

A Christian approach to educational issues

When a controversial proposal arises like the NSW BOS proposal to make over half the outcomes of four primary learning areas optional, Christian teachers are likely to ask: how can we make judgements about such matters?

A philosophy of education based on the principles of the Scriptures is needed and exists. For many years TCFNSW has operated on the principles articulated from Scripture by Anna Hogg in her foundational article in the Journal of Christian Education Vol. 5 No. 1 June 1962, and it reads as freshly today as it did then.

She argues that, In a Christian Philosophy of Education changing people is the goal, for this was the purpose of the events on which Christianity is based. It is about relationship with God and while many of the educational goals of our society are consistent with pursuing this relationship, they can not be at the expense of serving the purposes of God. The demands of society are not, as such, the standard for right and wrong for they also must be judged by the divine standard.

The Christian believes that God is known in Nature and in History as well as in the Bible. If God is revealed also in Nature and in the study of History and human relationships at all levels from personal to the international, then the pursuit of truth is fundamental to a Christian philosophy. The study of science and the social sciences have their place in a Christian philosophy of education.

Truth is apprehended by feeling, by aesthetic experience, by committal, by "being involved" (as the Existentialists say). The processes of reasoning and analysis alone are not sufficient. A Christian Philosophy will also have the Arts. Language, as one of the most important means of communicating truth, also has its place in the curriculum and includes foreign languages.

We could go on through all the subjects of the curriculum. The point is simply that Christian education is not a limited affair; it is as wide as truth itself. To restrict it to the Scriptures is to belittle God.

Even if specialisation is desirable- and as knowledge advances it must become necessary - it is doubtful if the Christian is ever justified in neglecting entirely the other disciplines. Further, note that in a Christian Philosophy of Education there is no hierarchy of courses. This view does not advocate equal time allocations, but respect for the importance of all subjects in the pursuit of truth.

Education, according to the Christian view, is however more than an array of subjects, even studies leading to a knowledge of God. It is a way of living, a way of thinking, feeling, doing, creating, reacting in social relations, in response to a Person. This too, has to be taught.

This philosophy continues to be explored by writers around the world and for us, as TCF members, it provides some principles on which we can ask questions about the proposal of the BOS.

- Will the proposal provide more or less opportunities to pursue truth and know God?
- Is the table of possible time allocation appropriate to a broad curriculum pursuit of truth?

- Is there any content being made optional that would be needed for students to continue to pursue truth broadly and including ways of learning, for example, historical method?
- Will making general religious education outcomes optional inhibit access for many students to know about God and the use the Scriptures in classes?
- Is there a Christian rationale to remove drama and dance from the mandatory curriculum?
- Will the recommendation to make all science and technology content outcomes optional provide sufficient study of science and technology to allow student to pursue truth in these areas?
- Is it right for a small group of BOS officers and teachers to propose such profound changes to the primary curriculum outside the BOS own syllabus development processes and without the input of the stakeholders in each learning area?

In reading the following article, members are encouraged to apply the principles of a Christian philosophy of education and to attend the meeting to help the TCFNSW Executive put together a response from a Christian perspective.

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