

Christian schooling: **Why bother?**



“But don’t you take both Christian children and teachers out of the mission field of the public school system?”

“Are you not just sheltering students from the real world?”

“Surely a Christian school must be academically compromised due to split energies?”

Have you ever been asked these or similar questions? Have you possibly wondered similar things yourself from time to time? This article discusses the rationale for Christian schooling in the contemporary context and seeks to offer apologetic tools to teachers and parents, who are often called upon to defend the existence of Christian schools. This first section will be a positive statement outlining the necessity of Christian schools. The remaining three sections will seek to defend Christian schooling against clusters of common arguments made by opponents.

The three clusters of arguments could be summarised as: Quality, Equality, and Qualification. Quality arguments concern the charge of academic inferiority and disadvantage and lack of rigour. For many people there is an absolute dichotomy between biblical perspective and academic attainment—you only achieve one at the expense of the other. Equality arguments concern the private/public debate; the Christian flight from the mission of public schooling; and the affordability and accessibility of Christian schooling to all. Qualification arguments concern the question of how well Christian schools qualify students to participate in the ‘real world’. They raise issues of over protection, lack of critical thinking, and loss of opportunity to grow in leadership through opposition.

Why Christian Schools?

Before this question is addressed, there is a prior question to consider—why Christian education? They are not the same thing; the former is one expression of the latter. **All Christian parents are responsible for Christian education: raising their children with a biblical understanding of the world.** The Bible assumes as well as directly teaches that this ought to occur. Deuteronomy 6 and Ephesians 6 are passages that are often quoted.

Four options for unfolding this mandate come to mind:

- **Home schooling.** Some parents believe this is best done by continuing informal home education into the formal education that is normally carried out at school.
- **Secular school.** At the other end of the spectrum, some parents believe that their children should attend a public school or a secular private school where teaching contrary to a biblical worldview will be counteracted by biblical critique and teaching at home.
- **Private religious school.** A further group prefer a private school where, although a Christian witness is allowed, regular, formal education is generally seen as distinct from the extracurricular religious program. Such parents may think they are ‘getting the best of both worlds’ while others might see this as the most dangerous option.

- **Christian school.** The fourth option is for parents to choose a school where they are confident that their children will have a Christian teacher and that all aspects of the educational program will be evaluated in the light of a biblical understanding of the world. There are two subgroups within this category: schools that primarily see themselves as a communal cooperative and schools that primarily see themselves as a service oriented institution.

Christian parents have freedom to decide how they are going to carry out their responsibility for Christian education. That they have the responsibility is not in question. Rather than beginning the conversation with what school the children should attend, it would be more profitable to first establish the biblical imperative for parents to raise children christianly. As to how they do that, **no option should be insisted upon as the only right approach!**

Respecting Christian freedom does not preclude Christians believing that a particular position is preferable or of sharing that preference with others humbly in the spirit of genuine fellowship. It is the fourth option and particularly the communal cooperative model of Christian schooling that this article seeks to defend and promote.

Christian education starts with Christian parents. Community based Christian schools are an expression of Christian parents fulfilling their responsibility for Christian education cooperatively with others. With particular regard for the more formal aspects of education, parents do together what they believe they cannot do alone. Not only do parents form community, they also partner with believing trained educators in community. In this model, parents ideally are committed community members rather than consumers of a product. Starting with Christian education and Christian parents in community allows the cultural paradigm of schooling to be evaluated and redeemed rather than perpetuated.

Starting with schools often assumes that the paradigm is neutral and a Christian flavour can be added to it. Such an assumption fails to discern the cultural expectations and educational values and practices that are in conflict with the gospel. When a community of Christian parents seek to fulfil their responsibility for Christian education the option of school needs to be evaluated. In this context, Bill Andersen, in 1983, suggested that such an evaluation might mean we have to call schools by a different name.

Once again we must start with a Christian view of life and education, and then we see what schools might look like and how they might function. And if, in the course of this project we were to finish up with some

set up so different from the present, that the use of school would be inappropriate, what does it matter?

