

Second Sight

Renewing the Vision of Bellevue Christian School for the New Century

by Lowell Hagan

Prologue

A century ago, people who could accurately predict coming events were said to have “second sight.” We cannot know the future of Bellevue Christian School, but like a runner who reaches the point of fatigue and then gets a new burst of energy, a second wind, we can get a new grasp of the vision and direction of the school, a second sight, and move with renewed confidence into the new century.

When brothers Albert and Joseph Greene set out to create a Christian school in Bellevue, Washington, they knew little more than that they wanted a Christian environment in which learning could take place. This would mean taking the best of what the public schools had to offer and adding biblical studies, prayer, and a Christian standard of conduct and dress. So when Eastside (soon renamed Bellevue) Christian School opened its doors 1950, it was little different from scores of other small, struggling Christian schools. It separated Christian students from the influence of the surrounding world, its pedagogy was highly traditional, and its behavior standards were rigidly enforced. Dewey Fredricks, one of the stalwarts of the faculty in its early years, later remarked, “We weren’t under grace in those days; we were under law.”

The Greene brothers early on found their respective leadership roles in the School. Joe led in the development of the physical plant, the transportation department, and business operations. Al led and guided the development of the educational philosophy. The school could not have survived without the abilities and dedication each of the brothers possessed, but because this book is concerned with philosophy, Al Greene will receive greater attention.

In the first 25 years of the school’s existence a unique educational vision took shape in the crucible of experience. Many people influenced that development. Al Greene was a voracious reader, and set the example that to be a teacher, one must also be a learner. In the meantime, Al was hiring an unusually well qualified faculty, several of whom had earned advanced degrees in their fields of specialization. They were beginning to rethink their own disciplines from within a Christian philosophical frame of reference. Parents who caught the vision were becoming involved in ongoing discussions. Eventually in 1986 a committee of parents and faculty members produced the Educational Confession, one of the foundational statements of the school’s philosophical basis (Appendix B).

The major actors in those formative years are now retired or have already gone Home. Bellevue Christian School has entered a new era, one in which the voices of those who helped to shape the vision of the school are fading. Teachers who labored to blaze a trail of Christian scholarship and teaching left few markers behind. Each new generation of BCS teachers will have to create new paths. This expanded statement of the mission of Bellevue Christian School is written in the hope that the educational vision will outlive those who shaped it. It continually refers back to the Educational Confession and seeks to re-examine its statements and reaffirm their meaning for the new era.

The first chapter, *Forming a Vision*, provides some historical background to the development of the BCS philosophy. Chapter 2, *An Educational Philosophy*, is an

effort to expand many of the statements made in the Educational Confession, and to show the basic philosophical stance of the school. Chapter 3, *An Educational Philosophy At Work*, puts legs on these statements, showing how the school has defined its sense of mission. Chapter 4, *Striving Toward the Goal*, asks how the outcomes of Christian schooling should be measured, looking particularly at the idea of excellence. Chapter 5, *Transforming the Culture*, then looks to the future, and seeks to set a course into the 21st century. A short epilog, *Flags of the Kingdom*, reflects briefly on the possible future course of the school. Each chapter, however, is designed to be self-contained. While this makes it possible for the reader to begin with the section of greatest interest, it also means that there is some duplication of content – though we have tried to avoid mere repetition.

Following these chapters is Appendix A, *Frequently Asked Questions*, which borrows an idea from internet information sites and takes up some issues that did not fit into the structural outline of the principal chapters. Appendix B contains the full text of the BCS Educational Confession.

One somewhat technical issue needs explanation. The English language does not have a gender-neutral word to refer to all of humanity. Here it echoes Hebrew, where the one word *Adam* can be either a word for all of humanity, or the name of the first man. For reasons of simplicity I have adopted the policy of using the capitalized word *Man* to mean all human beings regardless of gender, and the lower-case words *man* and *men* to refer to male persons only. And to avoid overuse of the awkward *he/she* I have chosen to alternate the words *he* and *she* when the reference is not gender specific. While this usage may be unfamiliar, it is only fair.

Finally, unless otherwise specified, all Scripture quotations are from the New International Version. I have also followed the NIV by using lower case letters in pronouns that refer to God and in expressions such as “the word of God.” The Educational Confession in Appendix B does not follow these conventions but retains the capitalization and punctuation of the original document.

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Chapter 1: Forming a Vision

A Slow Boat from China

When the Reverend Albert E. Greene, Jr. and his wife, Thelma, returned from China in 1949, they could not have dreamed that they would spend the rest of their lives as part of a place called Bellevue Christian School. Al's brother Joe had helped to found a Christian school in Seattle, but his children were traveling 25 miles each way to attend it. He wanted a school closer to his home in Medina, which at that time was a sleepy semi-rural community. Al had agreed to help Joe organize a Christian school on the eastern shore of Lake Washington.

On the long boat ride back to the States, Al met Rev. Peter DeJong, the incoming pastor of Seattle's First Christian Reformed Church. When Rev. DeJong heard about the plans for a new school, he jumped in with both feet. His denomination had a long tradition of Christian schools, brought to America by Dutch immigrants almost 70 years earlier. There was even an existing association of these schools, the National Union of Christian Schools (later renamed Christian Schools International), and Peter made sure that Al knew how to contact them.

Almost every day the two pastors met to talk about the biblical basis for Christian schooling. Peter's theology, derived from the tradition of the Protestant Reformation in the Netherlands, was close to Al's own convictions. Two ideas seemed paramount. The first was that since God is the sovereign Lord of all creation, he is Lord also of education and schools should be formed in obedience to him. The second was that since human beings are made in the image of God, their service to God should extend to the whole of life, and not be limited to a special category of "spiritual" things. By the time the boat landed, Al had begun a contemplation of the idea of Christian schooling that he would pursue for the rest of his life.

"The Greene School"

Al became pastor of the church in which he had grown up and joined the boards of both the existing Seattle school and the newly organized Eastside Christian School (soon renamed Bellevue Christian School). But God was bringing events together in a way that would move Al into a new role.

During Al's first year back in the States the Greene brothers' connection with the Seattle school came to an end. Geographical distance was not the only problem; a theological distance was also developing. At this time in American history there was a theological movement in many churches that radically separated the sacred and the secular. In this view, Christians were only to be concerned with the "spiritual" side of life. The present world rejected Jesus, went the argument, and he in turn rejected it, so it was headed only for destruction. The Christian's task was to try to save people out of this world. Outside of personal morality, devotional life and evangelism, everything was in the realm of the "secular."

When the Seattle school was taken in this otherworldly direction by a majority vote in the parent society, the Greens could not in good conscience follow. They were

convinced that “Thy kingdom come” is a prayer of Christians, who should be seeking the reign of God in all areas of life.

A similar change of direction was occurring in Al’s home church, and he felt he could not stay on as pastor. So by the summer of 1950 Al was looking for the Lord to lead him in a new direction.

God’s call came through an event that could have crippled the fledgling Bellevue Christian School. In late August the man hired to be the first administrator and to teach the first four grades abruptly resigned. On one week’s notice, Al became both principal and teacher. He soon realized that he had found his new calling, and the question of a philosophy for the school jumped to the top of the priority list. For a half-century thereafter, the development of Bellevue Christian School and the development of Al Greene’s educational philosophy were so closely intertwined that teachers in other Christian schools often called it simply “the Greene school.”

The Basic Structure

The question of how the school should be governed had already been answered. In most Christian schools the parent body elected a board, which hired administrators, who in turn hired the faculty, although in many cases the board was also involved in faculty hiring. This was the almost universal pattern in the National Union of Christian Schools. However, NUCS schools were closely tied to local church congregations, so their parent societies were quite homogeneous. Bellevue Christian School, on the other hand, was intended from the beginning to be broadly interdenominational. Consensus would be more difficult to achieve when families came from diverse theological backgrounds. Joe Greene’s experience with the Christian school in Seattle had convinced the Greenses that making a Christian school a democracy was a recipe for instability.

The founders of Bellevue Christian School therefore took their organizational pattern from America’s independent schools, many of which had existed before the organization of the first public schools. Most of these older private schools were chartered as nonprofit corporations with the authority to choose new corporation members and appoint a governing board. The board then hired administrators, who hired a faculty. The independent corporation structure insulated the school from the vagaries of educational or theological fads among the parents. It also ensured that no group could control the school by showing up in large numbers at parent society meetings, and no outside group could engineer a takeover by enrolling large numbers of their members in the school.

In later years, as Al Greene led the formation of an educational philosophy for the school, this organization would be challenged. Schools organized as independent corporations were not familiar here in the Pacific Northwest, and it ran contrary to the surrounding culture. Americans tended to regard democracy as the best form of government for all times, places and situation. Furthermore, most evangelical churches had a congregational form of government, and many expected this form to be extended to the school. There were others who insisted that the school was only an extension of the authority of parents, and for this reason parents should govern the school. The corporation structure, adopted in the beginning as a practical matter, would eventually have to be examined at a philosophical level.

The Fakkema Connection

Seeking philosophical direction for the school he now headed, Al reached out first to the National Union of Christian Schools. Dr. Mark Fakkema, the chairman of NUCS, hailed from across Puget Sound in Oak Harbor. Fakkema was getting many requests for help from new Christian schools, often from outside traditional NUCS circles, and he was developing a series of lectures to help them. Traditionalists in the National Union were nervous about Fakkema's work with schools outside their familiar theological tradition, and he soon left to form a new organization, the National Association of Christian Schools. For many years Bellevue Christian School retained membership in both organizations, dropping out of the NACS (by that time renamed the Association of Christian School International, or ACSI) in the 1980s when differences in educational philosophy became too great.

Two ideas were paramount in Dr. Fakkema's thinking. The first was that creation is God's revelation of himself. For many Christians this idea meant only that when we enjoyed a sunrise or a mountain landscape, we could repeat what God said of his own work: "That's good!" While agreeing that we ought to praise God for the wonders of His creation, Fakkema went farther, arguing that we could discern some aspects of God's own character in the creation. He worked from the traditional theology of the attributes of God. One paragraph from Fakkema's work will illustrate his method:

We take it that it is generally understood that the basic divisions of the universe are three-fold – SPACE, SUBSTANCE and TIME. From Scripture it is plain that the division of the Godhead are also threefold – FATHER, SON and HOLY SPIRIT. To put it pointedly our problem is: Knowing that the individual creatures are revelatory of the attributes of God, may we assume that the three aspects of the over-all universe are revelatory of the three Persons of the Godhead?¹

Fakkema answered this question in the affirmative. His lectures on the subject opened up new approaches in the Christian classroom. However, as they worked with Fakkema's ideas, Al and his staff at the school gradually realized that something was still missing. Aspects of the creation were being studied only to find object lessons that would illustrate what we learned from the biblical text. Was that the limit of the meaning of the idea that creation is revelatory of God?

Fakkema's second basic principle was that human beings are made in the image of God. He recognized that there were conflicting views of human nature within the Christian church. On the one hand there was what some have called "worm theology," an emphasis on the worthlessness of sinful Man before a holy God. On the other hand there was the concept of the dignity and worth of the human person, which historically had led many Christians to support movements for social change such as the antislavery movement and the temperance crusade. Could these two views, one positive and the

¹ Mark Fakkema, *Christian Philosophy and its Educational Implications, Book One*, Chicago: Christian Schools Service, Inc., 1960, Appendix A-2-1

other negative, be reconciled? Fakkema called his answer the Philosophy of the Image-Idea. To explain it, he used the metaphor of a person standing before a mirror.

The person before the mirror and his image in the mirror are similar in appearance. At the same time the two are worlds apart. The one before the mirror is absolutely free and independent in his actions, while an image in the mirror is absolutely bound and dependent upon what its original before the mirror is and does. If the original smiles, so must its image. If the original opens his mouth, so must the image. For the image not to conform to its original is death for the image.

The relationship that exists between the original before the mirror and its image in the mirror is identical to the relationship that exists between God and man. This relationship must be similar since God, the “Great Original”, created man to be his “image”. (Gen. 1.26) Not only is it man’s nature to be revelatory of God, but all creation is revelatory of the Creator.²

In relation to other persons and to the rest of creation, Fakkema insisted, a person is in the place of an “original,” a “somebody,” and is therefore of infinite value (the BCS Educational Confession scales this expression back to “inestimable value.”) But in relation to God, a person is “only an image,” a “nobody.” This approach avoided both worm theology and Man-is-God humanism.

Because he began with the biblical text, Fakkema was able to see that human beings are created in necessary relationship with one another. Social life is part of the creation, not something that human beings created later. Individuals are not merely parts of something larger, as communal social theories have held; and social relationships are not merely made up of individuals, as individualist social theories contend. In this way Fakkema laid a foundation for Christian education that would see both individual persons and the structures of society as part of the creation of the Lord.

Helpful as Dr. Fakkema was in the early years of Bellevue Christian, his philosophy was caught in an endless loop. Everything came back in the end to theology and morality. The physical creation was studied to find illustrations of the attributes of God, and human endeavor was studied to find the errors in non-Christian philosophies. While Fakkema appeared to reject the twin evils of individualism and collectivism, in practice he was motivated by an almost panic fear of socialism and communism. He spent a great deal of time attacking collectivist theories but never seriously challenged the individualism of American political, economic and social life.

The weaknesses in Mark Fakkema’s system were those of a man exploring previously uncharted territory. Others would surpass him, but he is the man who jump-started the development of an educational philosophy at Bellevue Christian School.

² Fakkema, Intro.

The Dutch Connection

Al Greene's thinking about Christian education was further stimulated when he met Professor H. Evan Runner of Calvin College in the late 1950s. Dr. Runner introduced Al to the flourishing world of Christian scholarship in the Netherlands. Here Dr. Greene found a path that would go beyond Mark Fakkema's emphasis on theology and morality alone, one that would fulfill the promise contained in the words of John Calvin, who said that the Scriptures must be like a pair of glasses; they must be the lenses through which we see the whole world.

At Calvin, Evan Runner presided over a student organization known as the Groen Van Prinsterer Society, devoted to a study of recent Dutch Christian philosophy. Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, often called the father of modern Dutch historical research, is best known for his 1838 series of lectures *Unbelief and Revolution*, a Christian critique of the French Revolution of 1789. Groen insisted that politics is not religiously neutral, that philosophical ideas have practical consequences. The French Revolution's rejection of all authority, especially of God's authority, Groen saw as the cause of a general political breakdown in his own time.

Out of Groen's work came the organization of a Christian political party in the Netherlands, known as the Anti-Revolutionary Party. The greatest leader of that party was Abraham Kuyper, a scholar and theologian who founded the Free University of Amsterdam and served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands from 1901 to 1905. Kuyper left his first imprint on Christian thought in the United States when he delivered the Stone Lectures on Calvinism at Princeton in 1898. Kuyper took Groen's insights further by coining the term *sphere sovereignty*, one few people have heard because it is a translation from the Dutch and does not work very well in English.

Kuyper argued that every social structure has its own independent sphere of action, and that God is the sovereign in that sphere – thus sphere sovereignty. The family, for example, has its own structure; it is not just a human invention that can be made up any way we decide. The kind of authority that resides in a family is different from the authority of the state, or of the business enterprise, or of the school. Here was a basis for a more thorough Christian analysis of human society, and for an answer to the question of how a Christian school might be governed. (See the section *School, Church and Home* in Chapter 3)

This rich, Dutch Christian philosophical tradition was most evident in North American colleges affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church. Not only Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, but also Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa, and Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois, were becoming centers for a renewal of Christian scholarship, and a number of evangelical scholars from outside the Dutch tradition were attracted to these schools. Joe Greene's wife Annie, who managed the BCS bookstore, kept in stock books by Calvin Seerveld, James Skillen, Richard Mouw, James Olthuis, and many others whose radical rethinking of the meaning of the Gospel in contemporary scholarship and culture was shaping a generation of BCS teachers. Some of the books Annie knew could cause controversy, so she kept them in her Under-the-Counter Book Club. In one sense they were subversive books, because they challenged some cherished assumptions and pointed new directions.

“Reformed School”

In addition to his other work at Calvin, Evan Runner was also the guiding spirit behind an organization awkwardly named the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies. The meaning of the name, while perfectly obvious to its founders, was less than clear outside of Calvin College and its surrounding Dutch immigrant culture. In this case, “Reformed” referred to the tradition of the Calvinist Reformation. Christians from other traditions thought it meant “new and improved,” making the Calvin scholars sound arrogant. “Scientific” referred to all branches of knowledge, while most Americans thought it meant only the laboratory sciences. It did not help that the association’s name was abbreviated to ARSS, which had an unfortunate pronunciation.

A publication that had considerable influence on Bellevue Christian School in the 1960s was *The Bible and the Life of the Christian*, translated from the Dutch by Dr. Runner and some of his students. In a series of intensive Bible studies, it clearly laid out a basis for Christian thinking. Unfortunately, most of the authors were unfamiliar, the translators frequently lapsed into Dutch syntax, and the footnotes were obscure. This was clearly an in-house document at Calvin College, and it did not travel well. There is still a copy in the BCHS library, but it is seldom read.

Though largely devoted to questions of government and politics, *The Bible and the Life of the Christian* also contained studies on marriage, the family, the school, economic life, industrial organization, and the relationship between the Gospel and culture. Through these and other materials, Al Greene began to see that God’s revelation of himself in the creation always calls for a human response. It is not enough to check off the attributes of God that we see reflected there. The creation does not merely reflect God; it declares him, proclaims him, speaks His word.

Through Runner, Al Greene became acquainted with the work of the 20th century Dutch Christian philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd, who later became the subject of Al’s doctoral dissertation at the University of Washington. Dooyeweerd made a distinction between what he called *naïve knowing* or *whole knowing* on the one hand, and *analytic knowing* or *abstract knowing* on the other hand. An example of whole knowledge is the weary hiker who lies down under the shade of a tree. He experiences the tree in its wholeness, not in any analytic or scientific sense. It cools him, gives him shade, shields his eyes, rustles in the breeze, and appeals to his sense of beauty. But once he has rested, he may begin to study its various modalities, its various ways of being. What variety of tree is it? How old is it? How much cooler is it under the tree? If he is a specialist in some academic field he may wonder how much oxygen its leaves are creating through photosynthesis, where the tree might have come from if it is not native to the area, how its rings might overlap with those of other trees to create a biological time line, and so on. Now all of this abstract reflection can broaden and enhance his naïve experience, his whole knowledge, of the tree.

Through his use of the idea of *modalities*, Dooyeweerd built on and extended Kuyper’s thinking. The term was common in European philosophy, but rarely used in America. Another way to use the concept of modalities is to speak of “ways of being.” From Dooyeweerd, Al borrowed the analogy of light passing through a prism. Just as sunlight breaks into a spectrum of colors, so the meaning of every created thing breaks

into a spectrum of modalities – physical, biological, historical, theological, etc. All these ways of being are part of God’s creation, though we may be imperfect in the distinctions we draw between them and the names we give them.

Dooyeweerd agreed with Kuyper that the idea of Man being in the image of God did not belong in any one of the *modalities* of creation. In the 18th century it was popular to declare that Reason was the image of God in Man: “God thinks, we think.” Then in the 19th century it became popular to link the image of God with creativity and originality: “God creates, we create.” But Dooyeweerd saw that the image of God is not a thing that Man possesses. Scripture does not say that the image of God is in Man, but that Man is in the image of God. The uniqueness of the human creation is that Man is the only created being with what Scripture calls a *heart*, a religious center out of which human life is lived out in every aspect of creation. “Religion” is not one of many aspects of human life; it is the focus and beginning point of all of life. Here Dooyeweerd echoes the words of the Reformation leader John Calvin: “All of life is religion.”

Here was a way to break free from the trap of opposing science and faith, reason and revelation. Furthermore, this way of thinking not only encouraged, but positively demanded, an integrated way of learning about the world. Al Greene spoke so often of the value of this Reformed tradition that some faculty members joked, “BCS is turning into a Reformed school.”

The Toronto Connection

The folks at the ARSS finally realized that the name of their organization had become a joke and renamed it the Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship. In 1967 the AACS realized one of its primary goals with the establishment of the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto.

