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Discernment in the Christian School

Countering Cultural Influence

Acknowledging Country

Re-Imagining the Education Machine

Worldview, Curriculum, and Pedagogy

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EDITOR:
Chris Parker

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:
Dr Jill Ireland
Judy Linossier
Dr Fiona Partridge
Tim White

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE:
Chris Parker
+61 2 4773 5800
ctj@cen.edu.au

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tanya@taninka.com.au

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nina.edlin@cen.edu.au
+61 2 4773 5800

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A JOURNAL FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS

The vision of the journal is to affirm the lordship of Christ in education. It aims to serve Christian educators, challenging them to a fuller understanding of their task and responsibilities; raising issues critical to the development of teaching and learning in a distinctively Christian way.

The Christian Teachers Journal is published by teachers as a forum for the exchange of ideas and practices for teachers to advance the cause of Christ in education.

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editorial

As I write this, Australia's coronavirus infection numbers are at 14 and falling. We have much to be thankful for by contrast to other countries—though we acknowledge that recent months have not been easy for our Victorian brothers and sisters in extended lockdown and at an extended time of at-home-learning. The *CTJ* editorial committee is thankful for the feedback on the August edition that explored what we are learning during this time of school disruption—particularly about what is essential to Christian education.

In this edition we feature an article by Dr Chris Prior, the principal of the National Institute for Christian Education. Chris explores the place of discernment, and biblical practices, in countering the cultural influences that bring pressure on Christian schools. This article is important for all leaders in Christian schools and for all Christian teachers.

We recommend the two articles from Dr Fiona Partridge and Gemma McWhirter that explore the notion of specifically acknowledging the original caretakers of the land where the school campus is located. Gemma provides reflection on the practice of Acknowledgement of Country, while Fiona provides practical suggestions for developing forms of words.

We have previously reviewed Dr David Smith's recent book *On Christian Teaching: Practicing Faith in the Classroom*. In this edition we provide a dialogue between David and myself about the book and its potential impact on Christian teachers. David and I focus our discussion on the place of worldview, and worldview language, in Christian education.

We also provide an edited excerpt from the recent publication *Mindshift: Catalyzing Change in Christian Education*. In this article the influences of a machine model for education are explored and contrasted with an education shaped by the 'Christ story'. Although from a North American context, the case study of Halton Hills Christian School provides powerful insight and inspiration.

We are thankful to one of the tutors at the National Institute for Christian Education, Tim Payze, for sharing his 5 top shelf books for Christian educators.

"Dear Father, may this edition be a help and encouragement to Christian teachers and leaders in Christian schools. Amen."

Chris Parker, Editor

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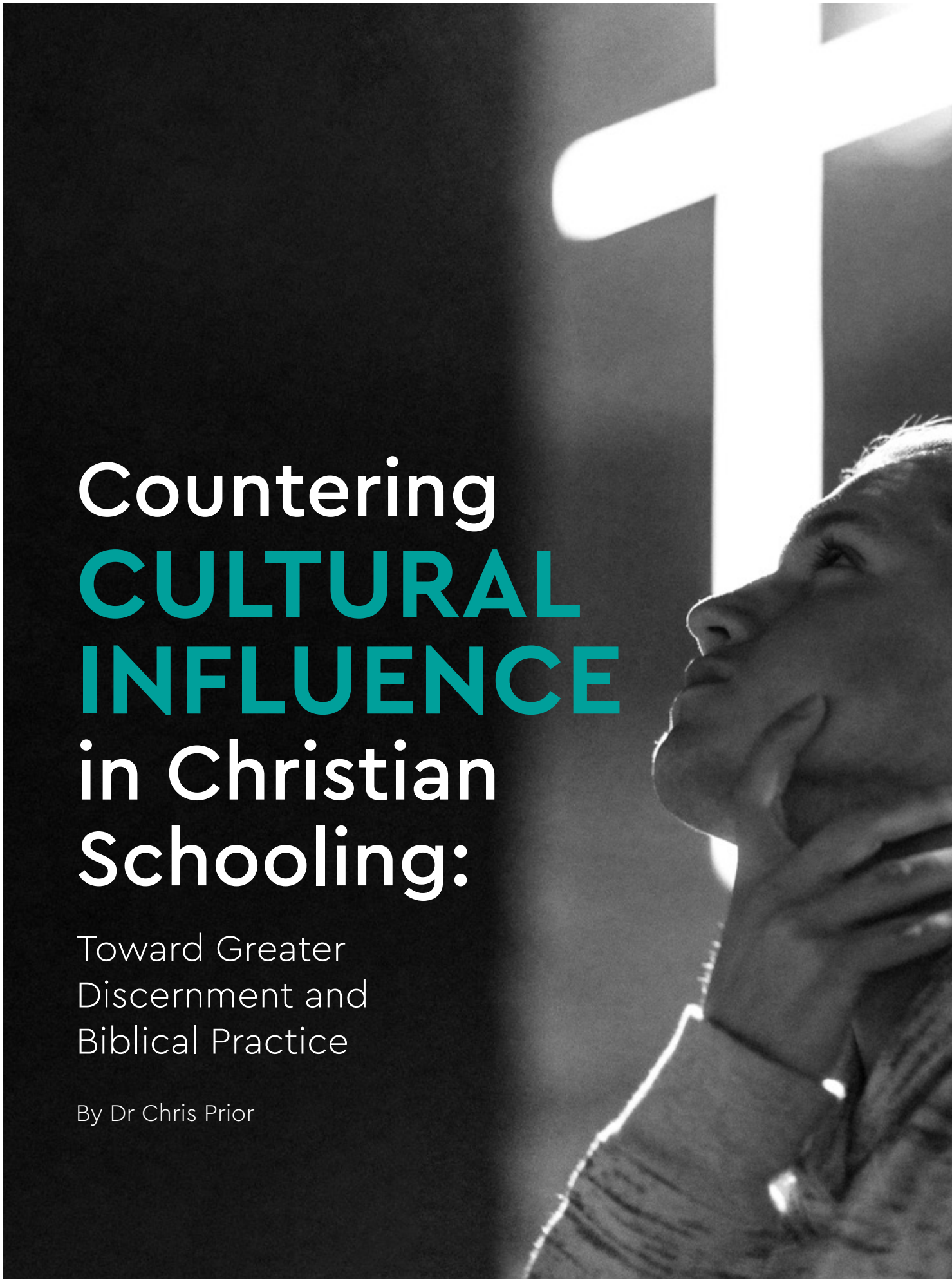

Countering CULTURAL INFLUENCE in Christian Schooling:

Toward Greater Discernment and Biblical Practice

By Dr Chris Prior

Teachers are busy. Leaders are busy. Consequently, it is not surprising that teachers suggest that time/workload is a significant barrier to teaching from a Christian perspective.

Established as a mission of a church or a Christian parent association, Christian schools possess a vision for education inspired by the particular Christian beliefs of their communities. While language may vary, it is commonplace for Christian schools to promote themselves as biblically-informed, or Christ-centred, supportive communities seeking to foster the giftedness of each child. They may also suggest that their teaching is informed by a Christian worldview or that teachers teach from a Christian/biblical perspective, often with a goal that students will learn to think critically from a Christian/biblical perspective. Ultimately, Christian schools are places of formation. They seek to form a certain type of person, shaping students to be more like Christ: to be disciples.

Despite shared language, there is no one approach to Christian schooling. Often denigrated as inadequate by those who argue for a different model, one approach is to enhance public schooling offerings by the addition of Christian components. Chapel services, mission trips, Bible classes, well-being, and leadership programs built around Christian values are typical inclusions. Many of these Christian schools also employ Christian staff who act as Christian role models through their morality and devotion. Positively, this approach to schooling fosters Christian character. It also offers students who may have no other connection with the Christian faith opportunities to learn about, and engage in, the cultic practices of the Christian church. Additionally, it affirms public schooling and the public school curriculum. A criticism of this approach is that it does not go far enough; it merely changes "the personality of a public school education" (Hull, 2003, p. 204). Essentially, it relies on the wrong cornerstone. While students are able to participate in Christian practices and be influenced by Christian staff, the approach is distorted by the worldview of the prevailing cultural context, the story of the West. Although a mixture of beliefs, the story of the West, at its heart, has a humanistic orientation. The world of the West is material. There is no life beyond what, through science and technology, can be observed and measured by our human intellect. Given this, the Western worldview presents a distortion of the biblical view of life. It elevates humanity and the rational mind, and since God is unmeasurable and unseen, relegates spirituality and faith to the realm of private belief. Thus, Christian schooling built on or over the foundations of the public school evidences conflicting Western and Christian worldviews, perpetuating an unbiblical dualism. The Christian faith matters, but as a spiritual addition, irrelevant to the secular and to everyday public life.

While students are able to participate in Christian practices and be influenced by Christian staff, the approach is distorted by the worldview of the prevailing cultural context, the story of the West.

Another approach to Christian schooling is education "reworked on a Christian basis" (Smith & Shortt, 2002, p. 15). This approach recognises all schools possess a philosophical perspective. Public schools have a philosophical perspective. They are premised on a myriad of beliefs, including secularism and humanism, which underpin the prevailing cultural environment. To foster a distinctive holistic Christian model of education Christian schools must develop and implement a Christian philosophy of education (Hull, 2003). An appropriate foundation being God's sovereignty or Christ's lordship over all of life, including education, including the curriculum, in the very fabric of the Christian school; evident beyond mission statements, foundational to the policies and practices, embedded in the heart of curriculum and school programs, and lived out through the staff. Professional learning is biblically informed with the goal that there be an alignment between vision and practice. A key ingredient in this approach to schooling is the intentional integration of a Christian/biblical worldview, often expressed as teaching from a Christian perspective. Utilising, for example, a Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration worldview schema, biblical worldview integration has been described as "the key distinctive of a truly Christian education" (MacCullough, 2016, p. 34). Such is the prominence of teaching from a Christian perspective it, more than any other term, "has become synonymous with Christian education" (Hull, 2003, p. 206).

