
The Role of the Christian School

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In the broad spectrum of Christian education, the vigorous growth of Christian schools is among the more significant developments during the past decade. Many new schools are starting, and many existing schools are expanding.

The Christian school is not designed to replace the church. Instead it seeks to supplement the responsibility of the church. Because the Christian school and the evangelical church share the same biblical philosophy of life, they seek to teach in harmony. By contrast, the non-Christian school and the evangelical church do not believe in the same philosophy of life. The church teaches a philosophy of life based on God, whereas the non-Christian school rejects revelation and teaches a philosophy based on man's reason. The result is confusion for students who receive widely divergent teachings at church and in school.

The Christian school also seeks to work cooperatively with the home. The school reinforces the home as the biblical direction for education. Instructions to parents are exercised by the teachers. During the school year, the teacher stands in the place of parents.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND PURPOSE

To comprehend the Christian school, its biblical basis must be understood. The school justifies its existence from the Bible. The reason the Bible is true, education—to be true—must be based on the Bible. In another way, since there is a revelation from God, a school must be based on that revelation and not on the reason of natural man. To establish the philosophical foundation of a school is to present a firm basis for a valid education. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge.

The following statements of educational philosophy, purpose, and objectives are typical of Christian schools:

1. God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things and the Father of all men.
2. God maintains control over His entire universe.
3. Because of sin, man tends to omit God and thus fails to acknowledge His knowledge to God, the Source of all wisdom.
4. Regeneration is by faith in Jesus Christ. True meaning and purpose are ascertained only in the light of His person, purpose, and promise.
5. God has revealed Himself in a general way in His creation and in a specific way in the Bible.
6. The home, the church, and the school should cooperate in the education of the child, promoting the student's spiritual, academic, social, and physical development.
7. The teacher stands in the place of the parents, the place of primary responsibility.
8. God has given differing abilities to each student. It is the duty of the school to develop these abilities to the maximum.

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sibility to challenge each child according to his ability and to seek to teach him at his academic level.

9. The Christian is not to be conformed to the world, but must accept his responsibility and his role in our democratic society.
10. The student's home, church, and school experience should be a preparation for a life of fellowship with God and of service to man.
11. The prayer of a righteous man has a powerful effect in the education of a child.

The purpose of Christian schools is to provide a sound academic education integrated with an evangelical Christian view of God and the world. The Bible is specific in stating the principles which underlie Christian education. Paul presented a comprehensive principle when he wrote of Christ, "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth. . . . And he is before all things, and by him all things consist" (Col. 1:16-17). And the writer of the fourth gospel said, "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:3).

There is an important difference between the Christian and the non-Christian viewpoints on a given subject. Even though knowledge is factually the same for both, no subject can be taught in the totality of its truth if the Creator is ignored or denied. Knowledge is purified by the recognition of God's place in it. No other approach to education can be entirely God-honoring, for parents and children.

Christian parents are responsible for the education of their children; and that education includes the counsels of God revealed in His world as well as those revealed in His Word. These parents want their children to be educated at home *and* at school with the consciousness that all truth is God's truth, including history and geography, science, music, and the arts, and that Jesus Christ is to be central in all learning and living.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The Christian school has numerous objectives in common with public schools and with other independent schools, although the Christian school sees these common objectives from the biblical perspective. It should be noted, however, that the Christian school has distinctive objectives which cannot be reached in the public schools, and which are not accepted by other independent schools. To illustrate, the first ten objectives in the following list are distinctive to the Christian school, while the last ten objectives would also be accepted by public and other independent schools:

1. To teach that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came to earth to die for our sins

2. To teach the necessity of being born again by the Spirit of God by receiving the Lord Jesus Christ
3. To teach that growth in the Christian life depends on fellowship with God through reading the Bible, prayer, and service
4. To teach that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is practically important
5. To teach the application of biblical ethics and standards of morality to every part of life
6. To teach students to manifest fairness, courtesy, kindness, and other Christian graces
7. To stress the urgency of world missions
8. To teach students to get along with non-Christians and with Christians who hold differing views
9. To relate the various subject matter areas with the truth of the Bible
10. To teach that God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and of man
11. To teach students to apply themselves to their work and to fulfill their responsibilities
12. To teach students to work independently and cooperatively
13. To teach students to think for themselves and to stand up for their personal convictions in the face of pressure
14. To develop the students' creative skills
15. To help develop the students' appreciation of the fine arts
16. To help the students develop effective communication skills
17. To teach the knowledge and skills required for future study or for occupational competence
18. To help students develop discretion in physical and mental recreation
19. To help students appreciate their national heritage and the current problems facing their country and the world
20. To show students their present civic responsibility and to prepare them for adult responsibility as citizens of their nation.

