Education Papers and Journal Articles   School of Education

2008

Is Christian schooling really at loggerheads with the ideas of diversity and tolerance? A rejoinder

Matthew Etherington
University of Notre Dame Australia, metherington@nd.edu.au

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME
AUSTRALIA

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Matthew Etherington

The University of Notra Dame, Australia

Abstract

This article builds on the foundations and evaluations laid recently by Symes and Gulson in their 2005 article, Crucifying Education: The rise and rise of new Christian schooling in Australia. It evaluates the warrant of Christian schooling within a liberal democracy and offers a rejoinder for defending the rights of Christian particularism within a secular educational system such as operates in Australia. In similar vein to Pike's (2004) challenge against the discrediting of Christian schooling in England, this article also questions the fundamental liberal tenet of individual autonomy as the supreme goal of education. The main thesis of this paper is that Christian schools are in fact a vital part of a diverse, tolerant and inclusive society in Australia. Moreover, any reflection of tolerance leads to other issues such as the nature of truth, values based education, belief and the warrant for one's belief, and the separation of secular and religious education.

Christian schooling

For the past thirty years, almost unnoticed by the wider community, an important movement has been developing across Australia. The last three decades has seen steady and solid growth in affordable, local, faith-based schools and the emergence of what has become known as the Christian School sector. The Australian Association of Christian Schools notes that in 1991, there were 30,477 students attending 151 Christian schools. By 2003, 75,108 students were attending 253 such schools.

One of the hallmarks of this movement has been the establishment of associations in the sector, such as Christian Schools Australia (CSA). With more than 150 member schools, employing 3,000 staff and educating more than 50,000 students, CSA is the largest association

representing the Christian school sector. Today Christian schooling is recognised as one of the fastest growing education sectors, with solid enrolment growth projected to continue.

Initially the movement received very little financial backing from either the churches or the Government. It has been attended by a sense of leadership, commitment, faith, risk, great struggle and sacrifice, and has had to contend with continual criticism and opposition. Yet the movement in retrospect can rightly be called significant and the independent schools that are part of it have come to be known as Christian schools.

Before responding to the most recent arguments against Christian schooling it is important first to provide a working definition of what is meant by Christian education. Christian education can be defined as instructing children about faith, teaching Christian doctrines, and conducting religious practice (Tye, 2000). What separates Christian education from educational philosophies such as Greek or Judaism is Jesus Christ who is the focal point of Christianity (Gaebelein, 1995). Bank, Maldonado, Lacey & Thompson (2005) note that 'although Christian doctrines often differ, faith in Jesus Christ, in addition to following His teachings, is the centre of Christianity (p.3)'.

Although Christian schools may attempt to display Christian intent from a crafted mission statement or from Biblical integration in the classroom, often a school prayer, scripture reading, devotions and sharing faith in the classroom may be the only differences between Christian institutions and other educational institutions. Although the academic success of students is important in Christian education, most important is the relationship a child develops with Jesus (Kienel, 1986). *Figure 1* shows the primary, secondary and ultimate aims of Christian education.
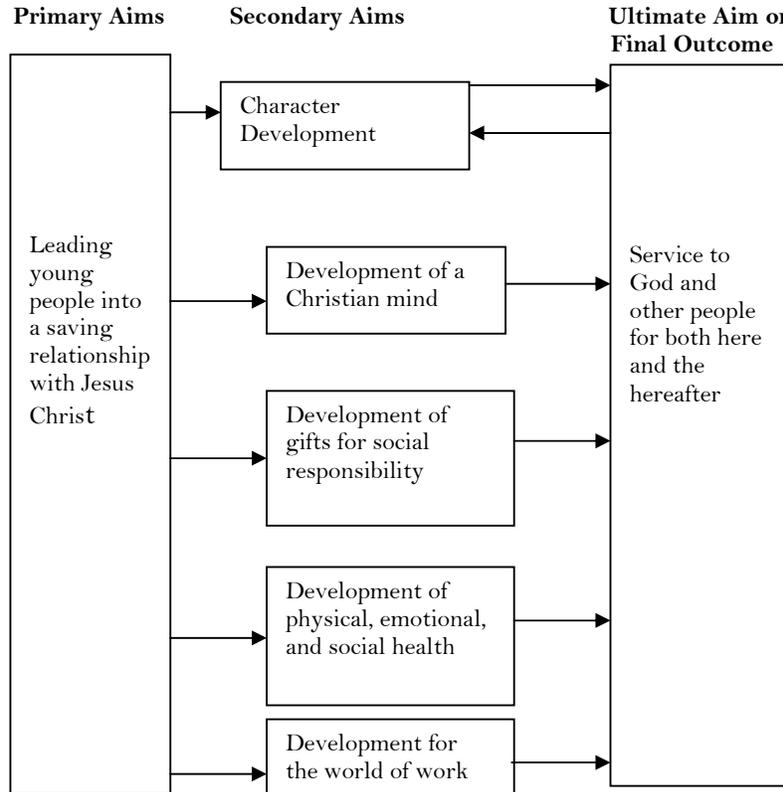
Primary Aims	Secondary Aims		Ultimate Aim or Final Outcome
Leading young people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ	Character Development		Service to God and other people for both here and the hereafter
	Development of a Christian mind		
	Development of gifts for social responsibility		
	Development of physical, emotional, and social health		
	Development for the world of work		

Figure 1. Purposes of Christian education that inform teaching. From "A Christian approach to education," by R. Knight, 2007, *Philosophy and Education: an introduction in Christian perspective*," Andrews University Press, p.216.