A caveat. Christian perspective is variously understood and practiced. While the above affirmations relate to the development of curriculum and intentional unfolding of this in the classroom, teaching from a Christian perspective can also be understood as "biblical insights into a select group of controversial topics" (Hull, 2003, p. 204). Often termed spontaneous integration, this practice allows discussion of the Christian life in the classroom as opportunities arise. While there is some authenticity in this, it is very much dependent on the biblical literacy of teachers. Fundamentally, spontaneous integration does not allow deep engagement with the biblical story and "may produce a dangerous dualism in our students" (Parker & Street, 2018, p. 16).

As with other aspects of practice within Christian schooling, Christian perspective has its critics. One criticism is that it presents a narrow, almost textbook, usage of the Bible (Cairney, 2018); a usage that emphasises that it is about "Christian ideas rather than the formation of a peculiar people" (Smith, 2012, p. 20).

> To be blunt, our Christian colleges and universities generate an army of alumni who look pretty much like all the rest of their suburban neighbors, except that our graduates drive their SUVs, inhabit their executive homes, and pursue the frenetic life of the middle class and the corporate ladder 'from a Christian perspective'. (Smith, 2009, p. 219)

While teaching from a Christian perspective may be a (or the) key element of a distinctively different and Christian education, there is validity in suggesting that, with a focus on thinking, it is more consistent with the prevailing post-Enlightenment description of the person than that of the Bible. A consequence being that while it may equip students to identify and articulate a Christian perspective, it may not shape them to be more like Christ: to be disciples.

In our discussion of Christian schooling thus far it is evident that despite intent, a Christian education may be a confused education; it aims for Christian formation, yet fails to (fully) discern the degree to which it is being shaped by the cultural environment. The practices employed in Christian schools will, in many respects, be biblical. It is questionable though, as to whether they are sufficiently biblical! Christian schools are often bursting with enthusiastic staff members with a sincere Christian faith, desirous to influence the next generation. Yet, as Tom Wright (2013) suggests, "It is sadly possible to tick all the 'correct' doctrinal and ethical boxes, to learn to pronounce all the shibboleths, but to put them all within the wrong controlling narrative" (p. 10). If Christian schools are to be the places of formation that they desire to be, then a starting point has to be asking, "The first, and most important, question … To what extent is our practice of schooling, in spite of our intention to be Christian, distorted by the influence of our cultural environment?" (Fowler, 1990, p. 42).

Sabbath reminds us that there is more to life than accumulation of wealth and consumerism, than busyness, than our schedules. Sabbath invites us to rest in God and to understand that He is a God of abundance!

By way of a simple example, there is an expectation in Christian schools that Christian staff model the faith. They are to seek to practice biblical piety and uphold the dignity of all students as image-bearers and loved children of God. While this is a necessary element of Christian schooling, on its own it is not sufficient (Shortt, 2014). Teachers may demonstrate biblical piety, but ignore that curriculum, for example, "is unfolded through a particular view of the world" (Parker, 2020, p. 11). Teaching is not a grab bag of techniques and skills that are value neutral. Through their repeated pedagogical choices, and the rhythms that they establish, educators communicate what they value and influence the formation of students (Cairney, 2018; Smith, 2018). Modelling then is more than relating to students. It also concerns our values and priorities (Pietsch, 2018). Thus, we may model Christianity through our character while perpetuating a Christian view of life full of cultural distortions in our practices.

The issue is not that Christians are unaware of the values associated within the cultural environment in which Christian schooling occurs. It is more that they evidence either cultural blind spots or selective discernment. This selectivity is evidenced, for example, by Pentecostals and many Evangelicals, who in seeking to take a "purity from" position as they engage culture, tend to be mainly concerned about sexual sin (Hunter, 2010). In a recent research project on digital learning in Christian schooling it was unsurprising that parents were concerned about the abuse of social media and access to pornography (Smith et al., 2020). These are valid concerns. Yet the research discovered evidence of students participating in online shopping during free moments in Bible class. As the authors suggested, "Christian ethics is certainly concerned with sexuality and violence, but greed and materialism are also relevant topics" (p. 186).

Christian schools routinely exist in societies where greed and materialism abound. Our post-Enlightenment culture has pushed faith to the margins. It has also promulgated a market-driven consumerist idolatry. In this culture, advertising abounds, seeking to encourage in citizens an orientation of having. We are compelled to adopt a certain lifestyle through clothes, cars, houses, sporting and cultural events, holidays, etc. This is a lifestyle where it is right to pursue wealth as we accumulate both possessions and opportunity. It is the way of mammon. As Christians we need to be mindful of mammon. Careful that we are not trying to build both earthly and Kingdom treasures and "giving in to the dangerous temptation to take the Jesus of the Bible and twist him into a version of Jesus we are more comfortable with. A nice, middle-class, American Jesus. A Jesus who doesn't mind materialism" (Platt, 2010, p. 12). A part of this cultural environment, fuelled by marketing and the need to have, is an uneasy restlessness. The "way of mammon (capital, wealth) is the way of commodity that is the way of endless desire, endless productivity, and endless restlessness" (Brueggemann, 2014, p. 11). The evidence of this restlessness in our contemporary culture is both "obvious and epidemic" (Brueggemann, 2014, p. 12). It fuels a busyness, an urgency. We are busy. We are to be busy. It is evident in our working life. It is evident in our home lives. Urgency dominates such that "whenever we do one thing, we immediately think of ten more that need to be done and start doing one of them" (Ford, 2012, p. 107).

Established to foster a Christian vision for life, Christian schools need to discern how the cultural environment can thwart sound biblically-informed intentions. In being a part of a consumerist cultural environment, market forces are a factor for Christian school success. When marketing, Christian schools can, unnecessarily, focus on their facilities, including access to technology, and their co-curricular activities as they look to position themselves as the 'right' school in an endless sea of options. That is, they can be biblically suggestive, but culturally compromised. This was evidenced in the research into digital learning mentioned above by one school leader who proudly offered that the Christian school looked to be the first to adopt new technologies, suggesting in "a resource-rich environment … this could mean that our students would have a leg up, that was not a bad thing" (Smith et al., 2020, p. 59).

Mirroring society, Christian schools are often busy and restless places. In our cultural environment it is not

Practicing Sabbath may assist us Christians, as educators, to be more aware of the cultural story of the West.

uncommon for Christian parents to search for the 'right' school and to model a culture of restlessness, busyness, and accumulation as they "perform as chauffeurs to get to the next tennis or soccer or piano lesson" (Brueggemann, 2014, p. 14). Christian schools can also buy into this through relentless cycles of innovation and change, and ever-expanding co-curricular programs. Teachers are busy. Leaders are busy. Consequently, it is not surprising that teachers suggest that time/workload is a significant barrier to teaching from a Christian perspective (Prior, 2018). This busyness is unhealthy. It thwarts discernment. Further, it removes Christianity from the heart of the school such that believers "give God some slots in the diary and after them to go on to the next thing" (Ford, 2012, p. 90).

While Christian discernment of cultural practices is vital, it is not enough. Together with thinking, we need Christian practice; practice that forms us. One suggestion for schools that are seeking better alignment of intention and practice is to stop! Simply reduce the number of programs being offered, creating space for reflection, space for renewal, space for God. Biblically, instead of being market-driven, another counter-cultural practice for schools to consider that is consistent throughout the biblical story is that of Sabbath. "Sabbath is subversion" (Watkin, 2017, p. 131). As Walter Brueggemann offers,

> Keeping Sabbath is refusal to have one's life defined by the production and consumption demands of a commoditized economy.... In our world, Sabbath invites living in the new rule of God that contradicts the fatiguing world of things. Sabbath keeping is indeed acting as though Jesus is Lord of our time and has decisively trumped the rigors of our schedule! (2020, Time, para. 5)

Sabbath reminds us that there is more to life than accumulation of wealth and consumerism, than busyness, than our schedules. Sabbath invites us to rest in God and to understand that He is a God of abundance!

> One of the tragedies of our life is that we keep forgetting who we are and waste a lot of time and energy to prove what doesn't need to be proved ... Wherever we are there are voices saying: "Go here, go there, buy this, buy that, get to know him, get to know her, don't miss this, don't miss that," and so on and on. These voices keep pulling us away from that soft gentle voice that speaks in the centre of our being: "You are my beloved, on you my favour rests". (Nouwen, 1994, pp. 165-166)

Practicing Sabbath may assist us Christians, as educators, to be more aware of the cultural story of the West. As a rhythm, Sabbath generally occurs once every seven days. Sabbath is also a promise. It is something that God desires for each of us. Ultimately, beyond this once a week time with God, this worshipful rest, we are also invited in Scripture to understand that God desires for us to rest in Him. As we lean into God and take His yoke we may be more able to discern the patterns of the cultural environment that we live in, that shape us, that shape our schools. We may also be better able to model to students a different way to live with fewer cultural distortions.

Christian schools are communities that are to be Christ-centred or biblically informed. Christian schooling certainly evidences Christianity. Yet, without ongoing discernment, practice can readily be distorted by the influence of the cultural environment. As they look to shape students to be more like Christ, Christian schools are encouraged to continually embrace a biblically-grounded critique of their practices. In addition, they are encouraged to find ways to counter the prevailing cultural environment, with one suggestion being to uphold the subversive practice of Sabbath; to rest in God, rather than embrace the way of mammon and the restlessness of the cultural environment.

