

WHY GO TO SCHOOL?

CHIP DENTON

Why do we send our kids to Trinity? No one answer to that question seems sufficient. In fact, when we become too fixated on any particular answer, our education can easily lose its balance and falter. At Trinity we believe in a constellation of purposes. At least three of those are worth mentioning here.

First, education is vocational training. Vocational training has gotten a bad name in some circles as a sub-par education. ("He went to a vocational school, not a real college!") But none of us thinks that getting a job is unimportant business or that training children to be gainfully employed is a sideline. We see our work at Trinity as preparing students to enter into and persevere well in their life's work. Much of what we do between 8:30 and 2:00 is justified by this purpose: learning to read, to subtract, to spell, to memorize, to organize, to socialize. And soon, we hope, to use computers for a variety of tasks.

Some of what we study at Trinity--actually a good deal of it--may not be so easily justified according to this first purpose. For most of us, Latin, Greek mythology, and the history of the Pharaohs won't be translated into a paycheck. But these are important things to study because an education is also a civic training, an introduction into the vitally important job of being a citizen. By the time students have graduated from Trinity, we hope they will be able to enter into the most important debates that touch upon our life together in this nation and world: about the nature of justice, about the balance between individual freedom and communal responsibility, about the implications of living in a country that subscribes to the notion of e pluribus unum. Civic education may sometimes seem impractical, but here we must resist good old American pragmatism to be Americans.

Even less practical is the third purpose for our education. Education is private cultivation. Here we attend to those things which, simply, interest us. Here we encourage individuality: This student loves gazing at stars, that one takes to music. Here we promote the enjoyment of what is true, good, and beautiful for its own sake and not because it is useful to make a living or get along with others in a democracy. Much of what we do at Trinity is concerned with such cultivation: the reading of good literature, music and art classes, field trips to museums and planetariums.

One thing more. We are a Christian school, and being Christian affects every one of these purposes. We don't paste a "Christian" wall-cover over a secular structure; instead, we believe that these good purposes for an education are, like all of life, transformed deeply and radically by the Gospel. There is not space here to do justice to this transformation, but a nod of recognition is warranted.

Education for a job becomes for us education toward vocation--that is, answering God's call to use the unique gifts God has given us as providential opportunities arise. In fact, it is the theistic conception of vocation which transforms "having a job" into "answering a call," so that our life's work is much more than a job or a task and becomes a way to serve the Lord Christ in our daily lives.

Education for citizenship becomes education on how to work for the common good, transforming culture with the values of God's kingdom and with the power of that kingdom as manifested by the Spirit of Jesus. We as Christians have as good a

reason as anyone for being concerned with "the common good." Far from taking us out of the world, the Gospel leaves us in it as salt and light.

Education for private culture becomes education that awakens and nurtures a sense of awe and wonder at God's good creation, as well as a hopeful and faithful expectation of his better recreation in Christ. And so it was that we began our year, at our opening assembly, singing "Let all things now living a song of thanksgiving to God the Creator triumphantly sing." Teaching kids to wonder and to worship is part of our mission.

As always, we want to be open to discussing these things. Please feel free to let us know your opinions on such matters. We hope that we have some definite ideas about education, "hard" enough to guide us, but "soft" enough to be reshaped in helpful ways in the context of this community where we are all learners and listeners.