

FOUNDATIONS

FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

by Michael L Drake

There is wonder and joy in teaching with Christ at the centre of every lesson. To do this the teacher, whether a parent at home or a professional in school, must begin with the right foundations. Here are seven basic foundations for Christian education.¹

1. KNOWLEDGE

God is the Creator and Sustainer of everything that can be known or known about. The search for knowledge, skill and belief is the search to know the mind of God.

God is Sovereign. As such he alone is the self-existent one who sets the standards of truth and righteousness. He alone governs all of life and history. He is beyond our comprehension; while man is the crown of his creation, we are still subject to his rule, his laws and his judgement.

We are dependent upon God for everything, including knowledge. In God's grace he has spoken to man. Man is born with a knowledge of God and creation displays his glory – but neither of these is able to free man from the bondage of his selfishness. Bound in sin, man naturally centres his thought, life and worship on himself. It is by means of the spoken revelation – the Word of God, the Bible – that man can learn from God.

The Bible contains the total revelation of God to man. All that we need to know about God and how we are to live in his service is found in its pages.² It is the complete and sufficient declaration of the mind of God for man. To know truth, men must subject their minds to the Bible.

Jesus Christ is the clearest revelation of the nature and mind of God. For this reason the King of Kings is also called 'The Word'. The Bible contains the only reliable and infallible record of that revelation.

When God speaks, declaring what is true, he does so through the Bible. It is the Bible, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit that gives light to the individual's learning and experience. This is why Solomon said 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.'³

No 'fact' however simple, is neutral. Depending on how it is taught and the context in

¹ This is an introductory text that assumes those who wish to understand these issues better or who wish to examine their development from the Scriptures will undertake further study. Note also, that distribution in this format is limited. The edition prepared for public distribution is in booklet format.

² Or in the words of the *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* "The sum total of God's revelation concerning all things essential to His own glory, and to the salvation and faith and life of men, is either explicitly set down or implicitly contained in the Holy Scripture." On the basis of the light the Bible sheds, man should – indeed must – explore and extend his knowledge with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Bible contains all that is necessary and sufficient for life in God's service: whatever else is learnt can be expected to help and enhance that service, but it is never necessary, nor sufficient.

³ Proverbs 9:10

which it is put, it will either led toward God, or away from him. It is for this reason that a Christian education is necessary for successful teaching. Wisdom and understanding begin, not with knowledge but with God-centredness. Without such an orientation everything a child learns tends to enhance his self-centredness and pride. Such self-centredness is to be replaced with humility and submission to God.

2. PURPOSE

The Christian school exists to glorify God by helping parents provide a Christian education for their children. The Bible teaches that God holds parents responsible for the teaching of children.

The school is a pragmatic institution, permitted but not required. The home, the church and the state are institutions ordained by God with specific functions, but the school has no such mandate.

In God's order, the state has no role in education. Every attempt to exercise governmental authority over the Christian school – whether through regulation, licensing, inspection or funding – represents a denial of God's order.

Parents exercise their responsibility and authority when they choose the form of education and supervise its delivery. The Christian school is to offer help with that education without removing parental responsibility. It does so by providing clear details of its curriculum, maintaining an open school for parents, responding constructively to their desires for their children and ensuring parents are free to choose a different way at any point.

3. OBJECTIVES

The Christian school aims to help parents raise their children in the training and instruction of the Lord.⁴

The first objective is to bring children to a knowledge of Christ as their Saviour and Lord. The school should confront the child directly with his sinfulness, need of repentance and need of faith in Christ.⁵ Beyond this, the nature of the schooling provided – the example of godly teachers and the Christian context and direction of every lesson – should constantly challenge the child with the inconsistency of attempting to live without Christ.

The second objective is to bring the child to maturity: self-disciplined and able to live a vital, Christ-like life in a sinful world. This requires training in self-denial and service. It requires the teaching of a solid foundation of skills, knowledge and beliefs. It requires helping children to understand the biblical basis for what they learn, and to understand the conflicting philosophies and beliefs that permeate the whole of modern culture.

The goal of the Christian school is to bring up children who are faithful to God and effective citizens in the modern world. Such children will serve God with joy, confronting their calling, work and recreation – along with sin and unbelief – with compassion and Christian action. They will be known as those who honour God and love their fellows with practical Christian care.

4. METHODS

Firstly, the Christian school acknowledges its total dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, it conducts all its teaching in a spirit of humility and prayer. While there is no method it can depend upon if the Holy Spirit will not work in the lives and minds of teachers and students, he can be depended upon to honour his promises. Confident, faithful prayer will therefore be the hallmark of the teaching method employed in the Christian school.

