**Considering Christian Schools**

*Rebuttals for Arguments against Christian Schools*

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**Preamble**

In a study entitled “Hemorrhaging Faith” The Great Commission Foundation (TGCF) indicated that “only one in three Canadian young adults who attended church weekly as a child still do so today.” And further that “of the young adults who no longer attend church, half have also stopped identifying themselves with the Christian tradition in which they were raised.”

These findings should be alarming to Christian parents who are looking to train their children to be responsive disciples of Christ who manifest their faith through active participation in a church and service to others. In contrast to the findings of TGCF, a think tank named Cardus undertook a study to determine the long term effects of Christian schools on their graduates. Among the findings of the study, it was uncovered that students who graduated from Christian schools, when compared to graduates from Public, Separate, Home, and Private schools, were:

* More likely to attend religious services
* More likely to tithe
* More likely to put trust in church authority
* More likely to trust the Bible as infallible

The results of the Cardus study give us reason to believe that Christian schools are important both to parents and churches. Parents and churches concerned about the trends illustrated in TGCF’s study should take the Cardus results seriously as they points to one of the ways that we, as Christian communities looking to further God’s kingdom through the next generation, can react to, and hopefully, reverse the troubling trends shown in “Hemorrhaging Faith”.

**Reason for this Tract**

Parents who send their children to Christian school are often very passionate about the schooling decision that they’ve made for their children. This passion lends itself to advocacy with many parents readily touting the merits of Christian education to those who have chosen otherwise. However, many parents have indicated to me that they don’t know how to answer the common arguments against Christian education.

This tract is an expanded version of a presentation made to the parents of Community Christian School in Drayton in November 2013. The purpose of the presentation was to provide parents a toolbox of rebuttals to use in defence of Christian education. Used as arguments against Christian education are those that I have either personally heard during my years defending Christian education, but also those that are commonly heard by parents.

It is hoped that this tract will be useful in presenting and defending the merits and value of Christian education, and ultimately in serving our Lord through more children being prepared for work in His kingdom.

**Format**

Common arguments will be given individual treatment in this tract. Each argument will be listed as it is commonly heard, followed by at least one, and in some cases more, rebuttals to that argument. All have an introduction to the argument to shed some light on its possible context. Almost all are concluded by a paragraph beginning with “The Christian school is a place…”. It is hoped that this will provide concrete examples for the rebuttals and will help parents to see their own school in the response.

**Arguments and Rebuttals**

**Argument #1**

“I want my kids to be salt and light in the public school.”

***Intro to Responses***

This is a very difficult argument to respond to because the heart of all Christian parents should be that their children are able to faithfully and genuinely speak about the work of Christ in their lives. However, there are some responses that can serve to help in delving deeper into this argument.

**Response #1: “How easy is this for you to do at work?”**

In many ways I think that we’re expecting more from our children here than we’re expecting from ourselves in our everyday lives. How often do we have the opportunity to, or even the courage to, speak about our faith at our places of employment? If we do, how is it received? Are there ramifications of doing this? When the numbers are stacked heavily against us in similar circumstances, how willing are we to brave the masses and speak forthrightly about our faith?

We must provide our children with the faith tools that they need prior to sending them to do the work. It takes an enormous amount of courage to actively spread faith, and the environment is usually not conducive to this in either our places of employment or schools (more on this below). It seems to be an unfair expectation to place on our children to do this in a setting that is non-conducive while they are spending their time primarily doing the academic learning expected of them, and secondarily jockeying their place in the social dynamics of the school yard and classroom.

The Christian school is a place where they can learn and have reinforced Biblical principles for living while experimenting with personal manifestations of their faith in an environment conducive to doing so. Christian schools are training grounds for future salt and light bringers.

**Response #2: “Research shows that peer influences are more formative than parent influences”.**

Some researchers have recently shown that children are more influenced by their peers than their parents. When the time that children spend at school and on the bus is considered, it is clear that many children spend a greater amount of time with their peers and teachers than they do with their parents. Schools generally operate about 6 hours per day with perhaps an hour or more on either end of the school day added on for transporting to and from school. At least eight hours of your child’s days is spent with peers and teachers. If it is in fact true that peers are a greater influence than parents on children, and those same children are spending 8 hours a day away from parents, it is clear that the scales are lopsided in favour of peer influence on children.

