

Christian education in 6 minutes

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When first challenged to write this article, my first inclination was to begin with what Christian education isn't. I imagined suggesting things like it not being principally about: protecting children from "the world" and its evil ideas; weighting learning towards Bible history, biblical doctrine, and Christian character; high quality "normal" education with Christian faith wrapped around it; an opportunity for evangelism; or ... my mind was racing.

However, if I only have six minutes of your time, then let me focus on what is the vision of Christian education—the vision of the founding parents of our schools. Such an exploration should start with the sometimes-under-emphasised reality of the non-neutrality of life and learning.

Nothing is neutral

There are no subjects in the timetable, practices in the classroom, events in the calendar, habits of the teacher, resources chosen, policies written, or curricula embraced that are completely neutral. Everything in this world has a vision or ideology at its core that sets a direction

that those exploring it may be pulled toward. This may include notions of (or pulls toward) a definition of success in life, or the purpose of life and living, or where ultimate truth can be found, or what is good character, or the origins of the universe, or personal and cultural "salvation", etc.

There is no denying that these pulls are often subtle—consider the ideologies hidden in the teaching of times tables in maths. Sometimes they are far more overt—consider a graduation ceremony and how the event is structured, and the language used in the speeches. However, they are always there in some form, and will be having a formational impact. Deep assumptions are always driving the choices made and the motivations for what is hoped to be achieved.

That nothing is neutral is deserving of special attention when we are considering the early formation of children's core beliefs, motivations, and visions for life. These are formed through their learning about the world. If nothing is neutral, then the question of what narrative we want shaping the content

and practices of the learning context for our children—and the shaping of the educational community they are embraced in—becomes crucial.

A narrative of life and purpose

The founding parents of Christian schools acknowledged that there are many narratives shaping us and our children, and the more secular a society becomes the more "pulls" away from God and His revealed purpose, wisdom, and truth are woven into these narratives. Hence, an education that deliberately seeks to have the full revelation of the Bible provide the grounding assumptions, tendencies, and understandings behind all that is done, thought, and felt, is a beautiful and deeply true education—a Christian education.

The biblical narrative pulls us toward a learning that is wrapped in the stunning, counter-cultural truth that this world is not random and without purpose, but has been designed, loved, and made by God. Humans are, likewise, not random and without purpose, but have been made with a likeness to the Creator and with a unique role as stewards of the creation



and its cultural potential.

Woven into this hopeful vision for life and purpose is a profound explanation for why there is so much wrong, or at least not quite right, in the world and in our lives. Original human rebellion, with the resultant cracks in the order-of-things, has tainted all human life and flowed into every nook and cranny of the cultural creation. This fundamental truth provides an intense clarity about life and world that is significantly lacking in other narratives. These alternative gospels may appear to offer hope. However, their grounding is often fleeting, shallow, and self-serving.

The depth of the Christian narrative is found in the profound hope it provides—its comprehensive solution to all that is wrong in the world (and in the human heart). It speaks of the Creator’s plan to redeem, restore, and reconcile all things through His entering creation as the man, Jesus. His death and resurrection bring redemption to the world, to people, and to all that is just not quite right. When an educational community intentionally places this counter-cultural truth at the centre of all that is thought, felt, and done, it offers a Christian education—an

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education that is often referred to with the shorthand phrase, *Christ-centred*.

Discernment and transformation

Christian education recognises that nothing is neutral and that all things have assumptions, and visions, and pulls, and pushes either away from, or towards, God and His glory. It therefore seeks to not only preach and teach the good news of the biblical narrative, but it will also seek to shape all practices, policies, and pedagogy such that students will form a vision for life and world shaped by the Bible and the centrality of the cross. It won’t achieve this by protecting students from the alternative narratives; how can our children resist being taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophies if they are not made aware of them?

Christian education will therefore lean into teaching its students discernment. To discern when they are being pulled away from the truth of life. To discern

when they are being pushed toward shallow visions of “salvation” and purpose (self-autonomy, material success, technological utopia, etc.). It will also lean, with all its creativity, into informing students of the beautiful big-picture vision of life and world centred around Jesus. It will invite them into a life of hope-filled discernment. It will seek to inspire them to see not only their learning, but also their life, shaped by this vision—and all for God’s glory.

I suspect my time is up.

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