

Passing on the Baton:
The Role of Christian Education

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Salt and Light Ministries

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Foreword

“What is hidden in the roots will be revealed in the shoots.”

This has been one of the lifelong principles by which I have sought to live and build. Experience tells us that what the roots of the plant are like, and what they feed on, determines what sort of fruit grows; where the foundations of a building are shaky, time and disaster will reveal it; where the most simple flaws are not spotted, dreadful disasters can follow – as when a basic defect in the fuel system of the Challenger space craft cost the lives of seven brave astronauts.

So it is with people. What we believe in our hearts will eventually determine how we live, how we build and what we end up with.

This “Roots and Shoots” series is not so much an attempt to define the distinctives of our family of churches, but rather to ensure that all our beliefs and practices are firmly rooted in the Scriptures.

Many people have asked us over the years: “Who are you and what do you believe?” While our structure may appear to be somewhat nebulous, nevertheless the understanding of our common beliefs needs to be clear and unambiguous.

We are a family of churches that believe we are to be “sons of the kingdom” sown into God’s earth. The key that transforms “the word of the kingdom” into “sons of the kingdom” is *understanding* (Matthew 13:23). In the Lord’s first parable of the kingdom (the Sower), the ‘word’ of the kingdom – the seed – when properly received and understood produces fruit. In the second parable of the kingdom (the Weeds), we discover that the fruit has become the seed, and that the seed is “the sons of the kingdom”. The word, bearing fruit, producing seed as sons of the kingdom, planted in the world! That is our prayer for this series of books.

Barney Coombs

Chapter 1

A Move of God?

“I’m planning to set up a Christian school amongst the Moslem community in central London,” said a recent educational visitor to our school. “What’s more,” he continued, “I have the support of Moslem parents!”

I was impressed by this man’s faith and vision – it certainly sounded a radical step. Thirty years ago, however, it would have been just as radical for *anyone* to say that they were setting up *any* independent Christian school at all – never mind amongst Moslems! But in the United Kingdom that was exactly what one pioneer educationalist did. In 1970 Mrs Betty Gross opened what was to be the first of the ‘new’ Christian schools, in Rochester, Kent. It was called ‘The Cedars’ and is still open today. Since then over one hundred more new independent Christian schools have opened throughout the United Kingdom. What is God doing?

I am privileged to travel fairly extensively and I find that all over the world the pattern is repeated. God has spoken to church leaders, and sometimes parent groups, to open a school which is Christ-centred and Bible-based. North America has led the way in pioneering this vision. The United States has thousands of ‘new’ Christian schools.

In Canada the Christian schools’ movement goes back to Dutch roots through the reformed churches in the early 1900s. In the Salt and Light family of churches one of the earliest schools to be set up in Canada was The King’s School, Vancouver, established in 1982. This was originally the result of the joint vision of Barney Coombs and Howard Carter (pastor

of Vancouver Covenant Community). They had been encouraged to take action by the results of other Christian schools already established in British Columbia. In Basingstoke, England, Peter Davis had pioneered The King's School in 1981 and subsequently spent time helping to establish The Gateway School, Winnipeg, and The King's School at Springcrest near Vancouver under its new principal, Steve Stewart. This school in turn inspired new schools to open in Vernon under Art Enns and in Niagara led by Peter and Joy Wyns. The pattern is the same all over the world, although of course on different time scales: one church breaks new ground in establishing a Christian school and many others are inspired to faith by this model.

All over the world God is on the move! And all over the world God is on the move in the sphere of education.

But why is this necessary? Surely state schools provide the necessary 'goods' for a rounded education? And in any case, shouldn't Christians stay in the state system to be 'salt and light' and to influence it for good?

Before I answer more fully, let me say that I appreciate the many people in the state sector who are working very hard and doing an excellent job. Many Christians know the clear call of God to work in a state school, either as heads, teachers or parent governors. Perhaps a prophetic picture given at a British Christian education conference in the mid-eighties will help to shed light on our thinking.

Alan Vincent, then leader of West Herts Community Churches in the UK, had set up a Christian school in the 1980's. He prophesied that there was a battle in the land for the education of our children. In battle, he explained, there is a military strategy called a pincer movement whereby a commander divides his army into two and approaches the enemy from two flanks thus trapping him in the middle, rather like the two arms of a nutcracker exerting pressure to crack a nut. In such a way God was working on a pincer movement, because of his love for all the children of this nation. One arm of the pincer was made up of Christian schools which were established to be a 'light', demonstrating an alternative, God-centred way of education. The second pincer arm, however, was not light but 'salt'. God had called Christian teachers and heads (and often parent-governors too) to be missionaries as salt in the system. They were to act

like salt against the moral decay, standing up for important principles of truth against warped and crooked thinking that would harm our youngsters.

“Both are important,” was the message of the prophecy. “Don’t see yourselves as Christians in conflict with each other but pray for each other and support one another.”

A few years ago a friend of mine took on some part-time work teaching teenagers in an English inner-city school. Although a good teacher and a strong and faithful man he found it took all his time to keep order. At the end of the lesson he was asked by the Head how he had got on. He confessed, “I don’t think I was able to teach them much; it was all I could do to keep order.” “Oh,” replied the head, “we don’t expect to teach them anything; if you can keep some control you are doing a good job.”

Another recent visitor, who had spent many years in Zimbabwe, came to a secular school in England and was shocked to the core at the moral decline in language and behaviour of teenagers. And this was a school which is regarded as ‘good’, being run by a Christian Head Teacher in a fairly pleasant middle-class town!

Every term at our own school in Witney, Oxfordshire, we have applications from parents of children who are being victimised and bullied in such ‘good’ state schools. Violence stalks our classrooms, with horrific examples of massacres like those at Dunblane in Scotland or at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, where deeply disturbed teenaged pupils killed their peers without mercy. How did so many state schools get in this condition? What has caused this marked moral decay and disintegration? The reasons are many, but some blame must be laid at the feet of governments who have discarded the moral absolutes represented by the Scriptures; in particular, the Ten Commandments.

Darrell Scott, the father of one of the victims of the Columbine High School massacre, addressed the Judiciary Sub-committee at the U.S. Congress, and in a moving speech quoted a poem he had written:

Your laws ignore our deepest needs,
Your words are empty air,
You’ve stripped away our heritage,
You’ve outlawed simple prayer.

Now gunshots fill our classrooms
And precious children die.
You seek for answers everywhere
And ask the question “Why?”
You regulate restrictive laws
Through legislative creed;
And yet you fail to understand
That God is what we need!

He went on to say: “Many of our major colleges began in theological seminaries. This is an historic fact. What has happened to us as a nation? We have refused to honour God and in so doing, we open the doors to hatred and violence.” Powerful words uttering powerful truths – as true for every nation as for that nation.

Family breakdown also plays its part with, for example, one in three marriages now ending in divorce in the UK, millions of couples refusing to marry at all, and gay or lesbian ‘partners’ fighting for the right to marry and raise children. Is it any wonder that society’s legacy is children who are angry, confused and unruly?

What has the Church to do with this? Surely the government and the state have always had responsibility for education? Well actually no, this is not the case. In Biblical times and in centuries past the church was always the educator. In Jewish tradition synagogue schools were provided in any place that had twenty-five potential pupils or more. In the West monasteries were centres for learning. In the UK it was Christian reformers in the 18th and 19th centuries who acted to set up schools for the poor. Their main aim was to teach them to read so that they could know the Bible.

The pattern in the UK, repeated in other countries, is that the churches began to look to the government to provide finance. In 1870 the Forster Education Act was passed so that the government could help finance the Christian work in education. Within fifty years the government had taken full control. He who pays the piper calls the tune! It is only within the last one hundred years or so that the state has assumed total control. Now the British ‘National Curriculum’ denies any mention of the God of those

very Christians who pioneered the first schools! We have lost our inheritance, like Esau, in exchange for a mess of pottage. No wonder God has initiated a new movement in education!