It is important that parents are able to monitor and control the peer influence that is had on children. This is, of course, difficult when parents are not with their children at school. The difficulty is compounded when peer composition is unknown or undesirable. Ensuring that our children are surrounded by teachers and peers that will reinforce the values and principles that we hold true becomes even more important when we consider peer influence in this light.

The Christian school is a place where teachers are selected carefully to reflect the values and principles of the Christian community and where peers come from homes that desire the same values to be taught to their children. At a Christian school it is safer to assume that your child will be influenced by values and principles that are reflective of your family’s.

**Response #3: “Your child could be prohibited from being a salt and light”.**

Increasingly I hear stories of children from Christian families being prohibited from sharing their faith in the public school. This isn’t just the case in the classroom, but also playground. Public schools are becoming progressively more hostile to individual displays of faith, especially Christian faith. In this light, it is difficult to see that the public school is an adequate environment for our children to attempt communicating their faith.

The Christian school is a place where students have the opportunity to wrestle with their faith under the guidance of mature Christians who can help them in verbalizing their faith. The environment won’t be one where students necessarily need to share their faith with those that are unfamiliar with it, but it will be a place where children can begin to practice verbalizing their faith both with those that are familiar with it, but also with those who might challenge their thinking within an environment conducive to spiritual growth.

**Argument #2:**

“There are Christian teachers in the public system”.

***Intro to Responses***

This is a common argument in small towns where the teachers are well known and in many cases may attend the same church as their students. Although there are areas where some religious instruction sneaks its way into the daily routine, this is becoming increasingly rare.

**Response #1: Public school teachers are largely prohibited from espousing publicly their private beliefs.**

The reality is that increasingly public school teachers are prohibited from displaying or verbally stating their individual religious beliefs. Even those that do dare to profess their faith publicly can be professionally reprimanded for doing so. Even so, the public system is built to serve the public, not individual faith systems. It could be argued fairly effectively that public school teachers shouldn’t be allowed to profess their faith in a system that strives to be religiously neutral (more on this fallacy later). Under no circumstance will you enter a public school where the teacher is engaging his or her faith actively in the classroom. There may be limited moments when individual teachers are able to say a prayer or recite a Bible verse, but these will most-likely be far and few between.

The Christian school is a place where teachers are free to, and encouraged to, engage, practice, verbalize, and live out their Christian faith in the classroom. They are called to be Christian mentors who freely and honestly show students what it means to be a Christian. They pray, read scripture, lead worship songs, explain what God is doing in their life, and teach in such a way that God and redemption through Christ is a central theme in all subject areas. This simply isn’t possible, or desirable in the public school.

**Response #2: What is your goal for the education of your children?**

What you value as a family should always be reflected in the goals of education that you have for your children. For example, is the goal of education forming a greater understanding of God and His world? Is it forming the skills needed to get a good job upon graduation? Is it instilling scriptural philosophies in your children that will carry through into their whole life? Is it becoming democratic citizens who are able to contribute effectively in society? Is it all of the above? Is this goal being met?

Public schools, as explained above, are limited in what they are able to offer in terms of specific religious instruction. If your goal for your child’s education is different than what is offered by the public school, then you must be able to reconcile the difference and determine how you as a family are going to ensure that the goals that aren’t being met are met in other ways. Time is, of course, precious in this regard with so little time available for explicit instruction outside of the school day.

The Christian school is a place where the educational goals are recognized not simply as academic and cognitive. It is recognized that God is the creator and sustainer of the universe and that any learning that happens not recognizing Him as such is simply not adequate. Jesus Christ, having redeemed the sinful, and redeeming creation is recognized as the answer to the question of what should be done about injustice. The overarching goal of education is recognizing God in all things so that children can come into a greater understanding of who God is, what God has done in creation, and what God wants them to do with their lives.

**Response #3: What is the hidden curriculum?**

In education jargon, the hidden curriculum is anything that isn’t taught explicitly, but is shown to be of value implicitly. For example, it is taught explicitly that 2+2=4; the teacher spends time actually saying and teaching this to the children. However, how the teacher arranges his or her room teaches children something about what the teacher values as well. A room of straight desks all pointing towards the front of the room rather than desks arranged into circles tells something about what the teacher values. The hidden curriculum isn’t confined to only physical classroom decorations, there are other values implied in teaching as well.