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Discussion Questions

- Many schools advertise a range of activities offered to foster the development of Christian character in students. What mixed/dualistic messages do we send to the community when we do this? Why might Chris suggest character development alone does not make a school 'Christian'?
- Chris suggests that, "professional learning is biblically informed with the goal that there be an alignment between vision and practice". Reflect on your school's professional learning program. How much time in the professional learning program is dedicated to working on an alignment between the school's vision and practice? Is it time to review the allocation for doing this intentionally in your school? Discuss with the leadership team.
- "The evidence of this restlessness in our contemporary culture is both 'obvious and epidemic" (Brueggemann, 2014, p. 12). It fuels a busyness, an urgency." Chris suggests that schools seeking better alignment of intention and practice should "... stop! Reduce the number of programs being offered, creating space for reflection, space for renewal, space for God." What might need to change in the life of the school in order to carve out time for reflection and renewal?

Chris works as the principal of the National Institute for Christian Education. He lectures in worldview, philosophy of education, school culture, and in school leadership. Previously, Chris held the position of principal at Bayside Christian School.

Recognising the TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS:

Reflections for the Christian School

By Gemma McWhirter

As a non-Indigenous person, I wish to acknowledge the Dharawal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which I work, and the Gadigal people, the traditional custodians of the land on which I live. The ability to share this land has come at an enormous cost to the First Nations people of the land now known as Australia. (I am indebted to Brooke Prentis for her use of this term.) I do not claim to speak for Indigenous persons or offer solutions. However, it is my hope that the research I am conducting as I study with the National Institute for Christian Education (a part of which is shared here) may be used by Christian schools in partnership with local Indigenous elders and community members, enabling them to move to a place of increased awareness, respect, and justice on the path towards reconciliation.

Several years ago my family stopped saying grace before meals. It was not a slow attrition, but a considered decision. Saying grace had become passé—a token gesture or habit, which seemed to have very little to do with the attitude of thankfulness that this custom was supposed to represent. It was liberating to drop this legalistic custom, but slowly I noticed a disturbing reality. I had not only stopped *saying,* "thank you" for my provisions, I had stopped *being* thankful. It turns out that the custom *was* more than a tokenistic practice—it was a reminder for my heart. A reminder that it was God who provided; that many hands came together to bring the food to my table—that we shouldn't take such provision for granted. Taking a moment before our meal to remember this not only gave an expression of my thankfulness, but also reminded me to respond with a grateful heart.

I begin with this anecdote because one of the most common reasons I hear against including Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country ceremonies at events is that they are tokenistic. If these ceremonies have become tokenistic, my advice is not to stop them, but to examine one's heart and recommit to the purpose of the ceremony—to acknowledge and pay respect to the First Nations people of the land on which we work, learn, live, and play.

However, I suggest there is more for Christian school communities to learn and embed as part of their 'Christian' response by examining the practice of recognising country.

Acknowledgment of Country ceremonies at the beginning of public events have become commonplace in Australian society. Indeed, McKenna (2014) argues that the "rapid and widespread embrace of these rituals constitutes one of the most significant cultural changes in recent years" (p. 478). I have encountered the ceremony at public school and university occasions, teaching conferences, and cultural and dramatic arts events. Indeed, the ceremony is required by the NSW Government at official events. Despite the ubiquitous prevalence at these events, I have found the ceremony relatively rare in Christian schools and churches. This caused me to speculate whether this was an oversight or an intentional omission.

Many Christian schools are unsure about what such acknowledgement ceremonies signify. However, as I experienced more schools and churches including the ceremony in their events, I wondered whether it was initiated as a response to theological reflection, or whether the organisation had simply adopted a current cultural practice. This led me to study the enablers and constraints of Acknowledgement of Country practices in Protestant Christian schools in the Dharawal region of New South Wales as my research thesis in my Master of Education.

What have I discovered so far?

Firstly, there are some specific concepts and terms as used by Pelizzon and Kennedy (2012) that need to be understood concerning Acknowledgement of Country. A Welcome to Country can only be performed by a "traditional custodian of the Country in question" while an Acknowledgement of Country is "performed by those who are not the custodians of that Country but wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Country upon which the act is performed" (p. 59). This is an important distinction as the terms are not synonymous.

While Acknowledgement of Country ceremonies generally adhere to protocols of the hosting organisation, a typical Acknowledgment of Country might be a statement such as:

> I would like to Acknowledge the _____ people, the traditional Custodians of this land. I would like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present. I would like to extend that respect to other Aboriginal people and/or colleagues present today. (NSW Teachers Federation, 2017)

Additionally, it has become customary to include "and emerging" after the phrase "Elders both past and present" in the Acknowledgement, recognising that Indigenous culture is not just from the 'past', but is continuing today, and developing into the future. The word *Custodian* suggests that "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people don't own the land, but care for it, so it is able to care for and provide for them" and relates to the "in-depth knowledge of their culture, including stories, songs, art and dances, rituals and language" (Muir & Lawson, 2018, p. 41).

The first 'official' Welcome to Country in federal parliament took place on Tuesday, February 12, 2008, when Aboriginal elder Matilda House-Williams welcomed the parliament to the land of her ancestors, the Ngambri people (McKenna, 2014, p. 476). McKenna proposed that the impact of this historic Welcome to Country may have been eclipsed by the significance of the apology to members of the Stolen Generations which took place the following day (McKenna,

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2014, p. 477). While this ceremony was significant for its public profile, the ceremony has a history extending further back than this event. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, which was formed in July 1991, and the first National Sorry Day in May 1998, were two factors that have been identified as contributing to the widespread embrace of the ceremony (McKenna, 2014, p. 478).

The acknowledgement practice has not been without its critics, sparking controversy about its place in the Australian cultural landscape. Some claim that the ritual should be abandoned as it has no validity (Bolt, 2016; Windschuttle, 2012) or is tokenistic (Taylor, 2012). Others advocate for the ceremony, suggesting that it is respectful and contributes toward reconciliation in Australian society (Moroney, 2016; Muir & Lawson, 2018; Dodson, 2009; Bodkin-Andrews et al., 2016). Christians may have additional objections, based on the concept of Country itself.

The term *Country* (conventionally with a capital C) has special significance in Indigenous culture. The word denotes more than the Western concept of nationhood, rural settings, landscape, or environment. Jackson-Barrett and Lee-Hammond (2018) state, "there is an ecological web and this is known as Country and Country is a living entity" (pp. 87-88). Thus:

> Country is so much more than just 'bush'. Each Country is imbued with stories, songlines and '*kartijin*' (knowledge) and it is these stories, songlines and knowledge that give rise to understanding ourselves, our worldview and our ways of being. (Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, p. 91)

Christian schools can engage with local Indigenous Christian elders to navigate the best way to recognise the First Nations people and their relationship with Country without falling into syncretistic practices.

One way organisations and schools can authentically engage with Acknowledgement of Country is to become familiar with the map published by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies on their website (https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia) which indicates Australian nationhood before European colonisation in 1788, with over 600 languages from 250 language groups (Whitehouse, 2011, p. 59). Jackson-Barrett and Lee-Hammond (2018) argue that it is valuable for teachers to spend time getting to know and understand the Country on which they teach (p. 99), stating "it is not good enough to staff schools with teachers who are functionally illiterate about the cultures to which Aboriginal children belong" (p. 99).

Acknowledgement of Country ceremonies give opportunities to respect the rich diversity of Australia's First Nations people and move away from the assimilation policies of the past. It is not surprising that few Australians with whom I speak understand the history and policies that negatively impacted Aboriginal lives and cultures. This may be the result of what Grant (2019a, p. 147) terms "the Great Australian Silence" where education syllabuses may have contained "whitewashed" versions of history, valorising colonial achievements and generally ignoring Indigenous presence. O'Dowd (2012) notes that if identity is based on the romanticised achievements of only the white settlers and their descendants, when confronted with the truth of Indigenous oppression and dispossession, people may resist this information, classifying it as "un-history, a history that could not be" (p. 104). Acknowledgement of Country ceremonies are one way to address historical imbalance, giving voice to a different story.

Acknowledgement of Country ceremonies also provide an opportunity for positive discourse, in a climate where matters involving Indigenous Australians, particularly in regard to education, are often cast in a negative light. This "rhetoric of disadvantage" (Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2018, p. 89) can mean that expressions such as "the Indigenous education problem" become a usual way of referring to matters concerning Indigenous people. One could argue that the Closing the Gap campaign deeply entrenches this negative stereotyping and there has been a push for more strength and competency-based rhetoric and measurement processes (Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2018, pp. 89-90). When incorporating an acknowledgment ceremony into the rhythms of the Christian school calendar, there will be opportunities to counter this deficit mentality with something more positive.

Christian schools have a deep understanding of the concept of reconciliation (Colossians 1:20; Romans 5:10, for example). Not only have Christians been reconciled to God—they have been given "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18, New International Version). Reconciliation with our First Nations people should be a priority for faith-based schools and observing Acknowledgement of Country ceremonies can be one way to achieve this goal. Reconciliation Australia (2016) identifies, "Acknowledge our past through truth, justice and healing" as a step in the path toward reconciliation (p. 13). These three actions closely align with Christian values. I can think of no better way to heed the exhortation of Micah 6:8, "And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" than to intentionally engage in practices that lead to truth, justice, and healing. Indeed, as 73% of Australian Indigenous people identify as Christian (2006 Census, cited by Prentis, 2018, p. 10), it is not surprising that many of the leading voices in the movement for acknowledgement, treaty, and reconciliation include Bible verses in their academic

Christian schools can creatively work with Christian Indigenous elders to learn from one another and create programs that honour God, respect our First Nations people, and model humility.

writings (see Grant, 2019b, p. 70). It could be argued that the three biblical mandates which form a metanarrative in the Bible—the creation mandate (caring for Country), the Great Commandment (loving our mob), and the Great Commission (yarning about our Saviour), could be contextualised in the Australian context within the reconciliation story and be a pathway forward toward reconciliation.