Tolerance

A definition of tolerance serves a practical purpose: to demonstrate that the charge of intolerance that Symes / Gulson make against Christian schools is logically inconsistent vis-à-vis a classical definition of tolerance – a definition which also serves as a point in logic. In exploring and explaining the nature of tolerance, Stetson & Conti (2005) note that in a democratic society tolerance is a value important to practice. At the same time we are sometimes unable to fully agree on what it means to be tolerant. For example, does tolerance mean the acceptance of all views as equally true, or does it mean that I should not believe too

strongly that my views are right, or most important, can I still be tolerant and believe in objective truth about religion, ethics and education?

Patrick Parkinson (2004), Professor of Law at the University of Sydney, presented trenchant criticism of religious groups who choose to express their views about issues of an ethical or moral nature. Parkinson writes: 'Consider one's freedom to express views about truth and falsehood, right and wrong, good and evil, which may offend others who have a different view on these matters. Now consider the grave danger that religious vilification, endorsed by legislation poses to this freedom'.

Parkinson has a point which requires one to consider a logical definition of tolerance. First, toleration is neither neutrality nor agreement. The *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (2006) defines tolerance as 'a policy of patient forbearance in the presence of something that is disliked or disapproved of'. We do not tolerate what we enjoy or what is generally liked or approved of. Thus, Moreland and Craig (2003) write, '…someone has a duty to tolerate a different moral view, not in the sense of thinking it is morally correct, but quite the opposite, in the sense that a person will continue to value and respect one's opponent, to treat him with dignity, to recognise his right to argue for and propagate his ideas and so forth'. Copen (1998) further notes that tolerance respects the individual, and not behaviours. Individuals have the right to a belief, and generally also have the liberty to express those beliefs; however, individuals cannot simply act, as they like. Although the concept of tolerance and intolerance is a principle most discussed and argued in the West, D'Souza (2002) notes that when we consider other world cultures we notice that there is nothing distinctively Western about intolerance. He notes the ancient civilization of India which practised an acute form of intolerance in its rigid caste system or the ethnic warfare, intertribal enslavement and the physical mutilation of women in Africa which has continued to afflict the continent. These are just two flashpoints of intolerance but they highlight a much needed defence of tolerance as a social institution worth protecting.

Intolerance is thus squared at those behaviours that are immoral to a just society and should be governed by laws to protect its citizens. Immoral behaviours are those behaviours that threaten the common good, like murder, torture, child abuse, rape, theft. Due to the harm factor that these behaviours inflict on others, such acts should not be tolerated but restricted by law. Moreover, intolerance extends to those

ideas or beliefs that propagate these immoral behaviours, as those ideas and beliefs would also threaten the culture in which they are allowed to foster. So we must then ask: What is the State's role in establishing and supporting tolerance? Locke held that one fundamental reason for the existence of the State is the preservation of man's natural right to liberty. The State is entitled and obliged to use force against an individual only when it would protect the rights of others.

In summary, there really is no culture war between tolerance and intolerance, the rivalry is really between other views of tolerance. The classical definition of tolerance entails a policy of patient forbearance. Thus logically built in to the very idea of tolerance is the presence of disagreement. Intolerance is a human problem, and not a peculiarly Western or Christian one. In the words of the eighteenth-century philosopher Voltaire, tolerance means 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it'.

The law of bivalance

Historically, if we were to examine Roman society, all religions were to the people equally true, to the philosophers equally false and to the government equally useful (Newbigin, 1986). It would be difficult to deny that this is true of some of today's 'developed' societies. But that kind of neutrality is evidence of impending collapse or else of the fact that some other ideology has taken the place usually occupied by religion.

Postmodernists claim that there are no absolutes – that truth is relative and subjective; right and wrong differ from person to person and from culture to culture. We often hear statements such as 'no one has the right to tell me what's right or wrong, you must decide for yourself what is right or wrong, it's wrong to impose your morals on someone, or look that's only your opinion' (McDowell & Hostetler, 1998). Consequently, we need to ask ourselves two questions; are truth claims objective or are all claims to truth subjective and relative to the one making the assertion? The law of bivalence is helpful here for responding to these two questions and therefore has relevance to supporters and sceptics who promote or aim to censure the advancement of Christian education.

To avoid confusion it is important to make a distinction between a declarative sentence and a proposition. A sentence is a linguistic entity

composed of words, such as, 'this is a 100 page book'. Such a sentence is complete, in that it expresses a complete thought, it has six words, a subject and a verb. A proposition on the other hand is the information content in a declarative sentence. So the proposition, 'this is a 100 page book' has information content and is meaningful in that sense. That is, the information states that the book is 100 pages. The law of bivalence holds to a point in logic which supports the proposition as true or false, and is necessarily true or false. The philosopher William Craig (2007) notes the distinction with propositions about God:

> Consider the proposition expressed by the sentence - God can be described by bivalent propositions. The Anti-Realist might retort that the above only shows that rational paradox is inevitable when we try to talk about God. But that is not the case. What is incoherent is the Anti-Realist's denial of the validity of the Principle of Bivalence for propositions about God.

