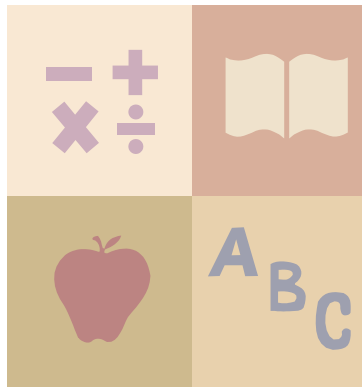


EDUCATING GOD'S CHILDREN FOR A LIFE IN GOD'S WORLD



*foundational statements about
Christian education* Introduction

Introduction

Many Christian schools have included references to historical Christian creeds in their school's constitutions. Such references are usually an attempt to guarantee that what is sometimes called a Reformed or transformational perspective will guide education in those institutions. A transformational perspective affirms the total sovereignty of God in all realms of life and points to the centrality of the risen Christ in the educational process.

This perspective also distinguishes such schools from those that see the school primarily as a vehicle for evangelism, or transmission of morality, or achieving high academic goals as independent of a holistic Christian world-view. Furthermore, such a Reformed or transformational perspective sees children from Christian homes as responsible to maintain the special relationship (covenant) into which God has placed them.

To many of those supporting Christian education, however, the inclusion of a requirement to affirm such "church" creeds is problematic. To mention but one example, it is difficult to show how a particular view of the Lord's Supper may affect education. Thus, it seems necessary to "put the creeds to work" and to state as precisely as possible what these documents—the "Three Forms of Unity" or the Westminster Standards—imply about education and Christian schooling, about educating God's children for a life in God's world.

Educating God's Children for Life in God's World

God: We acknowledge the sovereignty of a Creator God. This God is all-powerful and above all that he has made. God created the universe and everything in it by his Word. By his Word and in his works God shows himself to be just, loving, faithful, wise, gracious and merciful.

The Bible: The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments serve as a sufficient and authoritative guide for human

faith and life and also as the basis of a guiding Christian

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philosophy of education. The key to understanding God's Word is faith in Jesus Christ worked in the lives of believers by the Holy Spirit. God's revelation in the creation is a fit and Godly activity for Christian students but must be done along with a study of the Scriptures as they illumine school subjects.

Creation: Through his Son, God created the entire world, all things visible and invisible. Christian education affirms the Christ-centeredness of the creation itself. It affirms that study of visible things and invisible things (economic, social, mathematical laws, etc.) are part of a Christian school's calling.

Providence: Christian education affirms that to study the functioning of this universe is to discover the loving, maintaining, and judging work of God.

The cultural mandate: The call to “have dominion” over (subdue and care for) the earth is one of humanity’s first tasks given in Eden. The study of how humanity has and is

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responding to this command is a major aspect of Christian education.

The goals of Christian education: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” The first part is the number one motivation for Christian behaviours. “Enjoy him” implies that those parts of life which some might call “indifferent” or even “secular” – such as music, art, sport, cooking, etc. – are to be studied, participated in, and enjoyed as part of the Christian calling; they also form part of the curriculum.

God’s plan: Christian education opposes all idolatrous theories such as evolutionary naturalism, fatalism or a belief that science, governments, class struggle, etc., are sovereign in life. The absolute sovereignty of God is affirmed; from this standpoint students study non-Christian philosophies of life.

God’s covenant with humanity: God’s covenant is a relationship between himself and his people which he institutes out of his sovereign grace. This relationship includes many benefits to his people and calls forth certain obligations on their part. It is impossible to escape the demands of this covenant: one may only keep covenant or break it.

Children of Christian parents are thus God’s children and are to be raised and treated as such, which includes Christian nurture in school. For this reason Christian schools were instituted.

Children of Christian parents are called upon to affirm the relationship between God and themselves as they

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attempt to serve their God in their schooling. Thus, an attempt at keeping covenant with God should be apparent in

their studies and behaviour at school.

Regeneration: Society members, board members, staff, etc., of a Christian school must all confess Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Saviour. When dealing with students who may or may not have made such public testimony, the Christian school needs to take into account the need for personal regeneration, and should not avoid echoing God's call to repentance.