Does the teacher value competition, or collaboration? Does the teacher value individualism, or community? Does the teacher value secularity, or faith? Does the teacher value humanism, or faith in God? These are just a few examples of the drastic difference between how one teacher will approach his or her craft contrary to another depending on his or her implicit values.

The Christian school is a place where the teachers’ beliefs are explicit in what they say and what they do. You know that the teachers profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and that their actions and words will reflect this. There is no guess work on the part of the students because the teachers are permitted and encouraged to integrate their Christian beliefs into their craft.

**Argument #3:**

“I don’t want my kids to be sheltered”.

***Intro to Responses***

Some parents believe that sending children to a small Christian school will limit their childrens’ ability to socialize with those from the community. The extension of this argument is often that students will be shocked when they get to a large secular high school and supposedly are forced to fend for themselves. Sometimes a personal anecdote and experience is expressed in this argument.

**Response #1: “Why not? Protecting your children is your responsibility”.**

It is the parents’ responsibility to protect their children. This is not only Biblical, but also legal. This expresses itself not only in physical protection, but spiritual protection as well. As shown above, peer and teacher influences can be very formative and so the parents’ protection is fully warranted. If spiritual formation is one of your educational goals it is fully within your rights and responsibilities that your child is being exposed only to that which will foster their spiritual formation.

The Christian school is a place where the teachers and parents are partners in the formation of children. Teachers are Christians who desire to help children achieve their full spiritual formation while realizing that academic learning is part of fulfilling this goal. At the Christian school you can be sure that your children are being exposed to the same values and faith that you cherish at home.

**Response #2: “There are plenty of extracurricular opportunities for your children to rub shoulders with the community (with you present)”.**

Sending children to a Christian school does not preclude parents from finding ways to ensure that their children have plenty of opportunities to mature socially outside of the school environment. It is important that parents recognize that they will need to guide their children through developing friendships with those that don’t share the same faith and values. However, the role of the parent will be to do this carefully and to only allow children to enter social situations that they are spiritually mature enough to handle.

The Christian school is a place where your child is trained in Biblical truths and where spiritual disciplines such as prayer, scriptural meditation, and service to others are fostered. These are core aspects of helping a child to become a mature and discerning Christian who is able to live a social Christian life with integrity, even when confronted with opposing ideologies.

**Argument #4:**

“It’s too expensive”.

***Intro to Responses***

This is a difficult argument to address because in many circumstances it is absolutely true. Because of the political climate in Ontario, private schools are prohibited from receiving government funding. Of course, this means that Christian schools must find their own ways of managing the finances of the school. Not all of the costs can be covered by donations, and so parents must finance the balance. This can be very expensive, and the reality is that the tuition fees will always be too high for some families to afford. This is a lamentable aspect of Christian schooling in Ontario.

**Response #1: “It’s an investment. What are the long-term costs of educating your children elsewhere?”**

When you consider the possible risks involved in not providing children the Christian learning and training that happens at Christian schools, the costs can be considered an investment in the child’s future. In light of the Cardus study’s results, we see that there is definite reason to believe that the probability is greater that a child graduating from a Christian school will embody more of the traits that Christian parents desire for their children than those that do their schooling elsewhere. When long term results are the benchmark, it makes sense to bank on the statistical probabilities, and there is good reason to believe that Christian schooling is a very important part of achieving positive long-term results. There will always be exceptions to the rule (ie. those that didn’t go to Christian school and turned out to be God-fearing, mature Christian citizens, and vice-versa), but prudent parenting would suggest that we provide our children with as many tools as possible to increase the probability that they will become God-fearing, mature Christian citizens.

The Christian school is a place where parents and teachers know that the long-term results that are worth investing in are not simply those that increase the potential for living a wealthy life. It is realized that the most important aspect of a Christian student’s life will be his/her decision to live for God in this world. The Christian school increases the probability that this will in fact happen.

**Response #2: “Do you know what the actual costs are?”**

In many cases, parents who don’t send their children to the Christian school don’t know the actual, published tuition fees. Many will hear certain numbers through the grapevine, but these may be either understated or overstated. Many Christian schools offer tuition assistance or tuition bursaries for families with low incomes, or those new to the school. It is important to ensure that you are well acquainted with what the tuition fees are and what the school does to help those who have difficulty affording it. In addition to this, many Christian schools are able to offer charitable donation receipts for a portion of the tuition fees. It is important to understand this fully so that prospective parents can be given accurate and attractive information.

