

Educational Philosophy

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Introduction

Why should we send our children to a Christian school? This important question cannot be answered unless we ask a more basic question: what should a Christian school aim to be? When we clearly understand the character and task of Christian education, we will be able to say why we should establish, encourage, and support Christian schools.

This philosophy briefly describes a Christian school by discussing, first of all, the central, controlling themes of the Bible: God's majesty and power as Creator of heaven and earth; the tragic results of humankind's fall into sin; and the redemption made possible through the death, resurrection, and ascension of God's Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible assures us, moreover, that, in spite of the effects of sin, the earth still belongs to the Lord: nothing in creation can escape His will. And so, the Christian life must be a life of knowing and doing the will of God everywhere.

These biblical themes must direct a Christian school's program and practice. As a result, its curriculum will be designed to lead students to see God's revelation in every dimension of the universe. Children, guided by loving and believing teachers, are to be respected as image bearers of God. Gently but firmly they must be led to walk in the way of biblical wisdom and discipleship. And so, the Christian school – along with the home, the church, and the Christian community – prepares "God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13).

The Bible and the Christian School

The Bible is the infallible Word of God. It presents a reliable and unmistakable account of the entire human situation. It tells us that God created heaven and earth and innumerable creatures. He created human beings in His own image and appointed them caretakers of all that He had made (Gen. 1:28, 2:15, Ps. 8:6-8, 115:16). But they rebelled against God, thus needing redemption (Gen. 3; Rom. 3). In response, the Lord sent His Son to die on the cross and to be raised from the grave, so that Christ might establish His rule over all of creation (Matt. 28:18). And now His followers are called to be agents of Christ's reconciliation in a broken world lost in sin and darkness (2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 1:20).

In describing the human situation, the Bible addresses education as well. How? In the first two chapters of Genesis, we read that the Lord created and appointed human beings to develop and conserve the earth. This implies the need to train younger generations to care for God's creation in His name and to His glory (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11). But sin distorted the human understanding of this divinely-given task. Instead of developing and preserving the earth, human beings have selfishly misused God's creation (Rom. 1). They have hated when they should have loved; they have exploited and abused instead of acting as stewards. All of this deeply affected the realm of education. No longer were younger generations educated for loving discipleship and selfless service; human ingenuity, instead of God's will, began to shape education.

Because of the work of Jesus Christ, “the old has gone, the new has come”, also in education (2 Cor. 5:17). And so, those who love God and want to serve Him recognize that the task of educating their children cannot be left to those who reject the Lord or pay Him only part-time allegiance (2 Cor. 6:14-15). Christians, called to be the Lord’s agents of reconciliation, want their children introduced to the fullness of the Christian vision and taught to live the Christian life (Eph. 6:4).

Thus, a Christian school is an institution whose policies, programs, and activities should be governed by the message of the Bible – schools that must recognize in every dimension the implications of Christ’s redemption.

The Earth Is the Lord’s

The Bible reveals God as the almighty Creator and Sustainer of heaven and earth. His creation tells of His power, His glory, and His majesty (Ps. 19:1). No part of His world or aspect of life stands apart from the all-encompassing will of God: “the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (Ps. 24:1).

This means that all components of human life and education are subject to the will of God. There cannot be, for example, parts of the curriculum that have nothing to do with the Christian faith. There cannot be neutral science or valueless fact. No part of life or of education, no matter how large or how small, can ever stand apart from God’s sovereign will. Because the earth is the Lord’s, all things must serve Him and respond to His will.

Controlled by this biblical perspective, the Christian school rejects the dualistic view that human life is divided into two separate, mutually exclusive realms – a spiritual realm of religion and morals where God’s Word can be heard, and a secular realm of independent science and reason to which the Word of God has nothing to say. The Bible makes it clear that God’s Word and Spirit speak to and require response from the whole of our life (Acts 17:28).