So, let us turn in the next chapter to see where Biblical responsibility for children really lies.

Chapter 2

To Parents: Whose Children are They?

In the last couple of years I have had the joy of watching my own daughter and her husband training and teaching our first grandchild, Lara. The parental bond is so very close, communication so intimate and, happily in Lara's case, so very consistent in discipline, that you can see tremendous potential being invested for the future. My daughter has confessed that being a mum is top priority in her life; a job she wants to do as well as possible for the child she has produced who is somehow so much a part of herself. Yet at five, sometimes even earlier, the majority of children are handed over, without question, to the state. In these days it is largely taken for granted that it is the responsibility of the state to educate our children. But is this right?

What does the Bible say?

The Bible makes no such assumption. It tells us that children are a gift from the Lord (Psalm 127:3) and instructs parents to educate their children by training them in the way they "should go" so that when they are mature they will not turn from it (Proverbs 22:6).

In the New Testament the instruction is repeated: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Such training and instruction would involve character-training in such issues as respect and obedience but also in learning and obeying the Word of God. In Deuteronomy, where

Moses addresses the recently formed nation of Israel, there is repeated emphasis that children and subsequent generations must be educated in the commands of God so that they may obey him and possess the land he was giving to them. One example will suffice: “Remember the day you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when he said to me, ‘Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land *and may teach them to their children*’ ” (Deuteronomy 4:10).

Jewish Tradition

There is not a great deal written about education as such in the Bible because it was culturally accepted that children must be trained to know and obey God. However, Alfred Edersheim, in his book ‘Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ’ explains that the Jews regarded children’s lives as holy, and respected the teacher who had the role of filling it with the thoughts of God. He writes, “To the pious Jew ... the knowledge of God was everything; and to prepare for or impart that knowledge was the sum total, the sole object of his education.” The Jews’ religion consisted of two things: knowledge of God and service of God. The latter would include observance of all that was prescribed by God and works of charity towards his fellow man. Edersheim goes on to say: “There can be no question that, according to the law of Moses, the early education of a child devolved upon the father; of course, always bearing in mind that his first training would be the mother’s ... If the father were not capable of elementary teaching, a stranger would be employed.”

In the days of Christ, home-teaching began at the age of three with careful training in the memorisation of God’s Word. At six years of age the child would be sent to school. Such schools were attached to every synagogue in the land at this time. Here priority would be given to learning to read. It is interesting to note that classes were kept to twenty-five pupils in number: a teacher-pupil ratio that most governments have still not achieved!

From the Scriptures then, we can see that children are regarded as a gift from the Lord who entrusts them to parents for training. God has

created each child (Psalm 139) and each one belongs to him. The writer to the Hebrews describes God as “the father of our spirits” (Hebrews 12:9). Thus children belong to God and, as stewards of them for him, we are responsible to choose with care an education that will be consistent with the Word of God.

The Example of Abraham

In the case of Abraham, God states clearly the reason he chose this man. “For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him” (Genesis 18:19).

One of the reasons God chose Abraham, then, was because Abraham could be trusted to direct and train his children in the ways of God by doing what is right and just. But can we expect *the world* to teach our children *God’s ways* when it has largely rejected him from its worldview and morality, and therefore from its education process? In some states of America it has become illegal to teach children about their Creator. In the state schools of Great Britain one is no longer allowed to teach the truth that Jesus is the only way to salvation. Rather, children are presented with a confusing mish-mash of ‘multi-faith’, where Buddha and Mohammed are given equal status to Christ. This is far from the pattern God intended for the children who are his inheritance.

So How did the State gain Control of our Children?

The assumption that the state knows best and has this right to educate is totally without foundation and is a relatively recent assumption in historical terms.

One of the textbooks used in my own personal training (by the state) as a teacher ignores the parental role in the education process and states: “The development of the national system of education can be described as a growing partnership between voluntary bodies, the ruling government and local authorities who could levy rates in their area to finance education” (*Training for Teaching*, Sadler and Gillett).

It pays lip-service to the fact that, prior to the Education Act of 1902 which gave responsibility for British schools to local authorities, most education was provided by voluntary Christian groups. In fact, the social conscience of the churches of England was severely pricked in the 18th and 19th centuries when the prime purpose of education was to teach the poor the ability to read the Bible. The Sunday School movement of 1750 grew out of Methodism and the revival known as The Great Awakening. Prior to this, the Puritans and Non-conformists had grasped the importance of education and had formed their own schools. The church has always historically supported parents in training their children but gradually yielded its rights to the state through financial pressure.

Over the last century in state education we have seen an increasing rise in humanistic, self-centred training and a corresponding decline in absolute values to the point where “everyone does what is right in their own eyes.” Is this the right environment for God’s children?

Martin Luther foresaw the perils awaiting any school which ignored Biblical truth. “I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution which is not increasingly pre-occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt.”

The great Baptist preacher Spurgeon said, “I am much afraid that schools will prove to be the great gates of Hell unless they diligently labour in explaining the Holy Scriptures, engraving them on the hearts of youth.”

The Vital Importance of the Scriptures

Certainly, as someone once said rather flippantly, to deliberately sow our children to godless schools, when there are alternative Christian choices available, would be rather like the Israelites, having been delivered from Egypt, choosing to send their children back to Egyptian schools!

Moses spoke unequivocally to the Israelites in the desert about their parental responsibility in educating their children: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commands that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children, talk

about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut 6:4-7).

The Word of God was clearly intended to be a natural part of everyday life: indoors, outdoors, morning and evening and the teachers were to be the parents.

In the New Testament the apostle Paul teaches his disciple Timothy about the Word of God, demonstrating its power and relevance to the training process of men and women of God which applies equally to the education of children as future leaders. “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Home Education?

So, am I stating the case for home schooling? I believe there are many dedicated parents who have bravely taken up the task of educating their own children from conviction that this is their biblical responsibility. I take my hat off in admiration. At least they are taking their parental responsibility seriously! But I do not believe every parent has either the grace or the ability to fulfil this role throughout the whole education process – although, as we have seen in Lara’s case, the mother and father are always the child’s first teachers. It seems logical to me that, as the education process today must equip our children for a society and culture which is technologically developed and complex, we need men and women to train them in the necessary skills. However, for me it would be of prime importance that these men and women were teaching from a conviction that this is God’s world and that his Word is relevant to every age. The teacher exerts a strong influence on children (for good or bad!), imparting his own personal standards and values, both deliberately and unconsciously by his own example. We all know that, for young children at least, what the teacher says is law!

Another factor which would cause me to have reservations about home schooling concerns the aspect of social interaction and integration. The child educated solely at home may become very dependent on his or her parents and lack opportunity to build peer relationships. Many parents rectify this by forming some sort of co-operative with other home scholars to provide experience of relationships in a group setting with other children.

A Partnership

I believe the Church is intended by God to support parents in the provision of an education which is God-centred and Bible-based. God has called many churches to take up the challenge of supporting parents in their God-given responsibility by opening Christian schools. In these the variety of skills that parents cannot attain on their own can be supplemented by a healthy partnership between church and home. This partnership needs to be worked at by both sides but can be very fulfilling and, of course, the one who benefits the most is the child.

In this partnership there is mutual trust and open communication. This ensures that the teacher understands the child through information and insights given by the parent and, conversely, the parent appreciates how their child fits into the school's community. In the training process there is then a united understanding which leads to consistent training and discipline. We have found in our own partnership in Oxfordshire that both teachers and parents express satisfaction at setting mutual goals for the character-training of children and working at them from 'both ends' of home and school.