Beginning in the fall of that year, and continuing for the next five years, Al Greene brought lecturers from the Institute to Bellevue Christian to work with the faculty during teacher orientation week each August. The stone on which these men had to sharpen their mental knives was Dewey Fredricks, by now a ten-year veteran on the BCS faculty. A graduate of Bob Jones University and a staunch fundamentalist, Dewey was not easily swayed when his assumptions were challenged. He made “the Toronto guys,” as he called them, fight for every inch of intellectual territory. This kind of friendly but deadly serious confrontation between devout Christians of different persuasions was the healthiest way of bringing about change. When Dewey became an advocate of the developing BCS educational philosophy, no one would be able to say that some group had “taken over” or that a passive faculty had given in to the opinions of one man.

Peter Schouls from the University of Alberta delivered a survey of the history of Western thought that helped reshape the thinking of the history department. James Olthuis spoke on the biblical idea of *troth* as the foundation of marriage, family and friendship. Hendrik Hart analyzed the work of Harvard theologian Harvey Cox. Calvin Seerveld outlined a Christian understanding of art. And for two years, a series of speakers from Toronto addressed both faculty and parents on the challenges facing the church in contemporary culture.

The influence of these thinkers can still be felt in the educational philosophy of the school. The BCS faculty was beginning to take greater ownership of the developing educational philosophy. One man's vision was shaping a community. "He" was giving way to "we".

The Schaeffer Connection

Dr. Francis Schaeffer visited the campus of BCS in the mid-sixties. In his books *Escape from Reason* and *The God Who Is There*, Schaeffer challenged Christians to take the Gospel back into the marketplace of ideas. Schaeffer was convinced that the Christian message could hold its own. His principal example was the apostle Paul, who went to Athens, the intellectual center of the world of New Testament times, got permission from the city fathers to speak in the public forum, and stayed on to debate all comers. (An historical footnote: Schaeffer did not come to town specifically to visit BCS. He came to get his teeth fixed by Dr. Homer Perkins, a local dentist who was a member of his denomination, and whose children attended Bellevue Christian.)

Schaeffer was required reading for the BCS faculty during the late 1960s. When his book *Pollution and the Death of Man* was published, it put new legs on Schaeffer's thought, and gave an additional boost to the development of an educational philosophy at BCS. The environmental movement was viewed with great suspicion by many evangelical Christians, for several reasons. One was the influence of a theology that saw the physical world as a distraction from the spiritual interests of the Christian. This view has a long history in the Christian church, going all the way back to the century or so after the writing of the New Testament, a period when most Christian converts were immersed in Greek rather than Hebrew culture.

The traditional Greek view of life was strongly influenced by the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, who viewed the universe as having two basic principles. One was form, or pure thought, which was the source of order and good. The other was matter, the physical stuff of the universe, which was the source of disorder and evil. When Greek-trained philosophers became Christian theologians, they read the Bible through the spectacles of that philosophy. In this way the Greek opposition of the spiritual to the material gained a lasting influence on Christian thought. One byproduct of this way of thinking was monasticism, the building of monasteries where Christians could retreat from the world into a life of pure spiritual contemplation. A second outcome was a suspicion of the physical creation in general, exemplified by the English Puritans of the 17th century who ripped the pipe organs out of churches and smashed the stained-glass windows because they appealed to "the flesh," as the Puritans called the physical body.

The Greek-inspired distrust of the physical creation was only one reason for Christian suspicion of the environmental movement. A second was that it was generally associated with leftwing politics, and American Christians tended to be politically conservative. A third related reason was that environmentalism was opposed by business interests in America, particularly big business, and evangelical Christians tended to defend the American free-enterprise system almost as strongly as they defended the faith.

Schaeffer bypassed all these arguments and went back to the fundamental biblical proclamation that the creation is God's good work and that we human beings were created not only to develop it but also to protect it. Schaeffer brought the idea of the stewardship of the creation into the present day. Here again was direct inspiration for the development of a BCS educational philosophy. Clearly, to do it right, we had to break free of the categories imposed on us by the surrounding culture and return to the biblical text. Schaeffer gave a clear example of the kind of thinking the apostle Paul expected of us when he told us to "take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ."³

Schaeffer's biblical view of environmental issues became a model for an approach to other issues. The short BCS mission statement says that we want our students to be able not only to understand the surrounding culture, but also to transform it. That transformation will not occur if we simply accept the categories currently in use. Schaeffer provided an example of "outside the box" thinking that helped to inspire BCS staff in other academic fields.

The Continuing Influence of Al Greene

The 1970s were a time of a steep learning curve for the BCS faculty and staff. Under Al Greene's leadership we were learning a great deal in a short period of time, concentrating on Christian philosophy of education in a way that is seldom possible. The families who were sending their children to the school had no similar opportunity to think and learn about these things. It was clear that we would have to attempt to educate parents as well as children. Therefore Al established a required seminar for parents titled "The Christian Mind." While this seminar could not cover all the territory, it was designed to at least point people in the right direction. Though it is now taught by others, this seminar continues to be an important feature of the school.

Until his death in 2010 Al Greene continued to shape educational thinking at BCS by teaching courses for teachers and by sharing his most recent thinking in lunchtime faculty seminars. His books *Thinking Christianly* and *Reclaiming the Future of Christian Education* have been published by ACSI and are reaching a significant audience beyond the walls of BCS, in addition to being a resource for our own faculty. BCS staff members participated in a series of Christian education conferences in Chicago that resulted in the publication of *12 Affirmations: Reformed Christian Education for the 21st Century*. BCS English teacher Stefan Ulstein was one of the editors. History teacher Lowell Hagan's New Testament for children, *Theirs is the Kingdom*, has been meaningful for adults as well. BCS teachers in a variety of fields frequently speak at teacher conventions, passing on the insights they have gained studying with Dr. Greene over the years. Meanwhile in Australia, the Society of Parent-Controlled Christian Schools came to regard Dr. Greene as its philosophical founding father.

Dr. Greene continued to read widely in his post-BCS years. Among the authors he introduced to BCS staff are Roy Clouser on *The Myth of Religious Neutrality*; Parker

³ 2 Corinthians 10:5

Palmer on *The Courage to Teach*; Leslie Newbiggen on *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*; and Brian J. Walsh on *Subversive Christianity*. But this is only a sampling. Dr. Greene never considered himself a profoundly original thinker. He may have been overly modest, but over the years he harvested the best grapes from the vineyards of a large number of Christian authors and pressed a heady new wine that we believe will age very well.

Chapter 2: An Educational Philosophy

Asking Better Questions

Bellevue Christian School is a philosophy-driven school. Over the years we have sought to establish a framework of answers to the most fundamental educational questions, and to make those answers the basis for all the operations of the school. The apostle Paul wrote that we must “take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ.”⁴ We are occasionally asked how we find time to do the academic things if we spend so much time on philosophy. The answer is similar to the reply Martin Luther once gave to a question about the time he spent in prayer. “I could not possibly get this much done,” he said, “if I did not spend three hours in prayer every morning.” We could not possibly do our job at all if we did not take time with the basic questions.

The American philosopher Suzanne Langer once wrote that what you believe determines the kinds of questions you can ask, and the kinds of questions you ask determine the kinds of answers you can get. Faith not only shapes the answers; it also shapes the questions. Or as Dr. Al Greene once put it, “You can’t give a Christian answer to a non-Christian question.”

What distinguishes education at Bellevue Christian School is our belief that there are such things as Christian questions. Christian thinking is not simply a matter of trying to give Christian answers to the same questions everyone else is asking. Often the problem is with the questions themselves. Questions contain assumptions about the world. Questions are what we use to cut an infinite reality down to size. Questions limit the range of possible answers. They create boxes, within which we expect to find the answers. If we draw the box the wrong way, we will never find the answer.

For example, since the 18th century modern Western science has been willing to accept only that which can be observed, measured and quantified in the laboratory. Since God cannot be found in the laboratory, the box is drawn to exclude God at the outset. God cannot be in the answers because he was excluded when the question was asked.

An even simpler example of how the question shapes the answer is the famous categorical question, “Mr. Smith, do you still beat your wife?” Since the question allows only “Yes” or “No” as answers, the response, “I have never beaten my wife or anyone else,” is not allowed. In order to give that answer, the question must be changed. From courtroom dramas on television we are all familiar with the way these kinds of questions can distort evidence and thwart justice.

Like the persistent and annoying child who will not stop asking “Why?” we must keep asking for the question behind the question, until we come down to the statements which have nothing else behind them. They are statements of the way things are, and they cannot be argued. The philosophers call them the *a priori*, the prior things. At its

⁴ 2 Corinthians 10:5

root, every system of thought rests on answers to the three most basic philosophical questions:

- What is the nature of reality?
- What is the nature of humanity?
- What is the relationship between these two?

A philosophy for a Christian school must begin with biblical answers to these questions.

The Nature of Reality

The Bible makes it clear that all of reality is *created* reality. This is not just a statement about where things came from, about something that happened long ago. Creation is the essential nature of what reality is now. In the 1960s, during the height of the student revolutionary movement on the Berkeley campus of the University of California, Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse, a leading spokesman for the movement, grew frustrated with questions being asked in a televised interview. Finally he shouted, "I can't help it if the world is Marxist!" That is where we stand as Christian believers, declaring to the world around, "I can't help it if the world is Creation!"

Scripture says that the word of God is what holds reality together. The theme of Genesis chapter one is, "God spoke, and it was so." Paul the apostle harks back to this theme in Hebrews when he says that the Son holds everything together by his powerful word.⁵ The Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas expressed a similar thought eight centuries ago when he wrote that if God no longer wanted the world to exist He would not have to *do* something to actively destroy it; He would only have to *stop* speaking his creating word. The 18th century American Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards remarked that it is as if God were continuously recreating the universe from moment to moment.

The universe exists and continues to work because God spoke it into being, and he is faithful to his word. It is the law of God that makes scientific explanation possible.

Sir Isaac Newton, whom many blame for helping to create a clockwork model of the universe that could function without direct divine activity, understood that scientific laws are not the same as the law of God. A scientific law, according to Newton, is an assumption which, if made, produces reliable results. What we call the law of gravity is not the law of God; it is a humanly devised description of what happens when the universe obeys the law of God.

The psalmist says this about God's relationship to the physical universe:

He sends his command to the earth; his word runs swiftly. He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes. He hurls down his hail like pebbles. Who can withstand his icy blast? He sends his word and melts them; he stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow.'

⁵ Hebrews 1:3

This is not a so-called pre-scientific explanation that needs to be replaced by a modern scientific one, nor is it mere metaphor. Reality is structured and upheld by the word of God. The reality that we observe is a reality that is obeying the law of God.

The Invisible Creation. When we speak of creation, we often think of the beauty of mountains, the terrifying majesty of storms, the glory of a sunset. But Scripture makes it clear that there is more than this visible creation. Art, music, literature, philosophy and science are as much part of God’s creation as are trees and birds. Paul says that God created “all things, visible and invisible,” and places particular emphasis on the creation of all kinds of authority.⁶ Human social relationships, each of which has its own manifestation of God’s authority, are created by God and take their structure from him. Human ways of thinking and means of doing are all part of that invisible creation. Scientific thinking, which is so often turned into an idol in our world, is itself a creation of the Lord. And all this happens because God continues to speak his creating word. As Robert Farrar Capon said in his book *The Supper of the Lamb*, a chemical reaction is a reliable process because over and over “God says, ‘That was good. Do it again!’”⁷

This understanding of creation has many implications for Christian learning and education. Several of them deserve special mention.

A Meaning-full World. First, the idea of creation implies that reality is full of meaning. Meaning is something we discover, not something we create. For this reason, contemporary Christian scholars are among the last defenders of the idea that there is such a thing as a Big Picture. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the world of American scholarship is almost completely given over to the idea that we create our own meaning to fit the questions we want to ask. The terms *postmodernism* and *deconstructionism* are often linked with this movement. The basic idea is that there is no such thing as an objective reality; the person or group engaging in study creates language and the language creates meaning. Our approach, in contrast, is to see meaning as coming from God.

Endless Possibilities. Second, understanding that God is always and everywhere active in creation, holding it together by his word of power, implies that reality is full of possibilities that have been created, but are not yet realized. Creation is like a seed or a bulb. The possibility of leaves and flowers are locked up in a bulb but cannot be seen under any microscope. Only when the bulb is cultivated do the possibilities open up. The difference between a flower and an automobile is not that God creates one and people create the other. Both owe their existence to the creating word of God. But unlike a field of wildflowers, automobiles reflect an unfolding of creation that has taken place through human activity.

⁶ Colossians 1:16

⁷ Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1974)

No Sacred Cows. Third, a biblical understanding of creation makes it clear that the physical world is not inherently evil. God pronounced it “good,” and so it remains. Although the creation has been burdened by sin (a discussion that comes up later in this chapter) it is not *sinful*. When we study the creation we are on holy ground, because it proclaims the word of the Lord. It should come as no surprise, therefore, to discover that Scripture does not divide the world into the secular and the sacred. That is an idea that came from pagan culture. In God’s world, everything is sacred; everything belongs to him. As the writer of the Psalms puts it, “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.”⁸

Listening to the Creation. Finally, since God reveals himself in his creation, we need to listen to what the creation tells us. Paul Schrottenboer, first executive director of the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, illustrated this point with a story about his days as a missionary in New Guinea.⁹ He worked with a tribe where “life was one bag, and the chief and the witch doctor held the strings.” Several members of the tribe became Christians, and soon they came to the missionary to ask, “When should we plant our crops?” The question caught him off guard. When did they usually plant their crops, he wanted to know? “The witch doctor has always told us when the spirits wanted us to plant our crops,” they answered, “but we don’t serve them anymore. We serve Jesus Christ now. When does Jesus want us to plant our crops?”

Schrottenboer realized that for those brand-new Christians, the sovereignty of God over creation was not just a doctrine; it was a faith that demanded to be put into practice. After asking for time to think over his response, Schrottenboer began to pray and to study. He found these words in Isaiah 28:

When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and harrowing the soil? When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cumin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? *His God instructs him and teaches him the right way.* Caraway is not threshed with a sledge, nor is a cartwheel rolled over cumin; caraway is beaten out with a rod, and cumin with a stick. Grain must be ground to make bread; so one does not go on threshing it forever. Though he drives the wheels of his threshing cart over it, his horses do not grind it. *All this also comes from the LORD Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom.*¹⁰

Here was his answer. He went back to the elders of the tribe and told them that we do not need a new special revelation from God each time we plant our crops. God’s word governs the seasons, the rains, and the growth patterns of plants. If we plant seeds

⁸ Psalm 50:9-12

⁹ Schrottenboer told this story in a chapel talk at BCS in 1969

¹⁰ Isaiah 27:24-29, emphasis added

too deeply or in soil that is too cold, they will not grow. When that happens, God is teaching us when to plant our crops.

At Bellevue Christian School, we try to be like Schrotenboer in all the academic disciplines. When we study historical events, chemical reactions, emotional states, and economic relationships, we are listening for the word of the Lord. We are looking for the regularities that depend on the law of God. The world of academic scholarship is not a separate kind of knowing that is somehow independent of faith. In academic studies we are listening to hear the word of the Lord as it speaks to us through the creation. In every class we want to be able to say with Isaiah the prophet, “All this also comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel and magnificent in wisdom.”

What Is Truth? In this world of God’s creation, how is it that we can know anything at all? Indeed, can we know anything with certainty? The Greeks answered this question by stating that the basic principle of the universe is Reason. Since human beings possess rational souls, they can understand a rational universe. When Pontius Pilate asked his famous question, “What is truth?” he was setting a Greek philosophical question over against Christ’s simple statement, “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

Especially since the scientific revolution of the 17th century, our culture has confused *truth* with *factuality*. When we give true/false tests we are really not asking about truth but about logical correctness. In the Bible, the idea is not that *something* is true, but that *someone* is true. That which is true is not that which is factual, but it is that on which you can rely. The difference between the true God and all false gods is not that one says correct things and the other says incorrect things. A false god is one that lets you down when you need him most. This is the message of the story of Elijah confronting the prophets of the Baals in 1 Kings 18.

“Facts” are notoriously unreliable. The great American historian Carl Becker once scolded people who say that the study of history is just a matter of lining up all the facts and letting them speak for themselves. In the first place, Becker asserted, you can never line up all of the facts about anything, and in the second place, even if you could, they would not say anything. “Facts” speak only in response to our questions, and our questions are always shaped by what we believe.

Truth is not an abstract statement of factuality. Truth is a person. When Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life,” this was not a simile. Because Jesus is the very word of God, he embodies truth in his own person. He is the one by whom the worlds came into existence. Therefore nothing can be fully understood apart from him.

Summing Up. Because all of reality is created reality, we expect to find it full of meaning; we expect that meaning to be gradually opened up; and we expect to hear the voice of God instructing us from within the creation itself, in agreement with Scripture and the person of Jesus Christ. And because Christ is himself the Truth, true knowledge proceeds only from knowledge of him who is the center.

The Nature of Humanity

The most fundamental biblical statement about human nature is this: we are made in the image of God. The image of God is not a piece of us, some quality that we

possess. Scripture does not speak of the image of God in Man; it speaks of Man in the image of God. In the 18th century, when the Western world admired reason, Christians often accommodated to this view by saying that the image of God in Man is reason: “God thinks, we think.” Then in the 19th century, when reason was out of fashion and self-expression was in, it was said that the image of God in Man is Creativity: “God creates, we create.” Both of these statements reduce the full meaning of the phrase to a single aspect of human life.

Jesus Christ completes our understanding of the phrase “the image of God.” He is “the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”¹¹ So Jesus could say, “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me,” and “I always do what pleases him.”¹² We see in Jesus that imaging God is connected primarily with who we are and what we do, rather than with abstract characteristics.

When Scripture says that God made Man “a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor,”¹³ it expresses the value every person has regardless of his or her behavior. The fact that we are made in the image of God is behind the commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves: “Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”¹⁴ The New Testament makes the image of God to be the touchstone of all our behavior. We are to see God in other people; the way we treat them is the way we are treating God. “Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen,” Scripture says, “cannot love God, whom he has not seen.”¹⁵ At the judgment, Jesus said, the principle will be, “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”¹⁶

We were created to represent God in the creation, to act on his behalf. Therefore we are responsible to him for everything we do. Because we are made in the image of God, everything he says to us in creation, in Scripture, or in Jesus, requires a response from us. This central point of response to God is what Scripture calls the *heart*, so we may also say that what distinguishes us from the rest of creation is that Man is the only creature with a heart. “Above all else,” Scripture warns, “guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”¹⁷ Jesus restated this point when he said that good and evil do not consist in things that come from the outside, but “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are the things which make a man ‘unclean’.”¹⁸

Every Child is Precious. The fact that Man is made in the image of God has many implications for Christian education. First, it means that every child is valued by God, and should be valued by us. There is no place for discrimination with respect to color,

¹¹ Hebrews 1:3

¹² John 4:28-29

¹³ Psalm 8:5

¹⁴ 1 John 4:21

¹⁵ 1 John 4:20

¹⁶ Matthew 25:40

¹⁷ Proverbs 4:23

¹⁸ Matthew 15:19

nationality, sex, class, social status, academic ability or anything else. When the apostle James scolded his brothers for elevating the rich above the poor in church,¹⁹ and when the apostle Paul said that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female,”²⁰ they were re-stating this basic principle.

Every Child is Gifted and Called. Second, the fact that children are made in the image of God means that every child is uniquely gifted and called into God’s service. A major task of the school is to help students unwrap those gifts. Traditionally schools have emphasized logical/analytical gifts, and honored those who have those gifts abundantly above all others. At Bellevue Christian School, we believe that in order to honor the richness of the meaning of the image of God, we must value and recognize also gifts of physical skill, artistic creativity, social interaction, and the many other aspects that express the richness and diversity of creation.

No Child is an Object. Third, if we see students as bearing the image of God, and responding to God from the heart, we will not see them as objects to be used for our benefit. In educational practice, this means that we must see the student as an active participant in the educational process. The key biblical word is *nurture*, which means to cultivate growth. If we treat students as raw materials to be turned into standardized products, we violate the image of God.

