

The Messenger

Washington Christian Academy

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REFORMED DISTINCTIVES AS APPLIED TO EDUCATION

Second in the series of seven articles by Sterling Mehring, President of the Board of Directors

II. SOLA SCRIPTURA, THE SCRIPTURES IN EDUCATION

"It seemed good to me...to write...that thou mightest know the certainty of those things wherein thou hast been instructed"
Luke 1:3,4

"Scripture considers the withdrawal of God's Word from men the greatest plague and manifestation of God's wrath. On the other hand there is no greater manifestation of grace than sending His Word." --Martin Luther

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

Sola Scriptura - "on the Scriptures alone"- has been called the formal principle of the Reformation. This conviction that the Scriptures are the "sole" rule of faith and life given by God is the foundation for the material teaching of the Reformers. This was as much a departure from conventional thinking then as it is today, and it is so in two ways. First, that there is a single authoritative word from the outside, and that it is the Word of God. Sola is the bold assertion that real authority is only here. Luther could do no other than follow the Scriptures even in defiance of the intellectual world arrayed against him. Their appeal to Church Councils, to human tradition and reason left him unmoved. Second, real knowledge is God-centered not man-centered. Natural revelation (nature) and man's unaided reason is an authentic way of gaining knowledge. Man can know there is a god, know his power and see evidence of the creative work (Rom.1). He can also know something of himself and know that something in his situation is terribly wrong!

please turn to page 3

OUR TEACHERS AND STAFF

In the midst of this Christmas season with all the rush and distraction, I would like to highlight two very important events coming up in the life of our school and ask you to circle these dates on your calendar and make them a priority.

**Tuesday, January 26
Winter Society meeting
Plan to be there!**

Our school operates under the direction of the Society. All major decisions about our school's present and future are made at the Society meetings. The Board and the Administration prepares recommendations for these meetings, and then they carry out the Society's decisions on those issues. Anyone who is concerned about our school and can subscribe to the Reformed confessions may be a member of the Society, even if they do not have children in WCA.

Perhaps some parents have never attended a Society meeting or only attended when there was a controversial issue brewing. I invite each family now to make plans to attend the Society meeting next month. The Board of Directors of WCA will present information that affects each of us as a parent. They will present a budget for the 1999-2000 school year for approval by the members of the WCS Society. Even if you are not a member, you are encouraged to join us for this presentation and time of discussion. A report from our Long Range Planning and Facility Committees will also be presented. This will include an update on the Charrett to be held January 15-16.

Please, plan to come to the meeting and to the preceding dinner, at 6:00 PM. See the PTF message below for details of the dinner.

The second important date is Saturday February 6. That evening we will be honoring **Mrs. Marge Dick** on the occasion of her retirement from WCA. Mrs. Dick has faithfully served this school for 3 decades. We invite all parents, past and present, to join us for a reception to honor this special member and friend of our community.

Watch the *Koan Zone* and *Upper School Update* for further information on both of these events.

James H. Koan, II
Headmaster

Black History at WCA. At a recent Society meeting, a parent questioned why WCA doesn't celebrate Black History Month. Here is a fuller version of the answer we gave that night. Many schools celebrate Black History Month to correct their deficit in failing to include black authors, artists, scientists, and others in the curriculum. WCA does not have this deficit because the policy stated below has always been integral to our vision.

The WCA diversity policy grows out of our commitment to a school community that fully reflects the great multitude before the throne of God. Washington Christian School was integrated from its inception in 1960. The founders were so intent on making this vision a reality, that several parents drove many miles each day to provide the necessary

transportation. Silver Spring Christian Academy was also integrated from its inception in 1986.

Throughout the years we have found this policy to be successful because our faculty has a true appreciation and love for all God's covenant children. All truth belongs to God. Throughout the curriculum, WCA incorporates the truth and history of all Americans as appropriate at each grade level. Examples: Second graders have learned about the history of racial segregation, culminating their study with a trip to a play about *Brown v. Board of Education*, enacted from the viewpoint of the first-grade child, Linda Brown. Tenth graders have read *Diary of a Slave Girl*, *The Chosen*, and *The Joy Luck Club*, and they have explored native American poetry while reading Christopher Columbus's Log.

