

Diana Reynolds

Duane Daniel

ACSI Philosophy Course

January 7, 2010

Christian Philosophy of Education

We live in an era where new-age philosophies and humanistic ideas are being taught in the public schools. Our young people are constantly bombarded with secular, anti-God messages on a daily basis. In a society like this, how is a Christian school supposed to act? It should be obvious that a Christian school should be different, but how specifically should education be addressed in a Christian setting? There are three basic tenets of education that must be considered when discussing a Christian philosophy of education. First, education is the responsibility of the parent. Education must also be God centered, and education must be comprehensive in teaching both general revelation and special revelation. In addition to these three basic tenets, there are numerous goals for the Christian educator and the Christian school to strive for in educating students.

When God was teaching his people about his decrees, he said to the Israelites “teach them [the decrees] to your children and to their children after them” (Deuteronomy 4:9, NIV). God did not say anything to the effect of setting up a government run organization to pass on the knowledge of the law. The fact is that God told His people to teach *their own* children. He put the burden of education on the parent, whereas “the government, whose real biblical responsibility is to see that public justice is done, has no prerogative to control education” (Greene 12).

Even though, biblically, the government has no real control over education, most Christians “seem to regard secular school education as acceptable for their children” (Greene XII). What this does is take the burden of education from the parent, and the responsibility is given to an organization not worthy of the task. Since “God has given parents the primary responsibility for the nurture of their children... Christian parents are required to ensure that their children learn about the world and their place and task in it in a way that celebrates the lordship of Christ over all creation” (Edlin 74). The Christian should consider two options above the option of public schooling: home schooling, or entrusting the duty to a Christ-centered Christian school. When a parent sends their child to a Christian school, they still fulfill their scriptural mandate to teach their children in the ways of the Lord.

Leading in from the principle that parents are entrusted with teaching and training their children is the principle that education must be God centered. In the public schools textbooks end up “drained of significant religious or Christian content” and “reference to Christianity is now almost totally absent from the public school curriculum” (Greene 22). This is all done under the scope of separation of church and state, with the claim that the curriculum and texts are religiously neutral. The fact is, however, that in the public schools secularism is not neutral, but operates as a religion (Greene 22). It should be clear then, that the public school system is not the best choice for the Christian family.

Being a God-centered school seems like an obvious standard for the Christian school, but all too often even so called Christian schools shift the focus off of God. This too is not the way things should be. As Richard Edlin says, “the curriculum development process in Christian schools must begin with God’s Word at its center” (70). Since the

public schools will not allow a focus on God, the Christian school must. When a parent home schools their child in a Christ-centered environment, or enrolls their child at a God-centered Christian school, they will know their child is receiving the training and teaching they will need the rest of their lives.

One of the outcomes of education is that students come to find out who they are, and they gain knowledge of themselves. Green calls this one of the “most important kinds of knowledge in the world” (46). The other most important kind of knowledge is knowledge of God, and these two “kinds of knowledge are so closely connected that... we cannot know who we are unless we know God; if we know God, we will know who we are” (Greene 46). Because of this, a God-centered education is so important.

Being a Christ-centered school does not mean that students will lack anything or have a less comprehensive education. In fact, the opposite should be true, since both general revelation and special revelation should be taught. Students in Christian schools are still able to excel in the same subjects taught at public schools, but the information will be put into an entirely different context. We can compare this to being like Daniel in the Babylonian university. “Daniel was undoubtedly excellent in the various disciplines taught there, but he put all he learned into a totally different framework from that of his teachers” (Greene 175). This is what is done in a quality Christian education.

One last basic tenet of education is that it must be comprehensive in teaching both general and special revelation. Students who receive a Christian education should be thoroughly educated in the ways God reveals himself, through His creation and His word. The goal of education is not to just produce students with a “desire for earthly success,” (Greene 11) but to produce students with biblical understanding.

The Christian educator will teach the same subjects – history, language, literature, mathematics, science, psychology, philosophy – but they will also “help the child realize that even ordinary studies, since they reveal God, are occasions for response to Him” (Greene 34). In addition to looking at “ordinary” subjects, the student in a Christian school will have the opportunity of learning Biblical foundations. Christian education, unlike government-based education, is like a double-edged sword: “With one edge we slice through specialized academic disciplines, and with the other we apply biblical answers to academic and cultural questions” (Gangel 60).

In addition to the foundations outlined above, there are numerous goals for Christian education. While all educators should strive to produce students who are able to think and reason, a Christian educator should also strive to produce young people who are able to defend faith intellectually, as well as with personal conviction and feeling. In order to reach that, educators must work to produce young people with a biblical worldview and ethics. At the same time, the Christian educator is also responsible for ensuring their students are skilled in core subject areas as well as elective areas. Christian education is no small task.

Since evangelical Christians as a whole have developed a reputation for avoiding deep or serious thought, “it is important that we pursue a Christian philosophy” (Greene 77). Only by developing the mind, which, according to the Bible, “is part of the very essence of discipleship unto the Lord Jesus” (Moreland 43), will we be able to break the reputation of avoiding hard subjects. Christian schools and educators need to work to develop the thinking skills and logical/reasoning skills of their students, even more so than the public school. Our God is a “god of truth, wisdom, and logic” (Spears 10), and

we cannot fully serve him without loving Him with all our heart, soul, *mind*, and strength (Mark 12:28-30).