Confusion about truth claims is more the result of perceptual differences due to cultural norms and ideals. For example, history has shown that the state has had many varying beliefs about what is the true religion. The Persians believed it was Islam, the Spanish that it was Catholicism; the English espoused Anglicanism. They cannot all be right because the fundamental teachings are inherently contradictory. However they could all be wrong, or maybe one could be right, but they can't all be right. Additionally if truth is not exclusive, in the sense that it does rule out other completing claims as false, then for example, one may read the diary of Anne Frank and view it as the diary of a Jewish girl hiding from the Nazis in the midst of the holocaust. If someone else read the same book and concluded that it is an auto-maintenance manual, both claims would be right - that is, both claims would be equally valid. But surely this is absurd. As the philosopher Peter Slezak nicely put it, 'only academics could be so ridiculous - such beliefs given outside the tutorial room would be signs of clinical derangement' (W. Craig, personal communication, April, 24, 2002).

The law of bivalence is not a semantic trick, as some postmodernists may claim, but rather a point in logic. For example, the law states that for any proposition P, P is either true or false. For any proposition 'either it or its negation is true' (Mc Gee, 1990, p. 179). Propositions cannot be both true and false at the same time, although paradoxically postmodernists may also claim this as a 'truth'. It is self-refuting to state that truth depends on the context, or the culture, or one's perspective because these in themselves are all objective claims to

truth. When this law is applied to Christian education, the proposition is: Christ is *the* truth and the *only* way to God. One agrees to this proposition or disagrees. Obvioulsy Christian educators agree to the gospel as *the* truth; consequently these are claims that are to be taken seriously. The law of bivalence supports a commitment to the gospel as true and enables Christian educators to be firm in their allegiance to a Christian worldview as *the* way, not a way. To deny the law of bivalence or to suggest that contradictory ideas can be true and false commit to an elementary fallacy in logic which is known as the genetic fallacy i.e. the attempt to explain something away based on where or how it originated. The law of bivalance confirms that the Christian educator is warranted to support and teach the eternal claims of Christianity as true.

A response to the mainstream arguments

The following arguments against Christian schooling have been raised in the literature and deserve a response. The first propounds that public education is neutral in values based education while Christian schooling is not. The presupposition here is that a neutral based education is superior to a Christian education. It is suggested by Hull (2002, p. 211) that we 'have trouble grasping the concept "Christian education" because in our liberal environment education is education'. Indeed, the 'liberal environment' exerts such a pervasive influence, even upon Christians, that many find it hard 'to articulate what a biblically-based model of education means' (Hull, 2002, p. 211). The problem here lies in a culture of secularity which exerts a pervasive influence on the way many think about everyday matters like schooling and education. This is not a neutral based education.

   Schools as institutions, be they public, private-independent, catholic or faith based Christian schools aim to inculcate values and norms which are shared by the great majority of their students. Public schools share the responsibility for inculcating values and norms with parents, the local community and other social institutions. Young people acquire values through their experiences at home, at school and in other social situations. Public schools cannot be value-free or value-neutral. Students cannot be involved in schooling from Kindergarten to Year 12 without being affected in the way they think about moral issues and the way they behave. The public school system is based upon the values which relate to three fundamental principles: 'equality of opportunity, accessibility for all and a high quality of education' (Statement of

Corporate Purpose and Goals – NSW Department of Education, 1987, p.6).

While public schools do not promote any particular religious belief, they do recognise the importance of religion as a basis for fostering ethical standards, social responsibility and moral values in their students. In keeping with this recognition public schools set aside time for special religious instruction conducted by representatives of religious groups. Religion is thus viewed as being separate from mainstream curriculum – Christian schoolers would disagree. There is no doubt that values permeate the whole atmosphere of the public school and are reflected in the school's operation including the separation of God from the discourse of the mainstream classroom.

Education is always the expression of beliefs about life and living that are held by those who determine the educational process (Edlin, 1999, p. 45). Public education is secularized and far from being neutral, although some Christians do not object because they do not understand the influence such secularization can have on a child. If all teachers lead their students forth according to their own ideals, beliefs and faith commitments, education is always religious (Duncan, 1996). Therefore, secular theories are also liberal ideals.

In response to those who support the merits of including, supporting and maintaining a liberal education for 'all' students, Kymlicka (1996, p. 153) asks us to consider the following question: 'Is the insistence on respect for individual rights not a new version of the old ethnocentrism, found in Mill and Marx, which sets the liberal majority culture as the standard to which minorities must adhere?' Kymlicka asks us to consider a group that does not hold to liberal values and has no interest in ruling over others or depriving them of their resources. Would it not be wrong to impose liberal values, indeed would it not be fundamentally intolerant to force others to reorganise their community according to 'our' liberal principles? A tolerant society must not only accept differences in beliefs but actually seek to support and encourage a diversity of beliefs.

Christian schools are charged with encouraging sexism which is defined by Stitzlein (2008) as '…one gender inferior to another by virtue of biology, social position, historical role, intelligence or religious doctrine'. Stitzlein claims that sexism is an overlooked issue for girls attending Christian schools. She states: 'the sexist beliefs and rigid intolerance promoted by these schools is too damaging for me to

abandon my claim' (p. 55). The author recommends intervention in the form of state regulation. Stitzlein's claims are important and if true must be taken seriously, but first, the claims need verification. Any school that discriminates against a student based on gender, ethnicity, socio economic status or religious belief ought to be held accountable. In fact the Bible, in which Christian schools are morally grounded, has much to say on these particular issues. Moreover, the words and character of Christ which Christian schools seek to reflect can be consulted in relation to any acts of discrimination. In Galatians 3: 28 we read: 'Because all of you are one in the Messiah Jesus, a person is no longer a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a male or a female'. Paul's significant words, especially where they concern women, are bold even now, and certainly were astonishing in the time when he wrote them. This was another of Paul's transitional statements showing that a new covenant relationship through Christ had begun. The Bible teaches that both male and female have been made in the image of God and so have intrinsic value. In Genesis 1:27 we read, 'God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them'.