The Christian school is a place where parents share the cost of educating their children because the Ontario government will not provide public funds. Christian schools strive very hard to keep tuition fees low by engaging volunteer workers, maintaining stewardly use of funds, and recruiting donations from those who share the same vision for Christian education. Many Christian schools offer assistance for those who might otherwise have difficulty affording Christian education. Christian schools are not elitist and they strive to ensure that all parents desiring a Christian education are able to enrol their children in the school. Many parents need to make significant financial sacrifices to do this.

**Argument #5:**

“My experience was negative”.

***Intro to Responses***

This is another very difficult argument because a person’s perception of their experience is real. For whatever reason the person saying this may have indeed had a negative experience in a Christian school when they were young. There is nothing that a Christian school can do to negate this reality except to ask for forgiveness and to become better schools. This, of course, assumes that the person is recounting their experience truthfully.

**Response #1: “Many people have poor schooling experiences”.**

The truth is that many people have had poor schooling experiences. People in all schools have had negative experiences, but that doesn’t negate the importance of education in general, and Christian school in particular. Those who had positive experiences greatly outweigh those who had negative experiences. A negative experience doesn’t negate the benefit and importance of your children receiving an education that is aligned with your family’s spiritual goals.

**Response #2: “Christian schools have changed dramatically in the past 20 years”.**

Many people will attest to the fact that Christian schooling has changed dramatically over the past two decades. As children have grown up in Christian education and new generations of people have taken over the reins at Christian schools, the content and practice has changed accordingly. There is little that Christian schools can do to change the past and it is lamentable that some were able to claim that their experience was no different than the experience that their peers had at public schools.

It is with great confidence, though, that we can say Christian schooling has changed and is constantly aiming to better itself both in educational practices and integration of Christian perspective. In fairness, if you’ve had a bad experience, you should give the school a second chance. Make a fair and informed decision by visiting the school and witnessing the day-to-day in action. We believe that education is an important enough decision for your family that you should gather as much information as you can to make an informed decision.

**Argument #6:**

“They still pray in the public school”.

***Intro to Responses***

This is an argument heard primarily by parents in small communities where prayer is still sometimes heard in the public school classrooms. The rebuttal is aimed at showing that prayer is exercised for drastically different reasons in the public school than in the Christian school.

**Response #1: “Why are they praying?”**

In a school system that claims to be faith-neutral, the question must be begged “why are they praying”? As a school do they desire to speak to God and listen to what He is saying? As a school are they looking to worship God by relying fully on Him through prayer? If the answer to either question is ‘no’, then it seems obvious that the prayer included is not being done for the same reasons that it is done in churches and in our Christian schools.

The Christian school is a place where teachers lead their children in prayer daily, even many times daily. Students are expected to bring their cares and concerns to the class so that together they can pray over these cares and concerns. Teachers pray together for strength, wisdom, and God’s direction. Teachers also engage in prayer for their students by name asking God to work in and through them. Parents pray for the school at home during their devotional time and school leaders and administrators seeks God’s guidance as decisions are made.

All in all, the Christians school is a place where God’s will is sought passionately through prayer and meditation on His Word.

**Conclusion**

The education of children is one of the most important decisions that parents make on behalf of their children. We acknowledge that education is never religiously neutral. Some simple rhetorical questions can help us to understand this fact. Does the school teach that God is the creator and sustainer of the universe? If not, who/what is? Do they teach that Jesus Christ is the sole means of salvation? If not, where does salvation lay? Do they integrate Biblical understandings into Science, Social Studies, Music, etc.? If not, what underlying assumptions guide the study of certain subjects? Do they sing worship songs, memorize scripture, discuss evangelism, explore Biblical themes? If not, what activities and disciplines are encouraged?

If the answer to any of these questions makes you uncomfortable as a family, or if the answers don’t reflect your goals for your child’s education, we feel that you owe it to your family to consider Christian school.

**Additional Resources:**

www.whychristianschools.ca

http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v8/n4/is-public-school-option

http://www.cardus.ca/research/education/CES/

http://tgcfcanada.org/hemorrhagingfaith/

http://www.csionline.org/downloads

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