

Who Stands at the Center?

(Christian Schooling at Westminster Academy)



Every school that takes seriously its role as an educational institution has a well-defined and clearly articulated philosophy of education. A school's philosophy of education is the window, so-to-speak, through which it views life, morality, values, the world, and knowledge; in fact, everything that pertains to human existence. All that is done or said by the school in its total program will be determined and shaped by its philosophy.

Parents, before they entrust their children to a particular school or school system, should explore carefully the philosophy of education that underlies as a foundation the school's programs. What does the school believe about God, about man, about life, about values and morals? What does it deem worth knowing? From what set of presuppositions and priorities does it operate in the task of educating its students? It is at this very point that the true distinctions and differences between schools can be found. The school's philosophy of education is the basis upon which all things are done — from the size and shape of its buildings to the subject matter taught in the classroom. It governs what is or is not acceptable as behavior among the students, and what may or may not be spoken by the individual teacher. The kinds of courses offered, the types of teachers that are hired, the priorities found in the annual budget — all of these are determined by the school's philosophy of education.

Two Philosophies

There are basically two categories or kinds of educational philosophy. This may appear to be an overly simplistic distinction. It is, however, true. The two dominant alternatives in education today are the religious and the secular philosophies. Within each are many varieties, to be sure, but they ultimately fall under one of the two basic headings: religious and secular.

The earliest educational efforts in colonial America were predominantly religious in their scope and concern. Education was viewed as a God-given obligation to parents, with God at the center of all learning.

With the secularization of the state, there has come the secularization of the schools. This is especially true in the public schools of our country. The rise of the public school system, as helpful and necessary as it has been, has been accompanied by many new trends, not the least of which has been the gradual removal of the living God and the truths contained in the Holy Scriptures from the educational process. This is clearly seen, for example, in the philosophy of education held by leaders of the developing public school system. Horace Mann, widely recognized as the father of public education, was a Unitarian lawyer turned educator from Massachusetts. John Dewey was the torch that brought many needed reforms and new insights to American education. He was, however, an avowed atheist and evolutionist. Said Dewey, "There is no God, and there is no soul. There is no room for fixed, natural law or moral attributes."

Public education has become, in the deepest sense, secular education: that is, as Webster defines secularism, "a rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations." God has become excluded from public education, not only in practice but in philosophy. The underlying philosophies have become basically scientific naturalism, humanism, and materialism.

This secular philosophy has not only shaped and determined the course of public education but has also been embraced by many sectors of private education. Except for those schools that specifically and clearly have declared their basic religious orientation, private education at every level is as secular in its philosophy and practice

as the public school system. Whether it be a public school, the finest private preparatory school, a vocational school, or any other type of school in the broad expanse of alternatives available to the American public, the student will be nurtured in an educational environment that is secular together with the three children of secularism: naturalism, humanism, and materialism. These are the very soul of secular education, whether private or public.

The religious philosophy of education rejects the basic tenets of secularism. It holds its religious convictions and precepts as essential to life and knowledge. The philosophy of education at Westminster Academy® is not only religious but more distinctly a Christian philosophy of education. It embraces concepts and beliefs which are at their very roots different from the philosophies of the secular world.

Two Viewpoints

The basic consideration for me as a parent, therefore, in taking seriously my God-given responsibility to educate and train my children, is a philosophical consideration. Will my children be immersed in an educational environment in which they will learn to view themselves and their world from man's viewpoint or from God's viewpoint? In the former, science is viewed as a set of natural laws at work; in the latter, God the Creator is seen as present and active in the outworking of His laws. History, in the former frame of reference, is seen either as a hopeless tide of events sweeping through each generation in a repetitious cycle, or as an illogical, fickle, frustrating phenomenon that must be captured and modified by human effort. From the Christian viewpoint, however, governments, nations, empires, cultures, even the events of my everyday world, are seen as being moved upon and controlled by the Lord of history. The same basic distinctions are found in the study of literature, philosophy, psychology, and the other disciplines.

A Christian philosophy of education sees God at the very center of all of life, whether it be health or geometry, science or literature, values education or physical education. The Christian philosophy of education demands the approach to learning that places God and the truths of the Holy Scriptures at the center and calls upon teacher and student alike to interpret and evaluate all things from God's perspective.

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The Bible is used to evaluate all of life. Westminster Academy®, therefore, is not a Christian school because its faculty are members of a Christian church, or because daily Bible instruction is offered, or because its students attend chapel. It is not Christian because its students or their parents are perfect examples of God's redeemed community — we all fall far short. It is Christian because from its philosophical base and its commitment in daily practice it believes that the natural world only takes on meaning when viewed through the eyeglasses of the Word of God. Students are encouraged and hopefully enabled to view all of life from God's point of view. We are a Christian school because in all things we provide a Christ-centered, biblically-based education and strive to allow that education to glorify God by the way we live it out on a daily basis.

