

In God's World: Introduction

Adapted from *In God's World*

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In God's World is the basic Syllabus Statement for Carey College

A Christian school is one where Christian teachers teach a Christ-centred curriculum. There are many Christian teachers, but the greatest difficulty in establishing a Christian school is in breaking from the philosophy of this age in which man is the centre of existence.

A Point of View

The pagan philosophy of the modern world is that life is lived for the benefit of man. In this view values are made and modified by man for his own satisfaction. It follows that the prime function of the Christ-less school is to serve man. Both its methods and content are man centred. The secular school teaches by both precept and practice that man exists for himself – he is the arbiter of his life and master of his destiny.

The Christian rejects this view, for God has revealed to him in the Bible, his Word, the only true perspective. He knows that man, and all creation, is for the glory of God alone. He knows that God is both Creator and Sovereign of everything. He knows that man is called to know, enjoy and serve God, and so to glorify him.

Men born in a state of natural rebellion refuse God's call and must ultimately glorify him under his righteous judgement. Yet the message of the Christian gospel is that God in Christ sets aside this rebellion and establishes a fellowship with himself. A prime task of every Christian is to show God's way of reconciling man to himself.

This implies significant responsibilities for the teachers. They are to apply God's word to their pupils; they are to point them to Christ as Saviour and encourage a living faith in him; and they are to guide them in the joyful service of their Saviour. Put another way, it is the calling of the teacher to introduce children to God's world, to show them how the revelation of God is relevant to every sphere of human life, and to equip them with knowledge and skill that enables them to worship him in every thought and action now and for the rest of their lives.

Parents, Church and School

It is of prime importance that we recognise the relationship between parents, school and church. The responsibility for nurturing, training and teaching children rests with parents. The role of the school is one of helping parents train children in the way they should go.

It is beyond the resources and abilities of most parents to fulfil this responsibility on their own. But the school is able to help make up this lack. The school must never go beyond this basic function. It has no scriptural mandate to over-ride or ignore parental precept and practice. It is there to help parents in the God-given role of leading children to maturity.

This responsibility of parents for educating their children must be underscored. The Bible repeatedly directs parents to nurture their children in godliness, and children for their part are taught to honour their parents so that they may learn truth and live righteously. However, there is no such direct biblical warrant for the school. The need to educate fully implies and admits the legitimate help of specialists, but it is the parents who always have the ultimate responsibility for the child's education.

At the same time due recognition must be given to the gifts and calling of teachers. They are called and fitted by God to a calling that is not shared by all but is to be used in the service of all. As a result they have a knowledge and skill that in their field can supplement that of parents. Teachers have a special area of competence and parents are wise to look to the school for guidance.

Parents have the responsibility for the nature and direction of the child's schooling, for the content of what is learnt and for the approach and methods used. To enable that responsibility to be properly exercised, schools must plainly state their approach, method and curriculum content so that parents can choose a school that answers to their consciences, and responds to their insights. After this choice is made the way must be open for free discussion about each child's progress and about modifications to the programme. The possibility must always be open for either parents or school to opt out of the contract when either party believes the school is no longer supporting the parental position.

It follows that parents must be intimately involved in their children's schooling, and for its part, the school must not only be always open to the parents but must maintain a continuous fellowship with them.

While the school is responsible to the parents and serves them primarily, it has a secondary relationship to the church. Teachers in a Christian school must be living the Christian faith with integrity and consistency, which among other things means they must be members of a local church, within its nurture and contributing to its life. But more than this, the Christian school is teaching the Christian faith. Because of this, the school has a direct link with the church (in the sense of the whole body of Christ) and the church has a responsibility to the school.

The church must enunciate the faith in a manner that will guide and support the school, and its teaching ought to inform Christian school curricula. It may not be the responsibility of a local church to run a Christian school, but in that Christian schooling is a Christian ministry, churches must support and encourage families whose faithfulness to Christ enjoins them to use Christian schools; and the schools for their part need to encourage churches not only by way of information but by supporting their families in fully engaging in their churches.

There should be a close-knit working together of the school, home and church in the development and implementation of the school curriculum.

A Radical view

There have been many attempts to develop Christian curricula. Often those fail to bridge the gap between the basic principles outlined above, and their embodiment in content and practice in the classroom. What passes for Christian schooling is all too often indistinguishable from secular schooling, apart from a little superficial religion. Yet because the philosophy of the Christian position is radically different from that of the secular-humanist, we must expect that both the content and the practice of Christian education is radically different.

If all we do is adopt a conservative stance, we fail. We fail if we simply look for text books that are acceptable, or adopt a Christian moralism or values system within the syllabus. It is not enough to purge our classrooms of humanist views of life, censor references to evolution, and utter prayers twice-daily. The Christian educator must work out his faith so that the method and content, the life and product of his school is God-centred and God-glorifying in every way.

That is not to say that the world has nothing to teach us about education. Indeed, in what follows you may detect some of the elements of various schools of educational theory and practice. It is likely that some identical topics will be studied in secular and Christian schools, and that there will be similarity if not at times identity in methods of teaching. In God's grace unbelievers have insights into truth even if those insights are distorted by their unbelief: Christian teachers can learn from unbelievers! But for the Christian educator the Bible becomes the sole criterion for adopting or rejecting a viewpoint, a method, a practice.

In God's World

This brings into focus the two foundational principles of a Christian curriculum: God is the source of all knowledge, and the world is God's.

God, by his nature and revelation, gives meaning to knowledge and veracity to fact. God, who created all things upholds and rules them. Unless this is acknowledged nothing can be truly known, nor can anything be stated meaningfully. Whatever is taught in secular schooling – whether dogmatic facts or constructivist “creation” of personal knowledge – has no ultimate meaning and lacks truth without a frame of reference centred on and held together in the Sovereign Creator-God. The truly Christian curriculum structures all knowledge, skill and experience upon the foundation and within the context of a personal knowledge of the Lord God of Heaven and earth through Christ. Every aspect of schooling must be thought through in this context.

Equally important is the principle that the world is God's. He rules it so that the laws of creation operate day by day. He also rules so completely that the time, place and conditions of our existence are according his purposes. This means that both the child and the teacher are precisely where God ordained they should be. This affects the context of teaching, but it also affects the content of teaching. In recognising God's sovereignty over life we must recognise the call to teach the child about the particular corner of the world God has placed him in and is calling him to live faithfully in.

The corner of creation a child is placed in is comprised of people, places, events, history, culture, animals, plants, geography and so on. Such a microcosm of the world is in some measure unique to each child. But each child is also in a world that is largely shared. The successful curriculum will be one that can guide the teacher in identifying each child's corner of creation and within a fully Christian context, train up that child along with the others in his school, to know and serve faithfully.

Just as the content of the curriculum must reflect God's sovereignty and depend upon God's self-revelation, so the method of teaching depends on God who makes things known and has created and sustains what can be known. Even what man discovers is already known to God and made knowable by God: man only discovers what God knows and shows. It is hardly surprising then that the Bible speaks of teaching children in terms of instruction, direction, discipline and application. Parents and teachers have a heritage of knowledge and skill to pass on to children with deliberation and structure, reflecting God's way of teaching, and depending on the grace God has promised.