PROS AND CONS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Arguments favoring Christian schools include the following: (1) teachers are born again, dedicated, not merely holding a job; (2) parents have interest in the education of their children; (3) exceptionally good relations exist between the school and the home; (4) it provides a good student-teacher ratio for instruction; (5) in general, students do not have serious learning behavior problems; (6) unity is felt within the faculty; (7) good relations exist between the faculty and the administration; (8) enough problems exist that God must be sought and trusted daily; (9) the opportunity is given to learn from the Bible daily; and (10) academic work is integrated with the Christian faith.

Arguments against Christian schools include the following: (1) facilities inadequate or inferior; (2) programs are restricted, especially in music

athletics; (3) students are too sheltered; (4) students and teachers should be in other schools as witnesses; (5) the school is for students who cannot do well in other schools; (6) teachers are not highly qualified; (7) finances are too meager to provide quality education; (8) principals are not highly trained; (9) faculty and administrative turnover is excessive; (10) money spent on the school should go to foreign missions; and (11) the tuition costs are too high. Since each Christian school is independent, apart from a few which are a system, each must be considered on its own merits and limitations determined. Sweeping generalizations about the schools should be heard with caution.

STATISTICAL DATA

The United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) generates the most comprehensive and authoritative data on public schools. NCES surveys over the past few years indicate a period of growth for private elementary and secondary education. As indicated by Table 35.1, "Private education is assuming an increasing share of the American educational effort at the elementary and secondary levels."¹

TABLE 35.1
PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND ENROLLMENTS
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY LEVELS
U.S. TOTALS, FALL 1980 AND 1983

CATEGORY	TOTAL	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PERCENTAGE PRIVATE
Schools				
Revised 1980	110,400	85,900	24,500	22.2
Current 1983	112,700	85,000	27,700	24.6
Enrollment (In millions)				
Revised 1980	46.2	40.9	5.3	11.5
Current 1983	45.2	39.5	5.7	12.6

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, surveys of private and elementary schools; *Digest of Education Statistics, 1983-84* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1984); and *The Condition of Education, 1984* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1984).

Table 35.2 gives a further breakdown of the number of private schools, students, and teachers. Catholic private education accounts for the largest portion of American private education activity. However, "other affiliated" and "unaffiliated" segments are increasing, whereas the Catholic share is decreasing.

¹U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, Bulletin, *Private Elementary and Secondary Education, 1983 Enrollment, Teachers and Schools*, December 1984.

TABLE 35.2
1983 NCES PRIVATE SCHOOLS SURVEY

CATEGORY	NUMBER
Total schools	27,700
Not religiously affiliated	8,000
Affiliated-Catholic schools	9,700
Affiliated-other schools	10,000
Total enrollment	5,715,000
Total FTE teachers	337,200

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, surveys of private and elementary and secondary schools; *Digest of Education Statistics, 1983-84* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1984); and *The Condition of Education, 1984* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984).

PATTERNS OF ORGANIZATION

The three main organizational patterns for Christian schools are listed and described as follows:

THE PARENT-SOCIETY SCHOOL

This school is started by a group of parents, perhaps with interested friends or relatives, who form a legal corporation for the purpose of operating the school. To be eligible for membership in the society of corporation, a person must subscribe to the school's doctrinal platform and make a minimum financial contribution annually. The corporation, frequently called the school society, elects a board of trustees from among the society members. Since all members must agree to the school's doctrinal platform, dissidents do not sit on the board. The board is responsible for operating the school.

The school property belongs to the society. Typically, the great majority of corporation members are parents; thus this organization is often called a parent-controlled school. Only parents who fulfill the requirements for membership, however, belong to the corporation. It is possible, then, to be a parent and not a corporation member. Only corporation members vote on school matters.

THE CHURCH-RELATED SCHOOL

This school is owned and operated by a local church. It is governed by one of the existing church boards, or, more likely, a new board—with some representation from present boards—is established to operate the school. The church and the school are used jointly by the church and by the school and are owned by the church.

This type is also called a parochial school. Most Christian schools

lished recently are in this group. There are fewer state regulations on this type because of the favored position which the church has with the state. In recent years, some parent-controlled schools have had court cases with the state, while similar schools owned by local churches were not involved in litigation.

THE PRIVATELY-OWNED SCHOOL

This school is owned and operated by an individual, by a family, or by a group of people. It may or may not have a board. If it has a board, that board is usually advisory only, for the school is really run by the owner or owners. Unlike the first two types, this school may be a proprietary school. Property belongs to the owner. Policies, procedures, and standards are established by the owner.