Furthermore, by performing the ceremony of Acknowledgement of Country, faith-based schools are engaging in radical truth-telling, challenging the "convenient lie, the legal fiction, of *terra nullius* or empty land" (Whitehouse, 2011, p. 62). In doing so, Christian schools can counter misrepresentations of Aboriginal lifestyle prior to white settlement and highlight the effects of encroachment onto Aboriginal land.

Australian schools have an obligation to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures into their curriculum as this is one of three cross-curriculum priorities identified by ACARA as mandatory. Rather than approaching this mandate with fear or tokenism, Christian schools can creatively work with Christian Indigenous elders to learn from one another and create programs which honour God, respect our First Nations people, and model humility.

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Discussion Questions

- Do you have parallel examples from your own life of Gemma's experience of saying grace?
- How would you describe the key points of difference between the Windschuttle and Taylor articles on one side and the McKenna article on the other?
- How do you understand the ministry of reconciliation described in 2 Corinthians 5: 18? How does this understanding connect with your life as a Christian teacher?
- How do you see your school working towards "acknowledge[ing] the past through truth, justice, and healing"?
- What do you believe should be non-negotiable inclusions in an acknowledgment of country used at a Christian school public event?

Gemma currently teaches German at Shire Christian School and is completing her Master of Education. Her research thesis is on enablers and constraints regarding Acknowledgement of Country practices in Christian schools and she is passionate about walking a path toward reconciliation and justice with our First Nations people.

Shaping an Acknowledgement of Country for the Christian School

By Dr Fiona Partridge

Aboriginal people today still have a connection to the land—and that applies to the place our school was built on back in Adelaide.

The majestic ranges start to become clearer, rising high above the horizon as our bus travels towards its destination, nestled below Rawnsley Bluff on the edge of Wilpena Pound. The colours start to become deeper and richer—glistening shades of reds, purples, and orange—as we edge closer and turn off the main road, now stopping to take in the looming rock and layers of earth to the north of us. The Year 11 students who will call this place home for a few days on camp in this part of the Flinders Ranges can be heard exchanging statements of wonder and awe at the beauty of the landscape before them. Many have never been on Country in this area of South Australia before.

We move just a couple of kilometres further along the dusty road to our campsite and disembark. We ask the students to gather and we stop to acknowledge the country we stand on, sharing a little bit of language of the area, learning the name of the country for Aboriginal people. Hello—Nunga. Rawnsley Bluff—it is called Vuji Yandu by the *Adnamathyna* people, meaning cloud carrier. That makes more sense later in the week as we rise to watch the sunrise and share in morning devotions up the hill, seeing puffs of cloud sitting above the bluff head. We can see for ourselves why the bluff is called cloud carrier.

Students are reminded we have travelled from Kaurna country (the Adelaide Plains), to *Adnamathyna* country, and in doing so, learn a little more about the history and significance of the land to our First Nations people—the people God first appointed as caretakers of this part of His creation. When we meet our *Adnamathyna* tour guides later that night we are invited to receive a Welcome to Country, learning that *Adnamathyna* means people of the rock. It's not a weird or non-Christian ritual. It is a time of learning more about our nation's history, listening to personal stories, and considering what the results of colonisation meant for Aboriginal people in this area—the ongoing effects of which are seen in so many ways today in our society.

We remind the students that while it's a little easier to see the significance of the land away from the city while we are standing at the doorstep to the outback, Aboriginal people lived in the areas where the early settlers built townships and cities too. They lived and used the land, relying on its resources. Yet across the majority of settlement areas, Aboriginal people were removed from their land, with culture and language lost.

In this special place on country the students begin to understand that Aboriginal people today still have a connection to the land—and that applies to the place our school was built on back in Adelaide. Developing and building on this understanding and knowledge of country—all over Australia—is a step towards reconciliation in our nation.

I count myself blessed to have the opportunity to travel around Australia as part of my work with CEN and the National Institute for Christian Education. As I travel, I like to consider the significance of the lands I travel through, and work on, for Aboriginal Australia. I acknowledge Country as a personal practice as I walk on Country. I'm reminded again of the loss of my own family's Noongar heritage and the circumstances in society for the generations before me that fostered the loss of voice and place for Aboriginal people and culture. I wonder what God thinks of this messy past and how He'd like me to respond today.

An Acknowledgement of Country is "an opportunity for anyone to show respect for traditional owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to country" (Reconciliation Australia, 2017).

Many schools and organisations are more formally acknowledging country as our society learns more about the history of our nation, developing statements to be used at gatherings and formal events, especially when visitors come into the school community. An Acknowledgment of Country does not have to be a formal written statement. However, for many school communities, developing and formalising a shared Acknowledgement of Country statement to be read and publically displayed can be a helpful step towards reconciliation.

As I travel, I like to consider the significance of the lands I travel through, and work on, for Aboriginal Australia.

Some organisations display their shared statement in their foyers or campus entry. I've seen some beautiful examples of this in churches and schools. Some organisations include their Acknowledgement of Country statement in school-published public documents such as handbooks, newsletters, and email signatures.

Developing and presenting an Acknowledgment of Country involves the school taking the time to make connections with Aboriginal people. It requires listening, conducting some research on the area, and learning about the name of the Aboriginal Country and people group. The school can commit to finding out more about the impact European settlement had (and continues to have) upon the Aboriginal people in the area upon which the school is built. Learning some language of the country can also be a wonderfully rich learning experience for the school community; taking the time to realise the impact of European life upon real people and a real culture—not only past, but also present and future.

As Christian communities, it is Christ's love for all people that overflows when we consciously commit to acknowledging the significance of the Country our schools are built on as part of school practice when we gather together. This simple practice has the deep symbolic message that as Christians we acknowledge that the First Nations people who met the early European settlers were made in God's image—and continue to be! They are loved by Christ, and loved by neighbour—our Christian community.

It may be helpful for some school communities as they start on this journey to read some examples of Acknowledgement of Country statements from other CEN schools across Australia. Where possible, it is constructive for the school community to develop the statement in partnership with local Aboriginal people. Where there are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff in the community, the significance of their presence as a special part of Australian society—past, present, and future—might be included in the Acknowledgement of Country too.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may wish to help develop or deliver the Acknowledgement at public events, or be invited to deliver a Welcome to Country if they are people from that land where the school is built. The school may commit to annually inviting a local Aboriginal elder or community member to bring a Welcome to Country at whole school events.

Just as we include many Western practices in our school communities that are not necessarily Christian practices, we do need to be discerning, remembering all things find their place—and need to be understood—as part of the biblical story: God's story and plan for His creation and people.

The following page provides examples of Acknowledgments being used in some Christian schools.

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Discussion Questions

- Does your school investigate local Aboriginal history in interesting ways?
- How has interaction with local Indigenous people shaped the way your school approaches Acknowledgement of Country?
- How would you characterise the differences between the examples of Acknowledgements provided here?
- How do these examples embody their school's Christian perspectives?

Fiona is a senior lecturer with the National Institute for Christian Education and is the state executive officer for the SA CEN schools. She loves the Flinders Ranges and for many years has been a staff member on the annual Torrens Valley Christian School Year 11 camp at Rawnsley Bluff and Wilpena Pound. Fiona has enjoyed learning more about Aboriginal culture and her own Noongar ancestry in recent years.

Example Acknowledgements from Christian schools

Mountains Christian College (NSW)

Before we go any further with proceedings, we would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land. We recognise that God has gifted peoples of all races with lands to call their home. For many generations the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have enjoyed God's blessings and provision in this land we call Australia. In keeping with the spirit of reconciliation, Mountains Christian College acknowledges and shows respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which we now meet, the Dharug and Gundungurra Nations and their elders past and present. It is an honour for us as a school to have Indigenous students enrolled here at MCC.

Rehoboth Christian College (Western Australia)

We wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on; the Whadjuk people. We wish to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. They are stewards on behalf of our Almighty God, creator and sustainer of this land, world, universe, and everything in them.

Chairo Christian School (Victoria)

On behalf of Chairo Christian School, we declare with joy and trust that our world belongs to God! We believe God allowed the Bunurong people to first live in and care for this land, and we commit to living in and caring for this land well also. We commit ourselves to working toward reconciliation with all peoples, including our Indigenous brothers and sisters throughout Australia, believing that true reconciliation comes through the life, work, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Devonport Christian School (Tasmania)