The Factors Affecting Parental Choice

The prime factor in parents choosing a Christian education has to be a *personal revelation from God* that this is right. My hope is that this book will help you on the way and that you will take time to pray and listen to God about the future of your children. However, there are other factors to be taken into account as you pray and decide.

1) *The risk factor*

When we opened our school in Oxfordshire, several people outside of the church took me on one side to state their concern about the risk to my children's future. I was asked things like, "How do you know you aren't jeopardising your children's future?" "How can you be sure your academic results will be good enough?" In other words: How do you know it will work?!

My answer was always a truthful one: that I didn't know! But I did know that God had spoken and that I had to take the risk of faith. I used to say: "Jesus said, 'You will know the tree by its fruit'. Come back in ten years and we hope we will have some fruit to show you."

Happily, in our school in Witney, as in many other Christian schools around the world, God has honoured teachers' and students' work with excellent academic results. More importantly perhaps, we have seen encouraging results in Christian character-training and equipping for the call of God on their lives. One Further Education College tutor said, "We like your students because they know what they believe and hand their assignments in on time."

The risk has been worth it: God always rewards faith!

2) *The ambition factor*

It is good for parents to have strong ambitions for their children, as long as these are the result of prayer and God's refining. Frequently parents, reacting from their own deprivation or hurt as a child, are determined their children will not suffer in a similar way. While this may be right for some, it is sadly often the case that a parent is projecting their own ambition on to a child who is not gifted or called to fulfill that particular ambition. We have had some parents who have removed their children from our school because they were ambitious for them to be in an academic environment of a higher social status, despite the fact that this would not be training them in the ways of the kingdom of God. Surely our greatest ambition for our children should be that they want to love God with all their heart and obey him with their lives. Everything else will follow. God is no man's debtor!

3) *The facilities factor*

When we opened our school in Oxfordshire we were definitely pioneering; and although we had a large house in which we could accommodate the 77 children with whom we began, we certainly could not provide all the amenities one would find in a state school. For instance, we didn't have extensive playing fields, nor did we have a gym or a science laboratory. There were one or two families who, seeing this lack, decided not to send their children. While I sympathised with their perspective and would have loved to offer better facilities, I did feel they were looking at the externals only and missing the heart of the matter.

Fortunately for us, the majority of our parents had caught a vision in faith and were prepared to work towards the future whilst 'making do' in the early stages. Now, fifteen years later, we have our own football pitches, and an excellent science laboratory. We still don't have a gym but we do have a hall with some good PE equipment! It tested our grace somewhat when God gave us finance for a brand new purpose-built school a couple of years later and the same parents who had formerly declined to send their children to us now deigned to send them! However, we can have the best facilities in the world, but if we are not teaching students the true knowledge which is Christ-centred, then we are wasting our energy and their lives.

4) *The revelation factor*

The Bible says, "Everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). The only true basis for sending your child to a Christian school is that God has spoken to you or confirmed to you in some way that this is his will for your child. Without this, we as parents will not have the conviction or faith to make the necessary sacrifices over the years in order to see our children right through. If this booklet makes nothing else clear, I trust it will cause you to spend time with God about your children's schooling.

My plea to you would be: don't start by looking at finances and whether you can afford it or not. Go to God and ask him to show you what he wants for his children. Faith comes by hearing from God. Once God

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has spoken, we can pursue the right course knowing he will bless and provide.

Chapter 3

How God sees Children

For me, one of the most amazing verses in the Bible is found in Jeremiah 1:5 where God calls Jeremiah to be a prophet even though he is still young. “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

How astounding to realise that God knows us and the future he has planned for us even before we are conceived! I cannot believe that Jeremiah is a unique case, especially when we see how God prepared David, Joseph, Esther, and many others for such key purposes. Psalm 139 supports this truth when it speaks of our being formed by God in our mother’s womb and goes on to say: “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:16).

God is not a Father who has created us at random and then wonders what to do with us so that we may fulfil his pre-planned purpose for our lives. Paul underlines this in Ephesians 2:10 when he writes: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared *in advance* for us to do.”

Not as They *are*, but as They *will be*

Often when I look at the children in assembly I speculate about what their future role will be. I am reminded of the story that the 17th century Czechoslovakian educator Jan Comenius told about one of his school assemblies. He invited Philip Melancthon to be a guest speaker, who greeted the young boys with these words:

“Hail, reverend pastors, doctors, lawyers, superintendents! Hail most noble, most prudent, most learned lords, consuls, judges, governors, chancellors, secretaries, magistrates, professors!”

When some of the standers-by smiled, he said: “I am not jesting. My speech is serious. I look on these little boys not as they are now, but as the Divine Mind purposes, on which account they are delivered to us for instruction. Assuredly, such leaders will come from them, though there may be mixture of chaff among them as among wheat.”

The words are a bit old-fashioned but I believe they capture the heart of God. When God looks at our children, he sees them not just as they are, but as they will become in his purposes. Just as a tiny acorn has within it by the creator potential to become a great oak tree, so in our children’s DNA there is written a destiny for each one of them.

The Place of Prophecy

We have the great advantage of having the freedom to invite prophetically gifted men and women into our school on a regular basis. It humbles and thrills me to hear God’s heart through the individual words of encouragement and insight which are given to them. There are clues to potential destiny. Of course, this will always be conditional on the students following God in their lives. These prophecies cause the staff and I to look differently at the raw material in front of us! Such times always challenge us to be as proactive and up-building as God is in the way he addresses his children.

Many of our children have been dedicated or, perhaps at a later age, baptised in our churches and at such times prophetic words are given to them. In our school records we keep a pupil profile card for each student and, along with academic test results and progress, are recorded the word of God spoken into their lives. This helps us as teachers who are sharing in the parental responsibility to have a broader insight into the lives we are helping to train for God.

Made for Relationship

Although God speaks about *function*, he primarily desires *relationship* with our children. Function will flow out of relationship. As a Father he wants them to share eternal life with him. John in his gospel defines eternal life in terms of relationship: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

One of the priorities for us as parents, I believe, is to pray for our children to be born again of the Spirit of God. It never ceases to amaze me that when I give an assembly talk about salvation and explain in simple terms the work of Jesus on the cross, that even at the age of five or six the children know when they are ready to respond. We never pressurise or draw out the appeal but ask them to make their choice if they feel ready to do so. It is our testimony that most of our pupils become born-again within two or three months of joining the school. It is even more noticeable how they progress more easily in academic work and how their personality opens up once Jesus has been invited into their hearts. Of course, they don't understand all about justification and sanctification (some adults don't!); but they have opened their hearts and lives to Jesus and he meets them at the level of understanding they have. There will be subsequent responses and encounters when they will receive a more mature understanding. The gospel is the power of God for salvation!

Jesus' Words

Jesus, when he was on earth, revealed the Father's heart to us about children. For example, he rebuked the disciples who kept children away from him because they thought he was too busy (Mark 10:13-16). He also had some very serious teaching about children, which can be found in several of the gospel accounts. We will look primarily at Matthew 18.

Here Jesus shows that the Father cares deeply that the children he has entrusted to us should be trained in his ways; ways of righteousness and truth. Jesus first of all called a little child and used him as an example for adults of the teachable tender heart. “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom

of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:3-4).

Secondly he went on to underline the grave importance of ensuring that we encourage children’s faith in God. “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (v6). These striking words emphasise how important it is that we nourish our children’s faith.

We frequently respond to requests from worried parents who can see their children’s faith – faith in themselves and faith in God – being jeopardised by the state schools they are in. Of course, as we have already said, some schools are fortunate enough to have a Christian Head or Christian staff who seek to create a positive, caring environment; but it is a sad fact that there seems to be a steady increase in bullying and abusive language and behaviour in many schools. Sarah (not her real name), was referred to us because, although not a Christian, she had shown interest at her comprehensive school in the Bible given to her by The Gideons organisation. Immediately she confessed that she was reading it, she was mercilessly hounded and ridiculed by the other pupils until her confidence was seriously undermined. She became a moody, sullen child who hated going to school. Within days of starting at our school the parents testified, and we could see with our own eyes, that Sarah was transformed. Her face lightened, her eyes shone, and her parents had restored to them their daughter with a sunny personality who now looks forward to each day in school.

