Justice. Watch the first five minutes of *Boondock Saints* (or choose another movie that includes the concept of justice). Comment on the portrayal of justice.

Think about this: If there is a God, why is there so much injustice in the world?”

* What other options might there be?
* What assumption is this question making?
* When atheistic totalitarianism reigned in the 20th century, how many people died by the whim of dictators? How does this option jive with human history?
* Have there ever been any human-centered “success stories” as it relates to justice and authority? If not, why not?
* Are people really able to accomplish justice on their own? Why or why not?

Advertising. Philosophy. Marketing. With partners or in small groups, choose from the following statements those which interest you the most. Upon completion, (a) identify the assumptions and (b) critically discuss why you may agree or disagree with the statements listed below.

Examples

*"What's true for you may not be true Relativism; no objective standard for*

*for me.” truth; who decides right and wrong?*

*"Thirst is everything. Obey your thirst." Self-indulgence; physical needs exceed all others; what about self-discipline?*

Statements Assumptions/Discussion

"Life is short, drink it up"

"Be good. Be bad. Just be."

"Truth is evolving, revelation is ongoing"

"All views of life are equal."

"Society constructs reality"

"It's a dog-eat-dog world"

"Greed is good"

"Seeing is believing"

"Scientists tell us...Studies show..."

"No one can save us but ourselves"

"If it works, do it" ("Just do it")

"Humans are perfectible:

 we get better and better."

"Education and knowledge are

fundamental catalysts for true change"

"Law merely reflects the tastes and

 preferences of the current society."

"If you can dream it, you can do it."

"Life is a journey...Enjoy the ride"

"Life is short: Play hard."

"VISA. It's anywhere you want to be."

"The greatest good for the greatest

 number."

"The force surrounds us, binds us,

 feel it around us; the rock, the

 tree, me. . ."

Make a list of conclusions:



Academic Reading *Quotes from journals, books, videos, or interviews could populate readings prompting further consideration or discussion on a topic, plus a brief list of possible references for review.*

**Worldview books – of which there are many – begin to suggest various processes (i.e., why, how, when, and where) by which people acquire their views of what is “the really real.” This is a very brief survey.**

Blamires, Harry. 1963. *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* Vine

 **Some would argue this is the book that started “it” all.**

Clouser, Roy A. 1991. *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of*

 *Religious Belief in Theories.* Notre Dame.

Cosgrove, Mark P. 2006. *Foundations of Christian thought: Faith, learning, and the Christian*

*worldview.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel.

Dockery, David S. and Gregory Alan Thornbury, eds. 2002. *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The*

*Foundations of Christian Higher Education*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman.

Guinness, Os. 1994. *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don’t Think and What to*

 *Do About It.* Baker.

Harris, Robert A. 2004. *The Integration of Faith and Learning: A Worldview Approach*. Eugene,

OR: Wipf & Stock.

Hollinger, Dennis P. 2005. *Head, Heart & Hands: Bringing Together Christian Thought,*

 *Passion and Action.* IVP.

Holmes, Arthur. 1983. *Contours of a World View*. Eerdmans.

 **Holmes may be trained as a philosopher but his theological application is superb.**

James-Clark, Kelly. 1993. *Philosophers Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of 11 Leading*

 *Thinkers.* IVP.

 **All philosophers should be made to flesh out their ideas. The stories fascinate.**

Macaulay, Susan Schaeffer. 1983. *How to Be Your Own Selfish Pig: And Other Ways You’ve*

 *Been Brainwashed*. Chariot.

 **Introduce junior high students to Schaeffer’s ideas through his daughter.**

Mangalwadi, Vishal & Ruth. 1993, 1999. *The Legacy of William Carey: A Model for the*

 *Transformation of Culture*. Crossway.

 **How Christian thinking changed a country: a remarkable read.**

Miller, Darrow L. nd. *Discipling Nations: The Power of Truth to Transform Cultures.* YWAM

Naugle, David K. 2002. *Worldview: The History of a Concept.* Eerdmans.

Pearcey, Nancy. *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* Crossway.

 **Pearcey addresses the fact-value split, naturalism, dualism, and integration**

Plantinga, Cornelius. *Engaging God’s World.* Eerdmans. 2001.

 **The best, most readable, succinct Christian worldview book.**

Schaeffer, Francis A. 1975. *How Shall We Then Live.*

 **All of Schaeffer’s works are essential cornerstones of Christian worldview thought**.

Schlossberg, Herbert and Marvin Olasky. 1987. *Turning Point: A Christian Worldview*

 *Declaration.* Crossway. **The first in an excellent worldview series.**

Sire, James W. 2004. *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*. IVP.

 **Though more well know for *The Universe Next Door*, Sire does the service of**

 **exposing the weaknesses in worldview teaching that must be addressed.**

Sproul, R. C. 2000. *The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts That Shaped Our*

 *World*. Crossway.

 **Clarity of style shows what men believed and the outcome of those ideas.**

Stark, Rodney. 2005. *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and*

*Western Success.*

**A historical, sociological study of how Christianity established the ethos and ethics of the Western World**

Walsh, Brian, Richard Middleton. 19984. *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian*

*Worldview*. IVP

Wolters, Al. 1985. *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*. Eerdmans.

 **A classic, biblically-based philosophical framework for Christian thinking.**

1. Stories about academic discussions from Christian IUPUI (now I.U. Indy) students, from Mark Eckel, “Assumptions,” 31 January 2017, https://warpandwoof.org/assumptions/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)