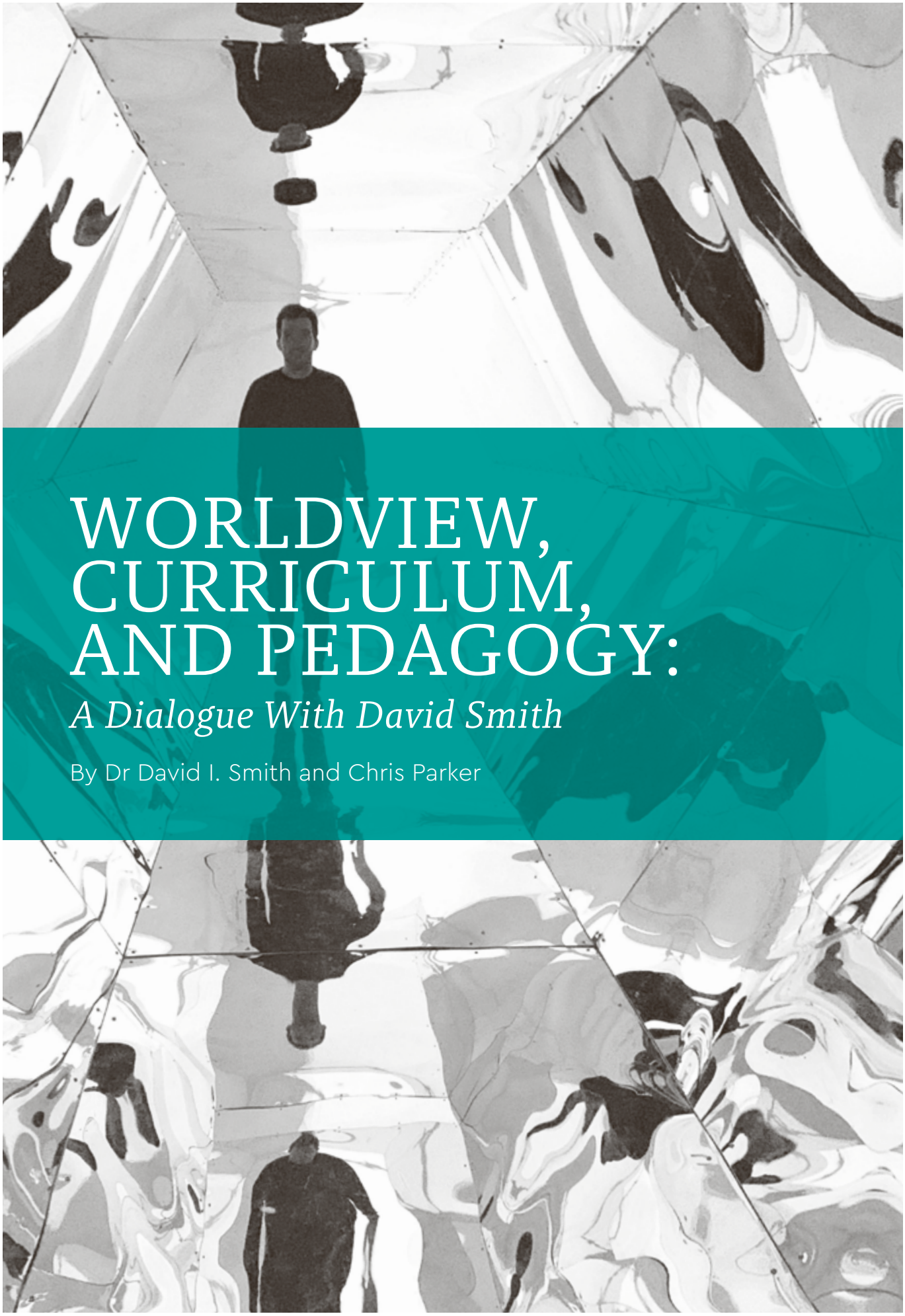
At Devonport Christian School we would like to acknowledge the Palawa people who are those appointed by God as the traditional custodians of this land — both within the Lutruwita Aboriginal land, which we now know as Tasmania, and widely across this land and country we now call Australia. We would like to pay our respect to elders past and present of the Palawa people for the way they have stewarded the Lord's good creation, and we extend that respect to other Indigenous people past and present, and those emerging generations who we pray will continue this task, trusting that our creator will continue reconciling all things to himself in Jesus Christ.

Torrens Valley Christian School – for Junior Primary gatherings (South Australia)

We thank God as Creator of this land we are meeting on and the Kaurna people as the first people of this region. We thank them for sharing and caring for the land we live and play on. We pay our respects to Kaurna elders past and present and we share our friendship and kindness.

Christian School (Queensland)

Since before recorded time, the Indigenous people have cared for this land. We give thanks to God as the Creator, owner and sustainer of this land. We honour those who have tended and cared for it. We acknowledge that we are people who live on the traditional lands of the ..... and ..... people. They are the first people to have lived in this region and the Indigenous custodians of this area. We pay respect to the Elders past, present and emerging and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are present. We ask Jesus' blessing on all who continue to work for the healing and restoration of this land and our communities.



WORLDVIEW, CURRICULUM, AND PEDAGOGY:

A Dialogue With David Smith

By Dr David I. Smith and Chris Parker

A recent routine email conversation between Chris Parker (CTJ editor) and David Smith at Calvin University about an article submission, led to the following dialogue about the place of worldview, curriculum, and pedagogy in Christian education. At the end of the exchange, both Chris and David made the observation that maybe the dialogue could, itself, become an article. And, well, here it is:

David,

G'day from Down Under. Just a scheduled follow-up email to check that your *CTJ* article is still on track?

Also, I am currently deep reading *On Christian Teaching*—really appreciating lots, and being forced to mull over some. Thanks for your work on it!

Chris

Hi Chris,

Flattery will get you everywhere! Getting folk to "mull over some" is my life's mission, I think, so glad to hear it's having that effect. It's meant as a stimulus, not a blueprint or a program.

The article is about a third written. I hope to make the deadline. Crazy times right now.

Blessings,

David

David,

Well, you probably won't be surprised from our previous chats that it is Chapter 7 that is causing me the most pause and reflection. Good pause; good reflection—but your emphasis shift here from a more 'traditional' (perhaps read 'worldview') posture in Christian education to a pedagogy-sympathetic-to-Christian-virtues approach is still buzzing around in the old grey matter. Thanks, it's a good thing to have buzzing!

In regards to the article, I have a healthy suite of submissions on this theme already. Given this and your current busyness, I wonder if the article that you have started could be, down the track, adjusted in a way that would speak more generally on reflections on Christian education (without the direct reflection on Corona).

Chris

Chris,

If you have enough stuff already for your issue, a later deadline would indeed help me, and I can easily pivot the material.

I am glad you said "emphasis shift"—the book is not meant to negate the importance of worldview (or build a virtue ethics approach as an alternative), in fact in some important ways I understand all of what I am saying as a radicalization or following through to logical conclusions of a worldview approach (see e.g. the first full paragraph on p. 30). Within worldview discussions themselves there has been recurring criticism of treating worldview as something that only happens in words or ideas, going back decades. If we really want education grounded in a Christian worldview, then the learning practices and processes and not just the ideas have to be thus grounded. Virtues are part of this, though only part (the importance of Christian virtues is also, I take it, part of a Christian worldview and articulations of worldview become dubious without them). And if we want students to be formed in a Christian worldview we need to face the fact that people are not formed only by words or by people talking to them. If there is a key shift away from some versions of a worldview approach it amounts to doubting whether teaching people explicit worldview frameworks through direct instruction can do enough of the work of formation or free us from teaching Christian ideas through pedagogical practices that undercut them. Some articulations of a worldview approach don't seem to me to take sufficient account of how folk learn or of the gap between what the mind learns and how the life is shaped.

It's probably also fair to say that I am a little less persuaded than some that we know exactly what a Christian worldview is. Specific articulations of Christian worldview seem to keep getting mixed up with politics and social locations. In my own Reformed tradition, articulations of "Creation-Fall-Redemption" sometimes give a lot of time to those structural ideas but a lot less time than the apostle Paul would to the cross. Current events here in the US are a further reminder of how complicated all of this is. We need to continue to figure out how much of Christian worldview is really white, privileged worldview or Western, post-Enlightenment, Christianized worldview. It is not very long in historical terms since the conservative, evangelical, Bible-believing

I see worldview as a helpful notion that describes the default, presuppositional, pre-theoretical, inarticulate way in which we respond to life and world.

position was pro slavery (the abolitionists we now like to write books about were the exception, after all, God clearly gave Abraham instructions on how to look after his slaves, Paul returned Onesimus, and the Bible never speaks against slavery) and moves against slavery were decried as an attack on a Christian worldview. It will not suffice to simply say "but they were not real Christians like we are". There are currently Christians who see rejecting concern about the environment/climate as a key part of Christian worldview, and those who think the opposite. This is one area in which taking account of social imaginary might help. Your/my worldview (according to most of the more rigorous accounts) is not made up only of the list of key Christian beliefs that you/I articulate in public. It's a mess of beliefs, assumptions, emphases, and ways of being postured in the world that are shaped by faith but also by gender, social location, moment in history, etc. It's not all conscious, and actual on-the-ground Christian worldviews are not necessarily entirely Christian. So how do we grow and learn amid complexity? What does that process look like? Can Christian teachers learn to teach Christianly without over-investing in the correctness of their current cultural diagnosis, while still being committed? And can we do that and still think worldview is really important?

Because it's not that worldview does not matter. There is a powerful moment in the film *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* in which Sophie is debating with her Nazi interrogator. He argues that she and the other White Rose students are showing ingratitude to their country and those fighting for them at the front, that they are misguided, that the state cares for them and has provided their education. He apparently wants to get her to compromise so he can avoid having a young German woman executed. Sophie has been arguing that the state is destroying human worth and rejecting God. At one point she says to him "it's not us that have the wrong worldview, it's you who have the wrong worldview." What makes it powerful is that on that declaration hangs whether she will live or die. Because of it she will die on the guillotine within days, in hope of resurrection. Worldview matters absolutely. But what process of formation led to her being able to utter that declaration? Was it just instruction in ideas? More likely it was also the model of her dissident parents, the poetry she read, the work she did with children with disabilities, her friendship circle, her reading the Bible, and so on. And quite likely she believed some things that most current American evangelicals would not think were part of a proper Christian worldview (because German Christians in 1943 and American Christians now do not see the world in quite the same way). So worldview matters absolutely, but it's embedded in a whole human process of formation in an embodied time and place. And learning a worldview is not the same thing as having someone explain a worldview.

So we have to think about pedagogy and formation, not just what affirmations or commitments we want to get to.

But I wrote a book on this, so I should get back to work 😊.

Thanks for the consideration re schedule. Let me know when you want the piece.

Blessings

David

Hi David,

My response to your really helpful reflections is, "yes!".