All too often Christians understand faith “as a blind act of will... something that is either independent of reason or that is a simple choice the believe while ignoring the paltry lack of evidence for what is believed (Moreland 25). Part of the problem is that “Sunday school classes, discipleship materials, and sermons too often address the heart and not the head” (Moreland 27). Biblically, however, faith means having trust in something we have not seen, but we have reason to believe is true, making faith something that built on reason (Moreland 25).

The Christian school should be striving to produce young people who are able to think and reason so that they will be able to defend their faith with reason and logic. There is of course a place for personal conviction, feeling, and experience. The Holy Spirit often moves in those ways, and “Christians must rely on the Holy Spirit in their intellectual pursuits, but this does not mean they should expend no mental sweat of their own in defending the faith” (Moreland 24). Christian education needs to work towards producing students who are able to think like Christ instead of the world, and reason through matters in life, because as Greene says, if the body of Christ “has already capitulated to the world’s way of thinking, it is in no shape to fulfill the Great Commission” (28).

While there should be an extra emphasis on thinking reasonably in a Christian schooling setting, all educators are given the task of helping students learn to think. So, what else separates a Christian education? In a Christian view of education, one of the most important things is producing young people with a biblical worldview and biblical

ethics. In our post-Enlightenment schools, the teaching of morals and ethics has been all but abandoned (Greene 12). Instead of believing absolutes, “people are inclined to think that the sincerity and fervency of one’s beliefs are more important than the content” (Moreland 74). The focus is no longer on what is right, but what an individual thinks is right, and how firmly they hold to the belief they are right.

Values like duty, virtue, and goodness have been neglected, and in their place are “minimalistic ethics.” This is the thought that “anything whatever is morally permissible provided only that you do not harm someone else” (Daniel Callahan, as cited in Moreland 38). This is the society we find ourselves in, yet from a biblical worldview “values do exist and they are absolute. They are created by God, and they run through every part of our life and experience” (Greene 129). The truth that there are standards and absolutes set by God is crucial to a Christian philosophy of education.

Unlike the ethics of modern society, Christian ethics are not based on “values and customs that are agreed upon by a certain society at a certain time” (Spears 13). Instead, the ethics taught from the Christian perspective are based on “universal principles revealed by God” (Spears 13). The Christian school must teach a worldview and ethics that are consistent with what God has revealed through his word. Or, to put it as Edlin does, “our worldview grows out of an understanding of God’s Word and does not stand independent of it” (73).

The goal for Christian teachers is more than just teaching students what biblical ethics are. Christian teachers should “want to produce adults who have woven their moral and spiritual lives out of a worldview based on biblically ethical and righteous values” (Gangel 59). It is not enough to lecture on ethics and worldview, and then

present a different story through actions. The responsibility of “helping young people develop the kind of worldview that leads to holy and responsible life choices” (Gangel 55) is an immense task, and can in no way be achieved without educators who are committed to a biblical worldview, and committed to biblical values.

One other goal for the Christian educator is to produce young people skilled in core subject areas, as well as elective areas, in order to prepare them for their future vocations. This too is something that a public school could also say, but the Christian school must do this while at the same time preparing students for a life of eternity. For the Christian educator, the goal is not merely for students to “acquire the skills needed to live in today’s world” (Greene 269). This is of course something that will be done through lessons, but students must also learn to become “true disciples of Jesus Christ” (Greene 269)

One thing the Christian school must avoid is “the impression that academics represent the fullness of what school is all about” (Greene 37). However, that does not mean that academic excellence will not be emphasized (Greene 175). Academics should be strong at a Christian school. Standards should be high, but not unobtainable. Students should be pushed to excel in their subjects, and students should reach for academic honors. However, the ultimate purpose of a Christian education is not academic honors, but kingdom living (Gangel 60). Instead of promoting just academics or athletics, “biblical education promotes a worldview emphasizing that the God of Creation and revelation, not simply of nature and humanity, is the ultimate object of our worship” (Gangel 60).

The task of education is a huge one. There are numerous books written on the subject, and one paper can in no way outline every premise or goal of education. As Christian educators, we are called to present God-centered, comprehensive lessons that provoke rational thought so our students can graduate with a biblical worldview and knowledge of God and the world He created. As educators we must realize that “the separation of religion from any aspect of life is simply impossible” (Greene 34) if we want our students going off to college with a Christian mind regarding their future (Moreland 175). Lastly, as educators we must “encourage students to live lives that incarnate the Christian worldview,” since this affects “all aspects of life, including home, school, business, and government” (Greene 275).

Works Cited

- Edlin, Richard J. "Core beliefs and Values of a Christian Philosophy of Education." *Foundations of Christian School Education*. Ed. James Braley, Jack Layman, and Ray White. Colorado Springs, Co: Purposeful Design Publication, 2003. 69-81. Print.
- Gangel, Kenneth O. "Biblical Foundations of Education." *Foundations of Christian School Education*. Ed. James Braley, Jack Layman, and Ray White. Colorado Springs, Co: Purposeful Design Publication, 2003. 55-66. Print.
- Greene, Albert E. *Reclaiming the Future of Christian Education: A Transforming Vision*. United States of America: ACSI, 1998. Print
- Moreland, J.P. *Love Your God With All Your Mind*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997. Print.
- Spears, Paul. "Introduction to Philosophy." *Foundations of Christian School Education*. Ed. James Braley, Jack Layman, and Ray White. Colorado Springs, Co: Purposeful Design Publication, 2003. 5-17. Print.