Children Grow in Responsibility. Finally, if the child is made in God’s image, we will see the process of growth and maturing as part of God’s good design. It is our responsibility as educators to try to understand the developmental stages of the child’s life, and to design our educational practice accordingly. As children grow and mature, they become more active participants in the process of their own formation. For this reason greater emphasis must be placed on personal responsibility as students advance through the grades.

Summing Up. Because the children we work with bear the image of God, there can be no discrimination based on any external characteristic; we must help students unwrap all of their gifts, not only their rational/analytic abilities; we must nurture the growth of each student individually, not subject them to a process designed to create standardized products; and we must modify our approach as children grow and mature toward responsible adulthood.

The Relationship between Humanity and the Rest of Creation

The third basic philosophical question, after What is the nature of reality? and What is the nature of humanity? is What is the relationship between the two? The most fundamental biblical answer is that human beings are the stewards of the earth. The metaphor is drawn from the idea of the steward in biblical times. The steward was the trusted servant of a man of business. He owned nothing, but his master’s entire fortune was at his disposal. He carried his master’s signet so he could transact business in his

¹⁹ James 2:1-10

²⁰ Galatians 3:28

master's name, and he had to account for the way he used it. He lived like a wealthy man, because the impression others got of him was their impression of his master.

This is what Scripture says about the place and task of humanity in the creation. At the beginning, the purpose of the creation of human beings was stated in Genesis 1 in the form that theologians call the *cultural mandate*: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.” This was repeated to Noah after the flood in Genesis 9. The meaning of that dominion over the earth is slightly expanded in Genesis 2:15, which says that God placed humankind in the garden of His creation “to work it and take care of it.”

The human task therefore is both to develop the creation and to protect it. But protect it from what? The story of sin has not yet been told in Genesis 2, so that cannot be it. The clear implication of the text is that the creation must be protected *from the process of development*. Every time we open up some new possibility in the creation, we also endanger it. If we plow the earth to plant our crops, we open the soil to erosion by wind and rain. If we extract coal and oil from the earth to help us do our work, we create toxic by-products of burning. A crucial task of a Christian education therefore is to help reestablish the balance between these two aspects of human task, development and protection.

Human beings are not intruders into an otherwise self-regulating world, as many radical environmentalists hold. We were made on the sixth day of creation, not the eighth; the biblical story is saying that the creation was not finished apart from the creation of humanity. By the same token human beings – although set apart by being made in God's own image – are not separate from the rest of creation. We were made “of the dust of the ground,” made of the very stuff of the creation itself. One of the great prophetic voices in the history of the Christian church, St. Francis of Assisi, attempted to make this point by going out into the forest and preaching to the birds and the animals.

Human existence is inextricably linked with the rest of the creation. The creation was not complete until human beings were created. Humanity's fall into sin brought the burden of sin onto the entire creation. And when all things are fulfilled, Scripture says, redeemed humanity will live in “a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”²¹ Unlike the ancient Greeks, Christians do not expect to be separated from the physical creation. The Bible promises a bodily resurrection. It was this idea of the resurrection of the body that caused many Greek listeners to walk away in disgust from Paul's sermon in Athens. Their desire was to get as far away from the physical creation as possible and into a purely “spiritual” existence. This is not part of the biblical message.

Thus the biblical answer to the basic question of the relationship between humanity and the rest of the creation is that human beings are part of the creation, yet separate

²¹ Isaiah 65:17, 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 5:1-5

from it by virtue of being made in God's own image. Our continuing task in the creation is to protect it, while opening up its possibilities for human good, to the glory of God.

Sin and the Nature of Humanity

So far, in giving a biblical answer to the three basic philosophical questions, we have largely ignored one major factor: the reality of sin. The reason for this is that sin is not an original part of the creation. Unlike some Eastern religious philosophies that see good and evil as necessary and complementary aspects of the creation, Scripture does not speak of sin as having a separate origin. There are not two gods in the Christian faith, one good and one evil. Scripture speaks rather of one person who was the first to reject God's authority. That person, known as Satan or the devil or simply "the serpent," is not an evil god, and is not the creator of sin. Satan is a created being, a fallen angel. Sin itself is not a separate force with an independent origin. Sin is a warping of the truth, a distortion of reality, a misuse of that which is good.

For this reason Christians do not hope to salvation through good deeds. Good deeds and evil deeds are not separate categories of things in Christian theology and philosophy. Things are simply things, part of God's good creation. What makes them good or evil is the uses to which they are put. Human sexuality, for example, is a good thing; but when it becomes something that is pursued for its own sake, it becomes an idol. Scripture condemns sexual relationships outside of marriage, but not because God is a spoilsport who is afraid that someone, somewhere might enjoy it. Scripture is directing us away from the misuse and distortion of sexuality, and toward the blessing he intended for two people committed to faithfulness in a lasting relationship.

In Scripture sin originates in rebellion against God's authority. In the Garden of Eden story in Genesis 3 the original temptation brought by the serpent was, "you will be like God, able to decide for yourselves what good and evil are."²² This declaration of human independence, this rejection of the sovereignty of God, was the point at which everything in human life began to go wrong. Sin is not a collection of bad deeds; it is an attitude of the heart that makes even our best efforts unworthy in the eyes of God. The fall into sin was a *radical* fall; that is, it goes to the very root of human existence. When the prophet Isaiah says, "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags,"²³ this is not a basis for worm theology; it is a declaration that sin touches and corrupts even the best of human effort. As the 19th century preacher Harry Ironside said, "I am not a sinner because I commit sins; I commit sins because I am a sinner."

Sin did not destroy the image of God; human beings still bear it. Therefore it is important in Christian education to distinguish between what is the result of sin and what is merely human. We do not need schools because we are sinful; learning is not a consequence of sin. We need to learn because we are human. Only God already knows, and does not need to find out. Toddlers fall down when they are learning to walk. In a sinless world, toddlers would still fall down. Children make mistakes on their math

²² Genesis 3:5, paraphrase

²³ Isaiah 64:6

papers because they are children, not because they are sinful. Making mistakes is how we learn. Things that are wrong, in the sense of being incorrect, are not necessarily wrong in any ethical or moral sense.

Sin and the Nature of Things

Humanity is the crown of God's creation. Because of the central place and task of human beings, the future of the creation itself was tied to the future of humanity. So when our original ancestors rebelled against God and rejected his authority, the whole creation had to bear the burden of human sin. Paul says "the creation was subjected to frustration," is in "bondage to decay," and is "groaning as in the pains of childbirth."²⁴

It is important in a Christian educational philosophy to recognize that the creation is not *sinful*. The Greeks regarded the material world as the source of disorder and evil, and Greek philosophy has had considerable influence on Christian theology. By contrast Scripture affirms that the creation is good, though warped and distorted by sin. Sin has touched every aspect of the creation and of human life. The result is that disease and death, sin and sorrow, failure and brokenness have become an inevitable part of daily life. Nettles and thistles grow in our gardens rather than staying in the wilds where they belong, babies are born with heart defects and Down syndrome, and earthquakes and tornadoes destroy whole cities -- all because the creation no longer works as originally intended, and because we human beings have lost the insight to exercise our proper stewardship.

Though sin has burdened the creation and clouded our insight, it remains true that the creation declares the word of God, reveals God to us. So the apostle Paul was able to say, "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made."²⁵ However, to be able to read the book of creation properly, we need the guidance of the word of God in the Bible, and we need to have our hearts renewed through Jesus Christ, who is the word of God come in the flesh.

Sin and Human Learning

Human thinking is itself created. Everything there is to think about is part of God's creation, whether the thinker acknowledges it or not. Because the creation is dependable and is the same for all humanity, every human system of thought, no matter how wrong it may be in its understanding of the world, is bound to come to some correct conclusions. No system of thought could work at all if it led to no legitimate or useful knowledge of the world whatsoever. And as in the old Indian fable of the blind men and the elephant, the one who mistakenly believes that his or her piece of reality defines of the nature of all reality can still tell us quite a bit about that one piece.

It is far too easy to go for the intellectual jugular vein, to examine other systems of thought only to find what is wrong with them. If we do this, we may miss out on

²⁴ Romans 8:19-22

²⁵ Romans 1:20

valuable insights. God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust alike, and the secrets of how his world works are laid bare to all who look. At the same time, we recognize that any system of thought not grounded in Jesus Christ is bound to be false in its ultimate meaning and direction no matter how many valid conclusions it may reach. We need to be able to learn from them all while being centered in our faith in such a way that we are not led astray by their false premises.

In our learning we are still creatures with a heart, a religious center from which everything else flows. John Calvin recognized this more than four centuries ago, and he used what for him was a recent technological innovation to describe it. The ability to make glass lenses was quite new, and for the first time in the history of the world people's vision could be improved with glasses. But if the spectacles were made with imperfect glass, they would distort the wearer's view of the world. Our most fundamental beliefs, Calvin said, are like glasses; they determine what we will see. Our aim in the Christian school is to help provide our students with a meaningful frame of reference within which they can understand the world.

Because we are created beings and not gods, we are prone to error; in fact, trial and error is the human way of learning. And because we are sinful, we tend to elevate our own conclusions to the status of absolute truth. In some cases this leads to the notion that education is simply a matter of passing along a received body of knowledge to the next generation. But that kind of certainty can never exist in human thinking. It is a form of idolatry to regard a body of knowledge as having the attributes of God—complete in itself, unchanging and authoritative.

There have been times in the history of the Christian church when Christians were so successful at reconciling current scientific theory with the Scriptures that they began to think that the Bible actually taught those theories. One such time was the late medieval period, when scientific theory placed the earth at the center of the universe, and theology placed humanity at the center of God's attention. The two ideas went so well together that they were regarded as an unbreakable unity. So when Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and others began to show that the earth revolves around the sun, there were many who felt they had to choose between their Christian faith and the science of the time.

With more energy than wisdom, prominent Christian leaders jumped into the fray. A clergyman at Padua told Galileo that his telescope was an instrument of the devil because it showed alleged moons circling Jupiter, which was impossible. Martin Luther weighed in on the side of an earth-centered universe. The words and actions of some Christian leaders in those days are today an embarrassment at the very least. If we do not teach Christian young people to distinguish between Scriptural revelation and our human thinking *about* Scripture, we will put them at risk of the same confusion that befell their ancestors.

A Redeemed Community

There is a basic threefold focus in Scripture: creation, the fall into sin, and redemption in Jesus Christ. According to the biblical text humanity was created in the image of God, rebelled against God's authority and so fell into sin, and has been redeemed in Jesus Christ. We tend to focus so much on redemption as applying to us as individuals

(“Jesus is my personal Savior”) that we neglect the biblical idea that *humanity* has been redeemed in Jesus Christ. We are fond of quoting John 3:16, but are not quite sure what to do with John 3:17: “For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” When John the Baptist first set eyes on his first cousin Jesus he said, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” And John wrote of Jesus as the one who died “for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” Perhaps we fear that this sounds too much like a doctrine of universal salvation, as if every individual person has been redeemed.

To understand such expressions we need to return to the theologically profound double use of the word *Adam* in Scripture. It is sometimes the name of our first ancestor but it is also the word for humanity. This idea is carried forward in the New Testament, where Jesus is called the second Adam, the father of a new humanity.²⁶ We must grasp the idea that human beings were created *in community* if the biblical notion of original sin is to make any sense at all. The first reading primer published in Puritan New England states the idea succinctly: “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.” If humanity is not a community, but only a collection of individuals, then either this is nonsense, or God is unjust. But Paul is able to say, “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”²⁷ The human race itself has been redeemed, bought back from the sentence of death.

In Christ, as members of the new humanity, we are again called *in community* to fulfill the mandate to exercise dominion over the earth. But the dominion we exercise is not our own; it is God’s dominion. We are only the administrators. All human authority is a delegation of God’s authority. That authority is always limited to a specific task, and it is always given *for the benefit of those who are under authority*. This was the concept Abraham Kuyper expressed in his idea of sphere sovereignty: that God expresses his sovereignty in a different way in each sphere of life.²⁸

The Redemption of Creation

There is more to the biblical idea of redemption than the redeeming of individual persons and of the human race in general. In Colossians 1, for example, Paul says that in Christ God “was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross,” then immediately adds, “And you who were once estranged in hostile mind...he has now reconciled.”²⁹ Paul here sets the redemption of human beings in the context of a much larger work that God has done in Jesus. The bigger story is that the whole creation is being redeemed. And just as human sin brought all creation under bondage, so human redemption sets the creation free. “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:45

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

²⁸ see Chapter 1, The Dutch Connection

²⁹ Colossians 1:20-21

revealed,” Paul writes in Romans, because “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.”³⁰

In Christian hymnody some of our best theology is in Christmas songs. Isaac Watts captured this sense of the wideness of Christ’s redemption in the third verse of *Joy to the World*:

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.

The curse of sin extends to the entire creation; so does redemption in Jesus Christ. This is not something that is put off until the end of all things, although Scripture does promise a final renewal of creation, a new heaven and a new earth. Like the redemption of persons, which also is finally completed only in the resurrection, the redemption of creation and its reconciliation to God begins in the present. What is more, God has made redeemed humanity the prime agents of that reconciliation. Paul says that when God reconciled us to himself through Christ, he “gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ.”³¹

For this reason we should expect to see what Francis Schaeffer called a “substantial healing” of the creation in the present.³² And not only the visible creation, but also the invisible, is being restored in Christ; and both are part of the ministry of the reconciliation which God has committed to us. This is the true fulfillment of the cultural mandate. Our task as redeemed humanity is nothing less than this: to bring the reconciling power of Jesus Christ to bear upon a world warped and distorted by sin.

A Christian Culture. It is apparent, therefore, that God has called us to the building of a Christian culture, a Christian way of life. This is not simply a matter of adding Christian piety, ethics and evangelism to an otherwise secular realm of life. Nor is it intended to be a separate, walled-off way of life, a kind of Christian ghetto where the characters in the books always get saved in the end, the people in the movies never swear, and we never have to bother with the kinds of people Jesus got in trouble for hanging around with. Unlike Israel of the Old Testament—called to a physically separate existence hedged around with distinctive patterns and observances of all kinds—the New Testament people of God are called to live a separated life *in* the world. When Jesus prayed for his disciples, he said, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world,”³³ and Paul said he was not telling believers to stay away from “the immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.”³⁴

³⁰ Romans 8:19-21

³¹ 2 Corinthians 5:18-19

³² *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970), Chapter 5

³³ John 17:15

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 5:10

The building of a Christian culture can be painful because it forces us to examine our own beliefs and assumptions in the searching light of God's revelation of himself in creation, in Scripture, and in Jesus Christ. Like every generation in the history of the Christian church, we have become unwitting captives of the prevailing cultural winds, doctrines that are not grounded in Christ.

The apostle Paul warned us against "philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ."³⁵ The remedy is to become people who can say that "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."³⁶ Whenever Scripture runs contrary to some of our cherished assumptions, we will tend first to resist. What is more, not all Christians will agree on every aspect of biblical interpretation. For this reason, the struggle to encourage the development of Christian thinking and Christian cultural activity will at times inevitably become a source of conflict.

A Christian Community. The building of a Christian culture requires first of all a true Christian community. In the Bible, a community is not a collection of individuals who have voluntarily decided to join together for a common purpose. A community is a body, an organic whole, in which no member is self-sufficient, and which can accomplish things as a body that its members could never achieve if they all were acting separately. For this reason a Christian school must strive to become a community. Students and teachers must learn to live and work in dependence upon one another if Christ's calling on the students' lives is to be fulfilled in their adult years.

Christian community is the only thing that will enable us to survive the inevitable conflicts that will arise. If our bedrock commitment is not to our philosophy, but to Christ, we will be able to take many differences in stride. If the school fails to become a community, it will become instead an arena in which warring factions attempt to achieve a dominant position.

Learning in Christian Context

Although we remember studying the world in terms of academic disciplines, our lives are usually not organized according to academic categories. We may study psychology, sociology and anthropology, but we experience marriage, family, and friendship. We may study physics, chemistry and biology, but we experience Fourth of July fireworks, baking powder biscuits and herds of buffalo in South Dakota's Custer State Park. It was the pagan Greeks, not the Bible, that made detailed knowing, scientific knowing, to be the only real kind of knowing.

Basic to a Christian education is the understanding that scientific knowing, the detailed analysis of a limited aspect of creation, is always an abstraction from the wholeness of the creation. Scientific thinking is not an end in itself. It serves to deepen and enrich our experiential awareness of the creation. We make use of the insights

³⁵ Colossians 2:8, NRSV

³⁶ 2 Corinthians 10:5, NIV

drawn from psychology and sociology to better understand social relationships, but it is what we make of those relationships, not our sociological theories, that counts most.

Whole knowledge, experiential knowledge, can be compared to light, and the academic disciplines can be compared to the colors in the spectrum. Just as a prism breaks light into the various colors, so analytic study breaks the wholeness of the creation into a variety of aspects. Each of those aspects, examined closely, becomes what we know as an academic discipline. Those disciplines proceed from, and return to, the wholeness of the meaning of the creation.

Early childhood education begins in the world of the child's experience. As the child grows and matures, that growth can be better understood if we break it into its various aspects: biological, psychological, analytic, social, and spiritual growth are all part of this maturing process. And as children grow, their appreciation of the world around them becomes more complex and rich. Educationally, we gradually move toward a more analytic approach, until by secondary school level we are working primarily in terms of academic disciplines. The problem is that we can often lose sight of the wholeness of the creation. A Christian educational philosophy demands that we continue to integrate our analytic discoveries into the wholeness of our lives of service to God and neighbor.

Another way of saying this is to remark that we do not strive for an integration of faith and learning. Faith and learning do not need to be integrated; they are already inextricably interwoven. Faith is fundamental to learning, whether that faith is biblical or even godless. In our world, the term "godless faith" is almost meaningless, since we have pushed faith off into an upper realm of "spiritual" thinking, which has no effect on the world of logical thinking that we all have in common. But in a Christian view of things every person is a person of faith, and their faith is always reflected in the questions they ask, and therefore also in the answers they get. The integration we seek is the integration of *thinking and doing*.

Knowing is Doing

The ancient Greeks devalued the physical creation. The only real life of human beings was the life of the mind. The bodily part of Man was the source of disorder. So they valued pure thought, and looked down upon physical labor. For this reason, Greek society was founded on slavery. For this reason also, in all the history of science in the Greek world, we have only one example of a deliberately created experiment. The Greeks did not believe that anything useful was to be learned from an examination of the creation itself.

This Greek way of thinking is called a *dualism*, because it assumes that there are two basic principles in the universe that are in opposition to one another. From this dualistic Greek thinking came the characteristic dualisms in the history of Western thought: mind and matter, master and slave, male and female, thinking and doing, theory and practice, even faith and science. In a school setting we are particularly vulnerable to the idea that intellectual activity is superior to physical activity, that people with a college degree are somehow better than high school dropouts, that people who learn slowly are somehow inferior.

The Hebrew view of things, which is fundamentally the biblical view, is quite different. The Hebrew word for knowing means to know by experience, by practice. Knowing was not separated from doing. Knowing something always involved practicing it; to truly know meant to know by experience. There were certain things that were to be distinguished without this kind of in-depth experiential knowledge. The most important of these was the difference between good and evil. In the Garden of Eden story, Satan holds out the prospect of godlike status for humanity if they will know evil by experience, placing the difference between good and evil in the realm of human discretion rather than in the realm of God's direction.

In the New Testament Scriptures the Greek-writing but Hebrew-thinking authors had to do battle with the Greek language to maintain the Hebrew meaning. An example is found in James 2:14-26, where the apostle labors to establish that if belief is separated from practice, it is not true belief. There is no room in Scripture for the word *believe* in the sense of *think*, or have a strong opinion. There is a story, which may be apocryphal, of a late 19th century aerialist named Blondin who used to demonstrate his skill at walking a tight wire first pushing a wheelbarrow, then pushing a wheelbarrow full of potatoes. He would then ask his audience whether they believed he could cross the wire with a person sitting in the wheelbarrow. To the first person who responded "Yes," Blondin would reply, "Would you please get into the wheelbarrow, sir?" Legend has it that he never got a volunteer.

