

Encountering the Reformation: Christian Schooling

I am not a Christian school graduate. There was a time when I mocked those who attended private schools of any sort – as a matter of principle.

Yet today, I *passionately* love Christian schooling. I'm willing to sacrifice quite a bit to ensure that my children are able to receive a Christian education.

That's a big shift – another “culture shock” that arose from embracing a Reformed worldview. But this one began before I ever heard the name “Calvin.”

From kindergarten through high school, I attended Ambridge Area School District. I was happy to be a Bridger and wore my class ring with pride. I and my friends believed private schools were for snobs and sheltered Catholics.

But over time, I came to see that we were wrong. It was hard to express *why*, but I knew that we had missed something crucial.

Then came the “culture shock” of joining a Reformed Church and having a child. Those factors combined to motivate me to figure it out.

High school offered me the first few signs that something wasn't quite right in government education-land. It was around 9th grade that I started taking my faith in Christ seriously. I and some close friends started studying the Bible, openly talking about Christ, and asking what He should mean for how we lived.

That sort of thing doesn't always get a warm reception in a public school.

Don't get me wrong; I wasn't ostracized by the (whole) student body or mocked by (most of) my teachers. Most of them didn't seem to care either way.

But there were small conflicts. A teacher cautioned me that my explicitly Christian tee shirt seemed “inappropriate.” A biology teacher reacted strongly when I refused to *believe* evolution, even though I clearly *understood* it. I was warned of possible consequences for quoting Scripture in a graduation speech.

Here's the point: school authorities clearly saw my faith as being *separate* from my education. They would tolerate it, within limits. But they did not see Scripture or faith in Christ as being necessary (or even helpful) to education.

At graduation, a friend inscribed a book he gave me with Prov. 3:5-6. And I didn't know how to reconcile that with the education I had just completed.

But I did know I wanted an explicitly Christian college education. I wasn't ready to say that government schooling was unacceptable, but I knew that it had left some big gaps. Above all, it hadn't shown me what *difference* my faith was supposed to make in my *learning*. And I wanted to know.

As I started looking at schools, Geneva was at the bottom of my list; far too close to home. But when I visited the other schools on my list, I didn't see their *faith*. They all offered religion classes and had statements of faith. But they all had the fraternities, the beer bashes, the dorms cram-packed with worldliness.

Except Geneva. There, the students actually seemed to care about their faith. The professors talked about the Bible in classes on literature and science. All students were expected to attend weekly chapels, complete a series of Bible courses, and learn about the humanities from a Christian perspective. And they didn't even allow drinking (or dancing, for that matter) on campus.

A bit to my own surprise, I enrolled at Geneva. Close to home or not, it offered an education centered around God's Word and explicit about applying our Christian faith to every corner of life. *That* is what my schooling had lacked.

But I still wasn't ready to concede. I still wasn't ready to say that Christian schooling is preferable for Christian children.

It took College Hill and Van Til to take me the rest of the way.

College Hill is the name of the Reformed Presbyterian Church Grace and I joined before we married. College Hill helped me to grasp the need to *live* my faith. I was surrounded by a Church family that believed in submitting to Christ's kingship in all of life – and in holding one another accountable to that ideal.

The men started talking to me about the local Christian school and home schooling. We had discussions about what was *lacking* at the government schools. They asked questions I couldn't (or wouldn't) answer.

Then my father-in-law visited on his way home from a conference. He had bought *Van Til's Apologetic*, a book summarizing the writings of a long-time professor of *apologetics* – the study of defending the faith. It looked interesting.

Here's what I read: “God's revelation is more than the best foundation for Christian reasoning; it is the only philosophically sound foundation for any reasoning whatsoever. ... Man's reasoning about anything whatsoever ... is unintelligible or incoherent unless the truth of the Christian Scriptures is presupposed” (5-6). Later: “It is

only if we demand of men complete submission to the living Christ of the Scriptures in every area of their lives, that we have presented to men the claims of the Lord Christ without compromise” (23).

As I read on, I came to understand: Apart from God's Word and submission to His lordship, there *is no basis* for true learning – none at all. Any educational enterprise that does not begin with God and His Word is a building without a foundation. And structures lacking a foundation are doomed.

My work as a newspaper reporter confirmed what Van Til and College Hill were teaching me. The schools I covered gave knowledge, but without showing why knowledge is possible. They taught facts while denying the Creator of facts. They taught order and intelligibility, even as they claimed that everything arose from random, meaningless chance.

And thus, finally, I was able to humble myself and admit: the public education system is bankrupt. In fact, it's worse than bankrupt; it is *in debt*. Because what it would spend on its students – the currency of facts and figures, order and understanding – it can give only by borrowing from God and His Word. “The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7).

Our children need more than that. They need not just facts, but an understanding of *Truth*. They need not just *formulas* and *calculations*, but trust in the One who ordered and upholds the world (Psalms 144-147).

They need more than knowledge. They need Wisdom. For Wisdom calls out: “Whoever finds me finds life and receives favor from the Lord. But whoever fails to find me harms himself; all who hate me love death” (Prov. 8:35-36).

I am not a Christian school graduate – but I *passionately* love Christian schooling. My love for it arises from the *fact* that only our Christian faith is able to make sense of the world.

That's the sort of wisdom our kids can't get at government schools. Yet without that wisdom, all other learning is worthless – a building set upon sand.