A new name often captures and symbolises a new reality. (p.25)

After 25 years no such radical renaming has taken place and we might ask whether we have achieved a 'set up' that is so different! Nevertheless, Christian parents believed and continue to believe that with critical thinking and creativity, schools are redeemable and can be a suitable vehicle for Christian education. From such a belief, this defence of Christian schooling is being made.

Christian schools allow for the proclamation of the gospel in the public space (not withstanding the risk of enculturation and domestication of the gospel). The gospel says that Jesus is Lord of all of life and therefore reference to Him is crucial in rightly understanding life, i.e., education. We are used to relegating the gospel to the private realm of church and home; morals and evangelism. That is one reason why Christian schooling is a contentious issue among Christians. But taking a concept so public and common as school and rethinking it in terms of the gospel is a powerful undertaking.

Christian schools are a helpful and legitimate vehicle for Christian education as long as they don't become private in the sense of elitism or in the sense of private truth. Christian schools can also be a powerful expression of the lordship of Jesus over 'all things'.

... Christians can never seek a refuge in a ghetto where their faith is not proclaimed as public truth for all. They can never agree that there is one law for themselves and another for the world. They can never admit that there are areas of human life where the writ of Christ does not run.... The church can never accept this thesis ... that there has been no public revelation before the eyes of all the world of the purpose for which all things and all peoples have been created and which all governments must serve. (Newbigin, 1986, p. 115)

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A gospel shaped school will see itself as a learning community rather than defining itself in terms of control, conformity, and competition. Such a community will be committed to the development of disciples or learners of Jesus. Teachers and parents will be growing in their commitment to Christ. Students will be discovering who they are; what gifts they have; what the world is like, and how they can serve God in it. Such a school will see relation-

ships as the essential stuff of community and learning. Such a school will see the disciplines of knowledge as tools for loving service.

Christian schools should never see themselves as a religious alternative to the 'normal, secular' model of schooling but as a school with a competing religious orientation. All schools promote a vision for life or a religious perspective. In some cases there are multiple visions. Often a modern vision perpetuating the myth of utopia through science and technology and a postmodern vision celebrating the diversity of personal reality, image, and identity exist in a confused state of mind where the only commonality is the undisputed autonomy of humans.

Christian schools are motivated by a biblical vision for life where the world is created and sustained by God; where God has acted in history to deal with the distortions of creation caused by human rebellion; and where history is advancing towards a new creation in which all things are reconciled to God through Christ. A biblical vision for life that motivates Christian schools is one that repudiates human autonomy but honours human beings as image bearers of God created to rule the world. It is a vision for life that is realistic about human weakness but optimistic about our capacity and future because of God's sovereignty. A biblical vision for life honours service, suffering, and sacrifice because it understands that the cross is the central event of history.

Christian schooling is not about private protection and preparation for life within an exclusive cultural enclave. It is about cultural transformation. It begins with ongoing personal transformation; flows out to transformation of structures and practices; works towards transformed lives of students and transformed engagement with every area of human life so that our culture is challenged with the gospel of Jesus. Christian schooling wants to inspire students to be agents of God's shalom in a decaying civilisation.

Educational Quality

The frequency of questions about the quality of education at Christian schools demonstrates that there is a perception (sometimes strongly held) of a choice; quality education or Christian education. Recent research has found that this dichotomy of thinking can also, to some extent, be found among students of Christian schools. How has this view developed? What are some of the charges given in claiming academic disadvantage? In exploring these claims we will look at the following issues:

- external test results
- special needs 'hospital' schools
- extension of gifted students
- quality of teachers
- academic rigour
- school size

EXTERNAL TEST RESULTS

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Christian schools provide public education. Enrolment is not dependent on academic achievement, sporting prowess, or gifts in the performing arts. This situation results in a broad mix of academic ability levels compared to more exclusive independent schools, which may have an enrolment policy that academically biases student population. The comparing of schools through the window of student results in external tests may not be a fair comparison of the quality of the education that is offered. A much fairer comparison would be to track how student progress has developed through time in each school context. Independent of the academic starting point of an individual student or a class, how have they progressed in their time at the school? Unfortunately, this is more difficult to measure and is rarely reported. This adds to the unfounded perception that Christian schools offer an academically disadvantaged education when compared to more selective independent options.