In first-century Palestine, the way Jesus treated women was considered revolutionary. Jesus' honour and respect was not reserved simply for his mother. It was extended to all women - an attitude largely unexpected and unknown in his culture and time. Jesus, unlike the men of his generation and culture, taught that women were equal to men in the sight of God. Women could receive God's forgiveness and grace. Women, as well as men, could be among Christ's personal followers. Women could be full participants in the kingdom of God. Jesus offered full discipleship to women. Moreover a distinction must be made with what the Bible teaches vis-à-vis the Biblical description. For example, the Bible teaches us to love one another. In John 13: 34 Jesus teaches the following: ' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you'. Notice the difference when the Bible describes an event. For example, we read in Matthew 14: 13-21, 'And Jesus said, "Bring them here to Me". Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds'. Thus one needs to discern what the Bible teaches as opposed to the events that the Bible describes. Jesus' honour and respect for woman is understood in his teachings for those who believe in him.

A further argument against Christian schooling is the so-called *reaction reason.* That is, Christian schools simply develop out of a reaction to the public school system which is perceived as hostile with declining moral and academic standards. First, it would be very difficult to validate this as anything more than mere speculation. However, granted that this could be a motivation for some parents to send their children to Christian schools, it is not the reason *why* students should attend a Christian school. The main reason for a Christian education is to include God in the students' education. This is because the nature of education offered to children will be determined by the beliefs and worldviews or religious perspectives of those who instruct. Tolerance depends on a system supportive of freedom of choice and in particular, the freedom of belief. Thus we include in our democratic frame, parents who are committed to Christian beliefs and who have chosen such beliefs to be part of their children's education.

Christian schooling rests comfortably within a democratic constitution. At the same time one could also have additional reasons for choosing Christian schooling over non Christian education. One of these reasons is a reaction against the dominance and outspoken ideas of liberals who call for the eradication of schooling based on the Christian religion. For example, the atheist philosopher Richard Rorty (1998) claimed that parents who indoctrinate their children with 'Christian superstition' should be accountable to and disciplined by the state. This is because, according to Rorty, Christian schooling is a form of child abuse. He suggests the state should be given the authority and 'duty' to deprogram young people from their 'God beliefs'.

Within a democratic frame we must preserve a diversity of beliefs against the hostility of those who wish to reduce democracy to tyranny and demand a complete denial of access to a belief and way of life that is contrary to theirs. To illustrate, in 2003 Ziwar Muhammad Ismaíil, a Christian convert from a Muslim background was shot and killed. The killing was part of a growing hostility towards Christians in the country. Unless we support the preservation of a hard fought democracy where people are free to follow different beliefs the void left will not remain empty but be filled with a dictatorship that will enforce a uniformity of other beliefs.

Consequently, the claim that Christian parents as well as those of other faiths, 'do not have the right to ensure their children cross the threshold to adulthood holding the same beliefs, values and

commitments [as themselves], because this would infringe the child's right to an autonomous life' (Halstead, 1999b, p. 276) is intolerant and ultimately undemocratic. The point here is not, who is right, but rather the replacement of a child's Christian faith with a faith in another belief - liberalism. This is not neutrality but rather a strong push to another belief system – secularism - which is antithetical to a Christian worldview. Indeed, 'liberals stress that educational authority should not rest exclusively with parents' precisely because 'the autonomy of the family sits uneasily with liberal values', especially the 'principle of personal autonomy' (Halstead, 1999b, p. 276). Privileging the rights of the individual child over the rights of parents or a faith community is a particular ideological stance that Christian educators would challenge. The push for individual autonomy as a primary right (above those of parents or community) is a presupposition derived from a humanistic perspective. Clearly, the 'liberal state based on propositions about the desirability of individual autonomy is bound to be committed to educational programs which are incompatible with the beliefs and values of parents from non-liberal religious and cultural minorities' (Burtonwood, 2000, p. 269). When Christian teachers, parents or students are not included in the 'inclusion' being promoted, this shows that 'liberalism is hospitable to a wide diversity of beliefs, but is less hospitable to any group wishing to support Christian values' (Halstead, 1995, p. 268).

A further claim against Christian schooling is the irrelevancy of the Christian faith to the school curriculum. Since the Enlightenment it has become normal to divide life into public and private spheres (Linklater, 2000). The concomitant of the view that religion is private whereas schooling is public is that the very idea of 'Christian education' is difficult for many to comprehend. We hardly need more evidence of a profoundly secular worldview than the widespread belief that life can be neatly divided into separate spheres of spiritual and secular, sacred and mundane. In contrast, for many committed Christians, every aspect of life, including a child's time at school, is spiritually significant (Pike, 2002). The tyranny of a secular, liberal mindset is apparent when it is taken for granted that faith should have nothing to do with the curriculum and that Christian beliefs have nothing to do with learning. In fact the artificial separation of faith and learning is utterly incomprehensible to Christians who regard their commitment to Christ as an all-embracing lifestyle and wish their children to be educated in a way that is congruent with the values of the Christian home.

