

Umbrella and Systemic Models of Christian Higher Education

(from Duane Liftin's *Conceiving the Christian College*)

The “Umbrella” Model

“Umbrella institutions seek to provide a Christian ‘umbrella’ or canopy under which a variety of voices can thrive. Typically a certain ‘critical mass’ represents the voice of a sponsoring Christian tradition, so that sponsoring voice remains a privileged one. But the institution will nonetheless demonstrate genuine diversity. Some campus voices may be unhesitatingly secular, others open but searching, while still others may represent competing religious perspectives. Yet all are welcome under the umbrella so long as they can at least support the broad educational mission of the school. The institution has made room for them; they are asked only to make room for the institution.

In such institutions the sponsoring perspective will typically be kept more or less discernable. It may show itself in such things as the school’s architecture, traditions, curriculum, and extracurricular activities, as well as in the makeup of its governing board, faculty, and student body. Yet many non-Christian voices, groups, and activities can also be found, and the institution makes a genuine effort to keep the campus hospitable to them. The result is a relatively non-sectarian environment that can encourage rigorous Christian thinking even while serving as a venue where that thinking can engage other ideas in full.”

Examples of Umbrella Institutions: University of Notre Dame, Valparaiso University

The “Systemic” Model

“Systemic institutions reach for more, but in another sense settle for less. As the name suggests, they seek to make Christian thinking systemic throughout the institution, root, branch, and leaf. Their curriculum is typically all-encompassing. Their goal is to engage any and all ideas from every perspective, but they attempt to do so from a particular intellectual location, that of the sponsoring Christian tradition. Thus they draw their faculty exclusively from those who know what it means to live and work from that tradition—indeed, from those who know what it means to embody it. What is true of the critical mass in the Umbrella model is to be true of all the scholars in the Systemic model. They seek to live and work as Christians.

. . . with the Umbrella model Christian ideas are not only allowed on campus, they are encouraged; they may even enjoy a privileged position. But with the Systemic model, these ideas are the institution’s *raison d’être*.”

Examples of Systemic Institutions: Wheaton College, Calvin College, Westmont College

Levels of the Integration of Faith and Learning

(Framework from Rick Ostrander's *Why College Matters to God*, adapted from Arthur Holmes's *The Idea of a Christian College*)

Attitudinal/Motivational

"The key to a Christian conception of studies is the realization that prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. . . .

Of course school exercises only develop a lower kind of attention. Nevertheless, they are extremely effective in increasing the power of attention that will be available at the time of prayer, on condition that they are carried out with a view to this purpose and this purpose alone.

Although people seem to be unaware of it today, the development of the faculty of attention forms the real object and almost the sole interest of studies. . . .

School children and students who love God should never say: 'For my part I like mathematics'; 'I like French'; 'I like Greek.' They should learn to like all these subjects, because all of them develop that faculty of attention which, directed toward God, is the very substance of prayer."

"Not only does the love of God have attention for its substance; the love of our neighbor which we know to be the same love, is made of this same substance. Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them attention. The capacity to give ones attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle. Nearly all those who think they have this capacity do not possess it. Warmth of heart, impulsiveness, pity are not enough."—Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God"

Foundational/Intellectual

"Generally speaking, faith intersects an academic discipline at the point where it asks its most fundamental questions. Faith intersects where a discipline appropriates its most fundamental assumptions, from whatever source they may come. Faith intersects at the point where a discipline adopts a philosophical position to guide it or to provide a structure for its theories, data, and explorations. Faith intersects where a discipline establishes its core values, upon whatever basis they are founded. One could argue that faith is the fundamental basis for all human knowledge, without which rationalism and empiricism could not function."—Harry Lee Poe, *Christianity in the Academy*

Integrative questions:

- English: What are the similarities and differences in interpreting the Biblical text and interpreting other literature texts?
- Sociology/Social Work: To what extent are social problems caused by inadequacies in societal structures or by individual or group irresponsibility?
- Political Science: What is the role of forgiveness in international relations?
- Criminal Justice: To what extent should the penal system be retributive or restorative, or both?
- Fine Arts: What are the limits, if any, on the freedom for human creative expression?
- History: How do alternative views on the "direction of history" (e.g., linear, cyclical, teleological) fit or not fit with the Christian narrative?
- Economics: What is the relationship between the quest for profitability and the Christian call for compassion and justice?
- Physics: What is the status of models in scientific inquiry, and what are the similarities and differences between the status of models in scientific inquiry and the status of models in theological inquiry?
- Mathematics: Can the deductive nature of mathematics be used to do Christian apologetics (defend the Christian faith)?
- Religion: What is the relationship between the Creation account given in Genesis 1&2 and scientific findings in geology, astronomy, and biology? [Integration is a 2- way street]

