

HOW SHOULD WE THEN TEACH?

A Philosophy of Education

by Joe Bray

Life's meaning may be summarized in three fundamental questions. Successful teaching is causing students to learn God's answers to these questions.

Will I go to heaven? When our sin separates us from the Lord, our personalities literally dis-integrate. That's because *"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together"* (Colossians 1:17). We can now go to heaven only through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, who said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life"* (John 14:6). The Christian school helps students answer this most important question clearly, convincingly and completely.

Whom will I take with me? Jesus' marching orders to His followers were clear: *"Go and make disciples of all nations"* (Matthew 28:19). The Christian school helps students to *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have"* (I Peter 3:15).

What kind of world will I leave behind? This sets our lives in the context of God's unfolding plan in history. Christians are saved to serve. We will someday live in heaven with God, but first we live on earth for God: *"Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16).

The Christian school glorifies God by enjoying the study of His world through the lens of His Word. Man cannot spin truth, beauty and goodness out of his head, but he can discover the elegant design God impressed upon His creation. **Science** points us to God, *"for since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities...have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made"* (Romans 1:20). **Math** shows us the

orderliness of His thoughts, *"for God is not a God of disorder but of peace"* (I Corinthians 14:33). **Language** reflects Him, for *"In the beginning was the Word"* (John 1:1). **Literature** reveals our creativity as made *"in the image of God"* (Genesis 1:26-27). **Art** exists because of our deep desire *"to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord"* (Psalm 27:4). **Music** testifies that *"He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God"* (Psalm 40:7). **History** is merely *"[telling] the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done"* (Psalm 78:4).

The Christian school must be more than just a public school plus a Bible class. Jesus is Lord of all, and Christianity touches every area of human endeavor. A truly Christian education trains students to be on active duty behind enemy lines in the world's long war against God. The soul of the next generation hangs in the balance, so we dare not fail in our mission. *"If all the world were Christian, it might not matter if all the world were uneducated. But, as it is, a cultural life will exist outside the Church whether it exists inside or not. To be ignorant and simple*

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C. S. Lewis

now – not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground – would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defence (sic) but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered. The cool intellect must work not only against the cool intellect on the other side, but against the muddy mysticisms which deny intellect altogether" (C. S. Lewis).

If Christians withdraw from cultural life, the social fabric will unravel around us. People will still read (bad books instead of good), think (irrationally instead of rationally) and search for satisfaction (sensual instead of aesthetic). Many believers have

bought into the devil's lie that some things are sacred (the private domain of religious persons) and some are secular (Christians have no business in the public square). We tend to see things in bits and pieces, rather than in a comprehensive way. Thus we have been fairly good at personal evangelism, but have neglected cultural evangelism. The Christian school can help students recapture an inclusive vision. *"The Christian church needs young people who have been exposed to the best of Western culture and who are able to interact thoughtfully and reflectively with the literature, history, philosophy, and science of that culture. In short, we need Christians who have broad minds that have been sharpened to the point of usefulness"* (Ronald Nash).

Only the Christian school can provide an education worth the name. In fact, the Christian school movement may turn out to be one of the most significant achievements of Christendom in the 21st century. As the monasteries kept the light of civilization burning during the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, so Christian schools may be outposts of learning amid a postmodern society that is in intellectual and moral freefall toward another Dark Age. Godless educational models are flat, one-dimensional, and unsatisfying. By appealing both to reason and imagination, Christian teachers bring every academic discipline and cultural expression into the service of God: *"we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (II Corinthians 10:5).

We want to send forth our students as gifted, passionate, trained, called cultural warriors to their various stations in life. They will glorify God by producing quality novels, films, music, architecture, medicine, and law. Their light will shine in the raising of godly families, in their craftsmanship on the job, in their presence at potluck suppers, and in their leadership in sports leagues. They will understand what our civilization is desperately trying to forget: all of life is holy, sacred under God. The Christian teacher alone knows the integration point that makes life make sense. He can stand with confidence before his students and say: *"My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete*

understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:2-3).

God's first command to the human race was to fill the earth, subdue it and rule over it (Genesis 1:28). Even in our fallen state, God has never rescinded our dominion mandate, and education is essential to our obedience to Him. *"Man by the Fall fell at the same time from his state of innocence and from his dominion over nature. Both of these losses, however, can even in this life be in some part repaired; the former by religion and faith, the latter by the arts and sciences"* (Francis Bacon). Christian education, by pointing students to salvation in Christ and preparing them for service to Christ, heals the

false division between the "sacred" and the "secular," weaving all of life into a seamless whole. Jesus proclaimed, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me"* (Matthew 28:20).

Since Jesus is Lord over all of life, Christian young people should receive consistent and complementary teaching from the three most

formative institutions in their lives: home, church and school. The Bible says: *"A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"* (Ecclesiastes 4:12). The teacher stands arm in arm with parent and pastor to provide a support team for the next generation, to *"bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4).

Jesus observed that the greatest commandment is: *"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matthew 22:37, 39). Every activity of life - including education - should move us toward these two ultimate ends. The goal of education is more than to make a good living; it is to make a good life. May God grant us wisdom and strength equal to the task!

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

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