Moyes (2006) notes the *Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Equality in Education and Employment) Bill 2006* which sought to amend the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* in Australia by removing the exemptions that allow any private educational authority to discriminate in education and employment and allow employers who employ no more than five persons to discriminate in employment. The bill aims to restrict the freedom of Christian schools and other organisations, such as nursing homes, to establish themselves according to religious values, to choose teachers and staff that model religious values that are important to a religious community, and to enjoy the inalienable rights of freedom of association, assembly and worship. The bill would prevent religious schools from having a say in the way they operate their affairs and make them indistinguishable from public schools. The ability to make informed choices is fundamental to human nature and choice. Being subjective in nature, we are informed by our beliefs, value systems and traditions.

Christian schools are established to provide parents with the security that their children are being educated and taught certain values and life principles (Knight, 2006). Clearly, they seek to establish and maintain what we would see in most cases as being mainstream Christian values and to inculcate these values in the students. Denying Christian and private schools the ability to mould an environment that accords with the wishes of parents is to deny private schools the ability to exist and stand for mainstream values (Pike, 2006). Article 2 of the 1960 United Nations Convention against Discrimination in Education, states that 'the establishment or maintenance for religious reasons of separate … institutions offering an education which is in keeping with the wishes of the pupil's parents' is not discrimination. Freedom of religion, the paradigm freedom, is of the essence of a free society. With the freedom of religion and education, parents' have the right to raise their children in the way they desire and according to personal beliefs (Moyes, 2006).

In summary, the arguments against Christian schooling suggest a move towards an education system structured along entirely secular values and norms. However we must be careful about forcing others to adopt our secular views. Not only is imposing one's views on others an act of intolerance but it is also a form of neo-imperialism. The tyranny of secular egalitarian liberalism is only too apparent when it is taken for granted that education should be organized along entirely secular lines. Reinforcing the tenets of secularism within a society is an entirely illiberal position to adopt. Clearly, imposing secularist views on parents

concerning their child's education in a neo-imperialist fashion is not something liberals like to think they could ever be culpable of, but Christian educators might be able to help them grasp this particular nettle. The promotion of equality of respect and a careful avoidance of taking sides are considered to be at the heart of liberal thinking. The impossibility of ideological neutrality means that there is a very real danger of the common public school in a liberal democracy viewing the beliefs of Christians who do not share its values 'through the lens of an illicitly comprehensive liberalism' (McLoughlin, 1995, p. 251).

These are just some of the traditional and more recent arguments against Christian schooling and Christian education in general. The following section provides a rejoinder to the more specific arguments given by Symes / Gulson against Christian schooling in Australia.

A rejoinder to Symes and Gulson

Symes and Gulson charge Christian schools with the minority argument. Describing people who support Christian institutions as 'radicals' they argue the following: 'Radicals are more interested allegedly in peddling the views of minorities…' (Symes and Gulson, 2005, p. 2005). This claim is a presupposition that suggests belief in God commands only a minority and therefore should not be given such significance in government funding. This is one aspect of their argument that is not accurate. First, theists and theistic belief is not in the minority. In *How Australia compares* (2004) a reference book by Tiffen and Gittins, two distinguished Australian analysts, the data suggests that belief in God commands a statistical majority, both in Australia and internationally. The authors list 17 other developed democracies where a majority of the population subscribe to theism. Table 1.1 taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows the following percentages of people holding various religious beliefs in Australia between1901 and 2001.

Table 1.1

MAJOR RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS

	Christianity				Other religions	No religion	Not stated/ inadequately described	Total
	Anglican	Catholic	Other	Total				
Census year	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	'000
1901	39.7	22.7	33.7	96.1	1.4	0.4	(a)2.0	**3,773.8**
1911	38.4	22.4	35.1	95.9	0.8	0.4	(a)2.9	**4,455.0**
1921	43.7	21.7	31.6	96.9	0.7	0.5	(a)1.9	**5,435.7**
1933	38.7	19.6	28.1	86.4	0.4	0.2	12.9	**6,629.8**
1947	39.0	20.9	28.1	88.0	0.5	0.3	11.1	**7,579.4**
1954	37.9	22.9	28.5	89.4	0.6	0.3	9.7	**8,986.5**
1961	34.9	24.9	28.4	88.3	0.7	0.4	10.7	**10,508.2**
1966	33.5	26.2	28.5	88.2	0.7	0.8	10.3	**11,599.5**
1971	31.0	27.0	28.2	86.2	0.8	6.7	6.2	**12,755.6**
1976	27.7	25.7	25.2	78.6	1.0	8.3	11.4	**13,548.4**
1981	26.1	26.0	24.3	76.4	1.4	10.8	11.4	**14,576.3**
1986	23.9	26.0	23.0	73.0	2.0	12.7	12.4	**15,602.2**
1991	23.8	27.3	22.9	74.0	2.6	12.9	10.5	**16,850.3**
1996	22.0	27.0	21.9	70.9	3.5	16.6	9.0	**17,752.8**
2001	20.7	26.6	20.7	68.0	4.9	15.5	11.7	**18,769.2**

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006

At 68 percent theistic belief is obviously not in the minority. Moreover Symes and Gulson admit that at the university level in Australia the rise of 'Christian evangelicals is on the increase'. Therefore, it would seem that non-theists are in the minority. What exactly is their argument? 'Radicals' as Symes and Gulson describe them, are not those who simply believe in a God but rather those that 'pedal' the truth claims of Christian theism over other beliefs. But the problem here lies with a misunderstanding—Christian particularism is warranted for the one who believes in the God of Christianity as true. It would be a strange form of Christian education that presented Christian theism as false. Christian parents send their children to Christian schools because they believe the gospel to be true, meaningful and significant and they desire their children to receive a Christ centred education. Second, bypassing the rhetoric of 'diabolical perversions' Christian educators do not see public schooling as perverted. Rather, they view the nature and potential of the student, the role of the teacher, the content of the curriculum, and the social functions of the school in the light of their philosophic undergirding (Knight, 2006).