As a result, the difference between a Christian and non-Christian school is to be found not just in additional religious activities, moral teachings, or biblical studies, but in the curriculum, in instruction, in parent-teacher relations – in all of its operations. The Christian school approaches every part of its task from a biblical perspective.

Besides all forms of dualism, the Christian school rejects the notion that parts of God’s creation are to be avoided or regarded as inherently sinful. Because the earth is the Lord’s, Christians need to avoid nothing except sin and its effects (Rom. 6; 1 Cor. 10).

What is a Christian school? It is an institution that recognizes the Lord as the King of creation in every part of the educational enterprise. Before God, no self-proclaimed independence or neutral objectivity can exist.

The Beginning of Wisdom

The Bible, then, makes clear that we must wholeheartedly serve God and our neighbor (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5; Matt 22:37-40). In every sector of society, we are to be disciples of Jesus, joyfully bringing the message of redemption. We must hear and respond to the cry of the poor and the oppressed. We must discern and expose the evil that pervades the worlds of science, technology, politics, and the media. We must develop

alternatives to the rampant materialism, selfishness, and greed around us and among us (Matt. 28:20; 1 John 4:1-6). We must bring Christ's healing message to a world that is deeply affected and distressed by sin (Rom. 8:20-22).

Such discipleship requires wisdom. In fact, as God's people facing the world, we are expressly commanded to walk in wisdom (Col. 4:5). So, a Christian school must take our children along the path that leads from the beginning of wisdom to its fullness in Christ. What is wisdom? According to the Bible, a wise person both understands and does the will of God (Eph. 5:15-17). In other words, wisdom is not merely collecting and amassing theoretical or factual knowledge, nor is it simply gaining technical skills. Wisdom is knowledge and understanding deepened into spiritual insight and expressed in loving service (James 3:13). Wisdom originates in the fear of the Lord and is enhanced by faith, hope, love, knowledge, spiritual insight, and active discipleship. "The fear of the Lord," the Bible teaches, "is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding" (Ps. 111:10).

Thus, a Christian school is a place where Christian educators refuse to be satisfied with providing only factual knowledge and marketable skills. Rather, teachers in a Christian school seek to transform all activities and studies into an expression of biblical wisdom, training the students to walk as disciples of Jesus Christ.

By Way of Curriculum

The course of study, or curriculum, in a Christian school provides the central avenue by which our children are led to biblical wisdom. A distinctively Christian curriculum differs from that of a non-Christian school in at least three major respects. First, the curriculum in a Christian school should reflect and display God's dynamic design for the universe. All subjects must be understood not simply as cultural products or human inventions but as determined by God's work of creation. For example, biology and astronomy could not be studied if the Lord had not created plants, animals, the sun, the moon, and stars. The arts could not be practiced if the Lord had not created us to be artists or people who appreciate art. And so, the curriculum in a Christian school seeks to open eyes and minds and hearts not merely to an understanding of the world as described in textbooks, but also to the marvelous plan and design of God's creation. All subjects provide a glimpse into the workings and will of the Creator. They confront our children with the revelation of God.

A Christian curriculum, then, considers the Lord's plan and program for the world. For example, the physical sciences investigate the structure of the physical universe as fashioned by God's Word of power (Heb. 11:3). The life sciences study the wonderful diversity, construction, and function of God's creatures and their interaction with each other. The social sciences and language arts examine the ways in which the Lord intends human beings to relate to one another. Historical studies explore the ways in which cultures and civilizations have observed or disregarded God's will. The arts provide opportunities to respond to the beauty and design built into creation by the Creator Himself. The Bible, too, must be studied in a Christian school, for God's revelation in Scripture awakens and deepens our sensitivity to God's revelation in creation (Ps. 36:9).

Second, a Christian curriculum differs from a non-Christian curriculum by emphasizing divinely-ordained interrelatedness. The Lord did not create a chaotic, disjointed world. On the contrary, the universe, even after Adam and Eve's fall into sin with its distorting and fragmenting effects, continues to display astounding coherence and harmony. We see dependence and interdependence everywhere in our world. Since the components of the curriculum focus on dimensions of one coherent, God-ordained universe, the whole curriculum must exhibit coherence. Therefore, a Christian school ought not to over-specialize in one

area to the neglect of others. Instead, it should help our children become sensitive to the wonderful unity and diversity in God's creation.