Each organizational pattern has advantages and disadvantages. Since organizational structure has lasting consequences, it is important for steering committees of proposed schools to investigate organizational patterns carefully. Whatever the organizational pattern, the essentials for quality education are the same for any Christian school.

ESSENTIALS FOR QUALITY CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Christian school administrators accept the responsibility to operate sound academic schools. To put it simply, no child should have to take an academic penalty to get a Christian school education. A second-rate education, though based on the true philosophy of life, is unacceptable.

The following essentials for quality education are each important; thus no attempt has been made to rank them in order of importance: (1) a primary desire to see God honored through the education offered to children and young people; (2) a clear understanding of the philosophy, purposes, and objectives of the Christian school; (3) a principal or headmaster with leadership ability who is qualified spiritually, academically, biblically, and administratively to be the chief administrator; (4) a school board which works vigorously within clearly defined responsibilities; (5) a qualified faculty, born again, trained in the academic field for which each is hired, trained in Bible; (6) a low turnover rate in the faculty and in the administration; (7) a program of prayer by faculty, students, teachers, parents, and board which permeates the entire school program; (8) a financial stability which provides operational and capital improvement funds; (9) a selected student body whose educational needs can be met by the school; (10) a large enough enrollment to keep teachers from being spread too thin, for too many lesson preparations are required when several grades are combined in the same classroom; (11) adequate salaries to allow teachers and administrators to work without constant worry about the financial status of their families; (12) complete trust that God will do everything that He has promised in His Word, and the willingness to take steps by faith by

individuals and by the corporate school body.

The main essential for quality education is the teacher. Buildings and equipment are necessary, but are secondary. Some of the qualifications for teachers and for administrators will now be considered.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

Christian schools need teachers who are spiritually qualified. Teachers are to be born again persons to whom God has given the gift of teaching, who take their natural place in the classroom with children. They must have prepared in Bible and a continuous desire to study God's Word.

Teachers must be able to lead students to Christ, be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, and be wholesome, exemplary Christians. Their own lives must be lively and growing as they experience God in their personal lives. They must know how to pray and how to ask in faith for the wisdom that is from above.

Other qualifications include these: self-disciplined, conscientious, hard working, respectful of authority, able to function as a team worker, honest, possessing a sense of humor, patient, enduring, happy, not a murmurer, enjoying the fruit of the Spirit, and walking in the Spirit.

Christian schools need teachers who are academically qualified, well trained and competent in the content of the subjects they teach and in varied methods of instruction. Teachers also need an understanding of child growth and development. They must be willing to continue their education, earning at least a master's degree. Academic qualifications are essential because the quality of instruction will affect about sixty years of the child's subsequent life, the Lord tarrys. A Christian school should never offer a contract to a teacher to work in an area for which he is not trained.

To be properly prepared for teaching, Bible college graduates need training in academic subject areas, while graduates of other colleges need training in Bible. Since the school purposes to integrate a sound academic education with the Christian view of God in the world, both academic and Bible training are essential. There are no shortcuts. This preparation takes time, usually more than four years.

Christian school principals should meet all the spiritual and academic qualifications for teachers plus at least three years of teaching experience before becoming principals. Additional qualifications for principals include the following: (1) the spiritual gift of administration; (2) leadership ability; (3) graduate study in school administration, preferably in Christian school administration; (4) courage; (5) vision; (6) endurance; (7) the ability to work with adults as well as with children; (8) fiscal responsibility; and (9) the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:2-6, even though the school is not a church.

The greatest need in the Christian school movement today is of

principals. Men and women are needed to train for administration to lead these schools to become strong institutions, spiritually and academically.

Schools need teachers and principals for whom the Christian school is their life ministry and not a stepping stone to another job, nor simply one of two jobs. God is raising up teachers and principals who are planting their lives in this field of Christian service. Some are beginning teachers; others are experienced teachers and principals who are being called out of other school systems into God's school system, where Jesus Christ and the Bible are central in every aspect.

CURRICULUM

Christian schools give serious attention to curriculum development, for they are academic schools, not "vacation Bible schools" operating for nine or ten months. Students take the same standardized achievement tests that are given to students from other schools. Christian school graduates compete for college entrance just like anyone else and are accepted on the basis of their educational preparation.

Bible instruction has a central place in the curriculum. Most other subjects are taught at the same grade level as the other schools in the community to facilitate the transferring of students in and out of the school. The Christian school has complete control, however, in the choice of books and materials for each subject. This is an important factor in curriculum development.

The difference in Christian schools is not so much in the subjects offered, but in the way in which these subjects are taught from the Christian perspective. The late Frank Gaebelin, headmaster emeritus of the Stony Brook School, Stony Brook, New York, expressed it in this way, "All truth is God's truth." This refers not only to the Bible but to all academic truth. All truth is ultimately from God.

