

Rethinking religious education

A Christian school is a God-centred learning community. Students and their parents are drawn into a relationship with God through the impact of a total Christian environment.

Deuteronomy 11: 18-23

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the door-frames of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many.

John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in Him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Using these key passages we consciously seek to make explicit and celebrate:

1. the presence of God's Spirit
2. enhancement of facilities to promote awareness of God
3. focus on God through curriculum
4. overt behaviour that promotes a relationship with God.

Let's begin with the physical environment. We seek to celebrate God's creative works in Creation, (not nature), by building aesthetic buildings within a campus of beautiful flora.

Psalms 19:1

The heavens (God's creation) declare the glory of God.

Romans 1:20

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities - His eternal power and divine nature - have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

We are told in the Bible to remember our faith walk. The school calendar of events differs from that of most traditional private schools. Each week begins with a public gathering of parents and students. Worship, testimony, drama, music, Bible reading and teaching on a pre-determined God-centred theme. This God-centred theme then flows through the entire day's syllabus.

The Hebrews, in the Mosaic ideal, built young people into a relationship with God through a God-centred community. The religious ceremonies, festivals and calendars helped people keep an awareness of God's presence. The names of places, peoples, town and geographical features often contained a reminder of God

or His acts. The clothes, food, government, military, laws and commercial practices all flowed from Scriptural guidelines. All of community life was 'booby-trapped' with the reminders of the presence of God. In the Mosaic ideal, what was taught in the homes was reinforced and extended throughout society.

We know that the ideal was never realised. Rebellion and compromises restricted the full operation of the ideal. The disciples though, enjoyed the presence of God incarnate before them for three years. Jesus gave them a God-centred lifestyle and world view.

Matthew 6:28

See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that even Solomon in all his splendour was not dressed like one of these.

Mark 10:15

Anyone who will not receive the kingdom like a child will never enter it.

Jesus, the perfect teacher, taught the disciples to look at creation through God's eyes, to see His handiworks in all created things, to see His character in redeemed people, to know His ways through a recall of His historical acts and His daily revelation and provision.

A God-centred community of learners is wholistic. It doesn't fragment out God into Bible class and R.E. sessions, or chapel. It is different to a Sunday ceremony. A God-centred community recognises that the heart, not the head, controls a person's destiny.

It is easy to take the head trip, to know about God, to distil and clarify His ways, to systemise theology. Moses knew the ways of God, the character of God. The Israelites knew only His acts. God-centred education is heart-to heart learning. The heart embraces the totality of the human personality...the intellect, emotions and will. Revelation from the heart of God is the teacher to the student and its reverse response occurs within a relationship. It enjoys both left brain and right brain experiences, transcending a left brain culture. God-centred learning is not the transfer of information that occurs from a detached study of religion. It is rather the *transformation* that occurs in a person who has a relationship with Jesus, supported by a godly community. The Bible does not reveal God as a person who reveals himself for objective study, but instead, a Person who calls us into relationship with Him, so that we experience His revelation through our heart. Intellectualism tries to find God apart from the total personality. Without a clean heart we can not have a relationship with God.

Psalms 51:10

Create in me a clean heart O God.

Ezekiel 36:26

I will give you a new heart and put a new Spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees.