Worldview, Christian Maturity, and Young Adulthood: The What, When, Where, and How of Education after High School

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Abstract The years directly following high school graduation play a significant part in the realization of Christian maturity. During this time, children begin to take ownership over most aspects of their life, including their spirituality. For many, this process unfolds simultaneously with post-secondary education in colleges or universities that can strengthen the faith system of the student's childhood or divert her/his attention to a different pursuit. Consequently, children in their late teens need the guidance of parents to help them find the environment that will best enable them to grow in their Christian maturity, develop a Christ-centered worldview, and acquire the skills necessary to succeed personally and professionally. To that end, this chapter begins by defining Christian maturity and the development of worldview. In such context, the chapter discusses the values inherent in modern (or postmodern) universities and the influence colleges play in a person's life. Finally, the chapter provides details, advantages, and disadvantages of various choices after high school and guidance on discerning the best option.

Keywords Worldview · Life after high school · Christian maturity · Post-secondary education

Throughout the life of a child, one desire of Christian parents remains constant—the hope that their child will come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, which will eventually flourish into a life of Christian maturity. Even as children transition into adulthood, this desire remains. For as every parent of adult children knows, parenting does not cease after children graduate from high school and enter the adult world; it just takes on a new dimension.

The years directly following high school graduation play a significant part in the realization of Christian maturity. During this time, children begin to take ownership over most aspects of their life, including their spirituality. Through testing and trying, challenges and questioning, young adults form and habituate belief systems

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and behaviors. For many, this process unfolds simultaneously with post-secondary education in colleges or universities that can strengthen the faith system of the student's childhood or divert her/his attention to a different pursuit.

Consequently, the what, when, where, and how of life after high school is a vital decision that Christian parents are ill-advised to leave simply to the whims of their teenage children or the determination of convenience and cost. Instead, children in their late teens need the guidance of parents to help them find the environment that will best enable them to grow in their Christian maturity, develop a Christ-centered worldview, and acquire the skills necessary to succeed personally and professionally.

The role of parents is particularly important given the unique nature of each individual and the special knowledge of that nature parents possess. Each child has a distinct temperament and personality that must be carefully matched to a school that will be right for him or her. This means Christian parents should take inventory of their child's maturity level—emotionally, socially, academically, and spiritually—in order to find the best post-secondary fit (Bennett n. d.). This requires a clear understanding of Christian maturity and worldview and either a realistic understanding of the dominant values in today's colleges and universities or practical knowledge of how to discern a post-secondary institution's prevailing ideologies in order to match a child's present state with his or her social, emotional, spiritual, and professional needs.

To that end, this chapter begins by defining Christian maturity and the development of worldview. In such context, the chapter discusses the values inherent in modern (or post-modern) universities and the influence colleges play in a person's life. Finally, the chapter provides details, advantages, and disadvantages of various choices after high school and guidance on discerning the best option.

Christian Maturity

Like the general concept of maturity, Christian maturity can be thought of as a developmental process during which an individual passes through multiple stages of knowledge, belief, and action (assuming growth, of course). Gibson (2004, p. 298) proposes a four-stage model of Christian maturity, displayed in Fig. 1. At Level 1, much like the immature child in relationship to his or her parents, accommodation to God's rules grows out of fear of punishment (hell) or hope for reward (heaven). Therefore, a Christian's motivation for responding to God at this level of development is driven by self-interest. The desire to imitate and please a central, godly figure in one's life reflects the movement toward a second level of spiritual maturity. The concern of believers at this level is how they are perceived by an influential Christian in their life as fulfilling divine laws.

Level 3 maturity recognizes a person does not have beliefs of his or her own until those beliefs undergo challenge. Therefore, individuals reach a third level of spiritual development when they internalize the Christian worldview, which grows out of a personal commitment to Christ. The evidence of such internalization is the

Four Levels of Christian Maturity

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Accommodation to God's Law out of fear of punishment or hope of reward.	Imitation of godly exemplars with growing respect for and obedience to the Ten Commandments.	Personal, principle centered commitment to Christian worldview.	Movement beyond focus on individual piety to the active promotion of corporate piety and the redemption of creation's sin-stained structures.
Source of Authority: Self-centered	Source of Authority: Other-centered	Source of Authority: Principle-centered	Source of Authority: Kingdom-centered

Fig. 1 Four levels of Christian maturity

repeated demonstration of behavior consistent with Christian law and worldview in the absence of a "reinforcer" (Gibson 2004).

