

# CHRISTIAN SCHOOL MYTH BUSTERS

M  MYTH

One of my favorite television shows is the Discovery Channel's MythBusters. On the show, two daring stuntmen shoot, burn, blast, and drop things all to discover the truth about everyday myths. What exactly is a myth? Well, according to the Oxford Dictionary, the most common definition of a myth is "something that many people believe but that does not exist or is false."

A great number of myths are associated with Christian education, some of them rather amusing. My favourite is the notion that Christian school kids are close to perfect. After having four kids in Christian school, I can say for sure that this is not true... and I'm sure their teachers would agree.

This booklet contains some of the most common myths we hear about Christian education. To help us bust these myths I have asked Christian school principals Anne Ferguson (John Knox Christian School), Ellen Freestone (Vancouver Christian School) and Paul Tigchelaar (Carver Christian High School) to challenge them.

**Dan Dowber**, Development Director

## MYTH 1:

**CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS ARE LIKE THE PRIVATE SCHOOLS OF THE 50s WITH BIBLE CLASS AND GOOD MORAL TEACHING.**

Christian schooling is in my blood; maybe it's even imprinted in my genetic code! My grandfather started the Christian school in his Dutch village in the early part of the 20th Century; my parents helped start a school in Alberta; and my mother's cousin was a member of Vancouver Christian School's first school board in the 40s. After all that family history, I still feel like I am just scratching the surface of what a Christian school is supposed to be. It still feels like a never-ending task of possibilities, growth, and plain hard work. But why?

Isn't it just a matter of hiring a group of Christian teachers, making sure that Bible is taught twice a week, and teaching children good Christian values and morals? If that's all it takes, it would be a fairly simple task and, frankly, that kind of school would not be much different from the kind of public or private school you might have found in the 1950s.

So then, what is a Christian school? Yes, there are Christian teachers, Bible class, morals, and values. But what inspired my family members and what continues to keep us very busy is the quest to have children understand that all of life is to be permeated by faith. We are to look for God's thumbprint everywhere and to wrestle to understand His calling in all areas of life. We need to look for this in geological rock formations, ocean ecosystems, the heroes in children's books, the history of this great country and our aboriginal people, the policies we practice surrounding relationships and... well, you see the problem; our job is never done!

More than ever, our children are shaped and influenced by a worldview that does not recognize God in the big picture or in the details, and that worldview bombards them relentlessly through media. What a privilege to have an amazing alternative to offer them throughout their school career. This means hard work that goes far deeper and beyond Bible class, morning devotions, and good moral teaching.

As parents and community members, we need to be teaching our children what it means to be faithful servants on a daily basis in all areas of life. What a daunting task! Can all this be done at home, at church, and by attending a "good" school like the ones in the 50s? I know what my relatives would say...!

**Ellen Freestone**, Principal VCS

**MYTH BUSTED**

## MYTH 2:

**CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS ONLY TEACH CREATION.**

The issue here is not one of a struggle between the Bible and science, and whether both get equally fair chances in our schools. We want our students to wrestle with real issues, such as evolution and the various accounts of creation, with their feet firmly grounded in a Christian worldview. In short, yes, we teach creation. We know from Genesis 1:1 that "God created the heavens and the earth." But what we understand from the verses that follow varies; this we also teach our students.

You will find unlimited notable stories that address the question of what to teach about creation. I read an article written by a prominent scientist and Christian author in which was described a

continuum of no less than 12 different versions of a Christian creation story. These were all based on biblical truths and “evidence”, and each was compelling in its own right. They ranged from God’s use of an evolutionary process to a belief in a very young universe.

Thirty years ago I attended Calvin College, a Christian Reformed college in Michigan, with a staunch reformed faith worldview. At the time, three professors presented a concerted view of an old creation model that placed the creation event billions of years ago. Their disciplines were Biology, Astronomy, and Geology. The perspective they shared generated huge controversy at the time, which since has settled into extensive, complex, and generally reasonable dialogue spanning science, theology, and time.

Equally committed Christians who are experts in their fields of science don’t necessarily agree on a definitive model of the creation story, but I suggest that all Christians would agree that God created. While a personal view of how God created the universe is not an issue on which our individual salvation hinges, we are nevertheless compelled to learn about the nature of God through a deepening understanding of the Bible and of the way He reveals himself through creation.

We desire to lead our students in learning about the character of God and deepening their very personal relationship with Him. We do that by developing in our students a growing understanding of Biblical revelation. We also do that by exploring math, science, literature, and all the other disciplines through which God reveals aspects of himself— aspects that will never contradict the biblical account of who God is.

Thus, we encourage our students to understand and to challenge traditional and contemporary thought as we seek to learn together the truths of God’s revelation. Yes, we teach students about various views on creation, including ones that incorporate an evolutionary process. We discuss, we agree to disagree, and we delve into the history and science of God’s creation.