Of course, there are many state schools where Christian teachers are exercising a positive influence on the life and faith of children both through specific work on the curriculum (in some cases the Religious Education syllabus in Britain has been shaped by Christians) and through example. The point I am making is that the school community needs to create an atmosphere in which faith is encouraged and the individual respected.

To be Trained in Faith

It is exciting to see how easily young children can learn to hear God for themselves. By this I don't mean an audible voice; but as we train children to praise God and to wait quietly before him, they begin to receive simple pictures from him.

On occasions God has astounded us by the depth of revelation he gives to such young children. One of our six year-old infants, called Elizabeth, shared a sequence of three pictures with us shortly after she responded to open her heart to Jesus as her Saviour. She saw an ugly rock island with weeds on it sticking out of the sea. Then as she looked it sank under the water. In the third picture it rose again, this time covered in beautiful flowers. When we asked her what it meant, Elizabeth was quite clear: "The island was my life; before I met Jesus it was ugly and full of bad things. Then Jesus' love, which is the sea, washed over it and made it clean. The beautiful island covered in flowers is the new life Jesus has given me."

Another astounding picture came from Hilary, also aged six years. She saw a bar of gold and a glittering diamond. The diamond was saying, "Look at me. Look at me; I am the most precious." Then the Holy Spirit spoke (she was quite clear that it was the Holy Spirit). He said, "No, Jesus is the most precious; he is the bar of gold." As I pondered this afterwards I was staggered to realise firstly that Jesus (the bar of gold) had not spoken on his own behalf but the Holy Spirit had spoken for him. Secondly, the Bible says quite clearly that Satan can masquerade as an angel of light in order to deceive us, which is what the diamond clearly symbolised. Quite a lot of theology from a six year old's picture!

Chapter 4

Education is Discipleship

I want to suggest that education is included in the last words of Jesus to his disciples before he ascended to his Father. These are found in Matthew 28:16-18 and are commonly known as ‘The Great Commission’.

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus instructs his disciples to be teachers of others, including other nations, and to pass on, or transmit, the knowledge of God they have received from Jesus. I believe this includes children, the lambs of the flock. I want to suggest that a Biblical view of education is the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next; what we often call ‘generational transfer’.

Generational Transfer

In Old Testament times, the elders of each tribe fulfilled this educational role, after the example of Moses. Psalm 78 unpacks the content of this generational transfer. The Psalmist says, “I will utter hidden things, things from of old – what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done” (v2).

From this Psalm we can see that there are three main ingredients of the generational transfer:

1) *Our personal experience of God*

“What we have heard and known” (v3). Our teachers are intended to pass on their personal experience, testimony, and knowledge of God.

2) *The mighty acts of God in history*

“The praiseworthy deeds of the LORD” (v4). Every Jewish child was told of the history of God’s people, including such things as the miraculous parting of the Red Sea when God delivered his people (e.g., Deuteronomy 6:20-25).

3) *The word of God*

“He ... established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children” (v5). Parents are responsible for teaching God’s word to their children and training them in it.

The Purpose of Education

This Psalm also gives us *the purpose* of education: so that faith can be *passed on*. “... So that the next generation would know them (i.e. God’s commands, and therefore the God behind them) ... Then they would put *their* trust in their God” (v6-7).

By now you may be thinking: But what about ‘subjects’? What about literacy and numeracy? Aren’t they important? Of course they are. But unless we have the very heart of the purpose of education, these are only fragmented pieces of knowledge – like jigsaw pieces in an incomplete puzzle. Education, biblically speaking, is about *making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ*, involving a personal transmission from the teacher to the new generation. Those who are not disciples themselves simply cannot do this!

Interestingly enough in a modern secular book, described as “at the heart of the education debate today”, we read this: “What has happened (in our education system) is nothing less than a breakdown of the accepted conventions of the transmission of culture, which, if it is to survive, has to

be handed down in an orderly and systematic manner from adults to children ... knowledge, the transmission of received wisdom from one generation to the next has been disinherited and memory scorned” (*All must have Prizes*, Melanie Phillips, p64).

Knowledge is a Person!

Once we start thinking about education we also have to define ‘knowledge’. We often think of knowledge as a quantity of information or facts. In Genesis 3 the serpent tempted Adam and Eve by dangling a carrot of ‘knowledge’ in front of them. He told them that if they would eat of the forbidden tree of knowledge they would be like God, *knowing* good and evil (Genesis 3:5).

This was a lie from “the father of lies” (John 8:44). Up until this point Adam and Eve had been receiving knowledge through God himself as their teacher. He is omniscient – “all knowing”. All knowledge is in him. In fact, *knowledge is a person!* Satan’s temptation was to have *knowledge without God!* But in fact, this is impossible; it is a deception and a lie. All knowledge is in God.

The First Humanism

With this lie was sown a deception about the *nature* of knowledge. Ever since that time, man in his fallen state has responded to Satan’s temptation to his pride: *to ‘know’ without God*. This has spanned subsequent decades of increasing humanism, as man in his pride became deceived by his own cleverness into thinking that he is his own god. Knowledge has become relegated to a mental and rational process, rather than involving the whole person – heart, soul, spirit and mind.

Jesus is Knowledge

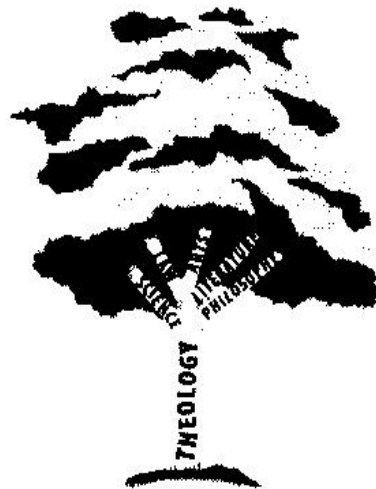
Jesus himself said, in that famous verse from John 14, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (v6). When he said this, Jesus was making an outstanding claim: “I am *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

This is a wonderful verse with staggering implications. If all wisdom and knowledge is *in* him, then no true knowledge is outside of him! How short-sighted then, to leave Jesus Christ out of the educational system of our children as many do today!

Education is training children to know Jesus Christ and his Father and, through that relationship, to handle all knowledge.

A Medieval Tree-trunk

Six hundred years ago, it was accepted that this was the only way to educate. The diagram below, in the form of a tree, represents the medieval approach to university education which was commenced primarily through the study of God. When the university was founded in the city of Oxford, where I now live, it was mandatory for every student to spend a whole year studying theology – the Word of God. This was the tree-trunk of the learning process.



Only after this could you advance to your specialist subject, represented on the diagram by the branches. It was taken for granted that you could not fully understand literature, history, science etc. until you had studied ‘the Queen of Sciences’ – Theology. Only in the light of the knowledge of God and the principles of his Word could subjects make sense! And we believe we’ve progressed?!

A Christ-centred Curriculum

We can see, so far, that Christian education means that God has to be at the heart of the learning process. Children need to be introduced to Jesus as Saviour and then to learn how to discern subject knowledge in the light of God's Word and his principles. What does this mean in practice?



In the secular curriculum system mankind is glorified and exalted. However in the Christian school I believe every subject is meant to reflect an aspect of the character of God. Let's look at some examples.