At Level 4 maturity, individuals move beyond a focus on individual piety to actively promoting corporate piety. The person who reaches this stage of spiritual maturity moves beyond internalization of principles to taking concrete action to promote "the liberation of persons and societies from all that prevents them from living an authentic existence in justice and shared community" (Bangkok Consultation 1973, p. 37). As such, the individual takes action on internalized principles to minister to society and the world. More concretely, the fourth level of spiritual development is attained by men and women who share and act on a vision to fulfill the Great Commission, to foster brotherhood and sisterhood, to house the homeless, feed the poor and embrace the sick, to speak out against inequality, to challenge oppressive economic systems, and so on. Here, the source of authority is Kingdom-centered (Gibson 2004).

Attaining Level 4 maturity requires an internalized commitment to the Christian worldview. This commitment comes not just from intellectual knowledge but also from an examination of core beliefs, an examination that leaves open the possibility of believing in something other than Christian principles. Indeed, as Gibson (2004) suggests, Christ calls for such an examination process and internalized commitment to following Him in John 6:42–58, when many chose to depart from Him. According to Halstead (1995), this process includes questioning assumptions, engaging in debate, and grappling with conflicting worldviews. For as Hall (1977) posits, surrounded by people of differing worldview, it is unlikely that individuals can rely upon padded answers for believing what they do.

What's Worldview?

This requires, of course, knowing what worldview is. According to McKenzie (1991), Reich et al. (1994), and others (Astley and Francis 2002; Ladson-Billings 2000; Shahjahan 2005) worldview is how one interprets the world around her after reflecting on her experience in and knowledge of it. It is what dictates people's decisions, how they define reality, and how they see themselves and others (Carpenter 2001).

Some of the more commonly recognized worldviews, among the panoply, include Marxism, which offers a total and definitive interpretation of human reality that is atheistic, materialist, and dialectical; liberalist-pluralist, the theories of reality of which are agnostic, individualistic, and tied for their moral legitimacy to the notions of human rights and respect for social contracts; and humanism, which is atheistic, seeing humanity as the apex of development and looking to the self-perfecting of humanity, including the founding of morality, by the use of reason (Plunkett 1990). Although each of these has had, and continues to have a presence in colleges and universities, for many years academia was dominated by the worldview of modernism, which subscribes to the centrality of reason, the belief in progress, the virtues of individualism, and faith in the scientific method (Bloland 2005).

But in recent decades, the academy, indeed the culture at large, has seen a transformation from modernism to postmodernism (Bloland 2005). In the worldview of modernism, culture and self-identity are viewed more or less as stable, and colleges focus on educating for citizenship, preparing for jobs, and facilitating personal growth and development. Postmodernism, on the other hand, subscribes to the idea of multiple, socially-created realities, malleable identities, shifting conceptions of self over time, and multiple truths. Postmodern higher education contributes to this by challenging prevailing tenets (modernist and otherwise) and encouraging students to do likewise, most fundamentally by prompting them to question who they are and what they believe.

At odds with postmodernism, indeed, one of the historically prevailing tenets challenged by it, is the Christian worldview, which teaches that reality is not created by us but by a Creator, in whose image mankind is made and to whom it is accountable (Gibson 2004). Consequently, human nature is predictable, and truth is known, fixed, and written on the hearts of all humanity (Holy Bible, Romans 2:15).

To the mature believer, this definition, and even this discussion of worldview, borders on simplistic, but as Kanitz (2005) and other Christian professors recognize, students—including those from Christian homes—need to be taught (a) about the concept of worldview, (b) to recognize various worldviews around them, (c) to realize their own worldview, and (d) to see how their worldview is shaped by the views around them. Indeed, Kanitz observes that Christian college students often see Christian thought as just one of many perspectives and not necessarily a correct or true one. Dumestre (1995) echoes this observation in his discussion of the rather shallow knowledge Christians generally hold of their faith principles, a lack of knowledge that can only lead to an undeveloped and malleable worldview.