We have also always urged parents who are concerned that their child learns particular information about any people group, to explore the many opportunities to teach their child by reading at home, visiting museums, etc. Christians are a unique race, the people of God, and we celebrate our oneness in Christ!

The WCA policy is the following: "Addressing Diversity. 'Behold a great multitude...from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne' (Revelation 7:9). 'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession' (I Peter 2:9).

Washington Christian Academy, as a Christian community, addresses the varied races and cultures of God's people throughout our curriculum throughout the school year, thus not limiting the contributions of any minority in the United States to a specific month or unit. As we seek to become 'a people for God's own possession' we value the counsel of faculty members with specific knowledge or background in issues of cultural diversity, history and its impact on our community.

Teachers with specific knowledge or background in a particular culture or race serve as a resource and advisor to the faculty regarding issues of cultural diversity, history and that culture's impact on our society evaluated through the lens of a Reformed worldview. The school library also maintains a wide collection of biographies and resource material to assist teachers in this endeavor. Our teachers integrate this philosophy into the curriculum through:

Book reports
Literature
Grade appropriate history lessons
Fields trips

These are samples of how this policy is implemented and are not meant to be exclusive or exhaustive. This statement reflects the current practices of WCA, which have been affirmed by our diverse community for several years."

--Janice B. Adams

Associate Headmaster for Academics

"Teaching Kids to Study Smart" Workshop. In this upcoming workshop we will cover issues relating to study

skills and techniques, organization, homework issues and other important areas that affect a child's academic progress. We welcome your input as we prepare this workshop. What questions relating to the aforementioned areas would you like to have answered? Look for more information in the Koan Zone, and place your questions on this topic in the workshop envelope located on the bulletin board to the right of the office door.

--Carol Parent

Director of Teacher and Student Development

CLASSROOM NEWS

Early Childhood Classes. Kindergartners celebrated "Christmas around the world" in both Mrs. Wybenga's and Mrs. Grove's classes. One of the highlights was breaking the piñata.

Lower Elementary School. We praise God for healing Katherine Minitte (2nd grade), who was hospitalized in early December for pneumonia. She is recovering steadily.

Upper school. The High school had a Christmas party on December 17 at school, complete with a 6ft sub, ice cream, and a white elephant exchange. They also plan a service project on December 18, delivering toys to needy children in Washington D.C. Thus they will miss our school's ice skating on that day but they plan to make up for it in January.

The seventh graders are planning their Christmas party at the Mehrings' -on Dec 18, with a white elephant exchange, food and fun.

SCHOOL LIFE ACTIVITIES

Academy Fund Drive. We always knew our parents were our strength, and what a great encouragement it is to see how many of you have already participated in the Academy Fund Drive—and how generously. We have received \$55,000 so far this fiscal year, which puts us one-third of the way to our goal. We all know that WCA's greatest need is economic, as is the case with any Christian school. Christian schools have always been at a disadvantage over non-religious private schools because our parents all give to churches (rightly) first and foremost. Yet many of you are fitting WCA into your giving plans, too, knowing the importance of Christian education. And it does make a difference. Encourage your own parents and other relatives also to consider WCA as they choose non-profit organizations to give to this year. It will make a difference.

Matching grant fulfilled already! More than twenty thousand dollars of this year's gifts and pledges since the banquet qualify for the match we announced in the last Messenger. Many thanks to the teacher and four parents who have pledged to match this amount. All good things are from the Lord and we praise Him for His goodness.

Open House. We are planning our Open House on Jan 12, 10AM and 7PM, just one week after we return. Did you know

that our own parents are our No. 1 marketing tool? (Those expensive little ads in the Yellow Pages are No. 2.) It's time to talk to that family you know whose children would really benefit from WCA. You'll be getting a half-sized manila envelope in the mail with a WCA brochure and an invitation to give to someone. Use it over the holidays. Only a few of us were "born into" WCA; most of us were persuaded by others that Christian schooling matters. Pass it on.

Volunteers are needed! Call Sue Ewell or , to help with food, Sherri Menkis.

