

2011

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HeeKap Lee
Azusa Pacific University

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Recommended Citation

Lee, H. (2011). Book Review: Creation Regained – Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview. *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal*, 7(1). <https://doi.org/>

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Abstract

It is my hope that most Christian educators have read Wolter's book, *Creation Regained*. Since it came out two decades ago, this book has had a tremendous impact on Christians to be equipped with sound Christian worldviews, a sense of identity, and godly responsibilities. However, one may ask, "Does this book say something about the roles and functions of a Christian education?" In fact, it does. This book provides many practical ideas and applicable points regarding teaching and learning in faith-based settings. In fact, Wolter's revisions to his original manuscript emphasize the proper role of a Christian education. I believe that education is a major concern of God and the Bible, as well as of Jesus. The first priority of Jesus' early ministry focused on teaching. When he was arrested in Gethsemane, he clearly claimed that his earthly task was mainly teaching (e.g., "Every day I sat in the temple court teaching...", Matthew 26:55). Clearly, education is crucial to transform the world as Jesus proclaimed. Even though this book doesn't dictate the issue of Christian education, Wolters indirectly focuses on the purpose and method of Christian education with many practical ideas and examples. This review is divided into two parts: a brief summary of what Wolters said in this book, followed by an analysis of the purposes and processes of a Christian education based on his suggestions.

Book Review: *Creation Regained – Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*

HeeKap Lee, Azusa Pacific University

Book Review: Wolters, A. (2005). *Creation regained: Biblical basics for a reformational worldview* (2nd ed.). William B. Eerdmans.

Why Read this Book Again?

It is my hope that most Christian educators have read Wolter's book, *Creation Regained*. Since it came out two decades ago, this book has had a tremendous impact on Christians to be equipped with sound Christian worldviews, a sense of identity, and godly responsibilities. However, one may ask, "Does this book say something about the roles and functions of a Christian education?" In fact, it does. This book provides many practical ideas and applicable points regarding teaching and learning in faith-based settings. In fact, Wolter's revisions to his original manuscript emphasize the proper role of a Christian education. I believe that education is a major concern of God and the Bible, as well as of Jesus. The first priority of Jesus' early ministry focused on teaching. When he was arrested in Gethsemane, he clearly claimed that his earthly task was mainly teaching (e.g., "Every day I sat in the temple court teaching..." , Matthew 26:55). Clearly, education is crucial to transform the world as Jesus proclaimed. Even though this book doesn't dictate the issue of Christian education, Wolters indirectly focuses on the purpose and method of Christian education with many practical ideas and examples. This review is divided into two parts: a brief summary of what Wolters said in this book, followed by an analysis of the purposes and processes of a Christian education based on his suggestions.

Main Points of "Creation Regained"

Wolters focuses on how the biblical themes of Creation, Fall, and Redemption interweave with human cultures and societies. Everything that God created (structure) – whether social, relational, cultural, or personal – is part of God's good creation, but has fallen due to sin. However, his point is clear: "Even though the effects of sin range widely, sin neither abolishes nor becomes identified

with creation" (p. 57). Evil does not have the power of bringing to naught God's steadfast faithfulness of the works of his hands. The key is how those fallen systems and institutions can be redeemed to the original good creation. To resolve this problem, Wolters reminds us of several principles that God established.

First, God appointed human beings (especially Christians) as the change agents to redeem the world. God's creation process is still proceeding and Jesus commanded us to go and make disciples of all nations and teach them to obey everything he taught us (Matthew 28:19-20). The world needs to be developed and sustained by God's people who carry on God's work. Second, how do Christians restore the fallen systems and institutions to the original good creation? Should the fallen, sin-created systems be destroyed? For example, the family and marriage systems have deviated from the original good creation since Adam and Eve sinned. Should these be abolished or renewed? Here, Wolters presents a reformational worldview in which he differentiates the concepts of structure and direction. Structure refers to "the essence of a creaturely thing, the kind of creature it is by virtue of God's creational law" (p. 88), while direction means its movement toward or away from God. Wolters claims that even perverted systems and institutions under sin are still God's good creatures (structure). Hence, it is direction that we are to engage in, not the structure, since structure was created by God for a purpose and is to be pursued according to that purpose.