Third, a Christian school's curriculum should be designed to prepare for wisdom. The primary reason for teaching subjects and skills is not to mold students into solid citizens or to prepare them for successful careers, important as these goals may be. Rather, a Christian school seeks to develop wise and responsible disciples of Christ. And so, a Christian curriculum must not only display God's design for all of reality, but also show how sin has affected it and how we are to work for restoration. Our children must understand the basic structure of our environment. They must sense God's order, design, and presence there. But they must also understand how sin has distorted it; they must understand the Lord's will for all areas of the creation, and be able to act accordingly. They must develop the beginning of wisdom, as they learn to address the issues of our time.

So, a Christian school is a school with a program that leads students deeper into God's wonderful creation; helps them understand and marvel at its unity, diversity, and coherence; and teaches them to follow Christ, counteracting the forces of sin wherever they are met.

Our Children

Who are the children served by such a distinctive curriculum? They are God's creatures, made in His image, and entrusted to us as gifts. Brought into the Christian home and the believing community, they are to be regarded as holy unto the Lord (1 Cor. 7:14). Therefore, parents must nurture those children in the life of faith and promote their love of God and neighbor. Parents lay the foundations of the Christian life in a child's early years. A Christian school expands a child's horizons, deepens their insight, improves their abilities, and guides them along the path that leads to wisdom.

Children, of course, are not bundles of disconnected parts. They are not composed of a separate spiritual part, a separate intellectual part, a separate emotional part, and a separate physical part. Children should not be treated as primarily intellectual beings to be educated abstractly and academically, or as predominantly social creatures whose only need is training in proper behavior. On the contrary, children, like the rest of us, are unified creatures before God (Gen. 2:7; Job 10:8-12). They must be attuned to His will and eager to obey it (Ps. 139:1-16; Matt. 22:37).

Although we can distinguish various dimensions of human life – such as the physical, the emotional, the intellectual, the social, the artistic, and the devotional – each dimension is always affected by all the others. Thus, in educating our children we must not train one dimension – say, the devotional dimension – in one way, and another dimension – such as the intellectual – in another way. For example, we cannot teach in Bible class that the universe is governed by God's will and in science class that it is controlled only by natural law. Nor can we meaningfully sing "Beautiful Savior, King of Creation" in chapel if in the laboratory we see no connection between chemistry and our Christian faith. If Christian education is not unified in its entire program, it may produce persons who follow the Lord in one part of their lives but serve other gods in other parts.

The Christian school, then, recognizes that our children are image bearers of God, and helps them to develop as complete persons whose lives are marked by love for the Lord and a desire to do His will.

Instruction and the Christian School Teacher

Teachers in a Christian school are concerned with proper methods of instruction. They try to avoid the misleading polarity between subject-oriented and pupil-oriented teaching. They are keenly aware of levels of curricular difficulty, of variation in gifts among students, and of stages of growth in maturity. Christian teachers should also recognize that they are called to instruct and guide young people who belong to Jesus Christ. They are dealing not with mere intellectual or social beings but with God's image bearers. Through loving, trusting, and obedient instruction, committed Christian teachers help our children learn how to serve God in every way. Christian teachers aim to develop young men and women who are not only virtuous, but also prepared to bring Christ's work of redemption to every part of culture.

Christian teachers must therefore be examples and models reflecting the love of Christ. They should exemplify genuine biblical wisdom, not only in the classroom, but in the other relationships in their life as well. Christian teachers must see their subject matter from a biblical perspective. With their colleagues, they ought to see themselves as members of a team, unitedly and purposefully pursuing the goal of biblical wisdom.