Life After High School

This dynamic further emphasizes the need for Christian parents to help guide their children in choosing a college or university in their growth toward spiritual maturity. The college years are a time when students not only equip themselves for a vocation, but a period when they formulate convictions about faith, values, and worldview (Bennett n. d.; Kuh 2002). Significant changes in moral reasoning and reflective judgment are common between the first and senior years of college (Baxter Magoida 1992). Faculty and courses most certainly contribute to this (Astin 1993; Pascarella and Terenzini 1991), but so do other factors of the environment, including peers, activities, work, sports, and so forth (Hammond and Hunter 1984; Kuh 2002).

In many colleges and universities, this influence is hostile toward spirituality generally (Shahjahan 2005) and toward a Christian worldview specifically. For faculty and students alike, faith, moral education, and spirituality have been marginalized in most areas of university activity, from student life to curricula (Bok 1982, 1990; Colby et al. 2003; Glanzer et al. 2004; Hoekema 1994; Long 1992; Reuben 2000; Wilshire 1990). Instead university life is dominated by a host of worldviews, such as those listed above, antagonistic toward the Christian worldview (Johnson 1995; Shahjahan 2005), an observation going back more than six decades (Nash 1944).

Thus, it is important for Christian parents to evaluate honestly and critically their child's state of maturity, both in general and as a Christian to determine the best fitting post-secondary option. For some children, particularly those in the early stages of Christian maturity, this may mean a Christian college or university that will provide a much needed foundation in Christian worldview along with education for a productive civic and economic life. For others, likely those in more advanced stages of Christian maturity, an environment that will challenge and sharpen their beliefs may prove a better fit. This assumes, of course, that a child will pursue post-secondary education. For some, college or university matriculation after high school may not be the wisest choice. Instead, pursuing employment opportunities may be a better option, given a child's academic trajectory or level of personal and emotional maturity. Therefore, it is important to consider *all* the various options when evaluating a child's needs.

Work or Service

As Bennett (n. d.) observes, from God's perspective, success in life is related to character and not necessarily to intellect or college degrees. God rewards honest, hard-working people who have succeeded in the critical areas of life, whether they have a college education or not. If a young person is not a serious student or is not sure what vocational field he wants to pursue, it may be best to consider rejecting or delaying the college decision until the potential student has matured. During this

time the child could work in the field he or she is considering. Another option would be to encourage the him/her to work with a Christian ministry in order to mature spiritually and further strengthen character skills that will help the student succeed, no matter what educational or vocational choice he or she makes. A year's wait—often called a "gap year" (Martin 2010)—at this stage in life can make a significant difference in a student's attitude and academic performance.

Community College

Community colleges are often a good option for the student who is struggling academically or is undecided about her educational or vocational future. They provide an opportunity for a student to mature a year or two before entering a larger college or a university. They also offer the added benefit of being more economical and allowing for more parental involvement. Time to grow in emotional maturity, more parental involvement, and more time in a home church could also facilitate the opportunity to realize greater Christian maturity.

Secular Institutions

As discussed above, secular colleges may be a good alternative for more mature Christian students. They offer broader vocational choices and often cost much less than Christian colleges. Many offer excellent opportunities for students to grow in their faith and develop evangelism and discipleship skills in the refining fire of a challenging academic and social environment (Bennett n. d.; Hammond and Hunter 1984; Veith 1998). To grow and thrive in such an environment, however, students will quickly need to settle into a vibrant church that has a campus ministry or participate in an interdenominational campus ministry (Bennett n. d.; Hammond and Hunter 1984).

For reasons of necessity or choice, most students from Christian homes will end up in a secular university. It is therefore important that students and parents consider how to arrange an educational program that will result in optimal vocational training and spiritual growth. This is not an impossible task, but it will require work on the part of the student and parents.

Christian College or University

As Wilhoit and Dettoni (1998) acknowledge, "Christians do not emerge from the spiritual experience of being born again as full and complete Christians but as childlike Christians, who, like human children, have all the potential for growing into complete and mature adults but need to be nurtured and guided" (p. 28). Thus, for

the young person who would benefit from a college or university education but also needs to grow in Christian maturity, a Christian college or university is an important option. And the choices are many and diverse. As Hammond and Hunter (1984) observes, there are several hundred Bible colleges and seminaries and approximately 100 private Evangelical liberal arts colleges and universities.