Therefore, the central issue is not free education versus tuition payments, general versus college preparatory education, or the degree to which discipline is or is not present. It is not relaxed clothing standards

versus uniforms, or big school versus small school. All of the above are certainly matters that one must take into consideration. However, the central issue is a philosophical one. Through what window do you wish your child to view life — through the window of secularism and humanism or the window of the Holy Scriptures? It is a struggle for truth; who stands at the center of all things — man or God?

Is It More Than Mere Rhetoric?

The schools that are serious about the business of education have a well-defined and clearly articulated philosophy of education. It is one thing, however, to have on paper a statement concerning a school's philosophy of education and quite another to actually allow that philosophy to come alive in the life of the school. There are many schools at both the secondary and university levels, for example, which operate under a stated philosophy that is Christian but whose curriculum is secular, through and through. There are schools,

both secular and Christian, who supposedly embrace excellence as the only standard tolerable in education, but who in budgeting priorities, curriculum design, and faculty hiring practices, belie their well-phrased philosophy. It is quite easy to be a second-rate school with a first-class statement of philosophy.

When a school goes through the accreditation process, the single most important document scrutinized by the accrediting agency is the school's statement of purpose and philosophy of education. A school is evaluated, first of all, on the basis of what it claims to be and what it claims to believe. The second most important aspect of the evaluation process is an evaluation of how well the school actually practices what it claims to believe. If quality education is its aim, is quality education going on? If the individual is important, does the design of the curriculum pay attention to the individual? If God is central to all things, is that reflected in the classroom and the hallways? A school is evaluated, then, on the basis of what it claims to be and to believe,

Statement of Purpose and Educational Philosophy of Westminster Academy®

I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Westminster Academy® is a parochial school and agency of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church. Primarily, it is committed to educating the children of this church and seeks to provide a curriculum that reflects their various needs and that is based upon and is faithful to the Holy Scriptures as interpreted in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechism. Secondly, Westminster Academy® is committed to educating children of other professing Christians, regardless of race, color, or national origin.

Believing that the parent has the responsibility for educating and nurturing the child, Westminster Academy® also recognizes that the church and the school must work together with the family to provide a unified worldview. The school is not to take the place of the home or the church but is committed to help both fulfill their Christian responsibilities.

II. PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION TRUE EDUCATION

God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — reveals Himself in His world and in His Word. He is the Sovereign Lord of History, the Author and Revealer of Truth, the Creator, Sustainer, and

Consummator of Life. Without Him life is meaningless, and education is misdirected.

God the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, has given us truth in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Scriptures, the only infallible and authoritative basis for faith and practice. Education is the total process of coming to know the truth of God, applying that truth to all of life, and evaluating all of life by that truth. God is ultimate in entering and understanding that pattern of life.

We are naturally blinded to the truth because of the disintegrating effect sin has on each one of us in every area of life. Because of sin, our minds are darkened, and we are incapable of understanding or obeying God's truth.

Freedom from this blindness comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. He alone has paid the penalty for our sins and has taken our deserved judgment and death. He offers us the free gift of eternal life because of His immeasurable grace and calls us according to the purpose of His own will. Only through faith in Jesus is the human being at last set free to hear, understand and obey God's truth and to become a part of God's family.

Life at Westminster Academy® seeks every

opportunity to know and share this truth and to experience its effects upon our lives and our approach to education. In all of its activities, the school submits itself to the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit who has been sent by God to guide us into all truth. All things are to be done to God's glory; our primary responsibility is to Him. Therefore, true education has God alone at its center.

Education in the Reformed tradition is education of, and for the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Christ's kingdom is not only a future kingdom for which we hope, but also a present one in which we participate. It is a kingdom present not only in the quietness of the heart, but also publicly; public not only in the life of the individual, but also collectively; collectively not only in the worship and work of the church, but also within ordinary society. It is a kingdom in which Christ's people are to be led not only to a righteous stand against certain behavior and societal structures, but also to work for the transforming of that behavior and those structures through our present and future priestly endeavors in the basic spheres of family, vocation and culture. It is a kingdom requiring ultimate and final allegiance to Jesus Christ in all of life.

Above all else, Christ's kingdom is not an austere power and rule imposed impersonally from afar

and also on how well it carries out its beliefs and claims on a daily basis.

There are some Christian educators who resist accreditation as an unnecessary intrusion from the secular world. The cautions and fears are well-taken that the Christian school must oppose any attempts to dilute its basic commitment to a God-centered program. However, accrediting agencies have not been in the practice of forcing any particular philosophy on a given school.