Biblical faith means getting into the wheelbarrow. Both faith and intellectual knowledge need to be put into practice if they are to be real. If the purpose of a Christian school is to prepare students to live lives of service to God and neighbor, and if every aspect of human life is to be an act of worship, the practice of what students learn must begin in the present, and not be postponed to some later, more mature period of life.

Discipleship

Because thinking cannot be separated from doing, the academic content of teaching cannot be separated from the content of the teacher's life. Similarly, the academic work of the school cannot be separated from its personnel policies, business operations and administrative functions. Jesus connected both of these ideas the night before his betrayal and execution when he said,

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.³⁷

If modeling meant being a perfect example, the burden would be too great for the faculty and staff of a Christian school to bear. We are sinners in a sinful world. The pretense of perfection would be dishonest. Modeling extends also to the ways in which we deal with our failures, errors and sins. In this as in all things, a Christian school

³⁷ John 13:15-17

should be governed by the law of love: “Love God above all else, and your neighbor as yourself.”

The apostle Paul urged the Christians at Corinth to be his disciples, just as he was Christ’s disciple.³⁸ This is the ultimate goal of a Christian school: that students and teachers alike may become followers of Christ. In our day, we can imagine Paul writing, “If we get straight A’s and win every academic prize, but do not have love, of what use is that? If we graduate from the best colleges and get the highest-paying jobs, but do not follow Christ, what have we gained?” In the words of the BCS Educational Confession:

A life dedicated to Christ will be a life devoted to the service of others. Therefore in all the operations of the school, its goals and objectives must serve the ultimate goal of seeking first Christ’s kingdom and His righteousness, so that we may be His servants doing whatever Christ has called us to do with our whole hearts for him.

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:1

Chapter 3: An Educational Philosophy at Work

Let's not mistake the Christian school for anything other than a school. It's not an incubator from the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil. The Christian school is not a penal institution for the incarceration of wayward sons and daughters from Christian homes. As long as there are human beings involved, every Christian school will have its share of human iniquity. The difference is that in such a school, girls and boys learn the power of redemption, the cleansing of forgiveness, the strength of prayer, the promises of Scripture. The Christian school is a training ground, a place of elementary and secondary instruction in the rudiments of loving God with all the mind, strength, soul and heart.

(D. Bruce Lockerbie, *Thinking and Acting Like a Christian*³⁹)

A Different Kind of School

“If we really carried out a Christian educational philosophy to its fullest,” Dr. Al Greene has often said, “we probably would hardly recognize our school.” But there are many things that shape a school besides its philosophy. One is its surrounding culture. A school too radically different from its surroundings would be a school with few students. There is a place for such schools, but Bellevue Christian School has dedicated itself to serving the general Christian public, a public with expectations that limit the amount of change that can take place. Putting a Christian educational philosophy into practice therefore involves many compromises.

One thing that cannot be compromised is the fundamental belief in a Christian way of thinking and learning. Christian education is not a matter of adding spiritual insight to a religiously neutral body of knowledge. It is not even only a matter of giving different answers to the questions the world asks. Christian education involves asking different questions, questions shaped by biblical beliefs about the nature of reality, the nature of humanity, and the place and task of human beings in that reality. This chapter is an attempt to describe the way our educational philosophy is put into practice.

Committed to Serving the Lord

Bellevue Christian School is first of all a faith community. Commitment to Jesus Christ is a condition of employment for all staff, whether they be bus drivers, custodians, classroom teachers or administrators. If we expect to model a biblical way of living together, resolving conflict and carrying out our responsibilities, we must have a common reference point.

Christian commitment is necessary, but not sufficient. We believe that a person's way of earning money should not be a job, but a response to a calling from the Lord. In the staff selection process we look for that sense of calling. We cannot expect many

³⁹ Portland, Oregon: Multnomah, 1989

prospective teachers to come knocking at our door who are already steeped in a biblical philosophy of education. Therefore we look for people who are genuine in their faith, well prepared for their tasks, and teachable. A desire to learn and a willingness to enter into an ongoing process of learning about Christian education are essential. The staff selection process works best when current staff members who understand the school's philosophy are involved.

Consistent with our belief that the world is not divided into the sacred and the secular, we see all work as the Lord's work. Every Christian is a minister, and every Christian should be involved in "full-time Christian service," an expression often reserved for preachers and missionaries. Secretaries and maintenance personnel are equally servants of the Lord with teachers and coaches. A student may learn about interpersonal relationships from a bus driver, and about the sacredness of work from a custodian.

Hiring an all-Christian staff does not make a Christian school any more than the marriage of two believers automatically creates a Christian marriage. There must also be a commitment to biblical ways of resolving conflict, administering authority, treating students, relating with parents, developing pedagogy, and all the other kinds of activities that go on within a school. The Board of Bellevue Christian School has formally adopted the Educational Confession as a current statement of the primary biblical principles that should govern all aspects of the life of the school, and has committed itself to measuring all its decisions by that Confession, and ultimately by the Scriptures on which the Confession is based. In the words of the Confession, "the Christian school has a responsibility...to model a biblical vision of life in all its operations and in all the relationships it contains."⁴⁰

This commitment to a set of principles sometimes slows down the decision-making process. For example, we spend long hours putting together a secondary school activities calendar when it could be done much more quickly by executive decision. We take the time because we are committed to the idea that students should be able to unwrap a variety of gifts; therefore as much as possible, activities should not be scheduled in competition with one another. Maintaining the vision is more important than speed.

Serving the Children of Christian Parents

Bellevue Christian School exists for those who want their children brought up "in the training and instruction of the Lord."⁴¹ We are not here only for the affluent, or for the college-bound, or for stellar examples of Christian conduct. Our goal is to serve the Christian community as a whole, not a particular sub-group. In its admission and retention policies BCS strives toward that goal.

Inequality of Resources. Education is expensive. Even though BCS, like most independent schools, is financially more efficient than typical state-supported schools, the final bill is still high. Unfortunately, this places Christian education beyond the

⁴⁰ Educational Confession, VIII

⁴¹ Ephesians 6:4, KJV

means of many in the Christian community. To help overcome this problem, Bellevue Christian School makes a concerted effort to raise money for scholarships. At the turn of the twenty-first century, more than 20 per cent of all school families were receiving some financial aid. The needs, however, are still far greater than the resources.

Diversity of Gifts. God gifts students in a variety of ways. Not all of them find formal education easy. Contrary to the competition ethic of American society, God did not give greater ability to some in order that they could get ahead and succeed where others fail. Scripture makes it clear that our individual gifts are not given for us alone, but for the whole community of faith. This is the significance of the biblical image of the church as a living body in which the stronger members assist the weaker.

From the beginning BCS was open to all children of Christian families. When the school was very small, students' special needs were met on an individual basis in the classroom. As the school grew in size, we have developed formal procedures for insuring the academic success of as many students as possible. We created a separate department of Special Academic Services as part of a continuing effort to make Christian education accessible for all students. At the same time BCS has expanded opportunities for students who excel at academic work.

Although we are limited in the number of students with special needs whom we can serve, academic screening is not part of our admission process. We do not present ourselves as a college preparatory school, although our graduates are extremely well prepared for college. We do not advertise our test scores, and we do not try to acquire "bragging rights" about our academic programs. This policy represents a philosophical commitment to serving the needs of as many students as possible.

Divisions of Race and Class. Bellevue Christian School is shaped by all three of the words in our name. We are first of all a school, we are committed to a Christian educational philosophy, and we are located in one of the most affluent and ethnically homogeneous communities in the United States. When the school was founded in 1950, the east side of Lake Washington was a quiet, semi-rural region. A road had to be bulldozed through virgin timber for the building of the first classrooms. But our environment has changed, and the face of the student body reflects that change. Our student body is largely white and upper middle class. Whatever our personal troubles may be, as a group we belong to a privileged minority of the world's population.

The BCS community does not look very much like the church of Jesus Christ as a whole. We need the diversity of God's people if we are to help students grow up to become servants of the Lord. BCS continues to make significant efforts to encourage persons of all ethnic backgrounds to attend the school. These efforts have met with very limited success. However, as a school we remain committed to the goal of ethnic diversity. The first anti-segregationist was the apostle Paul, who wrote that Christ had broken down the first-century equivalent of the apartheid, the wall of separation

between Jew and Gentile. In his words, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”⁴²

Divisions Among Christians. From the beginning BCS has been a broadly inter-denominational school. This does not mean that the school lacks a theological grounding. It does mean that there may be some points of doctrine on which particular parents may disagree with the views of particular faculty members. As a school our primary responsibility is to respond to God educationally, rather than to take over the role of the church in specific doctrinal teachings. Beyond a basic adherence to the historic creeds of the church, our most important statement is the Educational Confession. We tend to stay away from questions such as how old one should be and how wet one should get when one is baptized. Instead, we try to show the breadth and diversity that exists within the church, and leave room for brothers and sisters in Christ to disagree.

All Have Sinned. Our emphasis in admission to the school is the Christian commitment of the parents. As students grow and mature, we pay greater attention to the personal commitment of the student. However, we recognize that these middle years, the years between childhood and adulthood, are often times of doubt, conflict and change. Of high school students who have made personal commitments to Christ, we ask that they seek to live up to that commitment in the life of the school. As for students who are not at the point of personal commitment, we will respect their current reluctance, and will expect them to show a similar respect for the faith of others. Rather than insisting on hearing the right answers, we seek to honor the commitment made by Christian parents when their children were baptized or dedicated to the Lord, and we trust in God’s faithfulness.

This means that we often admit students who are not sterling examples of Christian conduct. We are not equipped to deal with severe behavioral disorders, and we cannot allow a student to actively undermine the program of the school or to actively lead in a direction of disobedience to the Lord, but we are prepared to work through many behavioral problems with like-minded families. We are a school. Our students, like the rest of us, are on a journey. Their mistakes and their sins are opportunities for teaching. When Timothy was still a young man he helped Paul write a letter to the Christians at Philippi, that says, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.”⁴³

Admission of Non-Christian Families. Although Scripture encourages us to the formation of Christian community, we are nowhere instructed to do this by creating little Christian enclaves. Of course, dealing only with other Christians does make life easier in some ways. But as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5, this would require us to separate from the world altogether, thus violating the command to be salt and light in the world. We have had the experience of knowing many people who came to know the Lord as a result of their children coming to Bellevue Christian School.

⁴² Galatians 3:28, NIV

⁴³ Philippians 3:12

Our primary mission is to Christian families, but we do not automatically reject applications from non-Christian parents. Over the years we have had Buddhist and Muslim families in the school, as well as some who claim no religious affiliation. The presence of non-Christian parents and students can be a healthy thing within the school. People who never exercise do not grow strong; young people whose faith is never challenged do not grow strong in the faith. But we must learn to walk before we can run, and the balance of influence within the school community should not shift in the other direction. In an attempt to strike a balance on this issue, BCS has adopted a policy that no more than 10 percent of the available admission spaces will go to families without at least one parent who makes a profession of faith in Christ. What we ask of this small number of non-Christian families is that they be willing to cooperate with the educational program of the school, and that they not oppose the Christian emphasis they will find in the classroom and in other activities of the school.

Nurturing Children in the Lord

The Bible in the Christian School. The Bible is important in the Christian school in three different ways. First, Scripture is important in the devotional life of the individual student and of the school community. This purpose is partly fulfilled through daily devotional times and regular chapel services where we gather as a community to hear the Word of the Lord and respond to it in our specific school setting.

Second, there is a place for specific classes in biblical studies in the Christian school, especially as students' analytical skills grow and develop in the secondary school years. The purpose of these classes is not primarily devotional. School is a place where an academic study of the Bible can take place, a systematic look at the formation of the biblical text, its dominant subjects and themes, its principal teachings, and its relevance to the various aspects of life. In this context, biblical studies becomes one of many academic classes.

The third and most important place of the Bible at Bellevue Christian School is at the center of every course, every activity, every policy and every administrative action. Biblical studies cannot be limited to special classes because the Bible must become the lens through which we view every aspect of life. Bible reading and prayer cannot be added on to education like frosting on a cake. The Bible must form our view of reality and human life. At BCS our effort is to continually ask how we should respond to the word of the Lord in the various aspects of life.

The nature of this call to biblical centering changes as students grow and mature. In the elementary grades the primary emphasis is on the daily problems of getting along with others, developing attitudes toward the physical creation, and the responsibilities of family and school life. In the upper grades we begin to ask how we should respond to the word of the Lord in our understanding of history, economics, psychology, and mathematics.

For example, in Leviticus 25, when God was prescribing his law for the daily life of the children of Israel, he gave instructions concerning a Sabbath year when the land was not to be plowed and a year of Jubilee when all debts would be forgiven and all land that had been purchased was returned to the original owner. The Israelites never obeyed this law, and were ultimately punished, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 36. While

this law clearly pertained to a society and an economy very different from our own, the underlying principle was, “the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.”⁴⁴ In a Christian understanding of economics, we must in some way respond to this word of the Lord; otherwise we will be guilty of the same sin as those ancient Israelites, the sin of ignoring the word of the Lord.

Making Disciples. It is not particularly difficult to condition children to behave correctly. One only needs to carefully manipulate a system of rewards and punishments. However, correct behavior is not the goal of Christian parenting or Christian education. The goal is a life of obedience to Jesus Christ. We want our children to become adults who do what is right because it is right, not because it is profitable or advantageous or socially acceptable. We should never forget that, aside from his claim to be God, the most serious charges brought against Jesus during his lifetime were that he did not behave according to the standards of a strictly moralistic society. “He is a glutton and a drunk,” they said, “and he pals around with the scum of the earth.”⁴⁵ If Jesus had wanted the approval of the righteously moralistic people who surrounded him, he would have behaved very differently. He set an example for his followers of behavior that offended the guardians of public virtue.

Disciples are not simply people who ask, “What would Jesus do?” This exercise has its value in answering certain moral questions, but it does not help us when we are writing a business plan or conducting a laboratory experiment, because we cannot imagine what it would be like for Jesus to be a corporation executive or a chemist. The way to avoid having our thinking determined by the perceptions of the world around us, according to the apostle Paul, is to have our minds renewed in Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ This is not something that happens automatically when we place our faith in Christ. It is a continuing struggle, and it is one of the principal reasons for the existence of Bellevue Christian School.

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ, it is necessary to have a different goal in mind from the goals of our surrounding world. In Matthew 6 Jesus tells followers that although food and clothing were important, they should not be the first priority, as they are with the rest of the world. “If you will seek God’s kingdom first of all,” Jesus told them, “these other things will all fall into place.”⁴⁷ At BCS, we try to continually set before students the coming of God’s kingdom, his rule over all aspects of life. Some of this is preparation for later life, but the most important practice of discipleship occurs in school every day. “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,” Jesus said, “when they see the love you have for each other.”⁴⁸ The greatest evidence that we are a Christian school will come when we are truly a community of love.

One Christian school system adopted as its motto, “Jesus: The Man for Others.” Jesus calls us to love not only one another but also the whole world. It is not so

⁴⁴ Leviticus 25:23, NIV

⁴⁵ Mark 11:19, author’s paraphrase

⁴⁶ Romans 12:2

⁴⁷ Matthew 6:33, author’s paraphrase

⁴⁸ John 13:35

surprising perhaps that a man would be willing to die for a good man, Scripture says, but Jesus died for us who were his enemies.⁴⁹ Now he calls us to lives of loving service to others. Scripture tells us that when he comes in his glory, the Son of Man will divide humanity like a herdsman separating the sheep from the goats. This will be his standard: how did we treat those who are made in God's own image? Some will even wonder when they ever fed or clothed or housed the Savior, but he will say, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."⁵⁰ At BCS we strive to make service an integral part of the school program: not only organized service projects in the upper grades, but also practical service to one another on a daily basis.

Rethinking Academic Instruction

Because Bellevue Christian School encompasses all grades from Kindergarten through high school, it is difficult to summarize in a few paragraphs the educational program of the school. However, there are some principles that hold for all the grades, although their method of implementation changes as students grow older.

Integration. It is almost a cliché for Christian schools to talk of "integrating faith and learning." At BCS, we believe that all learning is already integrated with some kind of faith, that faith is in fact foundational to learning. So when we talk of integration, we are not speaking of faith and learning, but of the wholeness of the creation. (See the section *Learning in Christian Context* in Chapter 2.)

In the elementary grades we encourage the designing of integrated units, units that explore creation in its wholeness and use the various disciplines as tools to examine it. So for example, a science unit about fish might emphasize not only the biology of the fish but also the relationship between fish and the weather, human intervention such as the construction of dams on the Columbia River, the economic impact of the fisheries industry, the importance of fish in human diet, the salmon as a part of the faith life of native American tribes, the fish as a Christian symbol, and fish as a theme in art. In this way our aim would be for students to see that fish are not simply objects to be caught and eaten, but creatures that are interwoven with all the aspects of the creation.

At secondary school level the educational emphasis shifts to courses that are broken down according to academic disciplines. Here we encourage teachers to move beyond the limits of their own disciplines. In math, for example, we want students to always be aware that when we manipulate numbers we are manipulating an aspect of the whole creation. A cautionary tale in this regard is the story of Albert Speer, an architect and engineer whom Adolf Hitler placed in charge of running Germany's train system. This included designating trains to be used to carry freight, passengers, troops to the front – and Jews to the death camps. All Speer did was manipulate numbers on pieces of paper. He ignored the fact that these numbers represented people's lives. Of all the Nazi leaders charged with crimes against humanity at the Nuremberg trials after World War II, Speer was the only one who pleaded guilty. In his book *Inside the Third*

⁴⁹ Romans 5:7-8

⁵⁰ See Matthew 25:31-46

Reich Speer says that he allowed himself to be “willfully ignorant” of the human meaning of his technical decisions. He recognized that he could not claim that he was only making good use of his skills in math and engineering. He became a participant in the deaths of millions, without personally ordering the death of anyone.

A curriculum that integrates the academic disciplines into the wholeness of life is necessary if we are to avoid producing more people like Speer, people who fail to see the connection between their technical work and the world of real actions. We want our students to understand that not even numbers are religiously neutral.

Cooperative Learning. In the late twentieth century, many businesses began to recognize that most people work more productively in teams than they do individually. What distinguishes many high-technology companies from traditional American industries is a corporate culture of cooperation and team building.

This practical consideration is not the motivation for Bellevue Christian’s increasing emphasis on cooperative learning. Contrary to traditional American individualism, the Bible clearly teaches that we were never meant to make it on our own. We were created in necessary interrelationship with others. That is why Scripture uses the metaphor of a body, in which all the parts need each other. Paul told the Christians in Corinth that they had all the gifts they needed,⁵¹ but it was the church *as a whole* that had these gifts; for the gifts to be sufficient, they had to be shared.

Cooperative and collaborative learning encourage the life of the body of Christ; they encourage also a godly humility by helping students recognize that they can never be entirely self-sufficient. The same kind of balance between individual effort and team effort that makes a basketball team or a drama production work well is needed also in the classroom.

Rethinking the Disciplines. In every field of study, non-biblical assumptions about the nature of reality and of human life underlie the majority of the published works. A few of the sciences, notably psychology, sociology, economics and anthropology, are recent arrivals on the academic scene and have grown up almost entirely without biblical influence. At BCS, particularly in the secondary school, our aim is to hire teachers who are knowledgeable in their fields of specialization, and then encourage them to re-think their disciplines from a more biblical perspective.

History textbooks, for example, are for the most part written from what might be called a “contributions” perspective. In this telling of human history, humankind has gradually progressed upward through a series of technological discoveries, and each historical period has contributed something to this progressive development of humanity. This story of gradual human self-improvement has little to do with the biblical theme of the coming of the kingdom of God. As Christians we need to adopt a standard of judgment that is different from that of the surrounding world. Progress cannot be measured in terms of how comfortable people are, or how rich, or how technologically sophisticated, or how much of the earth has been brought under their sway. The Bible

⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 1:7

makes it clear that the nations of the earth will be judged according to the standard of justice. Therefore a Christian teaching of history must move away from the habit of nicknaming someone “the Great” because he killed thousands of people and conquered large chunks of territory. The story of God’s rule in human life is one of power but one of service and self-sacrifice. The only historical developments that can be classified as progress in a biblical sense are those that bring about a closer approximation to a biblical view of human life.