SPECIAL NEEDS 'HOSPITAL' SCHOOLS

It is sometimes suggested by parents that they are glad that Christian schools exist as they provide a wonderfully nurturing, caring, educational community for children with specific needs. However, because their children are not troubled academically or behaviourally they enrol them in the local state or independent school. This thinking is widespread within certain communities and some Christian schools may find themselves in a positive feedback loop where their commitment to love and serve all their students promotes a view that they are specialists in loving and teaching the less 'lovable' or less academic.

In defending this claim, the starting point is to state that it is true. There is a deep commitment by Christian schools to develop nurturing, caring, educational communities. There is a deep commitment to recognise the individual needs of every child — the gospel demands no less. The commitment of Christian schools to only employ teachers with a mature, authentic faith in the Lord Jesus and who are committed to a self-sacrificial, truth honouring relationship with their students *will bring healing!* The view that Christian schools attempt a nurturing education catering to the needs of individuals is true. The unfortunate perception that their strength is in 'treating' certain students is a result of their attempt to love *all* students. This perception needs to be addressed.

EXTENSION OF GIFTED STUDENTS

A similar claim can sometimes be made that the Christian school academically disadvantages those students who are 'gifted and talented'. It is suggested that emphasis and resources are given to those students whose gifts are not in the academic area and the more academic student is not nurtured, encouraged, or extended. It may well be that Christian schools have been a little unsure of how exactly to treat the academically talented. Hesitations with publicly acknowledging standout academic achievements for fear of promoting elitism and hesitations about awarding academic achievement in light of the conflict between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, have both been misread by some parent communities as a devaluing of rigorous academic pursuit.

Extending the academically gifted student fits perfectly with the mandate of the Christian school to love and care for each student, at all levels, by providing what is appropriate to their individual needs. The egalitarian desire to give each student what they educationally need does not need to mean that any student is disadvantaged. If students are not lifted up and praised publicly in front of their less 'gifted' peers for their academic achievements and the school marketing material does not highlight the top band of student results in external tests, it does not necessarily mean that the academically gifted student is not loved, nurtured, extended, and challenged. They may well be achieving at a high level but are being challenged to use their gifts in the service of others rather than to serve themselves and for the promotion of the school. This should not be assumed, however, and schools need to evaluate regularly the appropriateness of challenge to those students whose exceptionality makes them at risk.

QUALITY OF TEACHERS

A distinctive feature of Christian schools is their non-negotiable commitment to employ only Christian teachers. It is ridiculous to expect teachers to teach all things from a gospel perspective when they have not personally embraced the gospel.

This commitment, however, has often resulted in the perception that because the pool is reduced then there must be a compromise in quality. The logic appears to be that there are not enough Christian teachers of sufficient academic and professional standard to maintain quality. This assumption needs to be questioned! We do not make it in other areas of life. It would be unthinkable for a church looking for a new pastor to fear lack of quality should they insist on a Christian commitment. For a Christian seeking a marriage partner, the concern that they will lose out in quality because of the size of the pool, would not enter their mind.

The reality is that Christian schools want teachers who are Christians and who have high professional skills and standards. The zeal of commitment does not replace the capacity to carry out the required tasks. However, skills and understanding can be developed given the right attitude and aptitude. Wise principals and boards look not only at the skills a prospective teacher brings but also at their total contribution, potential, and teachability. But Christian

commitment cannot be taught or developed—it needs to be the starting point.