The educators do, however, scrutinize what the school says about itself. Each school is evaluated in the light of its own stated philosophy of education. In other words, within the framework of a given set of criteria by which all member schools are evaluated, the question is asked: "Who do you claim to be and how well do you actually live up to those claims?"

Westminster Academy® voluntarily submits itself to the evaluative searchlight of several accrediting agencies. It is an accredited

member of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, the Florida Council of Independent Schools, the Florida Kindergarten Council, Christian Schools of Florida and the Commission for International and Trans-Regional Accreditation. Westminster is also an active member of the Broward County Non-Public School Association.

Our Aim

Our attempt as a school is to faithfully live out what we claim to be. This is true not only in the area of religious instruction but in every area. Our aim is to allow what we claim to be and to believe to shine through what we do in every area of the schooling process.

The Academic Side of Christian Schooling

Westminster Academy® has an aggressive and ambitious process in place for developing and delivering the highest quality academic program. While thoroughly biblical

in its orientation, it is exceptional in terms of content, delivery, and anticipated results.

IMPACTwa is a program unique to Westminster Academy®. Originally developed in cooperation with Iowa State University, *IMPACTwa* is the process whereby every aspect of the curriculum is continually being reviewed, revised, and improved. Teachers are continually at work with others in reviewing and refining what is to be taught and how student achievement will be measured, as well as how student achievement will be reported.

Most schools rely on textbooks to determine their curricula. Others allow the curriculum to blow in the wind, so to speak, by relying on the interests and preferences of the classroom teachers.

If asked at the outset of the year what specific learner outcomes will be focused upon, what mastery levels will be expected of the students, and how those mastery

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requiring repressive servility. Rather, it is a covenantal relationship of encounter and response wherein Christ's people experience the intimacy of God's empowering and sustained presence.

THE LEARNER AND LEARNING

We recognize and affirm that every person has been created in the image of God with a unique identity. Within this person exist individual strengths and weaknesses, capabilities and limitations. By grace, through faith in Jesus, the individual enters that relationship with God whereby he is nurtured and matured. Thus, we want every person in our school to grow as an individual; acknowledging, appreciating, and using the identity which God has given and following the course which God has established for him.

We recognize that this unique identity is only fully realized as a person is in community with other Christians. Within the Christian community there is a blending of selves without the loss of individuality. Here we accept and are accepted, affirm and are affirmed; here we encourage and are encouraged; here we find strength as we give our lives to Christ and to each other.

Within this community we, as individuals, learn to recognize, accept, and prepare ourselves for the responsibilities that God has given to us. In this learning process, we experience times of success and times of failure. Throughout our effort we will be upheld and guided by the loving support and discipline of the community of Christ.

Living out these beliefs at Westminster Academy® includes educating the whole person for a whole life by providing experiences which

educate the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical areas of his life.

We believe that the individual is a spiritual being, created for fellowship with God. This relationship is initiated only through a personal encounter with Christ. Subsequent growth in the Christian life is a progressive development nurtured by praying, studying, obeying the Scriptures, and by participating in the Christian community. This development leads to a concern for the family, church, nation, and world.

We believe that the individual is an emotional being who acts, reacts, and interacts according to a God-given set of affections and feelings. Only through a relationship with Christ can a person find emotional wholeness. As he grows in this relationship, he recognizes the talents and limitations God has given and learns to accept himself as he is. He reaches out to others whom he learns to accept and with whom he shares his life and experiences. Through this sharing, he learns the joy of giving, loving, and trusting. Sometimes he experiences disappointments and frustrations in himself and with others. The relationship with Christ allows the Christian to act, in all circumstances, honestly and appropriately.

We believe that the individual is a rational being, capable of developing and exercising those mental disciplines necessary for life in contemporary times. The human intellect, blighted and warped by sin, is set free through faith in Jesus Christ in order to know God, to look at life from God's perspective, and to think God's thoughts. Through training, discipline, encouragement, and exposure to the various branches of learning, the human intellect grows and develops according to its own

unique capabilities and limitations. Through this intellectual growth, the individual takes his place in society and makes his own positive contributions to that society. Faith and intellect are compatible. In God's scheme, neither can adequately function without the other. The man of faith, therefore, takes seriously the intellect; the truly rational man, faith.

We believe that the individual is a physical being. Throughout history, however, mankind has promoted two errors concerning this physical being. One demeans man's physicalness, viewing it as a hindrance, a type of prison to be endured. The other worships the body, making its care, development and well-being the central issue of life. We reject both extremes. The physical body is a definite part of man's essential being and is a gift from God. Therefore, the Christian has a duty to understand it, care for it, and develop it properly. The body is to be disciplined and not worshiped, to be nourished and not rejected. The physical body of the Christian is the dwelling place of God's Holy Spirit. As such, it is offered up to God for His use.