This is the kind of radical rethinking that needs to go in every academic discipline. It is a slow, painstaking, and never-ending task. It requires that faculty be learners as well as teachers, and that we make use of the best that Christian scholars in the various fields have to offer.

Examining Alternatives. Christian schools are sometimes criticized for being narrow and parochial. In point of fact, BCS has greater opportunity than typical public schools to examine multiple points of view. Because public schools in the United States are bound by a rigid court interpretation of the Constitutional doctrine of separation of church and state, views that are expressed in traditionally religious terms are automatically excluded. Thus the school inadvertently teaches children that faith is at the periphery, that the significant issues of life are religiously neutral. It is impossible for such a school to do justice to all viewpoints.

At BCS, on the other hand, we have a solid grounding in a biblical view of life and the world. Because we see other points of view not as mere opinions but as expressions of other worldviews, we can examine them without fear of being overwhelmed by them. We can give honest recognition to a variety of faith perspectives, so that rather than simply setting opinion against opinion, or accusing those who disagree with us of being wrong-headed and stupid, we can examine how opinions on specific issue arise from a faith commitment. We can stand for a Christian viewpoint without needing to attack those who disagree.

In high school biology, for example, teachers present a variety of viewpoints on the ideas of creation and evolution, pointing out that devout Christians can disagree on these matters and examining the relationship between scientific theory and faith. At the end of the unit students are asked to write out their own viewpoints. Some find this difficult because the teacher has not told them the one right answer. The grade is based, not on the student’s conclusion, but on the quality of the argument.

Christian Education in a Sinful World. Hothouse plants do not do well when exposed to the elements. Children who grow up in a sheltered world where everyone is Christian and nothing bad ever happens are like the beaten path in Christ’s parable of the sower: the seed springs up quickly, but the plant wilts under the heat of the sun. On the other hand, to continue the plants analogy, we do not set out tender plants in the dead of winter. In the Christian school we can exercise some control over the extent and the harshness of the exposure.

We are preparing children to confront the culture that surrounds them, and we cannot do that without dealing with difficult and sometimes controversial issues. This is where a relationship of trust between parents and school staff comes to be of crucial importance. Teachers need to be prepared to explain why certain books are read and

certain issues are discussed in class; parents need to give some latitude to teachers in the classroom; and both need to depend on the Lord for the results. There is no better place for dealing with difficult issues than the Christian school, where they can be handled in a context of biblical perspective and Christian love. Students can grow up with the understanding that choices are never “free”: they are always constrained by the law of God.

Rethinking Discipline

One of the ways we have absorbed the values of our surrounding culture is seen in the way we use the word *discipline*. Too often we use it as a synonym for punishment, or to refer to a system of rewards and punishments that is aimed at modifying a person’s behavior. Although it is true that behavior can be conditioned in this way, this is not the kind of behavior God expects of us. He wants an obedience that comes from the heart, not from promise of reward or fear of punishment. He wants disciples, not slaves. Although at BCS we often lapse into using the word *discipline* to mean the techniques we use for dealing with misbehavior, we try to remember that it really means *to make disciples*.

Retaining the “Problem Child.” The Educational Confession says, “The ultimate goal of Christian education is to lead students to live lives of Christian discipleship.” Accomplishing this aim requires us to work with students rather than imposing an impersonal system for getting certain end results. Because we are a school, we believe in working with a student as long as there is a basis on which to work. It would be relatively easy to make the school look more successful by practicing exclusionary discipline. This would mean refusing to admit students with any potential behavior problems and solving conduct problems by expelling all those who do not fit some idealized picture of Christian conduct. But because we believe that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” we see ourselves as redeemed sinners working in a sinful world. Our admission and retention policies commit us to attempting to work through problems rather than just making them go away.

Teaching Right from Wrong. When confronting behavior we regard as wrong, it is important for us to remember that not everything that is “wrong” is sinful. A child who is learning to walk falls down, not because she is sinful, but because she is a child. Many human errors result from nothing more profound than the fact that we are human. A child’s poor performance on a math test, for instance, is rarely the result of sin on the student’s part. At other times what we call “wrong” is merely inappropriate in a particular context. Being punctual is highly valued in American society, but it only became so in the days of the industrial revolution when people began to be paid by the hour. Cultures that do not value punctuality are not for that reason lazy, inferior or anti-Christian. In school, being on time for class is important, but the student who has a problem with tardiness is usually not the result of a moral defect.

It is not enough to tell students that certain things are wrong. We need to get at what we mean by “wrong.” If we mean that it offends against the law of God, we need to be careful that we do not simply forbid, but that we point the direction toward what is right. Commandments are markers that say, “Stay on the path.” But it is the path that is important, not the markers. Discipline is not about punishing incorrect behavior; it is

about showing the right path. The biblical idea of training is not behavior modification. Children are not to be trained like animals in a circus. Getting them to behave correctly does not prepare them to live on their own; it makes them permanently dependent on outside threats and promises.

The famous passage of Scripture in Proverbs 22:6 says that children are to be brought up *in the way*. So at Bellevue Christian we try to always point a positive direction. For example, it is important to teach that we should eat right, get enough exercise, and avoid smoking and the use of drugs because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. But we need to go further and point out that our bodies are holy because they are to be dedicated to God's service. To be holy means to be set apart so that we can be "useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."⁵² Only by always pointing to this positive direction can we avoid a legalistic Christianity.

Getting to the Heart of Things. Many times we use the word *right* to mean culturally appropriate or technically precise or socially apt. But many issues are matters of the heart. From a biblical perspective, it is the attitude of the heart that is most important. Because at the core of our being we are sinful creatures, even our very best efforts will be tainted with sin. Martin Luther once remarked to his students that the only way we can avoid sinning is to do nothing, and that would be a sin. Therefore, Luther said, our only course is to "go forth and sin boldly."

Imagine for a moment four high school students, all of whose school grades are falling. One student has always been lazy and disorganized, but until this year when the academic bar was raised, he has always been able to handle the work because he is very smart. Another just learned that her parents are getting a divorce, and she is finding it impossible to concentrate on anything. The third has a teacher whose explanations don't connect with the world of the student's experience. The fourth has gotten into drugs and sex and is barely staying awake. In each case the symptom is the same: failing grades. The causes, however, are very different. A one-size-fits-all "discipline" policy simply will not work. To work effectively in this situation, both teachers and parents must take time to actually know the student. There is no substitute for community.

Relationships, Not Rules. We are a school, and a school is a place where people learn. We human beings learn by trial and error, by making mistakes. When we face the consequences of our mistakes and of our sins, it is important that there be someone there to help us regain the path. We need to rely, not on rules, but on relationships. At the high school level, for example, the list of rules of conduct in the student handbook is remarkably short. Legalism and behavior modification require an ever-expanding rulebook, because every new situation has to be covered by a rule. Our guiding principles are not rules, but positive signposts toward the kingdom of God.

One example is the decision made in the 1970s to eliminate student uniforms at BCS. The justification for uniforms was mainly a legalistic one and enforcement had become an embarrassment. Girls could be required to kneel to insure that the hems of

⁵² 2 Timothy 2:21

their skirts touched the floor. We realized that uniforms did not contribute to learning what constitutes appropriate dress. They were an easy way of gaining conformity to a standard of outward appearance, but they eliminated opportunities to teach the basic concept. We decided instead to adopt a small number of basic guidelines for student dress, and to work with individual students when problems arose. This method does make life more difficult for teachers, and sometimes also for parents. Nurturing children, however, is not about making life easy for ourselves.

School uniforms can serve as a metaphor for all kinds of school rules. Rules can be applied impersonally, they are efficient, and they get noticeable result. They also require constant attention and maintenance, and they depersonalize the student. Relationships are personal, so they require greater time and effort. They take longer to bring about change, but the change is longer-lasting. Above all, they maintain the dignity and value of the person.

The Ten Commandments were specific ways of living out the Great Commandment to love God above all else and your neighbor as yourself. The first four⁵³ say that if you love God you will not look to any other gods and you will not use his name to no purpose. The remaining six say that if you love your neighbor you will not kill him, betray him, or take what belongs to him. In this same spirit we at BCS act in the conviction that rules always need to serve some positive purpose. In the student handbook for the junior/senior high school we say that four questions can solve almost all of our problems about personal conduct:

- Is it right?
- Is it helpful?
- Is it kind?
- Is it necessary?

Building Community

Without a sense of community this way of handling behavior issues could never work. The command to do what is right implies that we agree about right and wrong. A community having a common reference point in Scripture can come to agreement about major issues. And recognizing each other as struggling disciples, we can respect differences about the best way to live out lives of obedience to Christ. Like the apostle Paul mediating between Jewish and Gentile Christians about keeping the Sabbath or eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, the school can allow for differences among families sharing a common commitment to the Lord.

Building community is important to the life of the body of Christ. At all levels we encourage activities both inside and outside the classroom that build a sense of common purpose and direction. In the elementary grades, the self-contained classroom is an ideal base camp from which students can venture out, then return to share what they have learned. In the upper grades, we have built time into the school schedule that is

⁵³ The Bible contains more than one list, and different traditions divide them differently. The text referenced here is Exodus 20:2-7, with verse 3 understood to be the first commandment.

intended to give students an opportunity to build relationships with each other. We schedule whole-school activities for the same reason. It is sometimes difficult for parents new to the school to understand why we require attendance on days set aside for service projects, whole-school outings, and other activities, when regular classes are not being held. The reason is that building community is at least as much a part of the mission of the school as is academic instruction.

Christian community is more than friendliness. It expresses a common sense of discipleship, common service to our one Lord Jesus Christ. In the words of the Educational Confession, “A life dedicated to Christ will be a life devoted to the service of others.”⁵⁴ At all levels we seek to build in opportunities for students to serve others. This begins with praying for one other, and in the upper grades includes days specially set aside for service projects outside the school. The Educational Confession recognizes that “[o]pportunities for service must be an integral part of a truly Christian education.”⁵⁵ The idea is not to try to compel an attitude of service; that is as impossible as trying to compel anyone to love poetry. But we require the study of poetry, and we require the practice of service; both are done in the hope of leading students to the point where they will begin to do these things on their own.

School, Church and Home: Educational Leadership

God is the creator, not only of trees and rocks, but also of automobiles and cellular telephones. That is, he made his world full of possibilities that human beings are in the process of opening up. A new Buick is just as dependent on God for its existence as is a sparrow. Similarly, in the realm of human society, God’s creation is not limited to the social relationships specifically mentioned in the Bible. He is as much the creator of schools and labor unions as he is of marriages and families. Contrary to the theory common in North America the authority of government does not come from the people. Similarly the authority of the family does not come from the children (or from the parents), and the authority of a school does not come from the parents. All authority is delegated by God and is given for the benefit of those who are subject to it. It is God who creates authorities, though it is human beings who shape the institutions through which his authority is administered.

The school has a responsibility to establish an educational direction and to make it available to like-minded parents. Parents exercise a familial authority in choosing a school for their children, and the school exercises educational authority by developing an educational philosophy and implementing it in faculty hiring, curriculum development, instructional methodology, and other operations. In order to maintain a consistent philosophical direction, BCS was founded as an independent corporation. Corporation members are persons with longstanding connections with the school who have a thorough understanding of the biblical basis and educational philosophy of the school. The

⁵⁴ Educational Confession, IX

⁵⁵ Education Confession, VII

corporation, not the parent body as a whole, elects a school board that is responsible for oversight of the school's operations.

Although the school has a responsibility to exercise educational leadership, and cannot simply adopt the lowest common denominator of parental preferences or expectations, the school must also become a community in which parental viewpoints can influence the operations of the school. For that reason, BCS regularly involves parents in key positions, such as membership on the Education Committee, which gives final approval to changes in the curriculum. BCS has also established regular channels for dealing with parental concerns. Rather than simply complaining, or spreading rumors, parents can follow procedures insuring that their concerns are heard and considered. In this way the principle of Christian community is worked out in the school's daily operations.

Practicing What We Preach

Bellevue Christian School is a philosophy-driven school. Biblical concepts of the nature of reality and of humanity's place in that reality shape our commitment to serve the educational needs of Christian families. Those concepts affect our admission procedure, our instructional strategies, our discipline policies, and our sense of the relationships among home, church, and school. They shape our sense of purpose, our educational striving toward the goal of the coming of God's kingdom. That striving is the subject of the next two chapters.

Chapter 4: Striving Toward the Goal

“It’s all well and good to talk about philosophy,” some may say, “but what about the end product? Does this school achieve excellence in education?”

By the turn of this century, the word *excellence* had taken on the nearly-religious meaning that the word *success* had in the second half of the twentieth century, and that the word *progress* had in the first half. But is excellence an appropriate goal for a Christian school? And if so, how should it be measured? This question applies to every aspect of the life of the school – academics, athletics, the arts, technology, fund-raising and administration.

Whether the word is progress, success, or excellence, the accomplishments of a person, institution or program can only be measured in terms of the intended goal. One humorist tells a story about an airline pilot who got on the intercom and said, “We don’t know where we are, actually, but we are moving at a terrific rate of speed.” Not a very reassuring statement, to say the least. To measure the success of a Christian school, we must have a clear idea of the goal.

The Call to be Faithful

In the early 1970s, I sat across a desk from Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon, at that time one of the few evangelical Christians in Congress. I asked him what it was like to bring a Christian perspective to Washington.

“Well, for one thing,” he answered, “I’m one of the few men on the Hill who can’t lose an election.”

I did not know what to think of this, so I simply replied, “Oh?”

“I look at it this way,” Hatfield continued. “If this November the voters of Oregon cast more votes for me than they do for the other guy, I will take that to mean that the Lord wants me in the United States Senate for another six years. On the other hand, if they cast more votes for the other guy than for me, I will take that to mean that the Lord wants me somewhere else, doing some other task. But as long as I am where the Lord wants me to be, I win.”

Then he leaned forward and pointed directly at me. “Remember,” he said, “the Lord did not call us to be successful. He called us to be faithful.” (I later learned that the phrase was not original with Hatfield. The person from whom he learned it was Mother Theresa of Calcutta.)

There is a popular saying in our culture: “You can’t argue with success.” But you can. The fact that something works is not sufficient reason for doing it. The means must always be measured with respect to the end. If we are reaching people with the message of the gospel, for example, then church membership will increase. But if we make increasing church membership the goal, we can easily lose sight of the real goal, which is reaching people for Christ. We may begin to offer what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called “cheap grace,” which ignores Jesus’ words, “If any man would come after me, let him

deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”⁵⁶

The apostle Paul makes much the same point about confusing means and ends in 1 Corinthians 13. He knew that many people would consider themselves highly successful as Christians if they were to work miracles, or forcefully declare the Lord’s message, or even become martyrs for the faith. But Paul said,

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.⁵⁷

Paul was not downplaying miracles or prophecy or martyrdom. In fact, he elsewhere urged believers to “eagerly desire the greater gifts.”⁵⁸ But he was saying that none of these things is a self-sufficient value. Unless they are put to work in obedience to the great commandment to love God above all else and neighbor as self, they are ultimately worthless.

Following the lines of Paul’s argument, if we truly believe that the purpose of Bellevue Christian School is nothing less than the development of a Christian mind, then we must say that if we send students to Yale and Stanford but they do not know how to put their learning in the service of God, then we have failed. If our graduates become wealthy entrepreneurs but they do not know the meaning of godly stewardship of the creation, then we have failed. If they achieve heights of acclaim in any field but do not learn to make their primary goal of the coming of God’s kingdom, then we have failed. Like the gifts of which Paul spoke, these accomplishments are not in themselves unworthy, but they take on their true meaning only when they are offered in service to God.

This idea of measuring ourselves by the goal of the coming of God’s kingdom is more fully developed in the following chapter (Chapter 5, Transforming the Culture). For now, suffice it to say that the only progress that is meaningful in the long run is movement toward greater obedience to God through Jesus Christ.

Unwrapping Our Gifts

Every student has been uniquely gifted by God, and is being called to a life of service to him. The calling of God does not often come by direct revelation. Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus is an extraordinary event, not a typical one. So is the situation of Moses, who believed he lacked the gifts to do what God called him to do. In most cases, God’s calling is discovered through a convergence of appreciation of our gifts, affirmation by others, particular circumstances, and spiritual growth. Furthermore, the calling of God is seldom a blanket calling for our entire lives. In his book

⁵⁶ Matthew 16:24-24

⁵⁷ 1 Cor. 13:1-3

⁵⁸ 1 Cor. 12:31

The New Man for Our Time the great Quaker author Elton Trueblood wrote of our need to live our life in chapters, to be ready to lay aside one task and take up another to which the Lord is calling us.

If we are not aware of the strengths and weaknesses in our own abilities, we may not be able to hear the Lord's calling. We believe that Bellevue Christian School should be a place where students can begin to discover how God has equipped them for the tasks to which he will call them. We should be opening up possibilities for all students, not limiting ourselves to those with extraordinary abilities in music, art, athletics or academic pursuits. Our goal is not the Greek idea of the well-rounded personality, but the biblical idea of stewardship of the gifts God has given us.

It is difficult for students to unwrap their gifts if they are processed through a standardized curriculum that expects the same kinds of products from everyone. We believe that teachers need to become aware of the differences among students, and to encourage a variety of responses so that students can utilize their strengths while working on their weaknesses. We have fostered the development of a school climate in which it is acceptable for an athlete to be also a scholar and a musician, if God has given her those gifts.

We have a God who gives "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,"⁵⁹ and often we are given more abilities than we can fully develop in one lifetime. We mean well when we encourage our children to do their best at everything, but this may be impossible. The available time and energy remain fixed. It might be possible for a student who reads slowly to earn an A in English, but that might require so much time that he would have to settle for a C or a D in everything else. Another student might be able to improve her academic grades by giving up sports or music or drama, but this might exchange short-term gain for long-term loss. Eventually, of course, people need to learn to prune to their lives and concentrate on a few best things, but there is time enough for that later on. The school years should be times of exploration, of venturing into the untried and the unknown. That is often how gifts are discovered.

Childhood and adolescence are not appropriate times for selecting out the best few and concentrating on them alone. With respect to music, for example, all children in a Christian elementary school should be encouraged to learn to sing well because music is such an important part of the expression of Christian faith in our heritage. A small choir made up of the best singers might be a good idea, but not if it constitutes the only music program. That is the reason why our high school has a large non-audition choir. Some students remain in this group all the way to graduation, while others move into a more select choir, and still others move on to other interests.

The music program at BCS is not trying to create future opera singers, any more than the athletic program is trying to create future professional athletes. For those who do have extraordinary gifts, however, we aim to provide an opportunity to develop those gifts and to learn to place them at the service of Jesus Christ. Education is the

⁵⁹ Ephesians 3:20

purpose of both music and athletics; professional expertise is the reward for those who take the opportunity to develop their gifts to the highest level.

The Idolatry of “Excellence”

When we take that which should be a reward for a task well done and make it the main purpose of the task, we are creating an idol. Idolatry consists in taking something from within the creation and elevating it to the place that only God should occupy. The modern Western attitude toward sexuality is an example of this kind of idolatry. Sigmund Freud made sexuality the root of human personality and behavior, and modern advertising makes it the chief goal of life. God intended sexual happiness to be the by-product of the building of a marriage. To make a happy sex life the *purpose* of marriage distorts both marriage and sexuality. When sex is pursued as an end in itself it becomes an idol. Herein lies the evil, not only of pornography, but also of many prime-time television situation comedies.

When that which should be a reward is sought as an end in itself, says C. S. Lewis in *The Four Loves*, it becomes demonic in its power. As a reward, it can satisfy; as a self-sufficient goal, it becomes insatiable.

