



MIND AND HEART

A Podcast by Trinity Christian School

Ep 1 | Why Christian Education? With Dr. David Vanderpoel

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Jo Wilbur:

Hello and welcome to Mind and Heart. I'm your host, Jo Wilbur. And today I'm sitting down with Trinity Christian School, Head of School, Dr. Vanderpoel. Hi, Dr. Vanderpoel. Thank you for joining us today.

Dr. Vanderpoel:

Thank you, Jo. Great to be with you

Jo Wilbur:

Would you mind starting by telling us a little bit about yourself and your background?

Dr. Vanderpoel:

Sure. I grew up the son of a Naval Chaplain, so I lived all over the place and moved every couple of years. Then I went to Wheaton College and after that did some graduate work; I went to Westminster Seminary and got my PhD from New York University. I pastored for twelve years on Long Island, was in business for a while, taught a little bit as an adjunct professor at a couple of colleges, and have been here at Trinity since 1998. Our three boys started then and all three are graduates from Trinity. I've now been Head of School for 17 years.

Jo Wilbur:

Excellent. What are some of the benefits of Christian education? In other words, why Christian education?

Dr. Vanderpoel:

I think in the present environment, one of the great benefits of Christian education is the fact that it has such breadth. I think that it encompasses all of reality and it understands that all truth is God's truth. So we're not afraid to look at all ideas and to consider them. We may not adopt them all because we're going to look at things within a Biblical frame of reference, but because creation is God's handy work, that means we want to explore everything that God has done. All learning is thinking his thoughts after him, but we also come to that with what Aristotle would call a sense of wonder. It's a sense of wonder because we are looking at what God has done. And so no ideas, no conceptions, no paradigms are off limits. We want to consider everything. I think that there is a breadth and a depth to Christian education that differs from the more parochial approach, the more narrow approach that you find in much of public education today, where so many things are off limits. And I don't think that that's true with Christian education.

Jo Wilbur:

What would you say is one of the biggest misconceptions about Christian education?

Dr. Vanderpoel:

I think probably what we just talked about: that [Christian education] is somewhat narrow, that it is provincial if you will, and that it is not academically rigorous. And I think quite the opposite. We are called to love the Lord our God with our heart and our soul, but also with our minds. And so we want to explore what God has made in order that we might understand better. He calls us to wisdom and to learning. I think that quite the opposite from being narrow or confined, I think there is a breadth and depth to Christian education that I would submit is much deeper and much broader than what people will find in some other educational endeavors.

Jo Wilbur:

That's very interesting. Off the top of your head, is there an example that comes to mind with maybe a particular subject or topic, where a Christian education really covers it in more depth than say a public-school education would?

Dr. Vanderpoel:

Sure. I think in the areas particularly of evolutionary theory. I think we are going to read Darwin's "Origin of the Species," we are going to also read Darwin's "Black Box." We are going to look at arguments for design, as well as arguments both for theistic evolution, but also for evolution within species and evolution within kinds. I think we want to look at the whole gamut of what is being presented. Science- or scientists I should probably say- are very clever. They, they want to rule out miracles. They want to have natural explanations for everything. So when they come across something that really is miraculous, they call it a singularity. But we are going to embrace both natural and supernatural explanations for different things and be able to consider them and be able to weigh them and to look at them.

Dr. Vanderpoel:

So again, we get back to that idea of breadth and I think we will find that not only in considering alternate paradigms and explanations of reality, but I also think that we will look at that in terms of history as well. In other words, trying to enter the understanding of people at different times and different places and in different situations, rather than imposing upon history the paradigms and particular concerns of our own period. We want to be able to think with other minds and see with other eyes and hear with other ears. We want to enter the thoughts of other people to see how they have approached problems that are not completely different from those that we face, but we want to think with them and to walk with them. I think you're going to find greater breadth in a Christian approach, as opposed to those that are closed off either to the supernatural or are closed off to looking at different cultures.

Dr. Vanderpoel:

I think that the idea that we are going to completely ignore Western civilization is probably not the best approach. That doesn't mean that we don't look at other civilizations as well, but Western civilization is framed and formed by Judeo-Christian values. It has much to offer. There are things about it that are not the greatest things that have ever graced the profession of faith in Christ. And we need to be able to look at those and we need to be able to say where the culture has fallen short as we do with all cultures. And I think the idea is not to ignore them, but to be able to look at everything and be able to glean what

is true and what is good and what is pure, if you will. And what is edifying from all these different cultures. All truth is God's truth. Therefore, we don't want to shirk from any area where that truth is to be found.