Art

Art, for instance, shows us God the artist, the creator God. All of our design originated with the line, shape, colour and texture of God's wonderful creation. Landscapes, sunsets, oceans, butterfly wings, scented flowers, all inspire us to emulate God the artist. We are made in his image and therefore are able to be creative – perhaps some more so than others!

History

History reveals the great plans of God the architect of time. History has tritely been called 'His Story' – but it is true! History is the outworking, linear unfolding of the story of God's plans for this world. At school I was never told how history began (at Creation), neither was I told of how all history in time and space will end one day. I was cheated of true knowledge. Yet Philippians 2 makes it clear that the focal point and goal of all history will be the day when every knee will bow to Jesus Christ as Lord when he returns to the earth. History is not, as someone once said, "one damn thing

after another”, nor as another said, “bunk”. History teaches us how nations and their leaders either co-operate with God’s principles and are blessed or act from impure and greedy motives and experience misery and war. Yet over all, as Romans 8:28 tells us, “All things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (RSV). God’s sovereignty means there is an over-arching plan and purpose being worked out on the earth.

Other subjects

Space doesn’t permit me to expand on every subject; but science reveals God the scientist, teaching us his wonders, from the atom to the galaxies. Languages teach us how to communicate accurately like our Communicator Dad! And maths I hear you ask – what about maths? Mathematics reveals God the mathematician and the precise, sequential, logical aspects of his nature. Did you ever struggle, as I did, with the fact that in maths you are never ‘nearly right’? You have to be either right or wrong! Maths reveals aspects of God’s righteousness. No one is ever ‘nearly saved’. They are either saved or they’re not. Maths also teaches us obedience and perhaps this is why so many find it difficult. In maths you have to follow *every* step accurately in order to solve the problem or get the answer – this requires obedience and diligence. No wonder many of us find it a struggle!

As we approach every subject in this light, the education process comes alive. Once we place Jesus at the centre, there is life. Countless parents, after I have explained our approach to curriculum, have come up to me with real enthusiasm saying, “I wish I had been taught like this. If only I could come to school again!”

Chapter 5

Christian School: Elitist Ghetto or Hothouse?

There are a number of regular arguments and misconceptions raised against the idea of a Christian school. In this chapter I would like to try and answer some of them.

Elitist?

One of the common charges brought against us is that in creating a Christian school we are creating an elitist community which is only for those who can afford it or for those who are Christian. It is true that education is expensive and that because we receive no government support it is necessary to charge fees. However, it is not true that this need exclude those who are unable to afford fees.

In our group of churches in Oxfordshire we have expressly stipulated that none of our church members' children will be refused education for lack of finance. We have made provision of a bursary fund in order to help those who may be financially disadvantaged. We have found it prudent, however, to create a small confidential committee who meet with those requesting help. We make it a condition of such help that the folk involved are prepared to open up their family finances so that we can honestly assess the amount of real help needed.

We regard the school as an integral ministry of the church to the young of the flock, and we therefore consider that those who tithe are

already contributing to the school, since it is from the tithes that the church's support for the school comes. We feel justified, therefore, in charging a higher fee rate to those who are not tithing members of our churches. Such fees are still cheap for independent education.

I do not believe Christian schools promote an elitist social class of pupil. What is happening is that pupils learn how to live in a kingdom culture and are disciplined in their character into a considerate community lifestyle where they learn to accept one another and love their neighbour as themselves. If the godly atmosphere created by this is elitist, then I'm all for it!

Ghetto?

Some people are genuinely concerned that by placing our children into a Christian school we are withdrawing them from the world into a defensive 'ghetto'. We have to be honest and say that it is possible for such a charge to be valid; but it need not, and should not, be so.

We are creating an alternative community to a secular school; but if it is healthy it will have what we might call 'external integration'. By this I mean that as a school we should be promoting relationships with the community around us and with other schools. We do this by looking for ways to serve our community, perhaps by visiting old people's homes, by hospital visiting, or by encouraging other initiatives. It is healthy for us to compete in sports with other schools in the area.

Our senior pupils often visit the local comprehensive school, at the request of the RE teacher, in order to give real life examples of what it means to be a believing Christian. In this way they learn to share their faith and their testimony of ways in which God has healed them or helped their family in various ways. This has always been well-received and is good training for our students too. We also encourage parents to involve their children in developing neighbourhood friendships where appropriate and in joining organisations like scouts or guides, gym clubs etc. where they get to meet other youngsters. In such ways we avoid a defensive ghetto mentality. In fact, when pupils move from our school to their local

comprehensive school (we do not cover the A-level syllabus – yet!), they fit in remarkably quickly and become well-liked pupils by their new peers.

Hothouse?

Another frequent accusation brought to bear against Christian education is that we are rearing children in a hothouse or greenhouse environment which is protective. To this charge I cheerfully plead guilty! However, it is necessary to explain why.

Jesus, as we saw in chapter 3, taught in Matthew 18 that we must protect the faith of young children. The implication is that they are vulnerable and sensitive. Just as we would not plant young seedlings out in a frost, but rather grow them in a controlled temperature with a view to planting them out later, so I believe it is necessary to do the same for these young lives. Our job is to provide an environment that is healthy and suitable in order to help them develop the ‘root system’ of faith. Once they have matured, we plant them out into the world. A couple of years ago one of our girls returned after a year in the local sixth form. “How’s it going for you?” I asked. Her reply was immediate. “Mr. Freeman, I’m so grateful for the grounding you have given us. In this past year I have been offered everything from sex to drugs. I would never have coped if you had sent us out earlier; but at sixteen I’ve been ready and able to deal with the challenges.” Obviously all teenagers do not mature at the same rate; but it was encouraging to hear from her that she had felt well-prepared.

Controlled Exposure

Educationally I believe in what might be called ‘controlled exposure’. By this I mean that we guard our pupils when young from certain information which we don’t consider suitable. For instance, we do not teach about other religions until they are in the senior school because young children need to be grounded in the truth and can be confused by different religions. With regard to evolution as a theory, we also expose our senior students to this so that they can appreciate what many believe about the universe and learn to handle the issues. At the same time we develop their appreciation for the fuller aspects of what it means to believe

in creation. We need to prepare our students for the world. They will need to integrate with others, but at a pace controlled by parents and school together.

Sixth Form and Colleges of Further Education in our area who have received our students have often been complimentary about them. “Your students know what they believe and are not afraid to stand up for their faith,” said one teacher to me. Another of our girls attended an interview at a local college accompanied by her mother. The mother explained to me later that as soon as the head of the college heard that she was from our school, he promptly concluded the interview by saying: “We’ll take you!” When the mother asked why he was suddenly so sure he replied: “We like having students from The King’s School. They are a good role model for other teenagers and always get their work in on time.” Although we have to be honest and acknowledge that we have had our failures, it would seem that in a very large percentage of cases, the greenhouse technique of a controlled environment followed by a controlled exposure is working!

Shouldn’t our Children be ‘Salt’?

Many sincerely believe that children of Christian parents should be used as evangelistic witnesses or ‘salt’ in state schools. I have to say that, as far as I can see, there is absolutely no scriptural authority for our children to be exposed to a humanistic system in order to be salt. When Jesus commanded his disciples to be salt, he was speaking to adults not children. And, as we’ve already seen, Jesus speaks of the necessity of protecting children and nurturing their faith. I believe there are very few youngsters who are bold or extrovert enough to stand against peer pressure at an early age. Certainly my experience has been that many Christian children become ‘schizophrenic’ in their faith. By this I mean that they are overtly Christian at home and in church but learn to keep quiet about their faith in school in order to ‘survive’. Too often they feel very guilty about this.

Rather I believe it is adults who are called to be ‘salt’ in the education system. As we saw in Chapter 1, teachers have a role as missionary pioneers to stand for truth in an increasingly confused moral climate. I was a state school teacher myself for nine years and deeply appreciate and value this

as the call of God on many to live as witnesses and hold out the Word of Life. Parents fulfil a tremendously valuable role where they become school governors and can take opportunities to apply ‘salty’ Christian values and principles to bear in the situations where God has placed them.