I guess I continue to hold on to a romantic, optimistic notion that all our teachers will have a "more rigorous account" of what we mean by worldview. In the fullest sense—and perhaps what the original proponents meant—your worldview is far more than, and perhaps far from, a mere set of beliefs, notions, logical schemas, etc. I see worldview as a helpful notion that describes the default, presuppositional, pre-theoretical, inarticulate way in which we respond to life and world. The 'gut' response that we tend towards that has been formed by a raft of experiences and messages that we have been marinating in since birth (the cultural storytelling from family, church, society). As such, I don't like to use the phrases, biblical worldview, or Christian worldview—there is perhaps no such thing. It is people that have a worldview. The Bible doesn't have a worldview. A doctrine or a systematic theology is not a worldview. Neither is a particular approach to life issues or a political stance. A philosophy or theology is not a worldview! However, your philosophy is shaped by your worldview, or is expressed via your worldview—it can't not be.

I know that you know all this. But I will keep going, even though I might be embarrassing myself.

I, therefore, prefer to speak of having a worldview shaped by the Bible. Many things shape, or form, our worldview. Narratives, in all the ways that you want to slice a definition, are powerful in forming us. Practices, habits, 'liturgies' (thanks Jamie Smith) are also powerful in shaping us (and therefore our worldview*). This, then, is why I am loving *On Christian Teaching*, and always love your conference talks, because pedagogies are in the mix of the things that have a powerful formational influence—and we should not, must not, neglect this.

However, in teaching, it is not only our pedagogies and liturgies that have forming effects. Education, by its nature, has students engaging in the realm of ideas and rationality. The presuppositions about life and world that have been woven into the curriculum content also have a

Focusing on concrete issues in pedagogical design is for many a better way to help them understand that things are not neutral.

significant formational influence. In Christian education, in our pursuit of forming faithful disciples of Christ with a worldview that is more shaped by the truth of the world and the nature and purpose of human life from the metanarrative of the Bible, and less shaped by the narratives of life, world, and purpose from secular cultural storylines, we don't seek to just teach a politically correct Christianised set of beliefs (what we are pro and what we are against as Christians). No! What we seek to do—in this space of curriculum and ideas etc.—is to lean into discipling in discernment. We seek to teach the skill of recognising the counter-biblical storylines. To do this we may need to, at times, explicitly explore and unfold how the biblical narrative might push us towards answering some of the big questions of life and world. This should never fall into a mere statement of 'what the Bible says' (and the diabolical proof texting sometimes evident), or a simple suggestion of a standard (politically influenced) stance on hot topics. It might be helpful, at times, in this pursuit to explore schemas and structures (e.g. Creation-Fall-Redemption), though never as an end in themselves, and never presented as 'this is the Christian worldview'.**

Hence why I used the word "emphasis". I don't hear you suggesting that we shouldn't consider worldview. I see your exploration of Taylor's notion of 'social imaginaries' in the context of pedagogies not too far away from this deeper definition of worldview I'm wanting to hold on to. However, there are social imaginaries woven into curriculum/content that also need to be explored and considered. But would it be fair to say that you are emphasising an exploration of the formational influence of pedagogy in this book? Great. An emphasis on Christian worldview—particularly in the flavour that you describe in your email—needs to be addressed. Teaching a squeaky clean Christian worldview through content, while using classroom practices and liturgies that are dissonant with the biblical narrative of life and community, may actually be damaging and not just underwhelming. Likewise, beautifully imagined classroom practices and liturgies that resonate with the biblical narrative and, indeed, the gospel of grace, while at the same time unfolding content steeped in undiscerned secular presuppositions, may also be unhelpfully promoting a dualism at best, and a works-based pietism at worst.

Now, I realise that I just hyperbolised those positions to make my point; forgive me. I guess I am just wondering if both need to be considered, especially in light of this deeper (redeemed?) definition of worldview. I am wondering if an overemphasis of one over another can be problematic.***

As I already confessed, I probably have a little bit of an overly romantic view that when our teachers here in Australia speak of a biblical-worldview education they mean what I am speaking of. Some would probably tend towards an approach similar to what you describe. However, many would be attempting curriculum design in sympathy to what I am describing. The National Institute for Christian Education has a 40-year history of encouraging a rich, deep, nuanced approach to biblical worldview education among Christian Education National schools.

Anyway, just some unedited quick thoughts. I have found the writing of this helpful. It was perhaps more for my sake, so don't feel obliged to reply.

Chris

*** I envisage this deep definition of worldview including the full spectrum of how we engage with the world—passions, will, desires, cognitions, etc.**

**** I suspect that this is much more an issue in the highly polarised North American context where Christian faith and living has been, unhelpfully, significantly entangled with right-wing politics. It is quite different here in Australia. It's not that we are completely immune from it, but it's far less pronounced.**

***** Forgive my over simplification of dividing teaching and learning so neatly into pedagogy and curriculum—it's never that neat. I am just using them here as shorthand to avoid complication.**

Chris,

Quick reply for now (just settling down to a glass of wine with my wife). I think we are exactly on the same page in everything you said. One of my fears for the book is that some people want a program to follow that displaces their last program, so are looking for the Smith approach that's all about pedagogy, as opposed to the old approach that was all about curriculum. The reason I am focusing on pedagogy (as I try to make clear in the last chapter) is not because it is the only thing we need to look at. It is because few have been paying attention to it and fewer still in ways that I find at all compelling. I want to take a magnifying glass to an area that we have neglected. That implies nothing about other areas being important or otherwise.

We do have a bit of a culture here of evangelical groups going round with questionnaires and creating stats to prove that Christians don't have a biblical worldview. It usually turns out you have to agree with their very specific theology to count as having a biblical worldview. So that's part of the

There are social imaginaries woven into curriculum/content that need to be explored and considered.

context too. Meanwhile, in Reformed circles, some have heard so much about worldview they have become inured to the term—and often what they heard was a simplistic Creation-Fall-Redemption offered as the Christian answer to every problem, and they rightly sense that life is more complicated and painful than the application of formulae to stay in the safe zone allows. So I do find it helpful to steer clear of that language much of the time, in the interests of communicating in ways that slip past people's defenses and jaded spots, and to use talk of worldview sparingly and when it matters. I like your summary, and your note at the end matters a lot—I don't see curriculum and pedagogy as in the end distinct, and a chunk of chapters 4 and 5 I could easily spin as being about curriculum (and they are certainly also about worldview).

Blessings

David

David,

I really appreciate this response. I wouldn't say that I have "fears" for the book, but you have well tapped into an unsettledness I have by sharing yours. I think there is a tendency here in Australia to chuck the worldview baby out with the bathwater because the new "Smith approach" says we can. This is perhaps driven by a few factors. First, "worldview stuff is too hard", and thinking creatively about my pedagogy is fun! Second, the understood notion of worldview is often the simplistic one that you spoke of, and teachers become, often subconsciously, suspicious of its helpfulness and at times embarrassed to be presenting it. Third, teachers are not immune from an attraction to fads and the 'new', and well, "we are a bit bored with worldview".

I appreciate your point about wanting to avoid the language of worldview and choosing your context and audience carefully. Especially in your setting. I'm concerned that a move away from the language of worldview might also bring with it a movement from, or at least a de-emphasis of, some of the crucial notions of worldview. Perhaps I am naive, but I would love to see a redeeming of the language and a revitalised rigor in defining it, and all this within a holistic approach to Christian education that sees all aspects of teaching and learning (and school life) being informed by the biblical metanarrative centred on the gospel of grace.

Hope it was a lovely wine and chat with Julia. I picture you with a glass of red at the end of a hard work day?

Chris

Chris,

Folk will always be doing bad things with babies and bathwater. I am pretty sure in the ITEC19 conference talks that I explicitly told people this was not a negation of worldview approaches, but hearing is always selective. Another angle on all of this is this: a few months back I led a session for new faculty. One faculty member said to me afterward, "I have heard a lot of talks about worldview and I was kind of on board but I never really got it. I get it now because you showed how it actually makes a difference in concrete examples." That is very close to the heart of what I am driving at. My overall project is not only about pedagogy, it is pedagogically driven; ironically, it grows out of trying to figure out how to actually teach people about worldview. Often we have tried to teach teachers to think about worldview by having theologians and philosophers talk to them, and as one of the subgenre of human being that thrives on that stuff I would be the last to say that is all bad. But I think it is never going to help every kind of teacher to learn. Focusing on concrete issues in pedagogical design is for many a better way to help them understand that things are not neutral and that there are more and less Christian choices. We can then help them tease out what commitments/imaginations are at stake in the choices they are making. That is the piece that still does not feel like it quite fits when you talk about "thinking creatively about my pedagogy" versus "worldview stuff". The last thing I am doing is pedagogical creativity seminars. What I am doing IS thinking about worldview stuff but the medium of learning is a focus on concrete pedagogical moves and use of narrative examples. I hope that there is not a single pedagogical example in the book that is described just because it is creative. The purpose of every single example is to show how concrete pedagogical moves are not neutral with regard to worldview. My bet is that this is a better learning pathway for many if not most teachers than the traditional "you need a Christian worldview" talk. So I share the goal, but I am adjusting the learning approach. Maybe some of what they are a bit bored with was in fact boring. So how do we help them connect the core idea of anti-positivism or anti-neutrality with their actual practice?

Maybe we do indeed need to redeem the language (some days I am up for that), or maybe a new one that gets at the same issues will be just fine (some days that seems more worth playing with). I am finding that "social imaginary" feels like interesting news to folk who are tired of worldview, even though it can let us think about very similar things. Worldview is only a little over a century old, comes out of German philosophy as an extension of Kant

What I am doing IS thinking about worldview stuff but the medium of learning is a focus on concrete pedagogical moves and use of narrative examples.

