

The Messenger

Washington Christian Academy

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REFORMED DISTINCTIVES AS APPLIED TO EDUCATION

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

III. Sovereignty of God--The God of all Truth

Westminster Confession 2:2 "God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of Himself...He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, and hath most sovereign dominion over them."

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE?

The doctrine of God begins with the assertion that God is and that He is the final explanation of all that exists. God Is. In his revelation to Moses, God called himself "I AM." The Old Testament name for God in Hebrew is *Yahweh* (translated *Jehovah* in Greek), literally I AM. God's existence is not something the scriptures pause to prove; it is assumed. To eyes unhindered by the cataracts of sin, everything testifies to the fact that God is (Ps 19). G. K. Chesterton observed, "...you begin to believe something when some things prove it, you really believe when everything proves it." That is the perspective of Scripture and the Reformers. God's being is not some added feature he possesses; rather, God gives being its meaning. Colossians tells us all things have their existence in him! In Him, all things hold together. God not only IS, but everything that is, is because of Him! He is alone the fountain of all being.

All the "stuff" of our experience owes its origin and existence to God and His sovereign rule. Recognizing this makes a profound difference to our vision of reality. It is an integrated whole with God at the center. The secular culture sees a universe of unrelated particulars, an incomprehensible collection of facts. The Christian recognizes a universe unified in principle, where God is the infinite reference point that gives meaning to all finite reality. We say with Augustine that every "...Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth it is the Lord's." There are no "maverick molecules" outside his control, no accidents of history not governed by God.

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OUR TEACHERS AND STAFF

Promise Tree March 6. We are grateful to each parent for your support of God's work at WCA throughout the year and we look forward each year, to this special event of lighthearted fellowship, food, and the occasional bidding "war" (Who can forget the \$475 pan of Macaroni & Cheese?). Don't miss this year's *Promise Tree Auction* at Church of the Atonement, in Rankin Hall (facing Amherst Avenue).

Each year, months of planning and labor go into the *Promise Tree Auction* that began over 25 years ago on the old Arcola property. In its early years, promises of goods and services were tied to an actual little tree, the "promise tree." It gradually has grown into a major fundraising event of our school. Every dollar raised at the *Promise Tree Auction* goes into our Tuition Assistance fund.

Our founders insisted on providing tuition assistance to families in need who nonetheless desired a Christian education for their children. These founding families demonstrated godly compassion in making funds available to the WCA community to offset tuition. Like those before us, we recognize the benefits tuition assistance brings to the school as a whole. These benefits include a student body that reflects the diversity of the body of Christ, and offers a more diverse educational program. Each item donated and each bid offered is an expression of Christian charity as well as an opportunity to advance our school. This explains the occasional extravagant bids – but at the same time, it is not unusual to find a real bargain.

In advance, I offer my sincere thanks to our auctioneer, Mr. Doug Hill of Channel 9 News, a WCA parent, and to our faithful Promise Tree Committee, headed by Jean Visy and Tammy Prestipino. See you at the auction!

--James H. Koan, II
Headmaster

Grandparents Day is Friday, March 19. Your parents' attendance will encourage your children that their efforts in school really matter. It will also demonstrate to them that elders are to be honored. You've probably noticed that we're working intensively

on our computers and wiring. All grandparents will be invited to participate in supporting our Technology Upgrade Project 1999 (see attached). We hope you will let your parents know how important their gifts are to your children's education.

--Robin Gropp
Director of Advancement

Student Development One of our goals at WCA is to provide our students with a high-quality, individualized academic program. To that end, we are developing several avenues to enhance students' class performance.

We are contacting senior citizens and other interested people in our constituent churches to assist us in establishing a tutoring program. Currently, we plan to provide assistance after school during the 3:30-4:30 homework hour in the aftercare program. In the future, we plan to offer individualized classroom assistance as more tutors become available.

We also hold periodic seminars and workshops for parents. This year we have covered Learning Styles, Homework Strategies, and Parent-Teacher Conferences.

All Kindergarten, first, and second grade students are presently being assessed for their level of phonological awareness. This brief screening helps to identify children who are struggling with hearing the sounds used to produce the English language. Inability to distinguish these sounds—or phonemes—dramatically impacts the development of reading skills. If discovered early enough, a systematic program that incorporates phonemic training as part of the reading instruction can be implemented and thus prevent some of the children's discouragement when they're struggling to learn to read.

These are just a few of the many ways WCA is working to provide services to students. We welcome your prayers, as well as your volunteer assistance as we strive to accomplish these worthy goals.

--Carol Parent
Director of Teacher and Student Development

CLASSROOM NEWS

Early Childhood Classes. The Kindergartners are studying reptiles. They were again able to have their learning supplemented by using the reptile zoo kit from the National Zoo. They also had a field trip to the local post office to learn about the postal system and they mailed something special to their parents.