Extended Family

It would be good to end this chapter with a positive vision of what a Christian school is meant to be. A Christian school should be a family, not an institution. In a Christian school parents and church leaders are meant to be co-operating together to create an extension of church and family. Our aim should be to provide a community and a framework of values which is broadly consistent with their home. School should be a place where truth, integrity, love and acceptance are valued and where we honour Jesus as the Lord and the centre of our lives and of our relationships. It should be providing a cohesive worldview for our children that recognises that “the earth is the LORD’S, and everything in it” (Psalm 24:1). In other words, we belong *to* him and we exist *for* him.

Chapter 6

Contrast of Two Systems

Whilst this chapter may not be very popular with some people, it is true that contrast is a good technique for highlighting the unique nature of any system. In this chapter I want to contrast the two educational approaches of the state school and the Christian school. Let us not lose sight of the biblical purpose of education, which is the knowledge of God. Many state schools pride themselves on being open-minded about faith or religion stating that knowledge is neutral. This idea of neutrality is a myth.

“The school system that ignores God teaches its pupils to ignore God and this is not neutrality; it is the worst form of antagonism for it judges God to be unimportant and irrelevant in human affairs” (Philip May).

I know that there are caring Head Teachers and staff in many state schools who are doing their very best for their pupils. As we have already stated in Chapter One, many Christians are called of God to work in these schools. The purpose of this chapter is not to denigrate them but to highlight the essential differences in the root philosophy, principles in practice, and fruit of the two very different ‘plants’.

In order to help us keep it simple, the following table may help which shows the contrasted ‘faith’ foundations of the two types of school. From these foundations follow the beliefs, practices and goals that each one aims for and the type of fruit it finally produces.

	Secular school	Christian school
Faith:	Humanism	Christianity
Source belief:	Evolution	Creation
Child:	Essentially good	Essentially sinful
Will:	Sacred	To be submitted
Teacher:	Facilitator	Discipler
Education process :	Child-centred self-development	Christ-centred servanthood
The goal:	Self-realisation	God's glory
Fruit:	Self-centredness Self-assertion Career-oriented Materialism Hopelessness Disillusionment	God-centredness Self-denial Destiny-oriented Contentment Hope Peace

Roots

As this series of books recognises on its back cover, “What is hidden in the roots will be revealed in the shoots” (a quote from Barney Coombs). Both schools’ approaches and methods are the out-working of a basic belief system, although this may not be openly acknowledged or even recognised by some state schools. The belief is rooted in how we believe the world began. For the Christian school it is clear from the Bible that God is a creator who made heaven and earth and who created man and woman in his own image. This has implications for the way pupils and the world in which they live are viewed, as we will see.

The state school system clearly espouses a belief in an evolution apart from God. There may be conflicting views about *how* the earth came into being; but state textbooks for science and geography clearly teach some sort of random, evolutionary development that has no room for God at all. It is rarely, if ever, explained to pupils that evolution is a *theory*

which cannot be proved and which even has some vital missing links to its chain.

From its root source of faith in man (humanism) the secular school produces stems, branches and fruit developed from that faith. Similarly, the Christian school's faith in a Creator God produces a grid reference of principles which are the outworking of that faith.

Stems and Branches

These two polarised roots of faith produce stems and branches of *principles* and *perceptions*. For instance, if the world is self-existent and a random 'chrome' development, this must affect our view of children and mankind. They too must be random, and therefore lack significant meaning. As someone light-heartedly quipped: "If we teach children that they are descended from monkeys we shouldn't be surprised if they act like monkeys."

By contrast, if we believe that we are *created beings*, then each of us has value and worth. We are the result of God's purposeful design. One of our joys in a Christian school is to explain to young children that they are unique and special. God planned their whole being; this helps us to appreciate differences rather than dislike them or be threatened by them.

In educational terms there will inevitably be a strongly humanistic belief undergirding the state school's perception of children. It is suggested that children are initially good; we just have to guide them to express the creativity and academic ability that is already within them. As Melanie Phillips shows, this approach of stressing the primacy of imagination has been taken to extreme lengths, particularly in English.

"Above all there is the primacy of the imagination. As has already been said, the development of the imagination is certainly desirable and there should indeed be a place in the syllabus for creative expression. But the essay once enjoyed pre-eminence because what it does above all is to teach children how to think. And that should be at the very heart of a child's education.

"The tremendous emphasis that has been placed on creativity, however, has greatly diminished the role of the essay in the classroom.

The result is that one of the prime tools for teaching children how to think has been devalued. Instead of being taught how to think, they are now mainly allowed to imagine” (Melanie Phillips, *All must have Prizes*).

We end up with teachers assigned to the role of facilitators, guiding a child-centred process. They are unsure of their authority and of the criteria by which they evaluate pupils because, by implication, if children fail to achieve it must reflect on poor teaching. Standards and expectations drop and there are national repercussions.

Original Sin!

Again, by contrast, the Christian believes that children are unique and full of potential, but sinful. David expresses it like this: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). Some people struggle with such a concept, regarding children as somehow untainted by sin. Most parents, however, have no trouble in believing sin is at work even in the youngest child. I well remember our daughter’s first lie at the age of two years. The wallpaper over her cot was torn and when I asked her, “Who did that?”, she replied unhesitatingly, “Not me”! Who had taught her to lie? Not I or her mother. It was sin at work within her. Any parent will agree that it is harder to get children to say “please” and “thank you” than it is to say “I want” with wilful determination! Here again, the selfish nature of sin is at work.

If our children are sinful, then they need a saviour. If they are selfish, then they must be confronted and their will needs to be shaped. All of this will affect our style and method of teaching in the classroom. Christian education is as much about training character as it is about training the academic or practical skills. Our model is the character of Jesus. The breakdown of discipline in state schools is directly attributable to the erosion of the teacher’s authority and the removal of the right to discipline with effective measures.

Self-development and ‘My Rights’

By and large, in a state school the emphasis is on the child’s own self-development as a pupil who has rights and who can make demands.

Of course, there are schools with Head Teachers and staff who train their children to help the Third World or to serve their community. Sadly, however, there is increasing self-centredness being developed in students who are, in many schools, now setting their own standards by increasingly anarchic behaviour.

Servanthood and Self-denial

In chapter 3 I told the story of Sarah. At the end of the first term at the Christian school she went to the Head Teacher saying, “Thank you for letting me come to your lovely school.”

What had caused such a transformation? She had entered a community where the love of Jesus is being outworked, however imperfectly. She was welcomed and accepted by the children and learned from them how to serve one another like Jesus the servant. She was loved and encouraged by her teacher and, as a result, has blossomed. Most children become Christians within a couple of months of being in such a positive atmosphere. When we learn to deny ourselves by putting others first, the result is happiness.

Throughout our school, emphasis is placed on servanthood. From the Infants being given little tasks, to the Seniors serving their school on a Student Council or working in the community, servanthood trains us in self-denial and combats that self-centredness which Archbishop William Temple said is “the source of all sin.”

Fruits

Both of our contrasting ‘plants’ bear fruit. The state system bears some unattractive, and often bitter, humanistic fruit. The result of being trained for your own fulfilment obviously breeds self-centred attitudes. The intellect may be developed, but perhaps at the expense of care and compassion for others. Students are produced who may be only materialistic or career-orientated, looking to gain money and self-fulfilment. Their aim may be to ‘do their own thing’. Sadly many become disillusioned and even depressed by being told that man is his own maker, the architect of his own life and, through technology, the shaper of the

world to his own ends. Disillusionment often leads to depression and even loss of hope. Sadly, too many youngsters commit suicide; sometimes through that pervading sense of hopelessness that they will never ‘make it’, sometimes through the pressure of the academic hoops that they have to jump through with no resource outside of themselves to turn to. In 1995 a survey of 13,000 teenagers from 65 schools in England and Wales discovered that 1 in 3 had considered suicide. The study *‘Teenage Religion and Values’* by Professor Leslie Francis and Doctor William Kay, of Trinity College, Carmarthean, Wales, also discovered widespread self-abuse and depression. Recent statistics reveal that British university student suicides have almost doubled in the past decade (Evangelical Alliance Youth and Children’s Bulletin, October 2000).