Similar observations could be made about other aspects of life. Our culture, for example, says that the purpose of business enterprise is to make money. The great Reformation leader John Calvin, for example, had quite a different view. “The shoemaker’s job is not to make money,” he once said, “but to make shoes to clothe the naked feet of his neighbor.” Viewed in Christian perspective, business is an organized way of utilizing the resources of the creation to create products and services that serve legitimate human needs to the glory of God. Profit is a measure of business efficiency; it is a necessary condition if a business is to continue. Profit is *necessary* to business but it is not the *purpose* of business. The modern idolatry that turns the reward into the purpose leads to the conclusion that anything is fair as long as it makes a profit. So the manufacture of shoddy products, the rape of the environment, and the psychological manipulation of customers through techniques of advertising, are all justified on the grounds that they increase profits.

Small wonder that the apostle Paul warned, “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”⁶⁰ Money is not a thing in itself; it is a representation of the value of the resources of the creation and of the human thought and labor that go into the creation of goods and services. That value comes from the hand of the Creator. To love money for its own sake is to become one of those who “worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.”⁶¹

Jesus made much the same point when he warned us not to allow even something as important as earning a living to become a self-sufficient goal. “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear,” he said. These

⁶⁰ 1 Timothy 6:10

⁶¹ Romans 1:25

are not the real goals; the true goal is always the coming of God's kingdom. "Strive for his kingdom," Jesus said, "and these things will be given to you as well."⁶²

In this same regard, there is an important lesson for us in the parable of the talents. When the day of reckoning came, the servants were judged not according to who produced the most but according to their stewardship of what they had been given. The master's words were the same to all those who had made good use of their trust: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"⁶³ The only one of the servants who was condemned was the one who did not value the trust enough to actually make any use of it.

Our aim at Bellevue Christian School is not to be better than everyone else, but to be faithful to the calling of the Lord. We want to find ways to be able to say to students of all ability levels, "Well done!" If our soccer team wins the state tournament, or our math team places first in the state math competition, or a woodwind quartet places first at the state solo and ensemble contest, we cannot therefore conclude that our soccer or math or music program is better than it was the previous year, or that it is better than a program in some other school. Real school success is seen on a smaller scale. It is the struggling English student who finally masters the ability to write a paragraph with a topic sentence. It is the seventh grader who learns that respect is not the same as fear. It is the student in wood shop who finishes the unseen under side of a table as thoroughly as the top because, he says, "God can see it."

If we begin to pursue high standardized test scores, state athletic championships and other accolades so that we can boast of our superiority, then we become guilty of the idolatry of excellence.

The Problem of Competition

Competition is a particularly thorny problem in a Christian school. It seems to be an integral part of human personality, yet it contributes to the development of an idolatry of success. Like money, competition is a good when it serves the larger aim of the coming of God's kingdom, but it must never become an end in itself. Charles Darwin's theory of the evolution of species by the process of natural selection popularized the idea of competition in the 19th century. Others coined the term "survival of the fittest" to describe it. In the decades that followed, ruthless business competition, an uncaring attitude toward the poor, and a worldwide arms race that led finally to the First World War were all justified as obeying a fundamental law of nature, the law of survival.

Curiously, although Christians continue to do battle with Darwin when talking about the origins of life, they will often accept the survival principle in other realms of life, particularly on the playing field and in the business world. In the early 20th century the industrialist John D. Rockefeller taught a Sunday School class and gave dimes to poor children, but his business methods were utterly ruthless. His worldview placed

⁶² Matthew 6:31-33

⁶³ Matthew 25:21

economic life in a separate, “secular” realm. In this split world view, killing someone economically by destroying his livelihood was exempt from the commandment “thou shalt not kill.”. Like many others, Rockefeller failed to see that the commandment not to murder is really a specification of the overall command, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Yet Scripture could hardly be more clear on the subject. When Paul says that all the commandments are summed up in the one rule, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” he goes on to say, “Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” Here Paul echoes the book of Job. Protesting his innocence, Job said that he should be blamed “if I have rejoiced at my enemy’s misfortune or gloated over the trouble that came to him.”⁶⁴ And the book of Proverbs warns, “Do not gloat when your enemy falls,”⁶⁵ and “whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.”⁶⁶

It is difficult to reconcile these passages of Scripture with the modern American idea of competition, that makes winning an end rather than a reward. It justifies the intentional foul and makes heroes of people who have no admirable personal qualities whatsoever but can win ball games. Clearly there is something profoundly unbiblical about the way competition is glorified in our culture. The problem is that competition has come to be seen as a good *in and of itself*, rather than as a tool that has some valuable uses. At Bellevue Christian School, we are making an effort to use competition where it serves the goal of the coming of God’s kingdom, while rejecting it as a basic principle of human life.

The Value of Competition

In his first Corinthian letter the apostle Paul used the Greek games as a metaphor for the life of the Christian.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.⁶⁷

Paul’s point is not to justify or commend athletic competition, but to draw an analogy from the surrounding culture. His is not encouraging us to compete but to be as focused in our service to the Lord as the athlete is in service to his goal of winning the prize. Nevertheless in drawing his analogy, he points up two of the positive uses of competition.

He recognizes first that competition can spur us on to greater effort. Just when we think we have done as much as is possible, someone else comes along and does even

⁶⁴ Job 31:29

⁶⁵ Prov. 24:17

⁶⁶ Prov. 17:5

⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

more; so rather than resting on past accomplishments, we strive to match and even surpass the other. For years the four-minute mark was an obstacle for those who ran the mile because nearly everyone believed such a speed could never be achieved. Competition continued, however, and when Roger Bannister finally beat that time in 1954, he shattered the psychological barrier as well. Within two years times under four minutes had become, if not routine, at least common

A second value of competition recognized by Paul is that it can concentrate our efforts. Just as competition motivates an athlete to give up distractions and train his body for the race, so it can help us prune our lives of nonessentials. Competition for grades, for example, can help some students focus more of their energy into learning.

There is a third important by-product of competition: it can help open up new possibilities. The history of the economies of the Soviet Union and the United States in the twentieth century makes it clear what where there is competition, there is also greater innovation. If humanity lives under the mandate to open up the possibilities inherent in God's creation, competition is certainly a spur to the fulfillment of that mandate.

Here again, however, the Bible always puts competition in the context of the fundamental command to love God and neighbor. "To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality," says the apostle Paul, "he will give eternal life."⁶⁸ A pastor friend once offered this paraphrase of Galatians 6:9: "If you must compete at something, compete at doing good."

In the Classroom and On the Field

Valuable as competition may be in its proper place, it has serious limitations. First, it is by no means a universal motivator. Some students learn and work better in an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration. Many parents and school have difficulty dealing with the student who does not find competition for grades rewarding or motivating. A collaborative learning style is more common among girls, contributing to lower achievement levels for girls in math and science, where the competitive model of instruction has prevailed. For that reason, some schools have begun experimenting with separate boys' and girls' classes in these fields. At Bellevue Christian we encourage the use of a variety of instructional methods, including both competitive and collaborative strategies, in order to reach a larger number of students.

Second, competition in the classroom easily becomes a reward/punishment system of behavior modification. For the competitive learner winning is a reward, and like all rewards it can be powerful in changing human behavior. The danger in changing behavior through a system of rewards is that we can form children who will perform only for the reward. As Christians, we want our children to do what is right *because it is right*, not out of hope of reward or fear of punishment. In the classroom, grades can be a powerful motivator for some students. However, we want our students to become

⁶⁸ Romans 2:7

learners, not grade-grubbers. At its worst, this can lead to a “winning is everything” mentality which encourages plagiarism and other forms of cheating.

Third, the continual use of a competitive model of instruction often works to the detriment of students who are not in the top academic ranks. In general it is good practice for teachers to praise students for work well done: praise is the teacher’s equivalent of a first-prize trophy. But if there are two or three brilliant students in a classroom, their unrelenting series of “wins” ceases to motivate anyone. At this point, competition can become a *disincentive* to achievement. If a student’s abilities will always place her in the middle of the pack, why should she do more than the minimum needed to achieve that magic C grade? At BCS we try to find instructional techniques that emphasize stewardship of individual gift, and methods of evaluation that measure progress against the student’s own previous work, rather than always against those with greater ability.

A fourth danger of competition is that it can encourage conflict and strife in violation of a Christian responsibility to be peacemakers. Some professional schools are notorious for deliberately setting students against one another in a vicious competition to be among the few who graduate. It is almost commonplace for high schools and colleges to use the language of war in promoting athletic rivalries. At Bellevue Christian we understand that the purpose of competition is not to drive others into the ground but to motivate us to improve. to make us better at something. We actively discourage any suggestion that an athletic opponent is the enemy. The classroom and the athletic field are not exempt from the apostle Paul’s admonition, “Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.”⁶⁹

Particularly on the playing field, a fifth danger of competition is that winning may become the purpose of playing rather than a motivator in a particular game. The place of sports in a Christian school is an educational one. Sports should give students the opportunity to learn physical skills, elements of strategy, principles of leadership, the value of cooperation and teamwork, habits of physical fitness, and godly ways of dealing with both victory and defeat. Seen in this light, a losing season can be at least as great an opportunity for learning as a winning one. The wins will come if the students turning out for a sport have sufficient innate athletic ability, and are well coached, learn the lessons of practice, and apply those lessons well. Winning a state championship is an exhilarating experience for the student athletes, their families and their friends, but it does not make the school a better school or the students better persons.

When winning becomes the object, the longer-range goals of athletic competition frequently get left behind. America has a large population of overweight, out-of-shape former athletes. The idea of physical activity as a way of caring for the body has been overridden by the goal of winning. This is particularly distressing among Christians, who understand that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

For these and other reasons, Bellevue Christian School does not participate in a survival-of-the-fittest mentality in any area. Our best athletes are given every

⁶⁹ Romans 14:19

opportunity to develop their skills, but our choices for team membership are based on more than sheer athletic prowess. A student can disqualify himself or herself from playing in many ways, including failure to keep up with required academic work, on-field conduct that dishonors the name of Christ, and a self-centered and self-aggrandizing attitude that undermines the idea of team play. On the other hand, a student may remain with a team while seeing little or no actual game time because his or her spirit of encouragement and teamwork builds the team in ways that cannot be seen by the crowd in the stands.

Academically, also, we seek to help every student exceed his or her own previous accomplishments, but we do not simply drop students who do not measure up to some arbitrary academic standard. For the student whose gifts, interests and calling point toward college, we are an excellent college preparatory school. However, the term “prep school” is commonly applied to schools that are academically selective, choosing to work *only* with students who have high academic potential. Applying this term to BCS would therefore be misleading because although we have high academic expectations, we are not academically selective.

Competition can help students discover and develop their gifts. Every student should be encouraged to excel, that is, to get the most from the gifts he or she possesses. But competition is not an end in itself; it is not the driving force of human life. Scripture makes it clear that God has given us gifts not for ourselves alone but for the benefit of all of the members of the body. Our aim is to encourage this body life, this growth of all believers into a true community.

The BCS mission statement states as our goal that students may be able to “understand, evaluate, and transform their world from the foundation of God’s unchanging values.” Taking competition out of the idolatrous position it occupies in our culture and placing it back in the service of the coming of God’s kingdom is part of the fulfillment of that mission.

Chapter 5: Transforming the Culture

The future has always been uncertain, but in this new century the world is undergoing unusually broad and sweeping change. Political, social, economic and cultural changes are sweeping away much of the world familiar to the generation born after the Second World War. It was in just such a time of profound change that Jesus was born; in another such time men such as Luther and Calvin led the Protestant Revolution. Such times create tremendous challenges and opportunities for the people of God. When old certainties are swept away, there is an enlarged opportunity for Christians to do exactly what BCS seeks to prepare them to do: to “understand, evaluate and transform their world from the standpoint of God’s unchanging values.”

Thy Kingdom Come

Although there are many important secondary purposes of a Christian education, the primary aim is not to help students get into college, become good Americans, or become successful in business. The primary aim is that students may become effective citizens of the kingdom of God, and that their whole lives may be directed to the coming of that kingdom. All those other things—finding a calling, pursuing an education, becoming good citizens and parents and consumers—will then take their meaning from the primary aim of the coming of God’s kingdom.

The kingdom of God is not a territory, or an organization, or a far-off future event. Jesus proclaimed that he was ushering in the kingdom. His disciples thought this meant that he would raise an army, defeat the Romans, and re-establish David’s throne in Jerusalem. Many scholars believe that Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus to the Romans in the hope of forcing Jesus to take this kind of action. Certainly some of his disciples hoped to get in on the ground floor, to become the equivalent of prime minister and secretary of state in Jesus’ new government. But he told them that his kingdom was not about the world’s idea of power. “Instead,” he said, “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”⁷⁰

There is a legitimate role, and a desperate need, for Christians as leaders in every field of endeavor, from pop music to politics. But God’s kingdom will not come by the strategy of Christians taking the reins of power. The kingdom comes, not by force, but by influence. Jesus’ parables of the kingdom in Matthew 13 are not about conquest, but about growth. The calling to be Christ’s disciples is not a calling to be in charge of things, but to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Jesus called us to change other people’s behavior, not by *telling* people how to behave, but by *showing* them: “Let your light shine before men,” Jesus said, “that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”⁷¹ As author Tony Campolo has often said, the historical record is that whenever the Christian church gains power, it loses its influence.

⁷⁰ Mark 10:43-44

⁷¹ Matthew 5:16

Confronting the Culture. In Chapter 2 under “The Redemption of Creation” we dealt with the idea that God has called us to building a Christian culture. This cannot be simply a matter of making Christian versions of what the world already offers—Christian bowling alleys, Christian romance novels, and Christian singles dating services. It means becoming, in the best sense of the word, countercultural. The problem, of course, is that we are products of the very culture God has called us to oppose.

To understand this, we must go back to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel. This is often turned into a little story about where languages came from, on the order of the Native American fable about how the polar bear lost its tail. God’s word to us in the Babel story is that because of our sin, our rebellion against God, the cultural mandate to develop the world and to protect it has been directed toward the building of the kingdom of Man rather than the kingdom of God. In the teaching of history in a Christian school, this is the clearest single break we need to make with the assumptions of the surrounding culture. Scripture says that most of human historical development has been undertaken in rebellion against God, not in obedience to him.

When we grow up in a particular culture, we tend to accept its values and presuppositions. We choose one of the answers given by the surrounding culture, then attempt to reconcile our view with Scripture. Instead we should be asking whether the question is framed in a biblical way. Here are a few of the dilemmas our culture presents and a sketch of how we can escape them by a radical re-thinking of the basic question.

Individualism vs. Collectivism. Throughout Western history there have been two competing views of the nature of human society. The old view, held by the Greeks, the Romans, the lords of the Middle Ages and the rulers of the Age of Kings, was that individual persons are only parts of the real thing, the social whole. In politics this meant that the king represents God to the entire nation, and therefore his will is law. About 300 ago, thinkers looking for a way to throw off oppressive government developed the idea that the real focus should be on the free, sovereign individual, so that social relationships like government are only social contracts that can be changed at will. But Scripture maintains that *both* individual persons *and* social relationships are created by God. The individual is not merely part of the larger whole, and the society is not just a voluntary collection of individuals. The apostle Paul applies this to the church, which he refers to as a body: “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body.”⁷²

Collectivism denies individual responsibility and justifies absolute rule. Individualism denies our responsibility for one another and justifies selfishness. The Bible establishes that the two ideas must be held together in a creative tension.

Liberalism vs. Conservatism. Ignoring the specific uses of these words in American politics, the liberal vs. conservative dilemma is essentially an attitude toward tradition and change. Liberalism values change for its own sake. Conservatism values tradition for its own sake. The Bible values both tradition and change. Jesus returned

⁷² 1 Corinthians 12:12

to the traditions of the elders for his answers to many questions, but he always gave them a new twist. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, he took the commandments and rephrased them in such a way that made them harder, not easier.

The gospel itself is new wine that requires new wineskins. The temptation is to confuse our traditional way of obeying God with the word of God itself. Our responsibility is to be as obedient to God in our own time as earlier generations were in their time. We may often have to find new ways of implementing old ideas.

Environmentalism vs. Development. Radical environmentalists speak as if the creation would get along quite well by itself if only human beings had never come along. Radical developers speak as if the creation is there only to be used in any way human beings see fit. Some environmentalists specifically blame Christians for holding to a theology of dominion that justifies the unrestrained exploitation of the earth's resources. But according to Scripture, when humankind was placed in the garden of God's creation they were charged with the responsibility to "work it and take care of it."⁷³ The development of the creation and its protection must go hand in hand. The solution is the biblical idea of stewardship, based on the proclamation that "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."⁷⁴ It is not ours to use as we please; it belongs to God, and we are accountable for our use or abuse of it.

Good guys vs. bad guys. Such examples could be multiplied. The point is that a biblical vision causes us to question the categories that the surrounding culture supplies because they seldom represent a Christian view of the nature of the creation or of human life. Most of these categories tend to divide the world into two groups, the good guys and the bad guys. The world would be much better off, the world around us says, if only we could get rid of all of *those* people; *they* are the ones who are responsible for everything that is wrong in the world. War, slavery, genocide, racism, the exploitation of women, all have been justified on the grounds of some supposed innate superiority of one nation, race, gender, or political viewpoint over another. In the early church there was a dispute between Jewish and gentile Christians over which was better. Paul waded into the dispute and came to this conclusion: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."⁷⁵

A fundamental tenet of a Christian education must be that evil is not found *out there*, and it cannot be eliminated by dividing humanity into categories of better and worse. Evil is found *in here*, in the human heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure," says Jeremiah 17:9. The story of the flood in Genesis 11 makes the fundamental point that even if you kill everyone in the world except one righteous man, you will still end up with a sinful world. Therefore there is no place in a Christian school for hatred of any group of people or for any attempt to find a scapegoat for evil in the world.

⁷³ Genesis 2:15

⁷⁴ Psalm 24:1; 1 Corinthians 10:26

⁷⁵ Galatians 3:28

One Sphere at a Time. The need is for Christians to be active in the various spheres of life. We need Christians in the media, in journalism, in business, and in the arts who are committed to a radical Christian discipleship. We at Bellevue Christian School cannot pretend to know all about what it means to be a Christian actor, artist, economist, or carpenter. But if we are right in our understanding of a Christian worldview, it means more than holding to personal morality, devotion, and evangelism—important as these things are. We must give our students practice in asking what it means for the reign of God to come in their world now so they will be better prepared to ask the same question about the world of business, politics, or the arts.

Our prayer is, “May your kingdom come, your will being done on earth as it is in heaven.” The kingdom is not only a future event; it is also a present reality. The kingdom is coming not only in the sense that it will one day be fully realized on earth, but also in the sense of present movement in that direction. In his own time, Jesus said, “From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing.”⁷⁶ He also said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.”⁷⁷ Some in the early church thought this meant Christ’s return in glory would come in their lifetime, but they missed the point. The people to whom Jesus was speaking *did* see the kingdom come with power; they just didn’t recognize it when they saw it. As Jesus himself said, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”⁷⁸

How does the kingdom of God come in the present? The Lord’s Prayer links the coming of the kingdom with obedience to the will of God. So we might use this formulation: where the will of God is met with willing human obedience, there the kingdom of God becomes manifest.

But what does it mean to be obedient to God as an artist, or in any other endeavor? Only Christian artists, film makers, chemists, corporate executives, carpenters, fishermen and computer designers, committed to the coming of the kingdom of God, can answer that question. Christians working in the various aspects of human culture will be the ones who will point the way of obedience in those fields.

How can we at Bellevue Christian School help prepare today’s students to be tomorrow’s shapers of a Christian counterculture? We cannot give them answers to the questions they will face. We do not even know what most of those questions will be. But we can help them ask the right kinds of questions, biblically grounded questions. We can do that by laying a strong foundation in a biblical worldview, giving them solid practice in framing questions that make biblical assumptions about the nature of reality, the nature of humanity, and the relationship between the two.

⁷⁶ Matthew 11:12

⁷⁷ Mark 9:9

⁷⁸ Luke 7:20-21

Our Nation and the World

Our goal is the coming of the kingdom of God, not the coming of the dominance of our own or any other nation or culture. Ever since the first European explorers began to venture forth in the fifteenth century, the world has been growing smaller. Transportation, trade and communication have brought nations and cultures together in new and often exciting ways. The Christian school is uniquely prepared to deal with global issues and with conflicts of cultures, because Christians understand that God does not limit himself to any one people or nation.