Third, that's why a transformation process should be a process of sanctification, which takes a long, progressive time. Two responsibilities of Christians that Wolters suggests are: (1) Christians must oppose distortions of God's handiwork (p. 100); and (2) Christians need to identify the goodness of

God's creation (structure) in every dimension and how much a sinful deviation from structural ordinance has been made. Therefore, Christians are responsible for a kind of reconciliation task, as Jesus has done on earth. Wolters proclaims:

It is still humanity that plays the pivotal role... If Christ is the reconciler of all things, and if we have been entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation on his behalf, then we have a redemptive task wherever our vocation places us in this world. (p. 60)

Thus, everything is restored by each Christian's active transformation process through personal renewal and eventually through this way Christians can transform the whole society to the goodness of God's creation.

Education: The Reformational Process

Even though Wolters did not mention the role and function of education clearly in his book, nonetheless, it is filled with many educational ideas and perspectives that Christian educators need to remember. He mentioned that education is "the instrument of God to restore all of creation" (p. 121). Therefore we can identify the characteristics of Christian education in several ways.

First, the purpose of education is reconciliation between the creator and sinful human beings. The beautiful and perfect creation that God created was alienated, entangled, and isolated from human beings because of sin. Even though humans have sinned and the image of God has been fractured, the residue of the image continued to exist in humanity after the Fall. God calls human beings, especially Christian teachers, to be his representatives on Earth to carry on what he left out through education. The goal of education is to restore the world to what God originally intended it to be and to regain the relationship between the Creator and the creatures.

Second, the essential goal of education is to build a community of shalom. God calls us to restore all areas of the world so that we can enjoy the original relationship with God along with a peaceful integration within the society of God's people. The community of shalom is a community of unity in which everything exists in the order as God created. Education functions as a key role to build this kind of community where redeemed people meet together in perfect harmony as God intended.

Therefore, all educational activities should be "missional" (p. 130).

Third, education is "a gradual and progressive process" (p. 91) and comprehensive in its scope, focusing on all dimensions of the created world. It restores all of life in all aspects of human beings including physical, cognitive, affective, and spiritual areas. Wolters boldly says: "Christians should actively engage in efforts to make every societal institution assume its own responsibility, warding off the inference of others. That, too, is participation in the restoration of creation and the coming of the kingdom of God" (p. 100).

Reformational Education Process

Education is a redirecting, renewing, and "restorative power" (p. 121). It is a reformational power of God to a world which deviated from the original goodness of creation. All educational activities should be aimed at preventing further perversion and turned toward God's original design. What does the reformational educational process look like? Wolters did not mention this directly. However, I can identify several steps and stages of the reformational education process.

First, education begins with identifying the goodness of God's creation in every dimension (structure). Educators need to clarify how those good creational structures have been perverted in particular cultures, contexts, and situations. The two critical questions that Christian educators should ask are: (1) what is the structure of a particular system and (2) how much has it deviated from the original state that God created? This is not an easy task for educators to discern; however, they need to be equipped with the appropriate skills and wisdom in order to identify the structure and direction of a particular system.

Second, the educational goals and intervention strategies need to be identified from the results of need analysis between the original goodness and the degree of perversion of a particular system or area. However, implementation strategies should be contextualized based on the particular cultures and societal backgrounds. The degrees of distortion and perversion (Wolters used the phrase idolatrous distortion) of good creation may not be the same to all cultures and societies. Wolters is right when he says, "The mission of God's people is to discern and embrace the good creational insights and

structure, and at the same time to reject and subvert the idolatrous distortion” (p. 137).

Finally, the result of education can be measured in two ways: the effect of self-renewal and the effect of societal transformation. The matured Christian needs to be able to discern and embrace the good creational insights and structure, which God created. However, accomplishing individual renewal only is not an adequate goal of education. We need to teach with the focus on societal renewal, changing social systems and institutions as God created. Individually and communally we are to be pointing to the kingdom of Jesus Christ. It is a gradual, long process, but a rewarding one. God calls his people to historical reformation in all areas and to a sanctification of creational realities from sin and its effects. What are the essential competencies of an effective Christian teacher? As Wolters identifies, some skills such as “discerning, interpreting, and applying creational norms” (p. 81) would be critically important.

Concluding Remarks

Wolters’ *Creation Regained* is a book about the Christian worldview as well as a book about Christian education. It is a book that Christian teachers should read carefully since all Christians, especially Christian teachers, have a special responsibility to reform the structures deformed by sin.