SCHOOL LIFE ACTIVITIES

The Tuition Assistance Fund will be nearly doubled to \$194,000 for next year—largely to help

current families stay at WCA. The Board of Directors would desire that no family be deterred from re-enrolling by the increased tuition rates. Apply early if you need some assistance.

More Ways to Pay the Cost of Private Education

Parents have shared some creative ideas with us, and we are eager to facilitate your efforts. Entrepreneurs: 1) Increase your client base by publicizing your business within the WCA community. Put your business card (or a short description) in the Small Business Box in the office. We will attach a list to a future *Messenger* and post it in the school. 2) Generate income by providing needed goods or services for another school family. For example, many families need transportation and cannot easily carpool. Bus service would cost a minimum of \$70 per child per month. Do you have an extra seat in your car? Or you may be able to generate income by including another child in your family activities after school. Soon, you will be able to post goods or services you offer on a bulletin board in the Lower School Wing. Check the Small Business List and the Goods and Services bulletin board before taking your business outside the WCA community. And keep the ideas coming!

Moms in Touch We are grateful for the joy of celebrating Marge Dick's 30 years of faithful, exemplary, and inspiring service to our school, which she has always done for the Lord. We also thank our God for a new life in our school community: Chad Nunez's baby brother. We continue to pray for the classroom module-related issues; for quick recovery for Julio Barretto; for re-enrollment and new enrollments; for smooth transition for students who just started at WCA in the second semester; and for continued grace for all our students, families, teachers, and school leadership.

PTF PTF Council meetings are open to any and all parents or teachers interested and able to come. We meet monthly. Watch the *Koan Zone* for the times and dates.

Alumni Update Sandra Ritsema was a Washington Christian Academy graduate before there even was a WCA. She started Kindergarten in then-WCS, where her mother was and is still librarian, just as her two sisters and one brother did, graduating from eighth grade in 1986. Her parents were among the founders of Silver Spring Christian Academy, and she was one of the three who made up the school's first graduating class, in 1990, five years before the two schools merged to form WCA. Throughout both schools, Sandra was known as a friend

to all, an always-patient person, an irrepressible punster, one of the best students, as well as someone who loved kids and collected children's books. "Babar" is still one of her favorites.

For college, Sandra followed family tradition again and attended Calvin College in Grand Rapids, MI. Despite her lifelong ambition to become "someone who makes a lot of money" so she could buy a castle in Bavaria, she ended up going into what all her friends knew she had a special heart and talent for--teaching. Sandra earned her education degree from Calvin in 1994, and was immediately hired to teach fifth grade in the Philadelphia-Montgomery Christian School system in Philadelphia, PA, where she's been ever since.

Over the last few years, God has laid foreign mission work on Sandra's heart, though, and she recently found a way to answer that call through World Harvest Mission. After a brief introductory trip last summer, Sandra will be going to Bundibugyo, Uganda in August for a year of teaching. The region is extremely poor, remote, and war-torn, but she's found contentment and joy in the Lord's will to serve Him there. "The love of Christ compels us..." I Cor. 5:14 says, and Sandra has no regrets following his leading. Even if she's yet to make it to Bavaria!

If you would like to know more about Sandra Ritsema's plans for teaching in Uganda, you can contact World Harvest Mission at 100 West Ave. W960, Jenkintown, PA 19046-2697

Athletics In the January *Messenger* I shared my thoughts on the importance of encouragement and building up with our words in stead of criticizing, blaming, and complaining. Our attitude must reflect Christ even when emotions are strained and tested by a player's mistake, possibly leading to a lost game. WCA is at the beginning of a tremendous athletic program. Of course, the road before us will not always be smooth or full of victories. There will unavoidably be some mistakes and a few lost games. But we want to keep our focus on Jesus Christ. In this, we do not accept any compromises. So we desire to develop great Christian athletes and build our program, one step at a time, even learning and growing from our mistakes, rather than being disheartened by them. Therefore we ask you, too, to show forth a Christian attitude and encourage, reassure, and cheer on our athletes, winning or losing.

--Coach Jay L. Barnhart
Athletic Director

Sovereignty Of God *continued from front page*
Because God is sovereign, there is meaning, intention,

and purpose in everything in the universe. If it is true, it is God's truth.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE IN THE SCHOOL?