Education, therefore, is concerned with the whole man. It seeks to bring the whole man to God through Christ and to aid man's subsequent growth in that new relationship. It also seeks to give the whole man training for a productive life in a contemporary society.

THE TEACHER

We believe that teaching is a godly, priestly vocation reserved for those specially equipped

levels will be reported, most schools will return your question with a blank stare. In the public schools curriculum is usually handed down from a state hierarchy.

*IMPACT*wa engages the entire team of Westminster faculty and administrators in this ongoing task. National and state standards are consulted. Annual results from national tests are studied (e.g. the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test, the Scholastic Aptitude Test, and national subject matter tests). Collaborative teams of teachers lend their experience and insight to the task. In this way a solid, well-designed curriculum is continually produced and delivered.

Our goal is to maintain the highest level of competency and performance.

Does It Work?

It's fine to talk about philosophies of education or the necessity to keep everything in balance, but a question comes to mind. *"The environment may be Christian. I like the friends my children have at a school like Westminster. I know that I shouldn't even weigh these things in terms of dollars and cents, but let's face it, it costs me a lot for tuition each year. Besides the Christian emphasis and the good environment, are my children receiving a quality academic education? I've heard rumors at times that Christian schools are long on the Bible but short on everything else."*

Test Scores

The results of various testing instruments used at Westminster Academy® indicate several important facts about the level of achievement in the school. The tests used vary from year to year but include the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (grades 1-8), the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (grades 9-11), and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (grades 11-12). The test score results of Westminster students are compared annually with national norms and with the scores of students in other schools.

Academic Soundness and More

In summary, this is what can be truly said about students enrolled at Westminster Academy®: each student will be personally known, deeply loved, fervently upheld in prayer, and positively encouraged by

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Statement of Purpose Continued

and called by the Lord and who evidence a love for children and a mastery of the essential teaching skills. Teaching is a spiritual ministry reserved for those who give evidence of a personal embracing of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who have received the Holy Scriptures as their sole rule for faith and practice, and whose faith goes beyond a mere tacit agreement with particular theological propositions to an exemplary spiritual life that qualifies the teacher to be model and mentor as well as instructor.

In accordance with the traditional concept of *in loco parentis*, the teacher is engaged by the parent to enter the child's life in a position of honor, obedience and reverence.

THE PARENTS

We believe that parents are charged by God with the responsibility for the child's education and nurture. We also believe that the home is to be the center of all learning, for worship and work, devotion and discipline. In a highly technical and specialized

society, parents voluntarily engage godly teachers to assist them in the educating and nurturing of their child.

Because parents are given the primary responsibility for the educating and nurturing of their children, and since that educating and nurturing is to be biblical both in its purpose and content, Christian schools are to be established with freedom from the permission and control of the secular state.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

We believe that Christian schooling is a biblical mandate. Thus, it is the obligation of the entire Christian community generally to establish, maintain, pray for, work for and financially support Christian schools, and to encourage and assist Christian parents to enroll their children in these schools.

We further believe that Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, as the rounding and governing church of the school, along with other local churches whose parents and children benefit from the school, should so engage themselves in the support of Westminster Academy®.

strong, exceptionally competent Christian teachers who are committed to providing the excellent instruction that has shaped the high level of academic achievement by which Westminster Academy® students are known. The result is a unique school climate where a desire for personal achievement is in the air. It is the assumed expectation of students that is fostered by the Christian homes from which they come and further developed by the faculty and curriculum which they experience at school. At the same time, the reality of a Christian atmosphere in which helping one another tempers the striving for personal achievement, is in stark contrast to the self-centered, win-at-any-cost competition often seen in other schools where singular, high achievement is the ultimate goal.

Added to this are all of the other advantages mentioned earlier in the discussion about philosophies of education. What is present at Westminster Academy®, therefore, is a blending of a strong academic program, a faculty composed of Christian men and women who are indwelt by God's Holy Spirit, a deliberately established philosophy that seeks to view all of life from a biblically-based and God-centered point-of-view, and a curriculum that is intended to produce growth in every area of human

development.

Westminster Academy® is a biblical alternative educationally to secular schools, whether they be private or public. It is a well constructed instructional alternative to schools that are weak in curricular design. Our goal is to bring each student to maturity, not only as a scholar and a good citizen, but also as a man or woman who is in touch with the living God and who, having received God's free gift of eternal life, is enabled to view all of life from God's point of view.



Westminster Academy admits students of any race, color, national origin, ethnicity, disability or sex to all of the rights, privileges, programs and activities made available to students of the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ethnicity, disability or sex in the administration of its educational policies, admission policies, financial assistance, athletics, or any other school administered programs, unless a particular status protected by federal, state, or local laws contradict the deeply held religious convictions of the school or Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church.