[not out of the church], and has a built-in temptation to privilege the detached gaze (view) and the global (world) over the active and concrete that I think may well be at odds with Jesus' understanding of "truth". It is not a perfect term, nor is it the only tool the church has ever used to think about the normative frames in which things exist.) I guess in the end I care more that teachers start realizing that the specific choices they make with images, titles, classroom layouts, topics, homework, etc. (all of which is curriculum) have visions of the good at stake in them and are not just efficient technique, than I care about whether we shift to a fresh term.

I am about to start teaching my summer grad class on curriculum and pedagogy. We start with a sweep through four centuries of curriculum looking for how social imaginary/worldview are reflected in it. And we also move on to working with Wayne Au's model of curriculum as "complex environmental design," which sees curriculum as made up of choices in language and symbols, behaviors, time, aesthetics, physical materials, and power. Curriculum is not just made of ideas. And all of those things are things that Christian faith frames in particular ways. If I can get teachers to think well about how their choices in those areas are Christian or not it seems to me I have got further toward teaching them how to do worldview thinking than if I only succeed in teaching them how to critique ideas.

(I also worry about the issue I mention on p. 146: there is some evidence that engagement with worldview literature doesn't necessarily lead to seeing teaching itself as something that needs to be informed by faith. There are some pressing empirical questions about what the traditional worldview approach in fact achieves.)

I wish we could discuss this over a beverage.

It was indeed a red, with some Stilton.

Blessings

David

David,

Can I please join your summer grad class!?

Chris

Chris,

I am afraid it had a max enrolment limit of 24, and currently has 37 students, so we shut the door tight!

David

David,

☹

Chris

Chris,

Maybe we should rework some of this as a dialogue and publish it in *CTJ* ...?

David

David,

Ha. Snap. I had the exact same thought!

Chris

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David is director of the Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning and professor of education at Calvin College in Michigan, USA. He is also editor of the *International Journal of Christianity and Education*. He has written widely on the relationship of Christian faith to education, including in his most recent book, *On Christian Teaching: Practicing Faith in the Classroom*.

Chris is editor of the *Christian Teachers Journal*, and associate lecturer with the National Institute for Christian Education. He is the author of the book *The Frog and the Fish: Reflections on Work, Technology, Sex, Stuff, Truth, and Happiness*. If you can't find Chris he is probably out trail running or playing with wood in his workshop.

FROM MACHINE TO HUMAN

By Dan Beerens, Justin Cook, and Katie Wiens

If the education machine looks at students through the eyes of efficiency and utility and transaction, by contrast a humane education rooted in the Christ story looks at students through the eyes of love.

Picture a machine in your mind. The machine could be simple, like the Rube Goldberg ones our students make. Or, you might picture a complex machine, comprised of multiple smaller machines, like an automobile assembly line. As you visualise your machine, consider this: what goes into the machine, what happens to it, and what does it look like when it comes out?

Regardless of which machine you visualise, all machines have certain features in common. For example, they control for common inputs, by selecting which materials go in to the machine. They use standardised and sequenced processes to act forcefully on those inputs. And ultimately, their goal is to produce homogenous products (think widgets).

It doesn't take much further imagination to see today's modern educational system as machine-like in its essence. We group students by age, force them through a year-by-year standardised course of study, and assess their progress using a one-size-fits-all set of standardised tests. Much of what happens to them in classrooms is exactly that—the teaching and curriculum happens to them, as they are unidirectionally taught content, with the expectation that they will retain and demonstrate mastery of it. And of course we know what happens to students who don't succeed in 'making the grade'. At best, they're provided with extensive support to help them get back to the spot on the conveyor belt where they belong, and at worst, they're either forced off entirely after repeated 'failure'—or become so discouraged they decide to drop out on their own. We borrow a term from Rex Miller and others in referring to this superstructure of Western schooling as "the education machine," which is designed to produce a uniform outcome with efficiency being the primary goal.

Machines work well for the industrial purposes for which they were invented. We contend they do not, however, work well in forming human beings, who are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26)—and as such are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14), diverse in their backgrounds and contexts (Acts 17:26), and uniquely gifted for good works as part of God's redemptive plan (Ephesians 2:10). So how did we end up with an educational system that is so far afield from God's design for human flourishing, and how can Christian schools move closer to a vision of education that is commensurate with that design?

A Brief History of the Education Machine

In 1837, Horace Mann, conceptualised a new vision of public education: the common school.

The common school movement prioritised a uniformity of thought and behaviour. Students learned to read using Noah Webster's *Blue Backed Speller* and later the *McGuffey Readers*, each of which intended to teach moral behaviour while students learned to read increasingly difficult texts. As the value of the schools moved from prioritising Calvinist theology to universalist theology, so too did the excerpts in the readers. While this movement can clearly take credit for catalysing a more educated populace—literacy rates skyrocketed for instance—some would argue the approach had a cost.

Primarily, and most relevant to this article, many believe this movement stifled creative thought and individual growth, instead prioritising uniform outcomes achieved most efficiently for the taxpayer, a utilitarian legacy schools—both public and private—have inherited. In the view of one historian, "the American public school is a gigantic standardized compromise most of us have learned to live with" (Kaestle, 1976, p. 396), a sentiment that we argue persists still today across North America in public and private schools alike.

As with any machine, choices are made in the design to enable a particular product to be made. In the case of the education machine, the desired product was a uniform populace, and therefore decisions about the design of that machine, such as the schedule of the day, age grouping, and teaching methods, for example, were made to achieve that end. Perhaps most significantly, the driving purpose of the education machine is the transactional nature of students producing work so that a teacher can 'grade' it. In turn, this led to the entire system relying on standardisation in order to measure its effectiveness and efficiently allocate resources. While the aims of schools have most certainly evolved, we are left with the structures of the education machine—and we believe many of those structures are making it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve the aims of today's Christian school.

The Christ story flowing from this love and interdependence tells of the value of each person as unique in all creation and as bearing the image of God.

Telling a Different Story

If the education machine looks at students through the eyes of efficiency and utility and transaction, by contrast a humane education rooted in the Christ story looks at students through the eyes of love. The Christ story comes from the life and person of Jesus Christ, in whom all things cohere and hold together; the source of all love, beauty, truth, and goodness.

The Christ story flowing from this love and interdependence tells of the value of each person as unique in all creation and as bearing the image of God. It tells a larger story of a citizenship in another Kingdom; a compelling and beautiful vision of a new land where the inhabitants are free from the perniciousness of sin, division, hatred, brokenness, evil, and all things opposed to human wholeness and flourishing. The Christ story suggests that the achievement of this vision of wholeness, beauty, and flourishing can begin right now.

Schools that focus on understanding and emulating the character of Christ seek to teach students what it might mean to be like Christ in contemporary society. What might it look like to be reshaped into a Christ follower—a true disciple seeking first how best to love neighbor and the world and to not seek first one's own agenda and advancement? This seeking to be a Christ follower, done well, should put students at odds with the stories of success and self-aggrandisement put forth by peers, family, cultural icons, and a world that rejects the Christ story. It should also put educators at odds with the default transactional nature of education as grade acquisition for personal gain. The Christ story starts by offering a fundamental reorientation of the purpose of education—from adoration of man and his achievements, toward the worship of God and His desire for human flourishing as expressed through the life and work of Jesus Christ. To help students to flourish means we are not simply focused on academics or the spiritual—we seek to show students a holistic approach to all of life, not just life at school.

Schools seeking to implement the Christ story of love will ultimately be measured by the desire expressed by their students to practice the faith that they see modeled by the life, work, and love of Jesus Christ and lived out by adults in their lives. Our key measure of success is whether students connect to the Christ story of love in personal ways that motivate and direct them into a life that lives out this story. If we hope for this kind of result then all aspects of our current models of educating students in Christian schools involving philosophy, pedagogy, and practices should be examined rigorously to see if they are in the end helping students to: 1) better understand the ultimate purposes of life; 2) become more Christ-like, as enactors of the shalom of God, and 3) live into the Christ story of love throughout their entire lives—to learn "to live the alternative reality of the kingdom within the present world order faithfully" (Hunter, 2010).

This leads us to the question of what kind of changes will it take to implement the Christ story more effectively in our current models. However, because most of today's educators grew up inside the education machine and were professionally trained to sustain and replicate it in our schools, it is extremely difficult to envision the necessary changes in the abstract. By way of popular metaphor, the fish that lives its whole life in a fish tank has no knowledge of the ocean.

In order to overcome these limitations, we need to consider schools that are actively living out Christ's story of love in practice. We devote the remainder of this article to one such school.

The Story in Action

Located just outside the massive urban sprawl of the greater Toronto area, Halton Hills Christian School (HHCS) is a school on a journey.

Principal Marianne Vangoor knew that she and her staff were passionately committed to the well-being of the 350 PreK-8 students in the school, but she believed they could do more. Marianne was not content with the status quo of a transactional education of grade acquisition. So she and her staff asked each other a pivotal question at the summer staff retreat in 2015: "What does love require?". This became the staff theme for that year and has shaped the learning journey at HHCS ever since.

The goal for the staff at HHCS in 2018-2019 sums up this desire well:

> To be an outpost of grace for families and students alike where young minds and bodies and hearts are nurtured, shaped, taught, and challenged, in order to become active and passionate ambassadors of the King right now and for all of their tomorrows!

This seeking to be a Christ follower, done well, should put students at odds with the stories of success and self-aggrandisement put forth by peers, family, cultural icons, and a world that rejects the Christ story.