ACADEMIC RIGOUR

It is claimed at times that Christian schools lack an academic rigour. When this is explored further it is perceived that there are lower expectations for student achievement and behaviour. Although there may be examples where this has been true, it does not need to be the case and most often isn't. In a learning community where it is acknowledged that individual learners have been created with a diverse range of abilities and that teaching needs to have realistic, differentiated expectations for all students, it can be misinterpreted that the expectations are lower for all students. A program of individualised high expectations is a far more just approach to educating compared to an inflated expectation that all must meet. Only the academically exceptional student can fulfil this expectation while the majority can't reach the bar (with some being motivated to a greater focus but many becoming demotivated and disillusioned). It is unfortunate if the customising of realistic learning outcomes is perceived as a lack of academic rigour.

Christian schools seek to develop curriculum that is based on a biblical understanding of the world. Christian schools do not balk at guiding students through government syllabuses while seeking to teach discernment and a critical thinking to review all things through a Christian worldview. It is therefore suggested that the academic rigour at the Christian school is potentially deeper and richer than those to which it is compared due to the additional worldview critique, and skills in wise discernment, that are nurtured and emphasised.

SMALLNESS OF SCHOOLS

Many Christian schools are small by design. What is seen as an advantage by the community of parents who established the school, is sometimes seen as a disadvantage by the wider community. Claims of reduced subject choice (particularly in the secondary school), reduced exposure to extra-curricular activities, and a lack of critical mass for the building of like-minded social networks can be heard. What is interesting is that educational research does not support these claims. The illusion that large schools provide a superior educational experience was initially questioned by Baker and Gump back in 1964 with the research that they conducted for their book *Big School, Small School: High School Size and Student Behaviour*. Their research revealed that the number and the variety of extra-curricular activities are significantly higher in small schools. Subsequent research has found that students at small schools are involved in a greater variety of activities and that a greater satisfaction is derived from their involvement (Fowler, 1995). It has been found that student attitudes and self-concept are both healthier in a small school. The research on student attitudes overwhelmingly favours small schools over larger ones (Bates, 1993; Howley, 1994). When it comes to academic achievement it may not be quite so clear. However, although approximately half of the research suggests no clear conclusion either

way, the remaining research indicates that student achievement in small schools is superior to large schools (Walberg, 1992; Eichenstein, 1994). The interpersonal climate and relational community of the small school is where the greatest benefits can unfold. Relationship is fundamental to the learning process. Discipleship is the ideal for teaching biblical discernment. Positive correlations between small schools and favourable interpersonal relations have been found by Stockard and Mayberry (1992).

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT QUALITY

When we assess the quality of something, in this case Christian schooling, we must be sure what we mean by quality. When we are reflecting on the type of school to send our children to we must ask, "What *exactly* defines a quality educational experience?" As Christian parents, do we measure the education we want for our children by results in comparative external tests or by the quality of relational structures; by the amount of publicity on academic excellence or on the rigour of biblically based critical thinking; on the amount and scope of programs or on the genuine commitment to people and their needs. Although the priority ought to be on the second options, a diminution of the first options should not be assumed. Christian schools have not always perfectly fulfilled their vision of providing quality education (though they do not have the monopoly on this type of failure). However, the caricatures that have developed are by and large unfounded and unfair. One does not have to choose between Christian schooling and quality education.

Educational Equality

"But don't you take both Christian children and teachers out of the mission field of the public school system?"

"Why should public funding go towards faith based schools?"

"Aren't Christian schools really only catering for middle class Christianity?"

Have you ever been asked these or similar questions? Have you possibly wondered these or similar things yourself from time to time? The aspects being discussed in this section are those centred around:

- the private versus public education debate
- the affordability and accessibility of Christian schooling to all
- the flight of Christians from the mission field of public schools

PRIVATE VERSUS PUBLIC

Questions are often raised about the validity of public funding being given to religious or faith based education. Though this claim is often made towards independent schools in general, there is often vehemence evident towards faith based schools. The argument is that taxpayers' money should not be given towards educating the children of those who choose an alternative 'flavour' of education.