Thus, a Christian school is a place where teachers, despite their shortcomings and failings, assume the awesome task and responsibility of Christian education, where teachers humbly dedicate themselves, with joy and sometimes with pain, to walk in fellowship with God, with each other, and with the young people they instruct in the ways of the Lord.

The School in the Christian Community

The Christian school, the Christian home, and the Christian church all provide educational services. All three must cooperate closely in pursuing a common goal: to help young people live a life of biblical wisdom.

At the same time, we must recognize the distinct character and task of each institution. The primary function of the church is to build up the life of faith, by way of worship and the preaching of the Word. The home sets the religious direction for our children and provides a context of love and trust in which they can mature and achieve emotional security. The school, however, supplies specialized instruction that the church and the home do not provide. By means of a well-designed curriculum and careful instruction, a Christian school prepares our children to serve the Lord and fellow human beings as it leads them into a deepening understanding of the world.

Furthermore, the Christian school, the Christian home, and the Christian church are three distinct expressions of the larger Christian community. The Body of Christ consists of all those who confess that Jesus is Lord and that He is to be served in all of life (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12). Christians meet together on Sundays to hear the Word and to worship. They apply the Word in their marriages and families and homes, in their daily work, and in the way they educate their children. Just as the entire Christian community encourages and supports sound Christian churches and healthy family life, so the entire Christian community is responsible for providing effective Christian education for its children.

What is the Christian school? It is an indispensable partner with the home, the church, and other Christian agencies in establishing, enhancing, and increasing the Christian community as a bright light shining forth in a dark world (Matt. 5:14-16).

The Christian School and the World

Christians are to be in the world but not of the world (Mark 16:15; John 15:19, 17:14-18; Rom. 12:2). This holds true not only for individuals but also for Christian homes and churches, Christian organizations, and Christian schools. They must be in the world. They may not withdraw themselves and practice Christianity in isolation from the larger world. They must affirm that according to God's plan nothing in the universe is inherently evil, unchristian, or off limits. The earth is the Lord's and Christ's work of redemption has in principle lifted the curse of sin from creation, reconciling all things to God (Col. 1:19-20). A Christian school, then, must examine the wonder of God's revelation in all aspects of the creation. It must discern the will of the Lord for every sector of life.

At the same time, a Christian school must not be of the world; it must remain distinct. It recognizes, of course, that Christians are not the only people on this earth: Christians live side by side with unbelievers in the Lord's creation, and both are confronted by the revelation of God. Christian education must acknowledge that unbelievers, because they are surrounded by the ordinances of the Creator, make many contributions to the society. But a Christian school also recognizes that those who deny the Lord do not promote the truth in their life and work (Rom. 1:18-21). A Christian school continually evaluates all human activity and achievement, taking note of the effects of sin and helping students learn to distinguish between God's will and sinful responses.

The Christian school, then, stands in the world, as a testimony of God's grace. It surveys the entire creation, explores the effects of sin, and declares that its program is designed to lead to wisdom. It is a place where our children learn to understand and confront the world, following Christ in every area of life.

Conclusion

What is a Christian school? It cannot be a school in which the Bible plays only a marginal role or exercises only part-time or restricted control. Nor is it just a Bible school; though the Scripture determines the entire program in the Christian school, the curriculum moves beyond the study of the Bible to God's revelation in all of His creation. The distinctiveness of the Christian school does not result inevitably and automatically from church affiliation; in fact, many strong and flourishing Christian schools have no official relationship with a specific church.

What, then, is a full-fledged Christian school? It is an institution of learning where Christ is present and in charge. All of its operations are governed by solid Christian principles. The children there are instructed in biblical wisdom. That is why we send our children to the Christian school: as Christian parents and members of the Christian community, we are responsible for nurturing our children to be disciples of the Master.

Why the Christian school? Not to shield our children from sin. We know better. Sin is present no matter where we are. Then why a Christian school? Because our relationship to God demands that we, together with our children, travel the road that leads from the beginning of wisdom to its fullness in Christ; and when we pursue wisdom, we obey the Lord, and His blessing will reign (Prov. 2).