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord,” says Psalm 33:12, but that nation is not an earthly political structure. The New Testament people of God are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.”⁷⁹ The blood of Jesus Christ has purchased men for God “from every tribe and language and people and nation,” and they have been made “to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God”⁸⁰ The “nation whose God is the Lord” has no earthly boundaries, but is made up of all those who follow Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, God does not limit himself to the people he has specially chosen. God. In Genesis 13 God promised Abraham that he would become the father of a chosen people. The very next story tells how Abraham rescued his nephew Lot from a rival tribe that had captured him and his household. As he was returning, Abraham met Melchizedek, whom Scripture calls “priest of God Most High.” Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and Abraham gave him a tithe of all the goods. The placement of the story makes it clear that although God was going to work in a special way through Abraham, he still had a priest among the other nations. There is much more we would like to know about this story, but God has chosen to tell us only this much. The story reminds us that although God has chosen us to be his people, he does not limit his activity to us.

As Christians, therefore, we are able to see how other cultures, even those that do not acknowledge God as God, have responded to the word of God as it is revealed in the creation. When we look at the culture of the North American Indians, for example, we can see the creational basis of their belief that the earth is our mother. We in the West, in spite of the influence of Christian thinking on our history, have tended to lose the sense that the creation is not our property to be used in any way we see fit. In a Christian school we can show that every culture has genuine insights into the nature of things, because God reveals himself in the creation itself.

Genuine respect for other cultures, and consequently preparation for the increasing diversity of cultural influences in our world, is best achieved in the context of a Biblically Christian education.

⁷⁹ 1 Peter 2:9

⁸⁰ Revelation 5:10

Tradition and Change

Cultural diversity threatens people who are steeped in tradition. In a world that is changing as rapidly as our own, people may sometimes plunge headlong in to change, thinking that what is new must be better. On the other hand, they may cling to the old simply because it is old, or familiar, or theirs. We need to be anchored in something deeper than either tradition or change – the abiding word of the Lord as it comes to us in the creation, in Scripture, and in the person of Jesus Christ.

At Bellevue Christian we encourage students to find their identity not in their nationality nor in their “life-style” but in Christ. Citizenship in God’s kingdom is not one characteristic among many; it is the defining reality of the believer’s life. If our identity is bound up in Christ, we will not be threatened by external change. The premiere example is the profound change early Jewish Christians had to undergo when they discovered that when Christ came as the fulfillment of the law, he knocked the pins out from under many cherished traditions. Jesus himself was accused of being a lawbreaker because he did not conform to the traditions. The apostle Peter had to learn that “it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him, [b]ut God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.”⁸¹

Bellevue Christian School is dedicated to an education that will take Christian young people behind tradition and change, beyond nation and culture, preparing them to live for God in a rapidly changing world. We cannot give them the answers, because we do not even know what many of the questions will be. What we can do is give them a solid grounding in a biblical worldview so that they will be able to ask Christian questions – and find Christian answers – about the problems that will confront them in the future.

⁸¹ Acts 10:28

Epilog: Flags of the Kingdom

At this time (the year 2020) Bellevue Christian School is 70 years old. During those years the staff and faculty have struggled through the development of a Christian educational philosophy that calls for radical discipleship to Jesus Christ. But can it endure?

The history of other Christian institutions is not encouraging. Yale University was founded in 1601 for the purpose of training Christian ministers. When I was a student there in 1960, the student-published humor magazine, the *Yale Record*, published a parody of the university undergraduate course catalog, containing the following description of the Yale Divinity School: "Become a respected and well-paid member of your community. No convictions required."

How do we know that BCS will not go the same way, gradually losing its Christian distinctiveness and becoming just another good school? There are, of course, no guarantees. But we must remind ourselves that the ultimate success or failure of any human endeavor is not in our hands. The apostle Paul said that he planted, and Apollos watered, "but God made it grow."⁸² This reminds us of the words of the psalmist: "Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain."⁸³

We cannot make ourselves accountable for the actions of those who come after us. Our responsibility is to be faithful to the Lord in our respective callings at Bellevue Christian School today. We must not forget that we will never bring in the kingdom in its fullness by our own efforts. The victory belongs to God; the ultimate outcome of all things is in his hands.

Several decades ago Dr. Maarten Vrieze of Trinity Christian College in Illinois told me the story of an event that occurred during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. Queen Juliana, the true monarch of the Netherlands, had fled and established a government-in-exile in London, anticipating the day when she could be restored to her throne. One day in the early morning darkness, two young men scaled the walls of the Amsterdam town hall, tore down the flag of the Third Reich, and raised the flag of a free Netherlands. They were shot by sentries so did not live to see the day of liberation.

When news of this event reached England by way of the Dutch underground, letters to the *Times of London* objected to this futile effort, this senseless loss of life. But one Christian writer, at least, saw it differently. The sacrifice these young men made, he wrote, should not be judged by whether they brought victory closer. That was not in their power; their only hope of victory lay in an invasion from the outside. Their responsibility was to bear witness to the truth, to keep alive the knowledge that the Nazis were usurpers, not the legitimate rulers, and that the true queen would one day return

⁸² 1 Corinthians 3:6

⁸³ Psalm 127:1

to reclaim her dominion. The two young men's lives were not wasted, he wrote. They should not be judged by their success, for success was not up to them. They had given their lives to raise the true flag, to set up the standard of that which was to come.

If anyone should understand this, the letter-writer went on, it should be the Christians of England. We are like the people of the Netherlands, he wrote. We are loyal subjects of the true king, living in enemy-occupied territory. Our hope for liberation lies with an invasion from outside, when Christ will return with all his hosts and establish his kingdom in righteousness forever. In the meantime, we are walking around with flags of the true king hidden under our overcoats, and every time we get the chance we pull one out and set it up to proclaim, "This territory belongs by kingly right to Jesus Christ." The important question in the long run, said the letter-writer, is not how long the flag continues to fly. If it is torn down at once and the people who put it up are executed, the effort was still worthwhile, because nothing is more important than keeping alive a testimony to the true king.

Dr. Vrieze's story should remind us that Bellevue Christian School is one of those flags of the kingdom of God. This hook has been written in the hope that the school's testimony will endure and increase. The best way to ensure that the work will continue is to focus, not on the future of the institution, but on the goal of Christian education. Our loyalty is not to the institution but to the risen Lord whom we serve in building it. Our task is to be faithful to the vision and to the call today, tomorrow, and in as many new days as may follow. In the words of the apostle Paul, "Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful."⁸⁴

⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 4:2

Appendix A: Frequently Asked Questions

It is relatively easy to give agreement to a statement of philosophy. The problems arise when the philosophy is translated into concrete actions. Veteran Christian school administrator Dr. Bernie Sachs once said, “There is nothing more practical than a sound theory.” But sometimes the theory leads to practical consequences we would rather avoid. It is at these times that BCS parents are most likely to show up in an administrator’s office, asking for explanations.

This section is an attempt to anticipate some of the questions that might be raised by the earlier chapters, and to raise some issues that did not easily fit into the narrative flow of the book.

- **BCS belongs to Christian Schools International (CSI). Aren’t the other member schools mostly Dutch and Christian Reformed?**

In the Reformed churches in the Netherlands there is a long tradition of Christian schools. Dutch immigrants brought the tradition with them in the late 19th century. Where there is a Christian Reformed Church, there is almost always a Christian school, and most if not all of the students will be from the same theological and cultural tradition.

The Christian Reformed Church in Bellevue made a decision years ago not to start their own school, but to throw in their lot with Bellevue Christian School. In the meantime Al Greene was discovering that the most profound thinking about Christian educational philosophy was taking place in Christian Reformed circles. So although he was not Dutch and had never been affiliated with that denomination, Al relied heavily on people who were both Dutch and Reformed.

BCS belongs to CSI by choice, not by culture. In the early days of the school, we were the only broadly inter-denominational school in CSI. Al Greene once said that the BCS faculty at a CSI convention is like a flock of white blackbirds: very similar in many ways to the rest, yet very different. Nationwide, however, the picture is rapidly changing. The Christian Reformed Church is gaining membership outside its traditional constituency, and families of Dutch extraction now make up less than half of the population of CSI schools.

- **Why do I keep hearing this word “Reformed” all the time? What do people mean by that?**

Martin Luther and John Calvin were the two most important leaders of the early Protestant Reformation. For a variety of historical reasons not important here, Luther’s greatest influence was in Germany and Scandinavia, and the churches that followed his leadership came to be called Lutheran. Calvin was more influential in Switzerland, the Netherlands and Scotland (through the work of John Knox), but the churches founded as a result of his leadership were called Reformed, except in Scotland where they took the name of their form of church government, Presbyterian. So we have the interesting situation that the Reformed churches have a presbyterian form of church government, and the Presbyterian churches are Reformed in their theology.

But what is meant by Reformed theology? Both Luther and Calvin developed theological systems. The starting point for Luther was Man and his need for salvation; the starting point for Calvin was God and his sovereignty over the creation. Both approaches are legitimate, but they do lead to different emphases.

In a Reformed perspective, all of the history of redemption is one continuous development, pointing always toward one end: the coming of the kingdom of God, the establishment of God's practical rule over all things. The forming of human culture is a result of God's original intention that humanity should exercise his dominion over the creation. Therefore the Christian attitude toward culture is not to totally reject it, but to transform it, to bring it more closely into obedience to the law of God. There is much more to the idea of a Reformed perspective, of course, but this much is particularly relevant to the task of a Christian school.

- **But isn't this world just going to be destroyed? Why should Christians try to transform it?**

The Bible talks about the destruction of the creation as we know it, but only as part of the accomplishment of God's overall purposes. Although the apostle Peter says "that day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire," he makes it clear that destruction is not what we are looking for. "[I]n keeping with his promise," Peter says, "we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." His purpose in reminding us of these things is not to focus our attention on the fire, but to challenge us with this question: "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives."¹ The emphasis in Scripture is on the renewing of the creation, not on its destruction.

- **Why is "that student" allowed to stay in the school? Shouldn't students in a Christian school be held to a Christian standard of conduct?**

Those are two different questions. We seek to make a biblical standard of conduct the norm at all times. But this is a school, and these are children. The Bible says, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."² But our students are not "old." And Scripture does not say, "If a child does not go in the right way, abandon him."

The easy thing would be to practice exclusionary discipline, to improve the public reputation of the school by simply getting rid of everyone who doesn't measure up. But a school is a place where people learn, and we must give students an opportunity to learn and to change. Our policy is that we will try to continue to work with a student as long as there seems to be a basis for working with her or him.

For some flagrant offenses, we have no choice but to expel a student. A student who has no intention of even trying to live up to a behavioral agreement will be asked to leave. A student who actively tries to undermine the faith or conduct of others will

¹ 2 Peter 3: 10-13

² Proverbs 22:6

not be allowed to remain in the school. But for the rest, we will continue to work with, counsel, and pray – even for those whose lives are not in order.

As a school we may make mistakes. There are situations where we have retained a student longer than we should have. Usually this became clear only after the student was gone. Since we are human, we will err, but we would rather retain a student too long than let him go too soon.

- **Some of the books students read in high school have some pretty unsavory characters and dark themes. Scripture tells us to think on things that are true and right and pure. Shouldn't that principle determine what books are chosen for the curriculum?**

We should remember that the Bible itself contains some very unpleasant stories, some of which are not suitable for children. There are stories of war, idolatry, murder, rape – even incest. An overly literal reading of Philippians 4:8 would make parts of the Bible off-limits. True, the Bible warns us to guard our hearts; but what are we to guard against? We are not to know evil by experience; but that does not mean we are not to know what it is.

We are instructed to be compassionate helpers of others; but we cannot be of much help if we do not know what they are suffering. We cannot insulate ourselves or our children from a sinful world without completely withdrawing from it. But withdrawal would violate the instruction to be salt and light in the world.

There is no better place than the Christian school for a student to encounter some of the unpleasant realities of the world, because it is a place where these things can be dealt with in the context of the love of Christ. To deal only with positive, uplifting, and Christian ideas through high school, then push students out the door into a world where saints must mingle with sinners, would be like trying to teach people to swim by showing them all the right moves on dry land, then throwing them in the lake. That kind of isolation is fundamentally dishonest. The kingdom has not yet come. The world is often an unpleasant place and living for Christ in that world is a significant challenge. Dealing with the realities of life in this world is an important part of a Christian education.

Books that are part of the curriculum are chosen through a selection process, not by any one person alone, and their appropriate use in the classroom has been planned. Parents who object to a particular book may initiate a process of review, asking that the book be reevaluated. But the fact that a book does not represent a Christian point of view or a Christian standard of conduct is not of itself reason for a book to be excluded; it may, in fact, be an excellent reason for the book to be read.

- **Aren't you just isolating people, when they should be witnessing to others? How will they ever be ready for the world if they are sheltered like that?**

Historically, Christian schools often did try to shelter their students against the world, and there is always some pressure from outside to make the BCS world more of a cocoon. Some feel that students should only read Christian books, should not be confronted with anything that might challenge their faith, should only be told the one right answer to every question, and should not be allowed to stay in the school if they do not model a Christian standard of conduct.

Others argue that students have a responsibility to be salt and light in the world and should be out there confronting the “real world” on a daily basis. Therefore they should be in public schools, interacting regularly with nonbelievers.

Both of these arguments miss the point. We are told that we are to be in the world, without being of it.¹ We are also told that parents have a responsibility to bring up their children “in the training and instruction of the Lord.”² Only the second can make the first possible. To live as Christians we are to be “transformed by the renewal of [our] mind.”³ To grow up to be mature Christians, children need to learn a Christian way of thinking, so that they will be able to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”⁴

It is not as if public schools are religiously neutral. Underpinning every course and every textbook is a set of assumptions about the nature of things, and those assumptions are usually at odds with a biblical view of life and the world. These unbiblical assumptions are reinforced by the news and entertainment media, to say nothing of the world of popular music. It is not “sheltering” when parents seek to have their children learn Christian patterns of thinking.

Bellevue Christian School does not shut out the world; it could not do so even if it wanted to. But it does create a situation in which difficult situations, challenging questions, and unpleasant realities can be examined and dealt with in the light of scripture.

- **I understand that in the high school, students are required to participate in service projects. Isn't that artificial? You can't compel service, can you?**

It is artificial only in the sense that all of school is artificial. When people leave school, they no longer have to do homework or submit papers to be graded. Many school tasks have no exact equivalent in what some would call “the real world,” but they are necessary for the learning of real-world skills. Requiring a certain kind of performance is intended to lead students to the point where they can decide for themselves whether this is something they want to do well. In requiring service projects we are not trying to compel an attitude of the heart. We are trying to give students experience in an important aspect of the Christian life in the hope that this will eventually become part of their willing service to the Lord.

- **You have a student senate in the high school, but people don't run for office or campaign. Shouldn't they be learning about how our political system works?**

One of the ways we confront the surrounding culture is by refusing to assign superiority to our own country's institutions and traditions. Because American-style democracy has worked so well in our own history, we tend to believe that our political system should be imitated by everyone, everywhere. Representative political

¹ See, for example, John 17:6-19

² Ephesians 6:4

³ Romans 12:2

⁴ 2 Corinthians 10:5

institutions do work very well as a way of governing in a sinful world, provided the level of literacy is high enough for the citizens to make informed and responsible choices, and provided there is enough economic equity for the poor to have access to the protections of the law. All these conditions were present at the founding of our own Republic, a principal reason why the American political system has worked so well.

This does not mean that democracy is the one best form of government for all times and places. It is not the model that Scripture sets before us for leadership among Christians. Student government at Bellevue Christian High School is modeled after the process set forth in Acts 6 for the selection of leaders in the church. The practical workings of American elections are widely covered in the news media and are given significant attention in social studies courses. Student government is designed to help BCS students gain practical experience with a biblical model for relationships among Christians.

- **Is Bellevue Christian School a college prep school?**

This question receives fuller treatment in Chapter 4, but the brief answer is: it all depends on the intent of the question. Do we do a good job of preparing students for college entrance? The answer is an emphatic yes. For the college-bound student, our academic program is one of the best.

But do we define ourselves as a prep school? The answer is no, because the term implies that preparation for college is the single or at least principal educational goal. At BCS, college preparation fits within the larger goal of enabling students to serve Jesus Christ in the whole of their lives. As commonly used, the term “prep school” usually refers to a school that is academically selective and works only with those of superior ability. BCS aims to serve a broad range of students – from the academically advanced to the learning disabled – and to prepare students for living out lives of obedience to Jesus Christ whether or not they are college bound. We include an outstanding program of preparation for college within the framework of a general Christian high school. The term “prep school” is not exactly inaccurate; it is simply too narrow.

- **You say that you value all kinds of gifts in students. But are these other gifts really placed on an equal footing with academic pursuits?**

That question touches on one of our most difficult continuing problems. The reality so far falls short of the goal. The arts, for example, are at this point not as well integrated into the school program as they should be. Although at the high school level we have an excellent arts program for a school of our size, it exists primarily for those who want to specialize in these areas. We require history and math and literature of all students but our requirement in the arts is the minimum state standard or two one-semester courses in four years. In classes that are not specifically devoted to the arts students are evaluated almost exclusively on the basis of work that requires logical, analytical writing. Other forms of communication are pushed to the periphery. At the elementary level a student whose gifts are primarily athletic does not get a chance to shine, because competitive sports cannot be allowed to dominate the playground.

This question does concern us, and we continue to look for ways to practice our philosophy more broadly, but we have by no means solved the problem. Complicating

the picture is the fact that the surrounding culture tends to regard anything other than traditional academic disciplines as a frill. The back-to-basics movement of recent decades and the increasing reliance on narrowly-focused standardized testing work against the broadening of our understanding of intelligence to include more than logical/analytical thinking.

- **The school has an excellent academic record. Why don't you advertise your students' test scores?**

It is true that we do not use test scores as a way to market the school. However, we do use standardized tests to help parents understand their children's abilities and accomplishments. Parents learn about the meaning of test scores and are shown how those scores compare with national norms. So how we use test scores internally differs from the way we use them externally.

Why do we not advertise test scores? In the first place, most of the tests in question measure ability, not education. The quickest way to raise a school's test scores is to get rid of the low-scoring students. Because public schools must accept all students, their test scores will inevitably be lower than those for schools that can restrict enrollment. For this reason, the National Association of Independent Schools, which includes most of the nation's top preparatory schools in its membership, has a long-standing policy against the publication of test scores.

Furthermore, test scores do not measure some of the most important aims of schooling, particularly Christian schooling. Ability to solve math problems can be measured; ability to make choices as to when mathematical answers are appropriate can be evaluated, but it cannot be tested. The section "Rethinking Academic Instruction" in Chapter 3 deals further with this issue.

Reporting of test score also tends to give the false impression the scores are somehow an accomplishment of the school itself. Schools cannot "fix" students. BCS cannot promise to raise a student's grades or test scores. Publishing test scores constitutes an implied promise and claims results for the school that may be only byproducts of the same factors that led parents to enroll their children in the school in the first place. For example, one very important contributing factor to the academic success of BCS students is the fact that most of them have parents who are involved in their lives and who genuinely care about their futures. This is not something that the *school* does.

- **You seem to spend a lot of time on philosophy at your school. Where do you find time to get the real academic work done?**

Philosophy is not an add-on that takes an additional period each week. Every school has a philosophical perspective, and it is reflected in every academic subject. Some schools don't know that they have such a perspective; they may even pride themselves on being "value-free." In this respect they are like the man who says, "I don't have an accent." He thinks that because he sounds like everyone else in his region; it is other people who have the accents.

In America's public schools, the prevailing fiction is that only those other schools, the private ones, have a religious perspective. At BCS, we recognize that all learning takes place in a philosophical context. We are straightforward and direct in stating our

philosophical perspective, and we leave it up to parents to decide whether this is the kind of education they want for their children.

There is more on this topic in the section “Asking Better Questions” at the beginning of Chapter 2.