1. Confident Exploration vs. Pious Propaganda

Dogmatism is a human characteristic that grows out of insecurity. We are secure in the knowledge that the Scriptures convey real truth about reality; God has revealed real information about the universe. The surrounding culture believes "religious" statements are safely hidden away in a faith compartment and scientific statements are housed separately in a "reason" box. But confidence in the source of all truth encourages us to deliberately remove the compartments in our mind. We let the God-centered and soul-satisfying vision of reality inform all of our thinking, thus we teach without fear of where truth will lead. We explore boldly because we know all truth is traced back to God just as all sunrises find their origin in the sun. We believe the students best prepared for engaging the culture will be those who have not been insulated from the worldviews and interpretations of a world in rebellion with its Creator. Here we agree here with John Locke that "the only fence against the world is a thorough knowledge of it." The best preparation requires teachers who model the mind of Christ, teachers who coach learners to develop an appetite for truth, teachers who are learners themselves, constantly analyzing what they think and know in terms of discipleship with Christ. Romans 12 points us to a renewed and invigorated mind not a closed one. C. S. Lewis once observed that Christ "wants a child's heart but a grownup's mind."

2. Forbidden Knowledge?

We value all truth but not all knowledge. Satan's offer in Genesis 3 is intellectually attractive but ultimately destructive. Therefore, bold exploration should be guided. While looking for the good and the beautiful, wise parents and teachers draw a distinction between recognizing man's rebellion in cultural expressions and participating in the rebellion. Purity of heart need never be violated to become educated. We give each other freedom to guard our hearts and imaginations while trusting that others who seem to explore more freely, are constructively engaging our culture for God's glory.

3. Integrated Curriculum

We are intentionally teaching a coherent view of reality. All truth has one source, so we expect to find connections as we retrace the path of truth. Education has been called the science of connections, and we are explicitly making these connections across disciplines and integrating them by the principle of God's existence and sovereignty.

4. Truth and Morality are Married

Naturalists hold the power in culture and their assumptions frame the debate today. The notion that “truth” is socially constructed, that “morality is the custom of one’s country and the current feeling of one’s peers” (Samuel Butler) is almost unquestioned today. Christian education stands in antithesis to these conclusions. We teach that morality is the observable practice of truth in daily life. Just as all truth is God’s truth, all legitimate standards of behavior radiate from God’s character. Character comes from a root word meaning “enduring marks.” In character training, parents and teachers are making enduring marks on eternal creatures. We go about this task with vigor and confidence because the character traits are revealed in Scripture and are fundamentally based on the character of God. As a Christian school, we must be explicit about the character curriculum we adopt, and it must grow from a consensus in our community so that standards are taught and supported consistently where students learn and live.

5. Bias Toward Content

The influence of the world’s philosophy is very subtle in our thinking. Indifference to the existence of absolute truth naturally leads to carelessness in seeking it. One result is a loss of enthusiasm for memorization or learning facts, and more emphasis on skills. If you believe truth is “discovered” in the process of social interaction, naturally your philosophy of education will emphasize individual discovery over conveying of truth from teacher to learner. It will emphasize skills and the process of learning over content and mastery. These are questions of emphasis, not of demonizing process or discovery. But it is well that we recognize the almost mythic positive inclination we feel for the word “discovery.” Calvin made a monumental point of the fact that the knowledge of God is revealed, conveyed to man by God’s gracious act. Man could never find saving knowledge on his own. The Reformed emphasis is on God’s act of revealing truth, not man’s discovery. A contrary concern is evident in many modern published lesson plans and textbooks that shun mastery

goals in favor of process-heavy make-work exercises. If you compare them with older counterparts, you will see a striking exchange of content for process. Facts and definitions make way for colorful graphics, “social values,” and exercises to draw out the learner’s personal feelings. For us, the end of education is passing on truth to another generation. Process must serve that end.

6. A Heart for Truth

Christ said, “I am the Truth.” Satan is called the Father of Lies. Clearly, there is something fundamental about our attitude to what is true. Our convictions about the God of Truth compel us to higher standards of precision in telling the truth. We want to exercise greater care in examining evidence and coming to conclusions. We value accuracy in a society that has abandoned truth or any hope of finding it. This is not a platitude, but a very practical character trait that should characterize our graduates if we are to be successful.

Suggested further reading on this topic:

Frank E. Gaebelien, *Pattern of God’s Truth*, (Oxford University Press, 1954)

Richard Weaver, *Ideas have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948)

Douglas Wilson, *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning: An Approach to Distinctively Christian Education* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991)

TO PONDER. “While the secular world does have much mediocrity in it, its worst sin is its often deliberate bias against Christianity and Christian ethics. To fight this bias effectively and to demand a hearing requires Christian achievement of the highest order. Because of our mediocrity we Christians all too often provide the excuse the world is looking for to ignore the truth of Christianity.” (F. Schaeffer, *Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th Century Christians and the Arts*. The book is available in the WCA Heritage Library.)

Coram Deo