A current trend in Christian schools is to develop a curriculum which is Christian in actual content. It appears that this trend may grow. New materials are being developed, although slowly. The development of these materials is difficult because the Christian schools are independent and do not agree on what constitutes a Christian curriculum. This is analogous to evangelical churches which do not agree on what constitutes the proper Sunday school curriculum.

The schools are careful to fulfill any curriculum requirements of the department of education in the state in which the school is located.

BUILDINGS AND EQUIPMENT

The days of Mark Hopkins sitting on a log with his student are gone. Christian school buildings do not have to be luxurious, but they should meet recognized standards for good school buildings from the standpoint of room sizes, health, safety, and sanitation. Outdoor play space should also meet

recognized standards for that size school. Schools must obtain what permits are required in that community for use of the buildings.

Schools held in existing buildings which were not designed for them have problems. Some of these problems can be resolved, others are often difficult to operate a school in facilities not designed for children.

Some churches are building their Christian education facilities at school specifications. Facilities are shared by the school and by the church, thus gaining efficient use of the property. This is an encouraging trend. In such an approach, care must be taken to provide proper outdoor play areas.

When schools build new facilities, the recognized planning principles determine the school's program, then design the plant for that program.

Equipment for Christian schools should be sufficient in variety and quality for the school to accomplish its stated objectives. Schools need the financial stability required for the annual purchase of equipment and supplies. Because a school is Christian does not mean that it can operate on inadequate buildings, insufficient equipment, or sparse supplies. The relationship between facilities, equipment, and the quality of education is determined by a school, whether or not that school is Christian.

ROLE OF THE CHURCH

The school sees its work as supplemental to the evangelical church. The church does not often feel that way about the school. This is unfortunate. It may be due to the following reasons: (1) the school may attract members away from the church; (2) division may occur in the church because of the school; (3) there may be misunderstanding of the philosophy and objectives of the school.

The role of the church in a church-related school is clearly illustrated by the Norfolk (Va.) Christian School, which is sponsored by the Tabernacle Church. Church membership and fellowship depend on relationship and fellowship with Christ, not on enrollment in that church's school. The Tabernacle Church teaches the sovereignty of God over every aspect of life, including family life, and teaches Christian family living, with the result that many parents bring their children to the school. The church and the school work harmoniously in their programs for the growth of the students and of the parents.

The role of the church to the other kinds of Christian schools includes the following: (1) prayer; (2) financial help; (3) student enrollment; (4) cooperation and understanding.

Regardless of organizational structure, all Christian schools are part of the Body of Christ, His church. It should be recognized that the Body of Christ profits when any child or young person receives an education in which Jesus Christ is central. Believers do not choose a church on the basis of the preacher's degree, the architecture, or the equipment.

building, but on the truth that is taught and preached in the church. Similarly, churches should recognize that a school should be chosen in the same way and should help support Christian schools exhibiting high standards. Many churches are indifferent and some are even negative toward these schools. But these attitudes appear to be changing as the times become more evil.

The schools must do a better job of interpreting themselves to the churches and not become defensive or uncommunicative. Strong bonds need to be built between the churches and the schools. They are not to be competitors.

AN EVALUATION

The Christian school is a testimony to God's name in elementary and secondary education. Every major court decision in the past decade has gone against allowing Bible reading and prayer as religious exercises in tax-supported schools. Even with electives in philosophy of religion and the Bible as literature, public schools are far from being Christianized. Christian schools are the answer to the dilemma of education.

New schools need time to become established, to purchase property, to develop a strong faculty, to become accredited. This often takes years, during which the school is open to criticism. There is much hope, however, because the schools are based on the true foundation, the Bible, which foundation is lacking in other schools, regardless of their buildings or reputations.

The need for Christian schools will undoubtedly increase noticeably in this decade. It is apparent that the enemy is coming into education like a flood, and it is equally obvious that the Lord will raise up His standard in education too. As older teachers retire from public schools during this decade and are replaced by beginning teachers who do not accept the life values and standards of their predecessors, public schools will change radically and quickly. This trend has already started.

To serve God as a Christian school teacher or principal is a worthy use of one's life. There are many positions open now, and there will be in the future. These schools offer an unusual opportunity to affect children and young people for God.

SUMMARY

The rapid growth in the Christian school movement is among the more significant developments within the body of Christ today. The presupposition on which the Christian school educational philosophy is built is that "if Christ is to be preeminent in all things, that must include a child's education." Christian school educators are convinced that the Christian school, the evangelical church and the Christian home should work together. The ultimate goal of all three institutions is to help the student develop a Christ-centered world and life view.