Finally, we acknowledge God’s sovereignty. We seek His wisdom and guidance as we struggle with a body of knowledge that supports the creation story. Ultimately, in our faith and learning communities we seek to grow in relationship with God as we develop critical thinking skills. This combination is what makes our Christian schools distinct.

**Paul Tigchelaar**, Principal Carver **MYTH BUSTED**

### MYTH 3:

**TEACHERS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE MORE PROFESSIONAL THAN THOSE IN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS.**

The real question is whether or not Christian schools have good teachers.

What makes a good teacher? A love for the Lord and a love for children are essential, and teachers at our Christian schools are both passionate about their faith and dedicated to their students.

Teachers also need to be able to lead by example when encouraging students in faith and they should be able to successfully teach the curriculum to their students. All this happens at our Christian schools daily!

What makes a teacher professional? Teachers at Carver, Vancouver, and John Knox Christian schools are highly qualified.

Most of the teachers and administrators, like their public school counterparts, are certified by the BC College of Teachers, which requires the equivalent of at least five years of university training in order to attain

professional certification. Several teachers and administrators have even shown their dedication to improving their teaching practice by obtaining Master's Degrees in various disciplines. Some choose to focus on a particular area in the curriculum, while others focus more on special education or leadership/administration programs.

All staff members are committed to professional development, and regularly take courses and workshops to improve and update their knowledge. For example, each October, all teachers and administrators attend a two-day CTABC (Christian Teachers Association of British Columbia) conference where they go to various workshops and collaborate with their colleagues in other Christian schools. VCS, Carver, and JKCS are also members of the Society of Christian Schools and take full advantage of the experts there who keep our teachers up-to-date with all the latest literature.

Written into the contracts for all our teachers is language that mandates regular professional upgrading for teachers. All staff members regularly review curriculum within their schools in order to improve educational programs on a regular basis.

In addition to all of the above, staff at all schools are held accountable for their teaching practice by means of formative and summative evaluations. Each person is encouraged to maintain a professional portfolio documenting their growth as a teacher or an administrator. Most importantly, all three schools are proud to have teachers and support staff committed to giving their best because of their passion for Christian education.

Are teachers in Christian schools competent? Absolutely! Are they professional? Definitely! Are they less competent or professional than their public school counterparts? Certainly not! Christian school teachers are highly competent, take professional development seriously, and, most importantly, are motivated to excel by their passion and love for educating children from a Christian perspective.

**Anne Ferguson**, Principal JKCS

**MYTH BUSTED**

## MYTH 4:

**CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS ARE  
"HOT HOUSES;" THEY DON'T  
REPRESENT THE REAL  
WORLD.**

We often hear that the general public, including some Christians, is critical of Christian schools, believing them to be safe havens for children to protect them from the "real world." Christian schools have been accused of becoming ivory towers, out of touch with "real life" issues. While some parents do put their children into Christian schools for these reasons, these criticisms are neither completely accurate nor generally valid.

First of all, the real world is in Christian schools in a variety of ways. Sin permeates all of life, and we can't expect that it will stop at the doors of a Christian school! We are prone to breaking relationships and the Ten Commandments just like everyone else. Every student is on a different path spiritually; many have not yet decided which path they want to stay on. Some older students will tell you plainly that they don't believe in God; others will clearly state their desire to follow Christ while living lives that fail to reflect any such commitment. Our families, too, come from many different directions; some families struggle with deep brokenness that their children bring to school in a variety of ways.

Secondly, our children—not to mention the teachers and staff—are so influenced by a secular worldview that we hardly realize how it slips in and around us. It is not uncommon for me to hear children from good Christian homes say, "Oh my God"; years ago, this seldom

would have happened. It is increasingly difficult to convince older students that sex before marriage is not God's plan; they see and hear a very different message in a myriad of ways. Students, teachers, and parents alike all wrestle with consumerism becoming an idol. Day after day, we all struggle to untangle what is God's truth from a pervasive secular worldview behind the doors of a Christian school. And it is hard work!

So if "real" people and the "real" world are in Christian schools, then how are we different? In our schools, we get to offer another picture of reality that the media and western society often disregard, or even disdain. This view is rooted in the belief that Christ offers us a solid foundation from which to understand and cope with the "real" world.

We get to talk about things that matter deeply and thoroughly; we can talk about both secular and Christian worldviews. If we do our job well, we really aren't sheltering our children at all; we are preparing them to live daily in the world as salt and light.

**Ellen Freestone**, Principal VCS **MYTH BUSTED**



## MYTH 5:

**CHRISTIAN SCHOOLING IS FINE WHEN STUDENTS ARE YOUNGER, BUT NOT AS NECESSARY WHEN THEY'RE OLDER.**

Fact: Christian schooling is important at all stages of student development, including high school and beyond. While a child is in elementary school, the parents and the school both help to form the foundation of the child's faith and worldview. When the children are older, parents work with the Christian schools, building on this foundation, to instill in their children a love for the Lord and to teach them all they can about how Christ calls them to live.