Christian particularism is reflective of a multiplicity of beliefs within a pluralistic society. Rather than destroy diversity, as Symes and Gulson claim, Christian particularism actually reflects a diversity of beliefs within a pluralistic society. Symes and Gulson's views are actually drawn from a secularised tolerance that attempts to siphon power from families and give it to governments and schools, the so-called 'experts.' The ultimate aim is a lessening of family authority and an increase in governmental authority (Stetson and Contie, 2005, p.35). Dr. Jonathan Sarfati (n.d) notes the Anti-Discrimination Act (1991) in Queensland, Australia, which 'prohibits discrimination on the basis of … religious belief or religious activity' (Ch 2 Sect 7), either directly or indirectly (Ch 2 Sect 9). Symes and Gulsons' views reflect a curriculum that is in line with a new cultural movement commonly referred to as the new 'tolerance'. This new form of 'tolerance' is completely intolerant of the viewpoint that other viewpoints can be morally wrong. So it is not surprising, that it is often coupled with extreme intolerance towards Christianity. New tolerance is a movement of hypocrisy, because it attempts to be all things to everyone, but winds up being nothing to anyone. While it preaches love of diversity, it actually advocates indifference, since by definition none of the various views being tolerated can be regarded as true or significant. Moreover, the new tolerance betrays the way we see and live our lives. For example, when

we replace a Biblical word like 'sinner' with a secular word like 'dysfunctional' the confusion is evident. What is wrong with the sinner is something that has to do with his or her relationship with God; what is wrong with the dysfunctional person has to do with not fitting into my projects.

When Symes and Gulson discover that Christian schools promote themselves using the internet as a marketing tool, their 'discovery' leaves one in anticipation of what this is supposed to demonstrate. If Christian schooling is grounded in a Christian framework and held to be true by those who believe in it, one would expect a promotion of Christian particularism as a significant discourse for education. It would indeed be a strange form of Christianity that promoted a belief based on what was believed to be false. Rather than teach a different value system, Christian schooling relates an ethical system grounded in God not man, a model of principles that corresponds to an ethical system that the majority of people do in fact share. Examples would be love, justice, mercy, honesty, self-sacrifice as being a morally acceptable system of ethics. In fact Christian teachers see their role as educators as a calling, not a career. In that sense, it is not a topic to be mastered, not a subject to be studied, but a life to be lived out and shared. Therefore, a promotion of Christian education is a logical consequence for Christian educators who believe Christianity to be true and an appropriate avenue for those who will choose to attend Christian schools.

The tolerance argument offered by Symes and Gulson and others does suggest that we are experiencing a paradigm shift. What is emerging is a radically new form of tolerance, a tolerance that equates to 'I dare not disagree with you'. This new breed of tolerance is anti-intellectual. For example, Stetson and Conti (2005) in their book, *The truth about tolerance,* suggest that claims of intolerance against Christian particularists is reflective of what they call 'the bizarre looking glass of political correctness and secular liberalism (p.114). Consequently they suggest that a redefinition of tolerance is imminent, threatening free intellectual debate as well as the unhindered exercise of biblical Christianity. A redefinition of tolerance is grounded in anti-Christian views. Symes and Gulson's anti-Christian views reveals more bluster than substance but is well entrenched in political correctness. The question remains, why Christian schools must accept a redefinition of tolerance that would exclude Christian particularism as a truth to be believed and lived. When Symes and Gulson claim that Christian

schools breed intolerance, their views should exhibit the same self-evidence and perspicuity for which they argue.

However, a more accurate definition of tolerance is changed from the traditional meaning of 'putting up with views not especially liked without sharing them' to a new radical definition espousing 'validity and equality of all viewpoints'. The new tolerance movement, what McDowell and Hostetler (1998) call a 'campaign of indoctrination', teaches children that they have to understand, respect, and accept all values and viewpoints as true. This, however, leaves little opportunity for the truth claims of Christian particularism to be regarded as anything more than an interesting persuasion. Moreover, the logical inconsistencies with all viewpoints and values when claimed as true seem obvious. For example, how would Christian schools teach that God exists as a truth statement and then also teach that it is equally true that God does not exist? Moreover, truth is not dependent on what one believes but rather on the evidence. As a historical religion, Christianity is embedded in historical events, therefore, Christian schools draw upon not only the witness of the Holy Spirit in one's life as a warrant for believing Christianity to be true but also on the historical evidence of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ (Sherwin-White, 1992).

Symes and Gulson argue that Christian education is problematic because it 'teaches' a lofty moral high ground and this postulates itself as morally superior; an us-and-them attitude. In my understanding this misses the central foundation or basis of Christian schooling. Rather than 'teach' moral superiority to the detriment of those who do not hold to Christian values, Christian schooling acknowledges a foundation or anchor point for morality in the very nature of God. This is not the old divine command theory that claims that morality is in the commands of God, but a morality that Christian schools acknowledge springs from the intrinsic nature of God. It follows that rather than teach a subjective morality that has sprung from the creative processes of socio-biological evolution' Christian schooling adheres to an objective and eternal morality that is grounded in an objective and moral God. As a result, the objectivity of morality is given its foundation.