Humanity's sin (and expectations of the student):

Since the fall into sin, all human beings have been fundamentally flawed, while not losing their power of making responsible decisions. Christian schools neither treat sin as "mistakes," nor demand impossible things of

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students, both of which demean the child. Christian education also recognizes that all members of its community are in need of encouragement

when they do well and correction when they do ill; and recognizes that education (or counseling) alone does not reach the root of man's situation. Christian education does not subscribe to theories of the "original righteousness" of the student (or teacher or parent) and rejects all psychological theories that treat student misbehaviour as solely determined by culture or psychology.

Humanity's sin (and scholarly humility): Since all aspects of human life have been affected by sin, Christian education is alert to its own tendencies to err, and teaches its students proper tentativeness and humility in their studies. Christian education does not shirk its responsibility to show its students just how devastating the results of sin are; this is done through Biblical study, literary study, social studies, sciences, etc.

Christ's atonement: The death of Jesus Christ as atoning sacrifice calls forth a life of thankfulness in Christian school students which will involve active involvement in self-sacrificial service in this world.

Three-fold office: Like their Saviour, Christians are called to function as prophets, priests, and kings. Christian education encourages students to speak prophetically ("to warn and to warn"), to be self-sacrificial helpers of the needy, and to care for and rule the creation and defend any of its members being oppressed.

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The scope of Christ's redemption:

Christ is/was at work in creation, in redemption, in maintaining his world, and will return to make all things new. Christ-centered education, therefore, may involve areas of study from agriculture to zoology; there is no separation of the curriculum into sacred and secular subjects.

Student work: Student work, done in thankfulness to God, is seen as a divine calling in the Christian school. The Christian school is, no less than a church, a place in which human service of God is the reason for existence.

Regulation of school life:

- a. The ten commandments function effectively as a guideline for thankful living and Christian scholarship in the Christian school, for example (a partial list follows):
- the first commandment encourages the Christian school to help identify modern idolatries such as materialism, Marxism, humanism, etc.;
 - the third commandment aids Christian students to see that caring for anything that carries God's name—including human beings and his creation—is part of sanctifying God's holy name;
 - the fifth commandment demands appropriate respect for the office of teacher. Offices of both teacher and student are seen to arise from God and thus are not dependent upon the "consent of the governed," "democracy," "rights," etc.
 - the seventh commandment demands that Christian schools oppose any form of unchaste behaviour, such as physical or sexual abuse, fornication, sexism, or other forms of immorality. Christian schools encourage the proper attitude and use of our bodies by appropriate courses and units which hold up the high and holy ideals of chastity.
- b. Without the inward work of the Holy Spirit, these commandments will prove frustrating. Christian schools affirm the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit's work in formal ways (such as establishing curriculum, policies, etc.) and personal, inward regeneration and sanctification.
- c. Prayer must be a part of all the activities of the Christian school, not just opening devotions.
- d. While testifying to the
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undoubted truth of the gospel, Christian schools do not attempt to force adherence to particular interpretations. Teachers witness to a Christian view of their subject, but accept their fallibility; students ought not use liberty of conscience to oppose the development of a common Christian mind.

Governments: Christian schools affirm the legitimate authority of ruling powers and oppose any attempt by

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government to usurp the limited sovereignty of school or family or the absolute

sovereignty of God.

Human rights and dignity: Christian schools, while reserving the right to teach from a Christian perspective, teach their students to oppose any unjust action or propaganda directed against their neighbours, such as racism or religious persecution.

Human relationships: All human interrelations in the Christian school,

whether those between peers or those between people in and people under authority

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are to be guided by the principles of mutuality; appropriate obedience, respect and honour; and/or servant-leadership. In this matter as in others, "love is the fulfillment of the law."

Church and school: Since Christ has gathered a people of his own (his "body"), the Christian school as one "member" of that body ought to hold the organized Christian church in high esteem, and work cooperatively with local expressions of that body.

Gifts: All Christians have been given gifts to share with others, in the Christian school as well as in the church.

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