These institutions are typically populated by faculty who passionately believe in a call to integrate faith and learning for students, which includes helping students develop a vibrant, holistic Christian worldview (Kanitz 2005). This often comes through close relationships developed between faculty and students. Because classes at these institutions are typically smaller, they facilitate greater interaction and more opportunities to ask questions. Informal discussions at a professor's home or at a restaurant are not unusual.

Not all Christian colleges or universities are created equal, of course, which means the resources dedicated to teaching students about worldviews or facilitating Christian maturity differ from one institution to another. In general, the more evangelical the institution, the more likely it is to offer or require that students take worldview-related courses (Fisher 1995; Glanzer et al. 2004). Glanzer et al. note that such institutions are more likely to influence character development than less evangelical institutions.

Discerning the Best Option

To be sure, the distinctions made above between institutional types are not always as simple as written. Despite calling themselves Christian institutions, some colleges or universities are essentially ChINO—Christian in Name Only. Likewise, secular universities vary in their levels of animus toward the Christian worldview. Thus, parents and students should endeavor to determine an institution's climate as part of the decision-making process. Although seemingly difficult, colleges and universities provide a host of indicators to the discerning eye. Generally, these indicators can be grouped into three categories: "print" material, people associated with the campus, and the campus tour (Carpenter 2001).

"Print" Material

Some research can begin on the Web.

- Visit the campus's website, and give it a critical look. What is featured and prominent on the pages? Who is on the faculty? How does the institution describe itself on its "about" page?
- Visit professors' webpages in your child's prospective major and generally. Read resumes, vitas, or bios. What types of works have they written? Scan their syllabi. What do they teach in their courses?

- Visit the student life webpage. Check out the calendar of events. What activities and festivals does the school sponsor? Do they host a speaker's series? Who do they invite to speak? What kinds of student clubs are listed? For Christian schools the ratio of evangelical vs. ecumenical groups can indicate the schools' evangelical nature. For secular schools, more extreme secular groups indicate a more liberal environment. A good mixture of Christian and secular groups can indicate a more tolerant environment for conservatives or Christians.
- Visit websites dedicated to reviewing institutions and faculty. One of the more popular is ratemyprofessors.com, where students rate their professor and include detailed comments about the courses and the faculty.

Hardcopy media also provides insightful information.

- Catalogs and handbooks are an excellent source of information (Fisher 1995). These publications usually contain church affiliation (if applicable), university mission statements, core values, statements of faith (for religious schools), student behavior policies, and general school policies (Glanzer et al. 2004). What courses are required of all students or of students within a major in which your child is interested? A college's requirements of its students are those subjects or skills that it believes are so vital that every student ought to learn them (Fisher 1995).
- Scan the schedule of courses. A college's courses and curriculum are arguably its most significant statement about what it seeks to teach its students (Fisher 1995). It is a reflection of the values that really drive the institution and receive the time, attention, and resources of the college's faculty and students.
- Check out departmental publications like brochures, annual reports, and academic magazines or journals. What do brochures or annual reports feature or value? What types of research do magazines or journals contain?
- Even applications reveal a school's worldview. Analyze the essay questions students have to complete. These can often point to what the institution values. Likewise, the types of essay questions Christian schools require indicate their evangelical nature.
- Scrutinize other application materials, such as scholarship and financial aid information. To whom do they distribute their funds? What criteria do they use to award money?
- Seek out magazine surveys, like the *U.S. News and World Report*. Other surveys rank schools on different criteria, including student life, party life, sexual activity, drug use, etc. Often these surveys reflect a school's reputation, which they likely have earned.
- Check out handbooks and other publications that include descriptions of various institutions. One of the better known is "Choosing the Right College" (Beer 2007), but other helpful books include The Templeton Foundation's "Colleges that Encourage Character Development" and Peterson's "Christian Colleges and Universities."

People Associated with the Campus

People on or associated with campuses provide great insight directly and indirectly.

- Ask admissions counselors, who spoke at recent commencements? What is the political background of the student body or faculty? Who are prominent alums or faculty? Are some Christians or conservatives?
- Be certain to visit with faculty. Ask professors what research they are working on. What do they value? How is the curriculum structured? Why is it structured that way? What is the purpose behind what is taught?
- How do religious schools and professors integrate faith into the courses and curricula? Solid Christian schools integrate faith into every aspect of life on campus, including the classroom.
- Talk to students, including former ones. What is taught in classes? How do students and faculty treat the Christian worldview? Is there room for discussion or debate related to worldview?