Secondly, the Christian school declares what is true, what must be known and how to perform particular skills. God has gifted each new generation with an heritage to be passed on from its forebears. The school must declare this body of knowledge, skills and beliefs effectively. To leave children to find out such things for themselves, to know only what they discover, to build their lives only on what they experience, is to steal their inheritance and enslave their minds. The Christian school therefore rejects forms of child abuse commonly practised in schools that abandon children to their own experiences alone or to the whims of a society without transcendent standard of truth or right.⁶

It therefore follows, thirdly, that the Christian school is an intensely personal place. Teachers and students alike are people who in bearing God's image may know, may value, and are responsible for their actions. Teachers are people who have a heritage of knowledge, skill and belief to pass on to people who can learn from them; and students, building on that learning may open and explore new fields of learning and service. Teachers and students alike must adapt and build upon this personal interaction by

⁴ Ephesians 6:4

⁵ It is important to note here that the school is not a church and has a different function: while the school will engage in evangelistic witness, its primary activity is not to replicate church ministries but to provide an education that while equipping the child with knowledge, skill and belief, thereby confronts him with his need of salvation in Christ.

⁶ The emptiness of existentialism, the vanity of Constructivism and the selfishness of behaviourism are all rejected.

which God is honoured and godly social behaviour developed.⁷

Fourthly, the Christian school will inculcate beliefs, knowledge and skills by explanation, practice, drill and memorisation. This involves a commitment to high academic standards and high standards in the application of skills and crafts.

Fifthly, the Christian school will give a biblical basis for what is taught. It will give reasons that not only show children why certain things are right, but will enable them to make their own judgements in the light of the Bible when faced with new situations.⁸

Sixthly, it will test and measure the effectiveness of its teaching and the progress and abilities of its students.

Seventhly, it will show children how this learning applies to the world. On the basis of what has been taught, children will examine the real world. Man idolises both himself and his experience. In this way he limits knowledge and truth to the narrow and fallible experience of each individual. Schools that 'teach' on this basis shelter children from the real world and deny them knowledge of reality. In the Christian school, children are fully trained and equipped to be exposed to the real world and experience it in all its diversity and richness. Thus practical experience is built upon a foundation of knowledge.

Finally, the Christian school will entice children to work, learn and serve with joy. While recognising that work, learning and service sometimes need discipline, it will present its teaching so that as far as is possible children will want to learn and will value what is taught.

5. AUTHORITY

The Christian school derives its authority from two sources: God and parents under God.

Its authority comes primarily from God. It is his requirement that Christians separate their families from the world, carry the responsibility for educating their children, and ensure that the teaching is distinctively Christian. The school is accountable to God, and must conduct itself by his standards.

In the second place, the Christian school has an authority delegated to it by parents. In contracting the school to provide part of the education of their children, parents delegate authority to act on their behalf. It should be noted, firstly, that this authority originates in God: he gives parents authority over their children which is subsequently delegated to the school. Secondly, the parents retain ultimate responsibility. The school does not operate in 'loco-parentis' (in the place of parents), but on behalf of parents. Thus the school is accountable to parents in every one of its actions.

6. DISCIPLINE

Right and wrong are measured by God's unchanging righteousness. The mature student will be self disciplined – that is, he will willingly subject himself to God's word in every thought and action. In contrast, anti-Christian schools establish beliefs on the changing whims of the individual or the social elite of the day. Such abuse of children leaves them without a lasting foundation of beliefs and prey to the machinations of the most persuasive.

The Christian school recognises the gulf that exists between God's righteousness and

⁷ In this, de-personalised behaviourist and mechanistic views of the universe are rejected.

⁸ This necessitates a rejection of legalism: children must learn how to make judgements, on the basis of biblical principles, about situations not previously encountered.

the natural sinfulness of man. It will recognise that its teachers are tainted with sinfulness; while they are to be those who know the cleansing and forgiveness of Christ, there will remain a propensity to sin. Teachers therefore need direction, oversight and discipline.

The Christian school recognises that disorder and disharmony are the result of sin. It will therefore endeavour to work with an environment and curriculum of order, structure, control and harmony.

The Christian school recognises that the child needs discipline. Born in sin, children naturally tend to think and do what is wrong. The school will provide structure and order that will correct this. Children will need reward, encouragement, correction, rebuke and punishment to teach them right values and train them in right action. Such discipline will always be given with compassion and justice. Its goal is not only an awareness of God's commitment to judge sin and reward righteousness, but to bring the child to self discipline.

7. RESOURCES

The Christian school must present every aspect of its teaching in a Christian framework. It must therefore seek to utilise resources that are most effective in presenting a Christian world and life view.

The teacher is the most important resource of the school. The teacher must be committed in philosophy and practice to a Christian perspective, and must be able to present his teaching within that context. The Christian teacher must be able to utilise even non-Christian materials in a Christian way.

It follows, that while Christian curriculum materials are desirable, they are neither necessary nor an assurance of Christian teaching. It is what the teacher does with other resources – how he uses the curriculum – that determines the nature of the schooling.

The Bible is the key resource available to the teacher. It is as its light is shed on each and every study that the natural world and life have meaning.

Beyond that every endeavour must be made to utilise Christian curricula materials where academic standards and quality content can be matched with an entirely God centred approach.