--Robin Gropp
Director of Advancement

SCRIP is back! SCRIP is once again available in the Business Manager's office. Margaret is happy to supply you with this easy way to pay for groceries. This is how it works: purchase SCRIP (special gift certificate) for your favorite grocery stores, like Giant, Shoppers' Food Warehouse, etc. Then spend it at the store just as you would spend money, and a portion of each dollar you spend goes toward a new sound system, classroom globes, classroom flags, etc., for our school.

This is a very easy and convenient way to support WCA. If you would like to volunteer to help make SCRIP more accessible, please contact Karen Lees.

Moms in Touch. The two-to-four faithful moms meet on Thursday mornings in the kitchen. We'd love more parents to join us! We also would like to encourage the staff and parents to submit requests to us, placing it into our box in the teachers' workroom. Prayers are offered on a variety of needs, ranging from physical plant needs (e.g., the modulars), safety and health (e.g. Marge Dick's broken arm, and her son's broken leg), guidance for decisions to be made, family reconciliations, finances, special events, and, above all, that the Lord would be glorified in all that we do. We hope all families pray regularly and specifically for their children's classroom teachers. And over the Christmas break, we pray especially for salvation opportunities to open up for unsaved family members and friends.

PTF. Greetings in this joyful season as we celebrate the birth of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ! The January 26th Society Meeting which will begin at 6PM as we fellowship and break bread together with a covered-dish dinner. The meeting will follow at 7pm. The PTF will supply the main course and beverages. We are asking families with last names beginning with A-K to bring a salad or vegetable dish to share; families with last names beginning with L-Z are asked to bring a dessert to share. See you there!

Athletics. I have coached now for over 26 years and consistently have seen a disturbing pattern. Even Christian coaches and teachers do not seem to understand how important their calling is to God, to students, to parents, and to their communities. I am talking about the power of the tongue (Prov. 18:21). Words are instrumental in salvation, as well as in

building up or tearing down, in hurting or in healing. Let me illustrate. Let's assume you are coaching a team and a player just made a stupid mistake that possibly could cost you the game. How will you react?

- a. scream at the player
- b. tell others how stupid the player was who made the mistake
- c. ignore the player and immediately substitute for him/her
- d. say. "Good try. You will get it the next time. Keep trying."

A Christian must choose 'd,' as he understands grace and forgiveness from his own relationship with the Lord. Our actions on the court and off the court are reflections of this relationship. We, the coaches at WCA, seek to exemplify this true Christian character with our words, choices, and reactions. With our focus on Jesus Christ, we strive to encourage and strengthen those trusted to our care.

--Coach Jay L. Barnhart
Athletic Director

Booster Club. The Booster Club will begin its penny campaign in February. The goal is one million pennies. That's right, one million pennies! More information will be provided to you in the coming weeks. In the meantime, save your pennies.

Basketball games have started. Check the bulletin board for schedule. Come and cheer on our teams.

In January, Wildcat sweatshirts, designed by our own Agur Adams, will be available to order.

SOLE SCRIPTURA, *continued from front page*
Man, in nature, knows enough to be without excuse but lacks the ability to apprehend the most important knowledge of all, the knowledge that gives meaning to all other questions. The reformation tradition has emphasized that man's highest knowledge is that of God and the consequent knowledge man has of himself. This knowledge is adequately found SOLELY in the Scriptures (special revelation). Special revelation tells who we are, what we are meant to be, who God is, and how that undefined longing can be fulfilled in Reconciliation. The priority of Special revelation determines our template for seeking knowledge. From the vantagepoint of Christian revelation we seek to understand all things, sometimes described as "faith seeking understanding". The modern heirs of the enlightenment begin with man as the measure of all things seeking to understand the universe by application of reason. Although discredited, the slogans and promises of reason alone are ever present. But man-centered knowledge leads to the despair of the unending search for meaning.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

Integrating Principle

In his book, *The End of Education*, Neil Postman makes a compelling argument for the essentially metaphysical or "religious" nature of education. He states that the end or abiding purpose of the whole enterprise must be to convey a vision of reality that is ultimate, to give students a credible view of the universe and their place in it. His point is that all

education will of necessity be integrated around some story, idea, or narrative that makes a claim to being ultimate. He feels the default narrative today is consumerism, i.e. a fumbled education equals loss of job opportunities and the “tragedy” of lower income and fewer shopping experiences. Postman claims that other gods and narratives claimed today include technology as savior, and environmentalism. These and other secular narratives fail the student and fall short of any credible claim at being ultimate. We should not wonder that so many are rejecting an education that has so flimsy a rationale.