Serving our Generation

It was said of King David that when he had fulfilled God’s purposes in his generation he fell asleep (Acts 13:36). What an epitaph!

A Christian education hopefully trains students to emulate Jesus through the example of teachers and leaders, and to trust in him to help them in all challenges. Most importantly, the emphasis on servanthood is carried through to the pursuit of our destiny in God. Students are encouraged to pray over their future, over their options for GCSE, because they do not exist for themselves but to serve their creator God in their generation. Prophetic encouragement and the perception of parents and teachers will all play their part in helping each student to discover their way towards “the good works which God has prepared in advance” for them to do (Ephesians 2:10). This is what we were made for! This way lies fulfilment, hope, joy and peace.

Students Speaking for Themselves

When our students had attended our newly opened school in 1984 for a couple of weeks we asked them how this school compared with their previous experience in the state schools. From seven year-olds up to thirteen year-olds, many of their comments were the same. “It’s a great relief. Now at last, everything is going in the same direction and we can be open

about our faith and pray.” They knew they *should* have been bolder back in their state school; but few of them could stand against the formidable peer pressure. In fact, they had become somewhat schizophrenic – Christian at home and church, but keeping their heads down at school, and feeling guilty about it. Since then many of our students have gone on to further education and careers and so it is time for them to speak for themselves about Christian education and how it has prepared them for their future.

Kathryn (now a trained nurse): “I’ll never forget the first day of The King’s School. I was nine years old and had been going to a state primary school. The main difference I felt was a sense of family. I had come from quite a hostile environment where school was like an institution really and the teaching very worldly. Although I was a Christian before, it was at The King’s School that I learnt the principle of living by faith and trusting God for the impossible. I saw miracles – healing in assemblies, provision of finance; indeed it was like a faith journey in the early years praying for finance and seeing God provide.”

Tim (now studying at Imperial College, London): “Although I initially found coming to the Christian school hard, having joined in Year 7, it soon became one of the most formative times of my life. The atmosphere was very different to all the other schools I had been to; there was a special closeness among friends in the school and a friendly respect for teachers which I had not seen before. I found the workload and discipline difficult when I first arrived, but soon appreciated the character development it caused in me. On moving to the state sixth-form I found that I had already been taught much of the material of the subsequent A-level courses I took, which placed me in an advantageous position in my class.”

Hannah (just back from a gap year in Burundi where she helped in an orphanage, and now preparing to study nursing at university): “The spiritual preparation and foundations placed in you at the school are very important when you go out into ‘the real world’. We were encouraged to think about our Christian views on important matters like abortion, pre-marital sex, drugs, drinking etc. It is so useful to have thought about these issues before leaving and to have arguments ready to use. When I started sixth form, we had ‘assemblies’ once a week. Only a handful of times did

we do anything remotely to do with God. It was just a completely different approach to education.”

Mark (who was also impacted by the Christian assemblies in our school): “The assemblies must be unique and surely give pupils an advantage in spiritual understanding which children in state schools just don’t get. I have just finished a PGCE and am starting work as a French teacher in a comprehensive school in September.”

Derek is a pupil who has returned to the school as a trainee teacher after sixth form and a ‘year out’. He has a unique perspective: “I have been impacted over these two weeks that I have spent in the school by the extent to which the Christian message pervades school life, not only in terms of rhetoric and assemblies, but also in the everyday running of the school. Honesty, integrity, joy, kindness, grace – these are the core values to which every class aspires and of which every classroom in the country needs more.”

Obviously, not every student from a Christian school is a success story. There are many factors involved in that, not least the pull of the world’s temptations. Yet the Scriptures clearly state, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). This is a promise every Christian parent can claim. ‘Old’ is not really defined here. When students turn to their own way, it is not the end of the story. A Christian education has laid a rich deposit of the Word and ways of God in their lives to which the Holy Spirit can appeal when, like the Prodigal, they come to their senses.

Chapter 7

What is our Aim?

Our children are growing up in a Post-Modern generation, so-called because it follows a period labeled ‘Modernism’. Modernism began somewhere between the 16th and 17th centuries, dominating Western life and thought until the 20th century. Modernists believed in the progress (now called “the progress myth”) and the increasing advance of society based on man’s development of science and technology. However, two World Wars, the development of nuclear weapons, the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, and such things as ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and elsewhere have caused Modernism to implode.

Little wonder, in the light of all this, that the Post-Modern generation is cynical. They no longer trust their political leaders; absolute moral values no longer command respect; there is no security. As Leonard Cohen’s song ‘The Future’ puts it:

“Things are going to slide in all directions
Won’t be nothing you can measure anymore.”

Truth is relative, depending on what you want to believe – that is, if you know what to believe! In words drawn from another time, “Every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6, KJV).

In such fluid and uncertain times we need to be training our children in the relevance of the unchanging biblical truths which lead to wisdom. Wisdom, I believe, should be our aim. Now, more than ever, the next generation needs the example of young people who can point the way to wisdom and demonstrate it in their own lives. Such wisdom is not gained

overnight, but comes from a foundation laid in their lives by consistent training during childhood and teenage years.

Building our Lives on the Rock

Jesus told the parable of the wise and foolish builders who built their houses on different foundations. I believe the ‘house’ in each case stands for the man’s life. If asked what was the difference between the two men, most of us would answer that the wise man built on the rock and the foolish man built on the sand. Whilst this is the symbolic picture language which Jesus uses, he makes clear in his explanation that, whereas both men heard his teaching, the foolish one quickly ignored it but the wise man “put into practice” what Jesus taught. He goes on to say, “But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand” (Matthew 7:26). His ‘house’ collapsed in time of storm whereas the wise man’s withstood the storm.

This, I believe, provides a picture for us of how our children’s lives need to be built on the wisdom of obeying God’s Word. This is the true rock foundation. Such training will enable them to withstand the ‘storms’ that will come through events that will shake their lives, choices that will confront them, people that will oppose them, or peer pressure that will seek to mould them.

The British Government states in its educational curriculum that its aims are “knowledge and understanding”. These are laudable; but *wisdom* is lacking from these aims. Wisdom is the ability to know how to use the knowledge and understanding that you have, applying them to make right choices. By right choices I mean choices which demonstrate obedience to the revealed commandments in God’s Word.

Two Types of Wisdom

The Bible speaks of two kinds of ‘wisdom’ in the world, which it defines as worldly wisdom and godly wisdom. *Worldly wisdom* is characterised by selfish ambition and denies biblical truth. “Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil” (James 3:15). *Godly wisdom* is characterised by the living of a good life,

right moral choices, and good deeds done in humility, which is itself an aspect of wisdom.

Worldly wisdom is usually influenced by outward appearance and judgement is often made by primarily responding to the senses. For example, Adam and Eve were tempted by such worldly wisdom from Satan. Eve, in particular, was affected because the forbidden fruit looked “pleasing to the eye” (Genesis 3:6). The prophet Samuel, when commanded by God to choose another King for Israel, was nearly misled by the striking outward appearance of Eliab, Jesse’s eldest son. Fortunately Samuel heard God’s judgement on the matter: “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). The chosen son was, of course, David who, at that time, was the youngest and least impressive of the family.