“Wherever possible, start with questions the students may care about deeply, and building on that initial interest, tease them, cajole them, inspire them into caring about an integrative question that is related to their interests.”—Harold Heie, “Integration of Faith and Learning in the Classroom: Posing Integrative Questions”

Applied/Ethical

“While the strict logic of philosophical analysis has educational usefulness, establishing strict categories of ‘Christian’ versus ‘Muslim’ versus ‘Existentialism,’ for example, is not very useful in helping us move from disciplinary insights to growth in our conception of God, shalom, and life.”—Susan VanZanten, *Joining the Mission*

“The end goal of the Christian university is not merely to educate students to think in theological terms, although that certainly is part of its job. In more complete terms, it involves teaching students how to love God with their whole being (their heart, soul, mind, and strength) and to do so in multiple contexts (as a student, neighbor, professional, citizen, possible parent, possible spouse, etc.). While helping students acquire a Christian worldview is an essential part of this larger goal, it focuses solely upon the cognitive part.”—Todd Ream and Perry Glanzer, *The Idea of a Christian College: A Reexamination for Today’s University*

Further Resources:

Umbrella Philosophies of Christian Higher Education

Chris Anderson, *Teaching as Believing: Faith in the University* (Baylor UP, 2004)

Mark Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America* (Oxford UP, 1993)

Systemic Philosophies of Christian Higher Education

David S. Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury, eds. *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education* (Broadman and Holman, 2002)

Arthur Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Eerdmans, 1996)

Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Eerdmans, 2004)

Rick Ostrander, *Why College Matters to God: An Introduction to the Christian College Experience* (Rev. ed., ACU Press, 2013)

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God’s World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Eerdmans, 2002)

Harry Lee Poe, *Christianity in the Academy: Teaching at the Intersection of Faith and Learning* (Baker Academic, 2004)

Todd C. Ream and Perry L. Glanzer, *The Idea of a Christian College: A Reexamination for Today’s University* (Cascade Books, 2013)

General Practical Guides to Christian Higher Education

Van Zanten, Susan. *Joining the Mission: A Guide for (Mainly) New College Faculty* (Eerdmans, 2011)

Christian Worldview

J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig. *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (IVP, 2002)

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

Philip Graham Ryken, *Christian Worldview: A Student’s Guide* (Crossway, 2013)

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

Steve Wilkins and Mark L. Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives* (IVP Academic, 2009)

Beyond Worldview: Other Models for Faith and Learning

Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation* (Oxford UP, 2004)

David Smith and James K. A. Smith, *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* (Eerdmans, 2011)

James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Baker Academic, 2009) and *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Baker Academic, 2013)

Simone Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," *Waiting for God* (Harper Perennial, 2009)

Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education* (Eerdmans, 2004)

Discipline-Specific Resources for Faith and Learning

IVP Academic's Christian Worldview Integration Series:

- *Psychology in the Spirit*
- *Authentic Communication*
- *Business for the Common Good*
- *Christianity and Literature*
- *Education for Human Flourishing*
- *Politics for Christians*

CCCU/Harper One's Through the Eyes of Faith Series

- *Biology through the Eyes of Faith*
- *Business through the Eyes of Faith*
- *History through the Eyes of Faith*
- *Literature through the Eyes of Faith*
- *Mathematics through the Eyes of Faith*
- *Music through the Eyes of Faith*
- *Psychology through the Eyes of Faith*
- *Sociology through the Eyes of Faith*

Crossway's Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition Series

- *Art and Music: A Student's Guide*
- *Literature: A Student's Guide*
- *Ethics and Moral Reasoning: A Student's Guide*
- *Philosophy: A Student's Guide*
- *Political Thought: A Student's Guide*

Mary Molewyk Doornbos, Ruth E. Groenhout, Kenda G. Hotz, *Transforming Care: A Christian Vision of Nursing Practice* (Eerdmans, 2005)

Judith Allen Shelly, *Values in Conflict: Christian Nursing in a Changing Profession* (Intervarsity, 1991)

Christopher Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Eerdmans, 2001)

Ed. Thomas P. O'Connor and Nathaniel J. Pallone, *Religion, the Community, and the Rehabilitation of Criminal Offenders* (Haworth, 2003)

Shirl James Hoffman, *Christianity and the Culture of Sports* (Baylor UP, 2010)

John Polkinghorne, *Reason and Reality: the Relationship between Science and Theology* (Trinity Press International, 1991)