Rather than being 'symptoms of the pro choice attitude to education fostered by market ideologies' as Symes and Gulson state, so called 'fundamentalist' Christian schools indeed reflect diversity of ideas and beliefs in the marketplace of education. What is important educationally is by its very nature philosophical, and so a diversity of beliefs must be

reflected in the market place of philosophies. What Symes and Gulson fail to address is the ontology of Christian belief, not its origin. In fact, an attempt to dismiss Christian particularism simply because of what drives it or who pushes it, is a textbook case of the genetic fallacy; that is, trying to explain something away because of where it came from. A more fundamental inquiry requires an ontological investigation into the very nature of Christianity and seeking to understand the Christian worldview. If Symes and Gulson did this, they would not conclude that Christian schooling is 'hard on free thinking that devalues difference and disdainsd egalitarianism'. Moreover, individuality and egalitarian are viewed quite differently from a Christian worldview. For example, Kamisky (1997) notes that 'the biblical writers were aware that our individuality can only be understood in relation to the various collectivities in which we participate and that being human means that the individual is linked to other people through the consequences that flow from each person's actions'. The Bible has a much nuanced theology of the relationship between the individual and the community.

What Symes and Gulson reveal is a *prima facie* case of intolerance to the diversity of beliefs which is ironic to say the least. A community of Christian educators, suggests van Brummelen (2001, p. 59) attempts to have all members of the school 'share ideas, joys and burdens as individuals, as classrooms, as schools, as companies of supporters, and as segments of the broader society'. Tony Morgan, the School Board Chairman at Pacific Hills Christian Church notes the motivation and foundation of Christian schools:

> I have observed two different worldviews that lie behind the motivation for Christian schools. One is a fortress mentality where the motivation is to protect our children from a world that is hostile to godly values. The other is a salt and light mentality where the motivation is to prepare our children for a leadership role in the world in which God has placed them…one of these tends to be inward looking, while the other tends to be outward looking…but one of these worldviews tend to be driven by fear while the other tends to be driven by hope…

Morgan highlights what is at the very heart of Christian schooling – a motivation, so to speak, that 'gets its hands dirty in the world'. These observations are geared towards involvement and participation, rather than insulating students from competing worldviews. Therefore, Christian schools seek to encourage students to be knowledgeable about the world, living and working in the world but knowing that ultimately this is God's world.

When Symes and Gulson claim that Christian schools remove students from the 'real world' and encapsulates them in an escapist 'hothouse' atmosphere leading to non-diversity, their claims do not resonate with the basic tenants of Christian schooling. At the same time, all schools, as nurturing institutions, are hothouses, i.e. all schools aim to assist growing, developing children, giving them direction and helping them learn about the world and prepare for their tasks in it. Rather than being an insular sheltered environment of learning, Morgan's comments highlight the importance of exposing Christian students to competing worldviews. The focus is on preparing children as leaders, by developing a sense of purpose grounded in God, not man.

Morgan highlights the importance of Christian schools as places that develop and encourage students' critical minds. As Kaita (2007) notes, Christian education does not end with an understanding of humanity's timeless need for salvation through Christ but in reflection which entails critical minds (as cited in Craig and Gould, 2007, p.52) and most importantly produces students who not only know their faith to be true but as Craig (2000) states 'can show their faith to be true'. That is, Christian education encourages students to develop the capacity to craft reasons for their faith, a justification for showing their faith to be true. This does not suggest that students must have good arguments for their Christian belief; the witness of the Holy Spirit is enough warrant in a child's life to conclude that reality. For example, Craig (1994) notes that it would be in one's epistemic rights, nay, epistemic responsibility to believe in Christianity based solely on the witness of the Holy Spirit in one's life. Although Christian schools encourage students to have a critical awareness as they evaluate their faith in the light of other beliefs, they develop the skills and knowledge to show that Christianity is true. At the same time one can know Christ as an existential reality wholly apart from good arguments or critical analysis.

Christian schools also provide an atmosphere of learning familiar to Christian students. Consequently, the school is more compatible with their student's relationships and lifestyle. Relationships are an important part of any educational experience (Glasser, 1993; Gordon, 1987) and Christian schools are uniquely equipped to provide positive relationships for students.

Christian schools are chosen by parents who see that one of their primary responsibilities is to monitor the input their children receive and how that input shapes their view of God and His world. Most parents make an effort to safeguard their children at home by

monitoring the books they read, the programs they watch, the web sites they surf, and the friends with whom they play. A Christian school affirms the importance of this parental role and logically extends it to the school day, actively continuing the work parents do.

Symes and Gulson charge that Christian schooling is isolated and individualist. This assumption is common in realist, liberal theory (Hurd, 2007). Speaking within a similar context of Christian schools, Newbigin (1986) argues that Christian belief is not individualistic but rather community minded, and centred on a corporate or horizontal movement. An individualised faith is not what Christians have been called for. The following passage from *The Household of God* (1953), serves as a programmatic statement of Newbigin's idea of community:

> It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community. He committed the entire work of salvation to that community. It was not that a community gathered round an idea, so that the idea was primary and the community secondary… The actual community is primary; the understanding of what it is comes second" (p.20).