Jesus demonstrates again and again in his life on earth how man should live by godly wisdom which results from obedience to God’s word. In the trial of temptation in the wilderness Jesus refused to yield to Satan’s ‘reasonable’ suggestion that he make bread and satisfy his physical hunger. Instead he quoted the word of God from Deuteronomy, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

True wisdom is only found in God and his Word. It can only be accessed through a relationship with Jesus Christ by faith. The Holy Spirit is sometimes called the Spirit of Wisdom and, indeed, becomes the agent or helper who “guides us into all truth” (John 16:13). As Paul puts it in his letter to the Corinthians: “We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us” (1 Cor 2:12). God wants his people to live by such wisdom and Scripture encourages us that if we lack wisdom we have only to ask God and he will give it to us (James 1:5). This has to be an integral part of the educational training of the young generation. We must train them to know the word of God and to refer constantly to God by praying about choices they have to make in life.

The Three ‘C’s

One simple way in which we in our school in Oxfordshire try to develop wisdom in our children is to teach them the three ‘C’s. The first ‘C’ stands for *Choice*. At any point of choice we ask our pupils to remember two more ‘C’s – *Command* and *Consequence*. We teach them when making a choice to first look back and ask: “What does God’s Word say about this?” (or, “What do my parents/leaders say?”) We then ask them to look forward to the third ‘C’ – *Consequence*. Here they ask: “What might be the consequence of different choices I might make in this instance?” Having prayed and consulted, they can make their choice. Note that the choice is hopefully then being made on a godly basis rather than on the basis of peer pressure or the senses alone. This training to think consequentially is just one facet, but a valuable one, of wisdom. This process also trains students to get into the habit of praying, which is a process of submitting our minds to God rather than being wise in our own eyes.

Daniel

Daniel in the Old Testament demonstrates for us the way to wisdom by a process akin to the three C’s. He was a teenager in times of great turmoil and was taken captive to Babylon when Jerusalem was invaded. Although he lost everything, even his name, something had been trained into this young man’s life which no one could take away. He had a living faith in the true God and he knew the commandments of God. Daniel stood firm for God in an idolatrous, hedonistic, alien culture. He refused to partake of the rich food and wine of the Babylonians which he knew would draw him into idolatrous feasts. By making a single choice based on the command of God, and an awareness of the consequence, he refused to be seduced by the culture’s appeal to the sensual appetites but gave himself to be true to God.

After three years of Babylonian education, Daniel was tested by King Nebuchadnezzar. He was, along with his three faithful friends, found to be “ten times better” in wisdom than any others (Daniel 1:20). The Bible tells us why. God honoured their choice to serve only him and “to these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning” (Daniel 1:17). Daniel himself acknowledged this

when he prayed, “I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power” (Daniel 2:23).

Modern Daniels

I believe we need to train a generation of ‘Daniels’ (both male and female!) who, like him, can stand for truth in an alien culture and who may be instrumental in their nation’s leadership. Daniel became advisor to four consecutive rulers – not a bad track record out of a single choice!

Abraham Lincoln said, “The philosophy of the classroom is the philosophy of government in the next generation.” Why should we not influence the governments of this world for good through Christian education?

We have had successes and failures in Christian education, but have seen some encouragement from the stand some of our students have taken. One, Annabelle, left her Christian school for a sixth form college to study literature. Presented with a sexually dubious book to read, she refused on the grounds that, as a Christian, she did not wish to submit her mind to such uncleanness. The teacher ridiculed her, calling her ‘Hallelujah Annabelle’; but she stood firm. Some time later the teacher became an area moderator for final exam grades and, in that capacity, he happened to visit the Christian school from which she came. He was so impacted by the atmosphere, pupils and staff, that he returned to apologise to Annabelle. In front of the class, he stated his new-found respect for her adding, “At least Annabelle knows what she believes and stands up for it.” I believe the spirit of the kingdom has touched him and he has been challenged by it. That’s quite a victory!

Parents – the Choice is Yours

Parents, we and our children exist for God’s glory. We have suggested that our aim, in one word, should be wisdom. We can do no better than invest in a God-centred education for the training of our children in wisdom. In Proverbs 4:7 a father says to his child: “Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.” Christian education costs; but what better investment could there be than to gain wisdom?

I hope that this booklet has caused you to think afresh. Even more, I hope it will cause you to pray and ask God about his desire for the education of your children who are a gift from him. Not all children trained in Christian education are instant success stories; but I believe that such a training lays a foundation to which the Holy Spirit can later appeal, calling them back to the truth.

With Hindsight

It is common for teenagers not to appreciate what is provided for them until they have moved on. Hindsight is nearly always twenty-twenty vision! We will give the last words to two more students from a Christian school who didn't always value what they had at the time. They have also had their struggles, but have come through for God.

Chris Cole says: "The King's School has given me a really good foundation for everything that I am doing now. I have had struggles since I left the school, but when I recommitted my life to Christ, all those foundations from my years in the school were still in place. Even during the time I was rebelling, because I had these things in place, I knew that I was rebelling, and although I didn't like it at the time, that brought me back. As Proverbs 22:6 says, 'Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not turn from it.' The biggest thing that the school has done for me is to have given me an international vision. There were many visiting missionaries who gave us a real heart for other nations. The other key thing was about 'destiny'. The teachers all know that God has a destiny for their lives and teach you that God has a destiny for your life as well. God laid Brazil on my heart as part of my destiny in him and I ended up going there. All that was due to the training I was given at The King's School."

Miles Wilton writes: "When I left The King's School I felt very ready to leave. I was at a stage where the boundaries of the school had started to prohibit my spiritual development in the areas of leadership and maturity. I had a fairly strong desire to move on to something new, even challenging. The limitation I was finding in my last year at school in spiritual development was simply because there were other areas in me which needed

desperately to catch up. In my state school Sixth Form I was confronted with large numbers of people who didn't care about anything 'religious' and who were involved in all kinds of immorality. The conversation was almost constantly full of coarse joking, sexual innuendo, criticism and gossip. But, my passion for God kept me praying, my passion kept me from sinning and my passion caused me to develop in both character and strength. I am not saying I always prayed, that I never sinned and always kept progressing, but that, over time, my desire for more of God overcame a lot of the pressures and influences on me.

"The King's School had trained me in leadership thanks to the opportunity available in the last two or three years. God used this as I started a Christian Union/Alpha group after I found there was none at my new school, and that has carried on since I left.

"Would I send my children to a Christian school? Definitely. I've heard all kinds of complaints from others about 'spoon-feeding' and 'over-saturation'; but to me this is completely irrelevant. Biblically, children should be brought up knowing God in all things and the school does a brilliant job of applying Christianity to all the subjects studied, giving Christian perspectives on life and life issues. With respect to 'spoon-feeding': no matter what you do to children, they have a way of deciding for themselves without being asked to. With respect to 'over-saturation', I think this is merely a critical comment or excuse by young people who don't appreciate what has been invested in them.

"Looking back, you realise what an honour and blessing it was to have spiritually mature men and women teaching you God's word. I remember being told by an ex-pupil while I was still at the school that they wished they had learnt more memory verses. Now I wish I had too! Actually being among teachers who are living out the Christian life faithfully was also very impacting. I could say an awful lot more on all of these areas; but so as not to write an entire book by myself ... I'll stop!"

In the relay race of life these two 'sons' have clearly grasped the baton of faith from the older generation of their parents and teachers who invested in them. They are now running with the conviction that they intend to ensure *their* children receive the same inheritance of faith by giving them a Christian education. As one pastor put it, "Fathers formulate

the vision; sons demonstrate the vision; and grandsons authenticate the vision.” In other words, the third generation who are trained really prove the vision to be valid and fruitful over the long term. We trust that this book has caused you to consider the effect of your choices on the generations yet to come.