Jo Wilbur:

Absolutely. And I think everything you just said speaks to the fact that in Christian education, and at Trinity, Biblical truth is not just limited to Christian studies classes but really is a worldview that affects every subject matter. Very interesting. What would you say to Christian families who argue that Christians ought to remain in public school for witnessing purposes and other purposes? What would you say to those families?

Dr. Vanderpoel:

I think that obviously we want to be salt and light to the world. And I think that that is certainly a worthy endeavor. But just as we don't send missionaries out to the field without training them first, we don't send children out to be ambassadors for the faith before they're fully trained. And I think that it is not some kind of neutral zone out there. Every educational endeavor has certain presuppositions. It has certain values that it seeks to inculcate into the students. None of this is done in a vacuum. Therefore, we must understand that there are certain presuppositions that are antithetical to Biblical values, and certainly students are going to begin to encounter those. But it is a question of the framework in which they encounter them. The scripture is clear that bad companions corrupt good morals.

Dr. Vanderpoel:

It's not the other way around. Well, that's not to say that they're not going to find bad companions here [at Trinity] as well. It's a fallen world. But the idea that somehow, we're going to take some clear water and pour it into a dirty bowl, and that somehow is going to make everything clean, is not realistic. We don't send an eight-year-old into a classroom to go toe-to-toe with a 40-year-old humanist. The child is not ready for that. If I would use the analogy, it is that we are like a greenhouse. We have the tender plants that we are going to keep in until that root system is mature and they're able to really grip the ground. And then we will transplant them out onto the hillside where the winds blow and the rains come, but where they are strong enough to withstand those challenges.

Dr. Vanderpoel:

So this is a time of training. This is a time of preparation, and we believe that as we are called to raise our children in the nurture and admonition and instruction of the Lord, that we are not going to put them in an environment that is antithetical to that. Moses doesn't tell the children of Israel, send your kids over to the Philistines for seven hours a day. No, he says, the words I command you today shall be in your heart. And you shall talk of them all the time to your children; when you stand up, when you sit down, when you walk along the way. In other words, the application of God's understanding of reality is to be given to our children in all the experiences of life. It is not an edifying thing to place our children in an environment where Christ is explicitly ignored and implicitly denied for seven hours a day. Your children need preparation and training before they go out to meet the denizens of a world that basically live in fictional realities.

Jo Wilbur:

Very well put. My next question was going to be, (although I think you probably pretty much just spoke to this), What would you say to those who say that they want their children to be prepared for the real world? And I know that's a key phrase, sort of the "real world."

Dr. Vanderpoel:

Sure. And we hear that often. I think the answer to that is that the real world is the world that Christ has made. The real world is a Christ-soaked universe. All things are made by him, says John, and without him is not anything made that was made. We are told that all things visible and invisible were created by him. We are told moment by moment Christ upholds the world, the universe, by the word of his power. Christ is not only the creator (all things were made by him), but also, he is the sustainer. He holds reality together. Moment by moment, Jonathan Edwards says it's as if each moment Christ is recreating the world. The scriptures say that Christ has been given all power in heaven and earth.

Dr. Vanderpoel:

Isaiah says the government shall be upon his shoulder. He is the one who governs all things in heaven and earth, each moment of each day. He is also the one in whom all things eventually will be united. All things in heaven and earth are going to be united in him. The consummation of all things belongs to Jesus Christ. And we are told that tomorrow's history's already been written. At the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord to the glory of the father. We are told that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. To think that we can have any kind of a real world apart from Jesus Christ is just absolutely foolish. It's nonsensical from a Biblical point of view. You can't deal with reality apart from Jesus Christ.

Dr. Vanderpoel:

You know the rules at Harvard in the early 1600's were: let every student be earnestly taught to lay Christ in the bottom as the foundation for all learning. And so we want our students to understand that that Christ is the center in which everything holds together. I think that particularly in this postmodern world, this is extremely important because we find everything siloed. We don't find that everything coheres or holds together. I think the great truth of Jesus Christ is that the Biblical view of reality holds everything together. We live in an age that doesn't like meta narratives. It doesn't like something that says this is true for everybody at all times and in all places. And that's that is exactly what the Bible exerts. That's what it claims. That claim is rooted in Jesus Christ. That's the real world and to try and construct reality, apart from Jesus Christ is to create fiction. It's a fantasy. If you want the real world, you need to have Christian education because anything else that leaves out Jesus Christ is fictional at best.

Jo Wilbur:

Excellent. Well, thank you so much for joining us today, Dr. Vanderpoel, we very much appreciate it.

Dr. Vanderpoel:

A pleasure. Thank you.