- **BCS wants to be open to all children of Christian parents. Don't your high tuition rates make it a rich man's school?**

When BCS was founded in 1950, a road had to be bulldozed through fifty-year growth timber to build the first classrooms. The East Side was not yet even a Seattle suburb, but a sleepy, semi-rural region with a low median family income. That all began to change with the opening of the Evergreen Point floating bridge in 1962. The East Side became first a commuter bedroom community for Seattle, then a business center in its own right. The area around the school now has the highest per capita income of any area in the state. Bellevue is now such an expensive place to live that new faculty and staff members, both at BCS and in Bellevue's public schools, can no longer afford to live in the city.

This is one of the most serious problems we face as a school. Yes, tuition rates do exclude many students. Because current court interpretation of the federal and state constitutions prohibits the use of tax revenues for what we call private schools, BCS must meet all its expenses through tuition payments and fund-raising. The high local cost of living raises costs above those of schools in less-affluent areas. And even though we devote a greater percentage of our budget to classroom instruction than do the public schools, we still cannot pay our teachers and other staff the equivalent of public school salaries. The longer a teacher stays, the greater the gap becomes.

At the time of this writing 21 percent of our students receive some financial assistance. A portion of the financial aid budget comes from tuition payments, and the rest from fund-raising. We are aggressively seeking to increase contributions to our financial aid budget, but for the foreseeable future, many families who might desire a Christian education for their children will be unable to afford it.

- **A campus visit makes it clear that the BCS is virtually an all-white school. Is anything being done about this imbalance?**

Although the percentage of families of Asian origin in the BCS school family approximates the ethnic makeup of the Puget Sound region, there are few families from other ethnic groups. The source of the problem is partly geographical, partly economic, and partly cultural.

First, because of our location, most of our students come from the east side of Lake Washington. In the region served by BCS, the percentage of ethnic minority families is lower than in the greater Puget Sound region. Second, ethnic minority families in the region tend to have lower incomes, so that tuition becomes a barrier.

The greatest problem, however, is cultural. For several years BCS developed a relationship with a Christian elementary school in Seattle with a mostly Black student body, but the students who came from there to BCS found the culture of the East Side

too different from their previous experience, and all but one of them eventually withdrew. We must not forget how intimidating it is to be a stranger in a strange land.

Because so much of teaching has to do with modeling, it is important for BCS to hire ethnic minority staff members. But thousands of public and private schools in the US are trying to increase ethnic membership on their faculties, and the sad fact is that the number of ethnic minority students entering the teaching profession is far below the level required for those minorities to be proportionately represented in the hiring pool.

BCS does actively seek to recruit students and teachers from ethnic minority groups and has made some additional financial aid available in recognition of the fact that minority families in this area are more likely to have lower income. The results so far have not been impressive. If you would like to know more about these BCS efforts, call the school office and ask for a copy of the Racial Reconciliation Plan, an action plan adopted by the school board several years ago. If you feel called of the Lord to work in this area, please make your desire known to the office of the Superintendent.

• **What would the school do if there were a student who was known to be gay?**

“Man looks on the outward appearance,” Scripture says, “but God looks on the heart.”¹ We have to concern ourselves with students’ behavior, and not try to judge the temptations they may face. Entering into sexual intimacy with anyone to whom you are not married is a sin, the Bible says. We cannot find biblical justification for the idea that sexual sin is somehow less serious if the two persons involved are of different sexes. If a student is actively involved in a sexual relationship, the gender of the other person is secondary. We will continue to promote and encourage a biblical standard of sexual conduct, and we will deal with known sexual misconduct. But we will not take action against a student simply because his or her sexual temptations involve members of the same sex.

BCS also has a firm policy against sexual harassment, and that policy does not tolerate sexually based teasing or hazing of any kind for any reason. A student who is struggling with the issue of homosexuality should find Bellevue Christian School to be a safe place. We are all struggling sinners, and there is no biblical justification for hating or despising anyone because he or she is tempted in ways that we are not. The biblical command to “carry each other’s burdens” is specifically connected with one who “is caught in a sin.”² It is far easier to judge and to condemn than it is to come alongside and give support and encouragement.

The fact is that the subject of homosexuality makes us uncomfortable. We would prefer that it would just go away. Blanket condemnations are nothing but a way of dismissing the problem without dealing with it. When the subject of homosexuality comes up, there is no better time to ask the question, “What would Jesus do?”

¹ 1 Samuel 16:7

² Galatians 6:1-2

- **How can you teach the values of the kingdom of God to the children of affluence?**

There is no more difficult question than this. But we should also put it in perspective. We tend to think of affluence as a characteristic of high-income Americans. It is easy to forget that in the eyes of much of the world, *all* Americans are affluent. The abject poverty that can be seen in the streets of Calcutta or on the plains of central Africa is almost impossible to find in the United States. We are the most affluent nation in the world. Our 10 percent of the world's population consume 60 percent of the world's resources.

The American preacher and scholar Walter Rauschenbusch once remarked, "It is difficult to gain riches with justice, or to keep them with equity." We begin to squirm in our seats when we hear the words of the Song of Mary: "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty."¹ When Jesus told the parable of the sower, he said that the seed sown among thorns stood for those who "hear the word, but the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing."² And as if to remove all doubt the meaning of these passages, Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."³

We could not escape this problem except by closing our doors and moving the entire operation to an economically depressed region of the state, but even there we would encounter "the lure of wealth and the desire for other things." Our conviction is that the Lord has placed us here. We did not cause the surrounding community to become so affluent. We take comfort in what Jesus said immediately after declaring how hard it would be for a rich man to enter the kingdom. "With man this is impossible," he said, "but with God all things are possible."⁴

Jesus did not say these things about the rich in to persuade us to give up on them. We believe we have a responsibility to call students to become disciples of Jesus Christ, and in the case of BCS that means doing so in the midst of great affluence. That makes it all the more important that we not adopt the methods and mind set of the world around us. If we manage our financial affairs in such a way as to insure the economic security of the school and lose our sense of depending on God by faith for the means to do what he has called us to do, then we will have lost our way. If we begin to admit families having no heart for the Lord because they can donate substantially to the general fund, we will have compromised our witness.

¹ Luke 1:52-53

² Mark 4:18

³ Matthew 19:24

⁴ Matthew 19:26

Our responsibility is to testify, repeatedly and in as many ways as possible, to the claims of Jesus Christ on the lives of men and women. If we are faithful to that responsibility, God will provide the results.

Appendix B: The BCS Educational Confession

Throughout the ages, Christians have responded to the Word of God in confessions of faith. By means of these confessions, they defined their life together as believers. At the same time they rejected the false teachings, and answered the troubling questions, of their time.

As Christians united in the task of educating children in the Lord, we have a similar obligation to respond to God's Word for education. This we are seeking to do in this educational confession. This confession does not substitute for or compete with theological confession, but seeks to be in harmony with the historic creeds of the churches.

I. GOD IS THE SOVEREIGN CREATOR OF ALL THINGS

God called all creation into being by his Word. His creating Word holds all of reality in existence continually. Both visible things, such as the chemical composition of a rock, and invisible things, such as the relationships of people in society, are created by him. All things function as they do because God's Word is living and powerful to sustain them. Therefore all of creation speaks of God and reveals him.

When we study any aspect of God's world, we are looking at the way in which God's Word holds together that aspect of the creation. Because we are dealing with the relationship between God and his creation, learning is a sacred task.

We reject, therefore, any form of dualism, which would divide human life into separate realms, a spiritual realm and a natural realm. We confess rather that all of human life is profoundly religious, being a service either to the one true God, or to some false god.

We reject also the view that any part of God's creation is inherently sinful or secular. We confess rather that the earth and all its fullness belong to the Lord. He made his whole creation good. God made humanity responsible for working the creation in a way that brings glory to himself. All aspects of God's good creation are open to our investigation, learning and action, so long as these take place in subjection to God's authority.

Though the creation comes to us in many aspects, yet it is one creation. To study any aspect in isolation, as if it were a thing in itself, is to violate the order of creation. The detailed study of any aspect enlarges and enriches our understanding of the whole. No academic discipline can be independent or self-sufficient. The unity of creation demands of us an integrated or holistic understanding.

II. THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD WRITTEN, INSPIRED AND INFALIBLE, THE ONLY AUTHORITATIVE GUIDE FOR FAITH AND LIFE

God's revelation of himself comes to us in at least three ways: in the creation itself, in Scripture, and in Jesus Christ. However, God's revelation in the structure of creation can be understood only in the light of his written Word. We reject the idea

that the study of the Bible is “added on” or “applied” to a branch of study that is otherwise independent or religiously neutral. Scripture is foundational to all study and learning because it provides the framework of understanding without which our learning is certain to go astray.

Therefore, though there is an important place for separate biblical studies in the Christian school, biblical study may not be limited to such classes. The study of Scripture must lie at the foundation of every course taught, every policy formulated, and every action taken in every operation of the school. The Scriptures must be allowed to set the limits and the guidelines within which all true knowledge is to be sought. The Bible, however, is not a textbook of any of the branches of human knowledge, as if it were written in the language of our academic disciplines.

III. HUMAN BEINGS ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Mankind is distinguished from every other order of creation by this: that we are made in the image and likeness of God. We are created to act on God’s behalf in his creation, and in all things to respond obediently to him. The meaning of human life is therefore bound up on mankind’s responsibility and accountability to God.

This view of life stands in opposition to any system of thought that would make human thought the creator of meaning or value. It opposes also any system of thought which makes humanity to be the chance product of an impersonal nature, or which in any other way reduces the uniqueness of the creation of mankind or denies that mankind is made in God’s image.

In every aspect of life, human beings bear God’s image. The image of God is not a thing which we possess. We are, in the fullness of our being, made in God’s image. We reject the idea that the image of God is to be identified with any of the aspects of human life, whether rationality or creativity or any other. No one aspect of life may be elevated above the others as being “more God-like.”

Because human beings are created in God’s image, every person is of inestimable worth, and deserves to be treated with love and respect. No difference of race, ability, sex, creed, status, class or anything else, can make one human being of greater or lesser worth than another.

The child, as one who bears the image of God, is to be nurtured in a path of willing obedience to God. Learning about God and his creation calls for a response from the heart. Our educational theory therefore must recognize that the child is an active participant in the learning process. Parents and teachers can cultivate growth, but they cannot create a product. Though there are many educational theories from which we can learn, we must not rely on any which denies the responsibility of the person for his/her choices. We can provide guidance, but must encourage growth in responsibility.

The child is deserving of respect as one who bears God’s image. The process of growth and maturation is part of God’s good creation. Our educational theory must take into account the developmental stages of the child’s life, and our educational practice must reflect the growth process. The more the child matures, the better able he/she

is to understand his/her responsibilities, the less extrinsic measures of accountability should be emphasized.

As an image-bearer of God, each child is uniquely gifted and called into God's service. Whether those gifts appear to be small or great, they must be fostered and nurtured. Provision must be made for students of all levels of ability to make maximal use of the gifts they have been given. Whether the student's abilities and interests are leading toward further education or toward a more immediate vocation, the opportunity to learn and grow in the context of a Christian view of life and the world must be provided.

IV. HUMAN BEINGS ARE STEWARDS OF THE EARTH

In the beginning, God entrusted the care of the earth to mankind, his image-bearers. God's command to subdue the earth and have dominion over it, repeated as the command to cultivate and to protect the creation, expresses the fundamental relationship of mankind to the rest of the creation. We reject any view that would make any part of the world our exclusive possession, to do with as we please. We confess rather that we hold everything we have in trust from God, to be used for his glory and for the service of others. We reject also the idea that human beings are intruders in an otherwise well-balanced creation, confessing rather that mankind was created to play an integral role in the creation as its stewards.

Mankind was placed in the creation with a task to perform, to cultivate the earth and to protect it. Work was a part of human life from the beginning. We, therefore, reject the view that work is a punishment for our sinfulness while at the same time we recognize that what was intended to be joyous service to God has become burdensome toil because of sin. We confess that in spite of the ravages of sin, humanity still bears the God-given task of exercising God's dominion over the earth. We confess further that only in Jesus Christ can we be restored to the place where we can take up that task in a way that is obedient and honoring to God. We are to work, not as those who seek to beat the creation into submission, but as those who serve God and the creation as stewards for him.

As stewards of the creation, we are under the authority of God. All human authority is a delegation of God's authority, to be exercised in obedience to His will, for the benefit of those under authority. The responsibility of those under authority to obey may never be used as an excuse for the abuse of authority, nor may the failures of those in authority, be seized upon as an excuse for disobedience. In the Christian school, as in every aspect of the life of the body of Christ, there is to be a mutual submission to one another, and a common submission to the authority of God.

V. MANKIND IS FALLEN IN SIN, AND HAS BROUGHT THE CREATION ITSELF UNDER SIN'S BONDAGE

We confess that sin is now a fundamental reality of human life. Because of mankind's rebellion against God, we have become alienated from God, from the creation, from other persons, and even from ourselves. Though sin has clouded mankind's ability to act as God's representatives in the creation, we reject the view that sin has destroyed the image of God.

We live in, and learn about, a creation that has been deeply touched by sin. Sin and sorrow, disease and death, failure and brokenness, have become part of us and of our surroundings. In our learning, we may not pretend that sin is not real, nor may we refuse to examine the world in its brokenness. The school has a responsibility to help students confront the world as it is and respond obediently to Christ, the redeemer of that sinful world, in the midst of brokenness.

Learning itself is not a consequence of sin, but a God-given responsibility. We learn because we are human, not because we are sinful. However, sin has warped and distorted mankind's understanding of the world. Every human system of thought is bound to be correct in some respects, because nothing, not even a system of thought, can exist unless it is grounded in the reality of God's creation. But every system of thought not grounded in Christ is also bound to be false in its ultimate meaning and direction, because sin has separated mankind and human thinking from God who is the ground of meaning. Furthermore, even our best attempts to respond obediently to God in our thinking and learning are prone to error and sin. Therefore we must never elevate the products of our learning to the status of absolute truth, which is found only in Christ who is the truth.

VI. REDEMPTION IN JESUS CHRIST EXTENDS TO THE WHOLE OF CREATION

We confess that God is reconciling the world to himself in Christ, and that we also, who were alienated from him by our wicked works, have been reconciled through the blood of His cross. If human life, including human learning, is to become again an obedient response to God, our hearts must be renewed through faith, by the Holy Spirit, on the basis of Christ's atonement.

Redemption in Jesus Christ extends not only to persons, but also to the whole creation. There is nothing that has been touched by sin which is beyond the reach of Christ's redemption. Because every aspect of creation has in principle been reconciled to God, we should expect to see a substantial healing in the present. Therefore it is our responsibility as Christians to lay claim to every aspect of the creation in the name of Jesus Christ.

Christ calls us to nothing less than the building of a Christian culture, a Christian way of life. We reject the idea that a Christian way of life means only the addition of Christian ethics, piety and evangelism to an otherwise secular realm of life. We reject also any attempt to take that which is of the world and to "baptize" it into Christ. We confess rather that the very foundations of every other "way of life" must be challenged in the light of Scripture, so that we can work out obedience to God at the heart of every aspect of life. It is a task of the Christian school to help build a biblical foundation for the rethinking of every aspect of life out of a Christian view of life and world.

VII. KNOWING IS DOING

Scripture is clear that knowing and doing cannot be separated. "If you know these things," Jesus said, "happy are you if you do them." We reject the idea that learning can ever be an end in itself, apart from the goal of loving service to God and neighbor.

We confess rather that faith without works is truly dead, that knowledge without practice is foolishness.

While meeting the educational needs of both college-bound and vocationally oriented students, the school cannot ignore the need of all students to grow by putting into practice what they know. A Christian education must extend beyond the classroom and into the world, beginning with an emphasis on service to one another within the school body, and extending to the practice of love to those outside. Opportunities for service must be an integral part of a truly Christian education.

VIII. TEACHING IS MODELING

In Scripture, teaching is not only the communication of ideas with words and rational arguments, but also the setting of an example, as Jesus demonstrated in His own life. We confess that the Christian school has a responsibility, not only to employ teachers and other staff members who will personally model lives of commitment to Christ, but also as a school to model a biblical vision of life in all its operations and in all the relationships it contains. Those who participate in the life of the school must always bear in mind that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, and must be prepared to act out of a biblical view of life and the world no matter what the surrounding world may say.

The Christian school task is not only to teach but also to model the kinds of relationships which should exist within the body of Christ. Love, respect and discipline as expressed in Scripture must govern all aspects of the school.

IX. THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF EDUCATION IS DISCIPLESHIP

We confess that the supreme loyalty of all Christians is to Christ and His kingdom. All other goals and objectives must be set in terms of this larger aim. "Seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness," Jesus said, "and these other things will follow." The ultimate goal of Christian education is to lead students to live lives of Christian discipleship. A life dedicated to Christ will be a life devoted to the service of others. Therefore in all the operations of the school, its goals and objectives must serve the ultimate goal of seeking first Christ's kingdom and His righteousness, so that we may be His servants doing whatever Christ has called us to do with our whole hearts for him.

X. SCHOOL, CHURCH AND HOME HAVE RELATED, BUT SEPARATE, RESPONSIBILITIES

Bellevue Christian School desires to provide responsible educational leadership for the Christian community and to remain in a relationship of mutual accountability with the home and the church. The school was founded as a corporation run school and as such is distinct from either a parent or a church run school.

We believe that Christian parents should be able to entrust aspects of their children's education to teachers who will seek to build them up in the faith and to equip them for service to Christ by opening up to them a biblical view of the beauty and complexity of our world. Within the body of Christ some members are gifted and called to be educators with a duty to provide the kind of specialized instruction which

most homes are not able to supply in our complex society. At the same time we recognize that no one school can meet the needs and desires of all Christian parents.

The relationship established between parents and the school is one of mutual support and encouragement. The school must be responsive to the needs of families without giving up the biblical education vision it seeks to pursue; parents must be responsive to the educational leadership provided by the school without abandoning their responsibility for the nurturing of their children. Bellevue Christian School seeks the counsel of biblical interpretation and insight from those churches which are supportive of and responsive to the doctrinal position of this confession.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

I. GOD IS THE SOVEREIGN CREATOR OF ALL THINGS

Genesis 1-2
Colossians 1:16-17
Hebrews 1:1-3; 11:3

II. THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD WRITTEN, INSPIRED AND INFALLIBLE, THE ONLY AUTHORITATIVE GUIDE FOR FAITH AND LIFE

Psalm 19
Psalm 119
Isaiah 55:8-11
II Timothy 3:16-17
I Peter 1:22-25
II Peter 1:20-21

III. HUMAN BEINGS ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-3; 9:6
Acts 17:24-31
James 3:9
Recreation: II Corinthians 5:17
Ephesians 4:24
Colossians 3:9-11

IV. HUMAN BEINGS ARE STEWARDS OF THE EARTH

Genesis 1:26-31; 9:1, 7
Psalm 8
Psalm 147
I Corinthians 3:21-23

V. MANKIND IS FALLEN IN SIN, AND HAS BROUGHT THE CREATION ITSELF UNDER SIN'S BONDAGE

Genesis 3:1-19
Romans 1:18-23; 8:20-23
Hebrews 2:5-9

VI. REDEMPTION IN JESUS CHRIST EXTENDS TO THE WHOLE OF CREATION

II Chronicles 7:13-14
Psalm 103:1-5
Romans 8:20-23
I Corinthians 15
II Peter 3
Revelation 21:5

VII. KNOWING IS DOING

Matthew 7:24-27
John 13:12-17
James 2:14-26

VIII. TEACHING IS MODELING

John 13:15
I Corinthians 4:16; 11:1
Philippians 3:12-17
I Thessalonians 1:6-7

IX. THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF EDUCATION IS DISCIPLESHIP

Proverbs 22:6, 19
Matthew 6:32-34; 28:18-20
Luke 14:27-35

X. SCHOOL, CHURCH AND HOME HAVE RELATED, BUT SEPARATE, RESPONSIBILITIES

Deuteronomy 6:4-9
Psalm 36:7-9
Book of Ephesians