There is no crisis of education when that project is integrated around an ultimate narrative as to nature and destiny of creation and man’s place in it. Teachers have a reason to pass on the inherited wealth of our culture and values within a Christian worldview. Students have a motivation and reason to sacrifice and learn. The Bible is our narrative. It is God’s unveiling of Himself, of His Will, and gives man an insight into the mysteries of His creation. Because it gives a basis for every subject properly taught in a school, Scripture is woven throughout the curriculum, not added on top. Bible is not a subject like literature. It informs every subject and determines how it is studied. We select teachers for their commitment to integrating Scripture in teaching within their own fields of expertise. In a real sense, all teachers are Bible teachers, as they labor to bring all knowledge under the Lordship of Christ (2 Cor 10:5). We shun the notion of separate spheres of secular learning and Christian living.

Teaching with Authority

21st century man is like the proverbial mariner wandering the trackless sea. He takes his navigational bearings from a heavenly light, but then despairs when he learns his reference was his own masthead light. Recognizing the tragedy of this situation, Socrates is said to have cried out for “a raft of revelation to carry me over the seas of doubt”. As a Christian school, our star, our raft is the Word of God contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This changes everything for a school! The watching world will regard our teachers as they did Jesus “for he taught them as one having authority and not as the” scholars of the day (Mt 7:29). The attitude is different when we see ourselves conveying objective truth rather than helping the student “discover his own truth in social interaction”. We diverge from our society when we seek conformity to Christ-like virtues instead of “values formation”. We find teachers with authority help students recover the heroic in life as well as art because they are confidently teaching real duties and real rewards. Teaching with authority results in emphasizing content and demoting discovery from an end in itself to a means of creative teaching. If you are sure of the value of the truth to be taught, the process of discovery takes a back seat to its object.

Importance of the Word

The very idea that the Reformers taught that finite words can

convey sufficient information about the infinite and transcendent God is very important. Language and literacy is given a prestige that is being lost in secular education today. If God has trusted the Revelation of Himself to the written Word, the motivation to establish schools is clear. On the frontier, in the Pilgrim colonies or banished to foreign exile, one of the first acts of the Reformed community was to start Christian schools. The highest rates of literacy ever achieved on this continent were in Puritan New England. The first schools for American Indians were founded to teach them how to read the Bible. It is in the area of language and literary interpretation where Christians are facing a most concerted attack. In colleges, our graduates face great skepticism over the idea of real truth or meaning being conveyed in words. Although it sounds like faint praise, we place a priority on reading. But actually this is significant, because we have an infinitely serious motivation. We honor the written word, and continually teach the discipline of reading because it is the basic tool for furnishing the mind for fellowship with God. We honor the written word by valuing excellent books. You will not find the leadership reluctant to making needed investments in excellent books.

Suggested further readings on this topic:

“The Institutes of the Christian Religion” Book I, by John Calvin

“Westminster Confession of Faith” Chapter 1

“The End of Education” by Neil Postman, Knopf

“How to Read a Book” by Mortimer J. Adler, Simon & Schuster, 1957

“The Humiliation of the Word” by Jacques Ellul

TO PONDER

Bryan Estelle shared with us the following quote from a Christmas sermon of St. Augustine: "He so loved us that for our sakes He, through whom time was made, was made in time; and He, older by eternity than the world itself, was younger in age than many of His servants in the world; He, who made man, was made man; He was given existence by a mother whom He brought into existence; He was carried in hands which He formed; He nursed at breasts which He filled; He cried like a babe in the manger in speechless infancy - this Word without which human eloquence is speechless!"

***May the wonder of God’s grace
and the joy of salvation brighten
your Christmas celebration and the
whole coming new year!***

Coram Deo