The goal highlights two key facets of how learning at Halton Hills Christian School moves from machine to human. First, the school is passionate about supporting students inwardly: the development of the whole child in a culture of unconditional love and grace ("young minds and bodies and hearts are nurtured, shaped, taught and challenged"). Second, the school is convinced that through their learning, students can actively contribute culturally to the flourishing of others and our world, both near and far ("in order to become active and passionate ambassadors of the King right now and for all of their tomorrows!"). This inward and outward formation forms the humanising learning vision at Halton Hills Christian School.

Inward Formation

HHCS educators believe strongly that social-emotional learning cannot be separated from academic learning, and the school has chosen to use resources from Responsive Classroom to enact this belief. Responsive Classroom is an evidence-based approach that seeks to create a culture of joy and belonging for students, by integrating academic and social-emotional learning.

The daily schedule at HHCS intentionally makes time for this connection of academic success and social-emotional learning. The morning begins with time for devotions in a morning meeting. In developmentally appropriate ways—the meeting looks different in Kindergarten from Grade 8—each student starts the day with four key elements:

- A **greeting** where each child is welcomed and welcomes each other by name
- A time of **sharing** where each child has a chance to connect their own stories with the stories of their classmates, recognising that they all have ways in which they are similar but also ways in which they're different
- An **activity** which helps build community and energise their minds and bodies for a day of learning together
- A morning **message** from the teacher that gives an indication of passion and purpose for the day

Each day also provides ten minutes of quiet time after the second nutritional break, so that students can again relax, recharge (especially those more introverted), and refocus for learning after an outdoor recess. And lastly, the day ends with a closing circle in each classroom, where students have a moment to reflect on the good and the hard parts of their day together before returning home. These practices help to ensure that each student at HHCS is known, loved, and valued as a contributor to school life.

Outward Formation

But HHCS is not only committed to supporting students in their inward social-emotional and academic development. At HHCS, a project-based learning (PBL) pedagogy is the key driver of this desire to develop active and passionate ambassadors. Over the past number of years, students have engaged in significant learning projects that have blessed their larger community.

- Preschool students grew their own food in a garden that was planned and maintained by them.
- Kindergarten students became marine biologists, challenged the school community regarding how plastic bottles and bags were used, and then led the way by designing and selling metal water bottles to fund ocean clean up.
- First grade students created HHCS welcome guidebooks for visitors and prospective parents.
- Second and third grade students educated the community about endangered species in the area, by creating an information-packed 18-month calendar.
- Third grade students created an architectural guide for historic buildings in the town of Georgetown to be used by visitors to the town.
- Fourth grade students wrote and illustrated a picture book comparing their daily lives with that of a fourth grade student in Afghanistan. The sale of the book raised funds to send 200 girls to school in Afghanistan through the non-profit Pennies for Peace.
- An agricultural fair was hosted by fifth grade students for the school community that included food trucks, animals, and even a tractor pull.
- Sixth grade students developed an action research project to determine whether or not the main artery, Trafalgar Road, should be widened, and presented the findings to Halton city planners.
- Seventh and eighth grade students provided leadership for the community to more deeply understand and begin the process of reconciliation with Indigenous friends and neighbors.

Schools seeking to implement the Christ story of love will ultimately be measured by the desire expressed by their students to practice the faith that they see modeled by the life, work, and love of Jesus Christ and lived out by adults in their lives.

Student feedback from these projects demonstrates the power of PBL in outward formation. In one of these projects, fifth and sixth grade students published a book of historical fiction, called *From Chains to Freedom*, using the novel *Underground to Canada* as their mentor text. Each student's story was included in the book (not just a handful of the 'best'), and the students used the profits of the book sales to support the International Justice Mission Canada in combating modern-day slavery. At a school-wide celebration of learning that included this project, one of the students shared how the project helped him to overcome his struggle with editing, as well as how to develop his voice as a writer. In reflecting about what he learned through sharing and selling their book at a local mall, the student commented that "people need to be informed about slavery today. You need to get out of your comfort zone, not stand behind a table and wait for the money." Another student indicated that she was nervous to share her book with others "because we're reading excerpts of our writing in front of an audience. But I'm also pretty excited." Why? "Because I'm really changing history and I'm freeing slaves today in different developing countries."

In addition to projects like these, each grade eight student also prepares a graduate presentation to a panel of staff and parents. The presentations are not about grades but about growth. They include a portfolio of the beautiful work the student has created, but more importantly, students reflect on their character formation over the course of their HHCS career. Their presentations address developmental questions like: How have they grown in their sense of self and in practicing and living out their faith? Where do they see their lives going after HHCS? What is God calling them into and how will they serve in the bigger Kingdom?

God's Beautiful Story

Although the "education machine" that arose out of the common school movement may have been appropriate for its own time, the Christ story calls into question the inheritance of a system designed for uniformity and efficiency, with grade acquisition as its currency and standardisation as its measurement. Our desire to humanise the educational machine is inspired by the Christ story. Asking "What does love require?" Halton Hills Christian School offers itself as a school on a journey, hoping to explicitly align its commitments and practices with its stated goal.

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Discussion Questions

- This article comes from a North American context. In what ways is our education system different and the same as what is described?
- What external forces press you into teaching in a 'machine model'?
- In what ways are you able, in your teaching context, to push against the "prioritising of uniform outcomes"?
- How do Dan, Justin, and Katie suggest that success in Christian education could or should be measured? Do you agree?
- What most struck you about the approaches that Halton Hills Christian School were implementing? Why?

This is an edited extract from Chapter 1 of the new book *Mindshift: Catalizing Change in Christian Education* (Swaner, Beerens, & Ellefsen, 2019). *Mindshift* is published by the Association of Christian Schools International.

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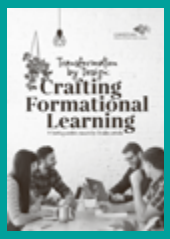


CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Classrooms as Grace-Shaped Communities
This course acknowledges that deeper learning happens in relationship and community and explores the importance of shaping classroom communities.

My Top Shelf

A Christian educator recommends five texts recently read

I am a voracious reader, so limiting myself to only five books was a monumental challenge. Although I have been working in Christian education for just over a decade, my association has been more than 25 years, having married a Christian teacher. In the early days I was captivated by her talk of sphere sovereignty and Abraham Kuyper. In the interim I studied a BTh loving the opportunity to read and study the Scriptures. My choice of books reflects this love and the wonderful heritage our schools possess.

By Tim Payze

1 The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story

Bartholomew and Goheen (2014)

I really appreciate the manner in which they convey the unity and majesty of the biblical story. Their six acts of the story are a helpful designation—an appealing way to unite the story—and they leave the last act open, to be played out by us in our various roles within the Kingdom. I found that their updates in the second edition were helpful, an improvement, yet I was still left unsatisfied with their treatment of the Wisdom Literature. This has become a significant interest for me recently, and will be central to my PhD, so maybe I was looking too intently under the microscope?

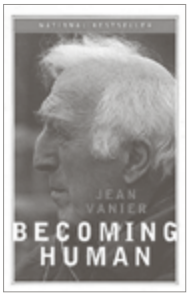
2 Wisdom and Curriculum: Christian Schooling After Postmodernity

Doug Blomberg (2007)

Although not an easy read, I was fascinated by Doug's engagement with wisdom. This book ignited my passion for a better understanding of wisdom and the Wisdom Literature. As a Year 12 teacher, much of my focus was on knowledge attainment and good grades. This book caused me to pause and consider more of what the goals of Christian education were and are, and to seek wisdom personally and within my students. I highly recommend reading this incredible work, but I do suggest to approach it in small bites, to better gain the most from its deep wisdom.

3 Becoming Human

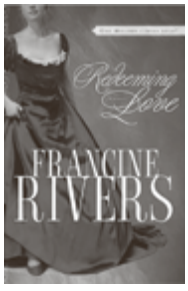
Jean Vanier (2001)



My MEd thesis completed through the National Institute for Christian Education was concerned with personhood. Vanier's book, then and now, has been my 'go to' book on all things related to what it means to be human. I still have all my Post-It Notes throughout, and I have also utilised Vanier's wisdom in many a sermon. He speaks from deep experience of living with people with severe mental and physical disabilities. He penetrates both personal experience and the Scriptures to find a 'real' understanding of what it means to be a human being. I often found myself weeping as I journeyed with him through his relationships with God's human creations.

4 Redeeming Love

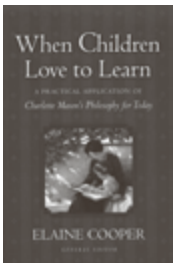
Francine Rivers (1997)



Not specifically concerned with Christian education, a life-changing book nevertheless! At one point I couldn't continue reading as I was weeping so intently. I had to put the book aside and sing God's praises, dwelling in God's great and awesome love. It is a re-telling of the Hosea story, and it so thoroughly captures an extensive picture of God's unfathomable love for us. I have often drawn upon this version of the Hosea story in class devotions, my teaching of Scripture, and in rectifying the way I see myself and my students.

5 When Children Love to Learn

Elaine Cooper (2004)



This book is a practical application of the educational philosophy of Charlotte Mason. I wanted to include Mason's 5 volumes on educational philosophy but that would be all my books taken up in one hit. I studied Mason for my MEd thesis, and I would highly recommend all Christian educators (and parents) read Cooper's application of this biblically-based masterwork (or you can borrow my 5 volumes of the original!). The title alone captivates, and further reading reveals the title's possibility. I was fortunate enough to travel to USA to observe this philosophy in action and I was enthralled to see children (and teenagers) who really, truly loved to learn!

Tim teaches at Mount Evelyn Christian School, is married to Sharon (who has taught at MECS for 25+ years!), and has one beautiful teenage son, Owen. He has been teaching the two National Institute for Christian Education foundation units, seeing teachers grow in their passion and understanding of this wonderful vocation.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