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One of the important things to realise is that public funding towards education is on a 'per student' basis and not school based. It is an assumed right that every child in our nation will have their education funded from public money. This money is gathered from taxpayers; in part, the parents of these students. Why should this money not be transportable with the child to any schooling system the parents wish to embrace? Of course there must be accountabilities in place to maintain certain educational principles, standards in curriculum, and quality of service in the independent school options, but if these are being met why should tax paying parents not have this choice? The reality is that the 'per student' funding provided for children in independent schools is less than that provided for those that attend government schools. The difference is contributed by the parents (who have already paid equal taxes) through additional school fees. In most of the Christian schools in Australia the parents pay about 40% of the education costs and the government — both federal and state — contributes about 40%. It is true that many independent schools collect fees that go far beyond this difference in public funding. This enables a higher level of services to be provided that may make it seem like an inequity. It must be also noted that if the students from independent schools were to be publicly educated, the total expense for education would increase substantially, with all taxpayers increasing their contribution.

A stronger argument in this public versus private debate may be found in the suggestion of the social divisiveness that may arise; a breaking down in the social cohesiveness that public education offers. The evidence for this within Australia's egalitarian society is questionable. We would suggest that faith based Christian schooling with its non-separatist approach to collaborating with government, communities, and local public schools, does not contribute to this divide.

AFFORDABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

Let us now turn our attention to equity of access for those who do want to embrace faith based Christian schooling but are not able to afford it. Leaving aside the issue of the analysis of family priorities and genuine commitment to the vision of Christian schooling, there are characteristics of Christian school communities that can be explored. We would suggest that most faith based Christian schools would not seek to limit access to the vision of Christian education to any family. Most faith based schools will publicly state that they are willing to discuss fee relief arrangements for any family committed to the vision but unable to find the full school fees. The faithful core of the parent communities would prefer to subsidise those families in this situation. Discussing financial matters is always difficult. However, a family might be surprised at how open, understanding, and flexible their local Christian school is in this regard.

It is possible that Christian schools have not always been as financially accessible as they have claimed. They may have at times been guilty of nurturing middleclass education. However, this must also be placed against the backdrop of very creative and innovative approaches that many Christian schools embrace. Bursaries, payment-in-kind arrangements, and income indexed school fee structures are examples of structures in place in Christian schools.

FLIGHT FROM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Christians have a calling to be light and salt in all arenas of life; in their family, in the workforce, and among their community relationships. When Christian families are involved with the local public school there is a wonderful opportunity for relationship building and evangelism. Christian students within the schools also share this opportunity with their peers. There is a sense that this is a powerful and attractive argument for Christians to embrace public schooling. However, it is worthwhile asking at this point if this decision is always weighed up against the impact that secular education can have on our children. Nothing is neutral and all forms of education are delivered through a faith based worldview; even secular education. The public school curriculum is written from certain worldview perspectives and it is also impossible for a teacher to completely divorce themselves from teaching through, and exposing their core beliefs about life and our place and purpose in the world. In fact quality teaching must always be characterised by a commitment to relationship and authenticity in the teacher. It is these perspectives of life held by the teacher that can often be more influential in shaping our children's minds, hearts, and passions than skills in literacy or numeracy etc.

Faithful parents may suggest that they are committed to creating a learning environment at home that will critique and debunk the unbiblical (and sometimes quite ungodly) perspectives subtly nurtured at school. This is a commendable approach as parents take seriously their calling to raise their children in the ways of the Lord and to nurture in them the understanding that Jesus is Lord of all of life. However, the examples often cited by those proposing this approach tend to be concrete, hot potato issues like evolution/creation or homosexuality. These are easy to critique with our children because they are obvious when they arise and somewhat black and white to critique. Perhaps not enough emphasis and concern is given to the subtle and more erosive worldview perspectives of naturalism, rationalistic humanism, reductionism, individualism etc. The discernment required to identify where the biblical worldview intersects with cultural worldview perspectives is difficult for mature Christian adults let alone developing young minds.