Students need a place to explore the world from a Christian perspective when they are still young and impressionable; yet it is even more critical for students to have not only a background in Christian worldview, but the support that a Christian school offers as they mature and begin to evaluate ideas for themselves. The teens are often those years in which kids experience the most turmoil in their lives, in which they form their own identity and search for their purpose in life. At this age, students' ability to think abstractly and process more complex ideas is beginning to develop in earnest. This is often when they begin to question everything they have learned. Is what my parents told me true? What if other faiths are merely different pathways to the same destination? How, if God is good, can so many good people suffer the pain of poverty or illness?

They will likely have friends and peers who do not share their Christian beliefs. How do they maintain these friendships without losing their integrity as Christians? What if their non-believing friends are right? How does being a Christian impact decisions they make about going to a party, seeing a movie, viewing certain websites? How will they decide what to do with their lives as they approach the end of high school and have to make difficult choices about what they should do next?

A Christian school is one of the best places for them to be when addressing such difficult questions! With a compassionate and caring cloud of witnesses surrounding them, encouraging them, mentoring them, and helping them to face the difficult issues teenagers face today, teenagers can spread their wings. When they fall, the Christian community found

in schools like Carver will help cushion them.

This time in their lives is critical to their development as adults. Christian education can give them the support they need as they discern God's will for their lives, and the assurance that whatever they are called to do, they can rest safely in the arms of our Lord.

**Anne Ferguson**, Principal JKCS

**MYTH BUSTED**



## MYTH 6:

**HIGH SCHOOL SHOULD  
START IN GRADE 8!**

Actually, this is not a myth in Vancouver and Burnaby...it's absolutely true! Elementary school starts in Kindergarten and ends in Grade 7; high school begins in Grade 8. What is most important about this fact is that our little corner of North America is one of the few places that structures schooling in this way. You would be hard-pressed to find another province, state, or city that separates students in this fashion. But why? What does the rest of the continent know that we don't?

It is really very simple: a 13-year-old has very little in common with a 9-year-old, and even less in common with a 17-year-old. The young adolescent's social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development is uniquely different from an elementary student and a high school student. Across the continent, educational research supports the idea that preteens and young teens need their own place, one that recognizes their unique needs and offers a transitional stage for their development.

This place is called "middle school" and it takes into consideration what this age group needs the most in their school experience. Most schools in North America separate this group into Grades 6-8, and a few include Grade 5 as well. A middle school should not be confused with a junior high (which is really just a high school for shorter people).

And what does a middle school student need? (A few ideas:)

- Educational practices that address the whole child
- A strong dedication to recognizing and addressing social and emotional development
- A few teachers who know each student well
- Consistent communication between home and school
- A place that frees these students from being treated like primary children and frees them from the pressures faced by students who drive, date, and work.

The current model of schooling in Greater Vancouver takes children from being taught by a single teacher in a school of about 250, to a system of over 1500 students being taught by 7 or 8 teachers a day, after two months of summer vacation.

Many Christian schools have adopted a middle school model over the years, as have numerous public school systems such as Coquitlam, Abbotsford, and New Westminster. Will Burnaby and Vancouver follow the North American lead? The expense and logistics will probably prohibit this. Is middle school the only way to educate? No, clearly it isn't. You can be assured that any educational model we use will be built on excellent theories and best practices.

**Ellen Freestone**, Principal VCS

**MYTH BUSTED**



## MYTH 7:

### CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS ARE ONLY FOR WEALTHY FAMILIES.

This statement fails to address the bigger picture. We are a Christian community and we want our children to grow in faith and be equipped as lights in a dark world. It is true that tuition-based Christian school education has a cost. It is true that sacrificial investment is required. Yet, it is also very true that if we want our children to grow in their relationship with Christ, in an environment that fosters excellent, faith-based education, we cannot afford to take them out of the Christian school!

The Bible speaks to all of this. Proverbs 12 instructs us to “train up a child in the way he should go.” Matthew 6:19 says, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” God has blessed us in many and various ways, each of us with different gifts. He has given us material wealth—to some more than to others. He has given us children—some more difficult than others! Families also vary in size. All of these are factors that contribute to final decisions about education.

It is true that for some families the financial burden of Christian education seems an insurmountable obstacle. Clearly, we must prioritize our spending and our vacationing, weighing our choices against the future of our sons and daughters. Though it doesn't seem fair, some families do have to make more difficult choices than others.

And yet, as we fully trust in God, he will surely open doors for our children to participate in schools like John Knox Christian, Vancouver Christian, and Carver Christian High. Those doors may include help from churches, relatives that can offer financial support, or tuition assistance for families with need—not to mention the significant tax refund that comes with the donation portion of tuition lowering the cost appreciably.

When considering the future of your sons and daughters, ask the significant questions: What is a Biblical vision for their future? Who do we want our teens to be? How can we make this work financially? You will likely discover that you can provide them with a Christian education. You will not regret your decision.

**Paul Tigchelaar**, Principal Carver

**MYTH BUSTED**



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