

Defending Your Decision to Send Your Child to a Christian School

from Dr. Paul A. Kienel, Founder & President Emeritus, ACSI

One of the bottom-line objectives of this publication is to provide "talking points" for parents as to why they send their children to Christian schools. Last school year Diane Noll from Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, wrote:

Those of us with children in Christian schools so often have to defend our reasons for our choice. I am weary of defending my decision. Your letter (Christian School Comment) has given me new confidence and ammunition with which to argue my point. . . . Thank you for your poignant approach. . . .

There will always be family and friends who know little or nothing about Christian school education who need "reasons" for the choice you have made to opt out of the "free" public system and pay tuition to send your child to a Christian school.

As recent as today's newspaper in Colorado Springs, Colorado, a headline reads, "Private Schools See Big Increase in Students Despite Rising Tuition." The article reports a forty percent enrollment increase in Colorado's private school population and adds the following statement from Margaret Goldsborough:

Margaret Goldsborough, spokeswoman for the National Association of Independent Schools, said the No.1 reason parents choose private schools is the belief that smaller classes, individualized learning, and a sense of community add up to a better education. [Student] Safety is their No.2 reason, she said. ¹

The student enrollment in evangelical Christian schools around the world has had a consistent steady growth for many years. Over the past five years, for example, enrollment in ACSI member schools and colleges has increased 28%! There are reasons for this steady growth some might even say 'dramatic growth' -of Christian school enrollment. In the minds of many evangelical parents, the reasons for Christian school education go beyond those mentioned by Margaret Goldsborough; namely: (1) quality academics and (2) the physical safety of students, which indeed are important.

Permit me to add several more reasons:

Philosophy of Education

Dr. James Carper, professor of American education history at the University of South Carolina, said, "Education, by its very nature, is a value-laden enterprise. It will, either implicitly or explicitly, express some worldview."² It's that "worldview" or the school's predominant philosophy of education that is a major concern to Christian parents. It makes a big difference which authorities are held up as models for students to consider.

For example, there is no biblical passage suggesting that it is good for your child to hear in a positive context the words of Sigmund Freud who said, "The aim of all life is death."³ How much better for your child to hear, in a positive context, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."⁴ Kenneth Gangel said it best:

The purpose of Christian schools is to present to our children, as clearly as possible, the truth about God, about life, about our world and everything in it, and to present the Word of God as the authoritative source upon which to build a life that has purpose and meaning."⁵

Dr. W. P. Schofstell, a former state superintendent of public schools in Arizona, said, "I prefer to send my children to a Christian school because Christ is central to all information taught and caught."⁶ It is

not uncommon, by the way, for public school educators to send their own children to Christian schools.

A Christ-Honoring Curriculum

A school's philosophy of education is immediately evident in the school's curriculum. One of America's great Christian school educators, the late Dr. Gene Garrick, wrote:

I want my child to learn, from his earliest years, that all of life belongs to God and was made for Him.

In science, I want him to know that he is studying God's laws for the universe.

In history, I want him to see the unfolding of God's plan for the ages and the redemption of His people.

In literature, I want him to test other writers by Christian standards so that he will appreciate what is good and true and beautiful and discern what is false or dishonoring to God.

In civics, I want him to know that true government is ordained of God and requires our loyalty and support, I want him to learn the principles of honesty, decency, cooperation, and fair play because these are rules that God has set up for the ordering of our life together.⁷

At the very heart of Christian school education is the idea of placing the Bible at the center of the school's curriculum. It is called Bibliocentric learning and requires the student and the teacher to evaluate all they see in the world through the eyes of God as revealed in the Scriptures. Bibliocentric learning is the centerpiece of Christian school education.

Christian Schools Stand for Eternal Values

I conclude with the words of another former state superintendent of public schools, Dr. Max Rafferty of California. A number of years ago I taped a radio interview with him in his office in Sacramento. I asked why he thought Christian schools were growing. He said:

Christian schools are growing because they stand for something. They have high standards, and they stick to them ... the Christian schools are convinced that there are eternal verities. They teach to these truths. In the process, they turn out graduates who are both literate and illuminated. Long may they thrive!⁸

I couldn't agree more!

1 *The Gazette*, (AP) March 30, 199B-News p. 3.

2 James Carper, "Today, Private Schools Span Diverse Range," *Education Week*, October 6, 1996.

3 Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Penguin Freud Library, Vol. XI, *On Meta psychology* (Hannondsworth: Pengum, 1991) p. 326.

4 The Westminster Catechism

5 Kenneth O. Gangel, cited by Ronald Nash, *The Closing of the American Heart* (probe Books, 1990) p. 128.

6 W. P. Scholstall, cited by Paul Kienel, *Reasons for Christian Schools*, p. 17.

7 *Ibid*, pp. 56-57.

8 *Ibid*, p. 117.