The authors also acknowledge their sympathy with the argument that Christian schools take Christian teachers out of the mission field of the public school system. It is crucial that we have Christian teachers in the public system, just as it is crucial that we have Christians in politics and nursing and other arenas of society. However, there are a limited number of students being educated and a limited number of teachers being the educators. If you move a number of students into Christian schools and move the

required number of Christian teachers into these schools you have not actually changed the ratio in the public system. From a ratio perspective, it may be a spurious argument. Increasing the total number of Christians that we have training to be teachers will be what impacts in a genuine sense. Mention can be made here of the program embarked upon by the Sydney Anglican Church to actively encourage Christian high school graduates, and university undergraduates, to consider teaching as a vocation (see www.aec.edu.au).

It is also important to realise that there are some Christian teachers who have some sympathy with how the parents of students in Christian schools are unfolding their response to the biblical mandate of raising their children in the ways of the Lord, such that they choose to specifically partner with them. These teachers see this as a way to acknowledge their faithful response and to partner with parents as the educational professionals in this learning community. It may also be that there are seasons in a Christian teacher's professional life where they serve in a particular context. Time spent teaching in a Christian school may actually be a time of development and consolidation of their understanding of the biblical worldview. This may develop as they partner in a community that is willing to dialogue and evaluate how the biblical worldview may be applied to all aspects of life. If they were to then seek to serve in the public system, the Christian school would send them with their full blessing.

Christian schooling is not elitist, separatist or exclusive. There is a sense that it is public schooling in that it is accessible by all and because it takes the proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus into the public space. Christian parents have the equal right to have their contribution to public funds used to serve their children in a faith based Christian school if they choose. Christian teachers ought to experience freedom to choose the mission/ministry of either public education or Christian education without the claim made that they are not contributing to the work of his kingdom.

Preparation and Qualification

One of the authors has just reached the ripe old age of two score (he was having his nappy changed when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon). This milestone has resulted in a certain amount of reflection. What have I achieved in life? How has the first 20 years prepared me for the last 20 years? How well have I met the challenges of adult life in the big, bad, real world? These are all questions that have flowed from this reflection. In this section we will explore the concern that Christian schools are lacking in their ability to prepare or qualify students to participate in the 'real world'. Issues are raised in regard to protection and sheltering; lack of encouragement to critical thinking; and loss of opportunity to grow in leadership through opposition.

OVERPROTECTION AND SHELTERING

This concern may be summed up by the claim that Christian schools shelter their students from the rigours of the 'real world'. It is a cloistered environment; a bubble of overprotected unreality. This results in an underexposure to community issues and the production of likeminded homogenous graduates. Included in this concern is the

notion that Christian schools provide an environment of emotional protection; they molly-coddle and shelter from 'real life' struggles such as competition and failure. The authors suggest that, although this view is perhaps again based on a caricature and exaggeration, there is an element of truth to be faced.

The first thing to say to this claim is that it is to some degree true. There is a desire of the Christian school to initially limit and then gradually expose students to some of the harsh realities of the world. This is a protection of innocence that we see embraced by Christian parents of little ones when they limit exposure to things they watch and read and to certain ways of relating and socialising. The Christian school provides an extension of these same parental desires into the early years of education. We are all easily 'taken captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of the world rather than on Christ' (Colossians 2:6), and this is surely even more the case for our little ones.

Despite various enrolment policies, all Christian schools are aware that worldly influences cannot be completely locked out. A mark of a Christian school is how it confronts these issues.

