

# THE CHRISTIAN CONTEXT OF EDUCATION

From a submission by Carey College to  
the Education Select Committee of the New Zealand Parliament  
14 March 2001

Of such importance is the Christian context of education to us that we would ask the Committee to consider our submissions in the light of our faith. It is a faith in God the Father as Lord over all, the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour of men and the Holy Spirit as the Guide for all truth. It is a faith that sees the Bible as the necessary, complete and sufficient authority for all life and faith.

Our Christian faith is such as compels us to ensure that all the education of our children is within the context of that faith. We believe that God is the Creator and Ruler of creation, time and space. All that children study, they study as part of our Christian practice. In our teaching we aim to impart knowledge and skill - but that teaching is as much a practice of our faith as is prayer, and the children's activities in academic areas are as religious as their Bible reading.

## Parental Responsibility

We believe that God holds parents responsible for the education of their children. The instruction "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." <sup>Ephesians 6:4</sup> reinforces the earlier injunction to teach God's word to our children in every situation: "Impress them [God's laws] on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." <sup>Deuteronomy 6:7</sup>

## The Religious Nature of Education

The foundation for education is found in Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Everything a child learns is about God, what he has made and what he governs. God made everything, he sustains and directs it by his power and wisdom, and we derive our being from him. In particular, man is created in the image of God. The main goal of education is to teach children to glorify, serve and enjoy their Creator. It is only as God is revered and known that any fact is properly understood or able to be wisely used. Every aspect of teaching is in obedience to God, every subject is considered and taught from the viewpoint that God is. To try to know anything without this perspective is to distort what is true. When, for example, we study history, it should be to see what God has been doing and how he regards the response of men to his law.

If our children are taught that there are subjects or parts of life where the knowledge of God makes no difference, that there are fields of knowledge in which he does not need to be specially honoured, we darken their hearts. Notable English educator, **Sir Walter Moberly**, remarking on attempts to achieve religious neutrality in universities said, "It is a fallacy to suppose that by omitting a subject you teach nothing about it. On the contrary you teach that it is to be omitted, and that it is therefore a matter of secondary importance."

In the same stream of thought **Edward J Murphy**, Matthews Professor of Law at the University of Notre Dame, asserts “Basic faith is the principal determiner of educational content, and people seek to teach or have taught that which they believe to be important ... In every educational system or philosophy there is posited an ultimate source of knowledge, and there are fundamental presuppositions which largely determine the particulars ... Invariably, one will see God as the source of knowledge and meaning in the universe and in events, or one will see himself or a particular collection or grouping of individuals as that source. Thus, all educational philosophy will be God-centred or man-centred.”

## **Christian Education a Necessity**

With such convictions we cannot permit our children to be educated within any system that denies our faith. A Christian schooling, whether at home or in an institution, is not merely a desirable option for us – it is a necessity born out of conviction. Yet it is this very conviction that also ensures we provide an education in knowledge, skill, character training, and respect for law and order and family life that enables our children to contribute constructively to the community in adult life.

Clearly such an education can only be provided when teachers have been trained to teach within the context of that faith. We are therefore committed to the training and employment of teachers who have a high degree of mastery of the subjects they teach, excellence of skill in the teaching task, personal commitment to a biblical-Christian perspective and who embody the Christian faith so as to be examples to those they teach.

## **The State’s Limited Role**

We believe the state is ordained by God and given an authority to which we must submit. We teach our children to respect and obey it. That authority is not however absolute. The State is responsible, as the servant of God, to ensure its citizens enjoy justice and peace. It is a coercive authority, but its power is expressly limited to the punishing of evil and the rewarding of good. It has neither the ability nor mandate to prescribe morality; rather its function is judicial. Accordingly we do not believe the State has a legitimate role in education - nevertheless we have a commitment, clearly evidenced by our record, to work in harmony with the State so far as is possible. While we have never recognised the State’s authority over parental choice to educate within the context of their faith, we have maintained open and co-operative relationships with education authorities and will continue to do so.