



Why Christian Education? What are the Issues with Secular Education?

We have been addressing different topics to help parents make informed decisions concerning the education of their children. This week we will look at 'secular education', and the problems with how values are handled within those systems. 'Secular' can be either a private or a public educational institution, but it is education that identifies itself as nonreligious in its orientation. Let me be clear: Champion Christian School is not here because we believe other private schools or the public schools are bad. From an educational perspective many are not. We have many friends and professional peers in both those movements. The Center as an organization works contractually, and I have personally invested many hours in public policy work, and have served on the Governor's Task Force on Education. However, there are fundamental philosophical differences that need to be pointed out. It is also important to understand that there is a difference between having adults involved in shaping an educational system, and submitting our children and young adults to be shaped by such a system.

Sending kids to a secular system as to a mission field is a little like the idea of 'missionary dating'. Sometimes it works out, but many times the 'missionary' is more influenced by the world view than the other way around.

It is interesting to think about why so many Christians have chosen secular education for their children. These are critical ages in values formation and shaping. For someone outside our contemporary culture it would be similar to people choosing a church that didn't believe God should be discussed in their teaching.

Why have we as a Christian community become so comfortable with the idea of secular education?

It has become the norm in American culture to think of ourselves as a 'secular' society. The definition of 'secular' in this sense means that we, as a culture, separate the sacred and the secular. One of the misconceptions about secular education is that it is opposed to religion. Secular education, as a whole, has not opposed religion. (Although this is becoming less true about Biblical Christianity.) It just wants to make religion not relevant to life. It is a compartmentalization of religion; allowing for parts of people's lives to be religious such as church attendance, observances at home, and within one's personal thoughts. The rest of the culture must then be maintained to be secular; i.e., work, school, education, politics, and every other arena. Interesting isn't it? Secularism allows us to have a personal faith, as long as that personal faith doesn't really affect any significant area of our life or anyone around us!

But, true Christianity is not just a 'religion' or a belief system. Christians believe that every part of their lives belong to the Lord and life should be understood according to the Bible.

In fact, biblically, it is questionable to even consider any part of our life as secular or without God.

Unfortunately, our post-modern and post Christian culture has begun to discriminate against Christianity while embracing all other religions or no religion. Secular schools will allow the teaching of the Koran which explicitly renounces all other religions as infidels and encourages their death but will ban the Bible saying it is 'too narrow and bigoted'.

The second misnomer about secularism is the idea that we can take values out of education.

It is important to understand that there is no such thing as a valueless education. Life is made up of and driven by our value systems. In fact, even the idea of taking religious values out of education is a value! So, in reality, secular education tries to replace religious values, which historically ruled and dominated education, with nonreligious and secular values. Secular education at best implies that it isn't opposed to religion, at the worst implies that Christian-based values are inappropriate in this arena. Let's look, for example, the cases involving the displays of the Ten Commandments on Federal property. Some courts have interpreted this to be unconstitutional; while the first official act of Congress was the printing

of Bibles! Why do some Christians oppose being involved in government? Is that in the Bible? NO! The secular value system is the one that says the public arena is no place for God. That battle is still playing out in how our society understands cultural values. Obviously, we can see why the greatest minds in our society that understand the need for values to drive our society, are laying all of their hopes on the Christian education movement in America to shape the next generation. We need to help everyone know that the success of science, government, education, and the family is based on understanding the true values that have driven our culture. We see what's happening in our culture today as secular educational systems define our future culture. We are now realizing what it means to have the adults who have significant power in our country being the first generations of people who have grown up in a truly secular driven educational system. Our hope in the Christian education movement is that children in Christian schools will be able to live Christianly in the real world; the world that includes God given and ordained values that drive us towards personal achievement, compassion with our fellow man, honor, and hard work. Values that are important because they are not just mine but come from a higher authority. They come from The One who created all of this in the first place!

As parents, we need to be careful to understand and make our decisions regarding our children's education while not being duped by the idea that education is value neutral. It is not. The choices we make about education are either distinctly Christian or they are non-Christian. And it is very difficult to be counter-cultural!

It is important to consider that regardless of the choice of education that you make, the school system will significantly affect your child's value system. Whether that school identifies its values or whether there is an implication that values are neutral, there is no way to make education or any of life void of values.

The real question is what values will our children learn?

So as you are choosing the kind of educational system that you would like for your child this year, remember that it is not a choice about "Do I want something better than neutral?" It is a choice about what values will drive the education and future understanding of your children's values.

I don't want to finish this topic without noting that there are many Christians who are teaching in the public and private arenas that are secular. It is important to remember that you can be a Christian in those arenas and realize that it is a major mission field. However, you cannot teach Christianly in a secular environment, public or private. You can be a Christian, but you cannot be a Christian teacher. Many of these professionals have given their lives to impacting kids in positive and valuable ways, and many have been able to be a strong witness in those settings. But they cannot integrate their faith into every subject area, or pray with their classes. The Bible says in Luke 6:40, "A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher." And that is an important but distinct difference, one that causes great controversy and is a point of debate beyond the scope of this article. But as it relates to children, what values do children pick up in that context that are implied and not necessarily spoken?

As you choose and think about Champion Christian this year, whether it is retention or in a new enrollment model, think about what your children and young adults are learning about life. Is it to cope with a non-Christian value system or to contribute and integrate it into their life? There are no guarantees about what values kids will choose. Regularly at faculty meetings at CCS we identify how difficult it is to combat the culture that kids are getting even with 30 hours a week to impact them in school in addition to what they get at home and church. Think about the values that will drive your children's education and how will they shape your child's mind about work, play, home, school, marriage, vocation, and the things that they will ultimately do in life. Will they be distinctly Christian in their presentation?

Thank you and God bless your decision-making.

Merle

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