The Christian school provides not so much a cloistering but a desire to wisely consider the rate and timing of exposure to the 'basic principles of this world'. The vision of a Christian school is ultimately to teach Christian discernment and wisdom through progressive exposure to 'real life' issues and the paradoxes and struggles of life. The Christian school does not shelter but through relationship and discipling, Christian teachers wisely and prayerfully guide their students through the harsh reality of life in a broken world. The early grades in a Christian school are more like a greenhouse providing nurture and an element of protection for the young sapling, but the same environment becomes stifling for an older plant and they will be guided and disciplined into the 'outside' environment. Students need to be judiciously exposed to issues with appropriate tools to resist and to critique. Despite various enrolment policies, all Christian schools are aware that worldly influences cannot be completely locked out. A mark of a Christian school is how it confronts these issues.

LACK OF CRITICAL THINKING

There has been the claim that Christian schools are characterised by a suffocation of critical thinking among the students and a discouragement of critical dialogue between students and teachers. There is no denying that the Christian school is a place that encourages a culture of respect and submission to authority. It would be a shame if this healthy aspect of the Christian school community is misconstrued as a confining expression and creativity in thought. These are important in the development of young minds and must be nurtured in every school. In the Christian school, respect is not one way. Students must respect teachers in the same way that teachers must

respect their students and their developing opinions and perspectives as they understand them to be precious and made in the image of God.

It may be that there have been occasions in Christian schools where a culture of respect for authority that emphasises submission, a common view of the world held by the majority, and a vibe that we are all too 'nice' to argue, have inadvertently fostered a climate of compliance. The Christian school recognises that it is easy for strengths to become weaknesses and that a community of respectful critical dialogue is crucial; just as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

As previously stated, the Christian school's great strength is its desire to develop the ability to critique culture from a biblical worldview, while being careful to allow a healthy level of internal critique as the community seeks to interpret the Bible faithfully and explore what it says about living, laughing, learning, and loving in God's kingdom. It needs to be also noted that Christian schools don't have the monopoly on the potential to create homogenous belief environments where counter ideas are discouraged. All schools are faith based to some degree and the secular school may initially present as if all ideas are accepted. However, every culture/community has its sacred cows; human autonomy, consumerism, or individualism. A student who offers a critical view during the learning process, by suggesting that God is sovereign; the Bible has authority; and that self-sacrifice is nobler than self-interest, may be stifled and coerced into submission. This is not an excuse for us to inhibit space for critical and divergent thinking. In encouraging critical thinking we invite critique of our inconsistencies while at the same time asserting that all things need to be critiqued against the word of God.

LEADERSHIP THROUGH OPPOSITION

The last of the claims that we will address in this article is that the Christian school does not provide an environment where the young Christian leader is nurtured. What may well be observed is that the desire to nurture humility and respect results in a lack of overt public leadership among the student body. Although it must be stated that the Christian school will foster and nurture all forms of leadership, the question of what defines Christian leadership must be explored. The world uplifts positional, power based leadership and speaks of leadership in these terms. The Christian school defines leadership biblically with ideas such as strength of character, perseverance, service, integrity, and humility.

In some schools it is true that possible opposition placed on a Christian student may provide good training and may result in them being strengthened to make a stand. However, this flourish or flounder environment will not provide the nurture for all young Christian leaders. Those with a quiet, relational, servant-hearted character-based leadership may flounder without the careful discipling of mature Christian teachers who point to Christ to define leadership strength. This leadership is in many ways far more difficult with its character based, rather than skills based, emphasis. In fact it may at times be far harder for a young Christian to take a stand in a nominal Christian

environment and this may even provide a richer training ground for Christian leadership.

Conclusion

In considering the claims against Christian schooling it must first be realised that the Christian school is only a physical expression of something that is far more fundamental for Christian parents — Christian education. Christian parents are responsible before God to raise their children in a biblical understanding of their world. Whether Christian parents choose home schooling, secular schooling, private religious schooling, or Christian schooling, they are not free from this responsibility. This article has been suggesting that Christian schooling provides an option that offers great support to the Christian parent. Although parents are free to choose which type of educational community they will embrace for their child, it is helpful to discuss the various options together without judgement or contempt. It is also important that we examine the issues without creating caricatures.

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