D. Jeffrey Bingham highlights the consequence of Christian individualism. Bingham notes that individualism removes people from their surrounding community and this is contrary to the function of the church. Individualism removes people not only from the present community, but all communities, past and present (Williams, 2002). If a Christian community draws on the values of a Christian school as a community, Symes and Gulsons' description of the Christian particularist as an isolated nomad unrelated to the horizontal relations of human beings with each other is not very convincing. Symes and Gulson misunderstand the basic tenets of Christianity and are clearly confused but more reflective of what Schweiter (2007) describes as the unique individualism of religious German adolescents. The comparison here is in a culture that is interested in religion but does not believe in the things taught by religion. For German youth religion is very much individualised and relativistic. However, this is not the commitment to religion that Christian schools in Australia invest in. Christianity is corporate in nature, and although not of this world it exists in this world and is seriously interested in humanity. Therefore, Symes and Gulson would have to show that Christian education in Australia reflects the individualistic commitment to religion of German youth;

otherwise their argument is irrelevant to an Australian context of Christian theism.

Discussion

This paper has offered positive arguments for the merits of Christian schooling. It has been argued that Christian education must be built upon a Christian view of reality. A Christian view of metaphysics lays the foundation for Christian education. Christian educational systems have been established because Christians believe that God exists. His existence calls for an educational system in which He is the central reality that gives meaning to everything else. Other educational systems have alternative foundations and cannot be substituted for Christian education. Belief in the Christian view of reality motivates people to sacrifice both their time and their means for the establishment of Christian schools.

It is argued that the classical concept of tolerance does not mean that one must agree in order to be tolerant, but to treat people civilly and with respect. To suggest anything less is a call to intellectual stagnation and mental conformity (Stetson and Conti, 2005). The latter are the real bedfellows that Symes and Gulson must deal with if people are deprived of free speech and freedom of religious belief. It would seem that the real stumbling block for Symes and Gulson is that Christian schools, and more broadly Christianity, claims that salvation is available exclusively through Jesus Christ. Although they may not agree, they must tolerate Christian beliefs that do not resonate with their own or fall victim to their own standards.

Restricting religious freedom, or denying Christian education to children, violates one of the many reasons that secularists have for wanting to protect cultural membership. Symes and Gulson must be challenged to be consistent if they declare their commitment is for people to have the right to maintain and propagate their own view on life. They must accept and even champion the cause of Christian schools as an unrestrained choice for parents and children who believe this is the way to truth (Edlin, 1999).

Education always expresses certain beliefs, values and principles, it cannot be neutral. Neutrality is logically impossible in an atmosphere brought to bear by a curriculum that maintains a politically 'correct' position on many issues. The new tolerance – a doctrine currently in

vogue, that supposedly embraces all values and beliefs as equal, that Symes and Gulson embrace, goes a step further – one truth is no longer possible, although all forms of education must agree to the truths of a secular public education. This is no longer tolerance, but agreement to the values espoused by secular education. But why should Christian schools place their faith in a secular education rather than a Christian education? If students, parents and teachers support the eternal principles of Christian education, with God at the centre and not man, then one would expect Christian schools to support, teach and encourage the basic tenants of Christianity.

Christian schooling and its implications lie at the heart of education. Whatever we say about the religious neutrality of public schooling, the experience of passing through school shapes the minds of young people in certain directions. It is not and cannot be religiously neutral. The omission of religion from the curriculum is in itself a momentous statement about what society believes and expects its children to believe. For those of us who have seen the movie *Dead Poets Society*, the conflict that occurred in the lives of students was where the educational perspectives of child-centred education and content based education clashed. One factor was highlighted; the nature of education offered to children will be determined by the beliefs and worldview perspectives of those who instruct (Edlin, 1999, p. 45). Therefore, any idea that public education is neutral is an illusion.

Symes and Gulson can see no justification for Christian schools because they compartmentalize life in such a way that is impossible for the committed believer to accept. To fail to recognize that such separation is a product of one's secular, liberal mindset is simply to provide further evidence of the hold that egalitarian liberalism has on Symes and Gulsons' reasoning. Christian education is more than Christian schooling – the home, church, and school are ideally founded upon the same principles (Knight, 2006).Egalitarian liberals therefore face a stark choice: an oppressive and tyrannical liberal secularism founded on the educational aim of individual autonomy or a democracy for diverse groups which respects the values of Christians who are neither secular nor liberal. The Christian school should be seen as an asset to any truly inclusive democracy. If Symes and Gulson really desire a genuinely inclusive society they must include Christian education.

History has shown that neutrality towards anything Christian has not lasted long before it becomes hostile to Christianity (Stetson & Conti, 2005). The first three hundred years saw the followers of the new creed originating in Palestine persecuted by the pagan Romans and a variety of Gnostic cults. In AD 410, after Alaric and his Visigoths sacked Rome, fleeing pagans streaming into North Africa carried horror stories of what happened and blamed Christianity for the disaster. In the first half of the seventh century a new challenge emerged out of Arabia in the form of Islamic conquests (Malik, 2007). The Mongol invasions and the Ottoman conquests that followed brought new challenges to European Christendom. Christian beliefs, therefore, have been embattled in every age.

If Christian schooling is expunged as an alternative education, another value system will take its place; a value system where the state controls what children should think and what they should believe. A state controlled secularized education is what Symes and Gulson desire for all children, and even for parents who choose a Christian environment for their children's education. Symes and Gulson have highlighted the need for Christian schooling to take a more compelling account of the cultural and social contexts of schooling or, as Newbigin (1986) maintains, more effectively consider the 'plausibility structure' of educating within a culture that is not sympathetic to the ideals and beliefs of Christian theism. There is an obvious need for a more extensive understanding of the perspectives of those who do not hold to the values of Christian schooling. In this sense, Symes and Gulson have pointed to issues that need greater attention in the future as Christian schooling gathers increasing momentum in contemporary Australia.

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