The Campus Tour

All campuses offer tours for prospective students and families, and most tours are highly organized to spotlight the best features of the campus. To really discern what the institution is about, pay attention to and make plans to spend "unscripted" time looking for the following.

- Look at a college's bulletin boards. What is advertised? What kinds of activities are held on campus?
- Read the student newspaper. What are they writing about? What are the campus's hot issues?
- What kind of student and faculty art is prevalent? What are people talking about on campus? What kinds of music do you hear while walking through dorms?
- While visiting professors websites at a secular institution, note if any are Christians. Make appointments to visit them while on campus. Ask them about the environment on campus, its people, their values, etc. If a search of the website is unproductive in identifying Christian faculty, check with local churches or student ministries such as Campus Crusade for Christ, Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, or The Navigators. Student ministries are often required to have a faculty advisor in order to be an officially recognized student organization (Bennett n. d.). While you are at it, ask representatives from those ministries about the institution.
- Talk to students on campus and ask open-ended questions like, "What do you like most about the campus?" and "Who is your favorite professor, and why?" (Bennett n. d.).

Resources

Life in the Information Age (Castells 1999) means an abundance of resources available to help make the best decision for life after high school, many of which are online. Although some are designed for young people, they nonetheless provide invaluable information for parents as well.

World View

True U: This online worldview project is a creation of Focus on the Family and provides excellent and accessible apologetics training (http://www.mytruthproject.org/truthproject/trueu/home.html).

- Leadership U: A creation of Campus Crusade for Life, this website provides a host of information on worldview, issues, and other related topics (http://www.leaderu.com/).

College Life

- Intercollegiate Studies Institute (ISI): This non-sectarian, non-partisan organization seeks to "further in successive generations of college students a better understanding of the values and institutions that sustain a free and humane society." They publish the aforementioned "Choosing the Right College" and offer numerous resources on their website (http://www.isi.org/).
- Intervarsity (http://www.intervarsity.org/), Campus Crusade for Christ (http://www.ccci.org), and Navigators (http://www.navigators.org/us/): Although there are others, these three represent the best known college ministries in the country.
- Boundless: This webzine is a publication of Focus on the Family that targets college-aged readers. In addition to general content, numerous articles address worldview, college life, and staying Christian on secular campuses (http://www.boundless.org).

List of Christian Colleges and Universities

- Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU): In addition to the handbooks listed above, CCCU provides a list of Christian colleges and universities with links to each one (http://www.cccu.org/).

Conclusion

The decision of life after high school often represents a critical juncture in the emotional, civic, economic, and spiritual life and maturity of a young person. Although cost and convenience often play a significant, if not the most important part in determining a child's post-secondary options, the importance of the years immediately following high school should not be left only to cost and convenience. Parents should also consider their child's needs related to spiritual development and include that in the decision making process by:

1. critically and honestly evaluating their child's present level of Christian maturity;
2. understanding their own and their child's worldview;
3. considering all post-secondary options, ranging from work or service to matriculation at a Christian college or university;
4. aligning those options with their child's emotional, professional, and spiritual needs; and
5. doing the research necessary to choose the specific opportunity or institution that best meets their child's needs.

One challenging aspect in this process is a child's increasing independence from parents in making decisions about his or her life. Because life immediately after high school typically means almost complete autonomy, it is tempting for parents to defer in large measure to their child in this decision. And it may not be unusual for children to try to isolate their parents from the process. The latter might be exacerbated when the criterion by which decisions are made about post-secondary options differ between child and parent, as could be the case, for example, when a child favors a college for its social life and parents see the school as a bad fit given their child's spiritual (im)maturity.

All of this points to the importance of early, detailed, honest, and frank discussions between parents and children about priorities and needs, goals and plans for the future, and the process that will be used for decision making. Through it all, children will likely learn more about themselves, Christian life and maturity, and the decisions and processes necessary in adult life. For their part, parents have the privilege of guiding their children into a new phase of life and laying a foundation for a different relationship with their soon-to-be adult children. And all involved will likely grow in their knowledge and beliefs as they consider their Christian faith and worldview in light of the beliefs and priorities of different post-secondary institutions and opportunities and their accompanying worldviews.

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