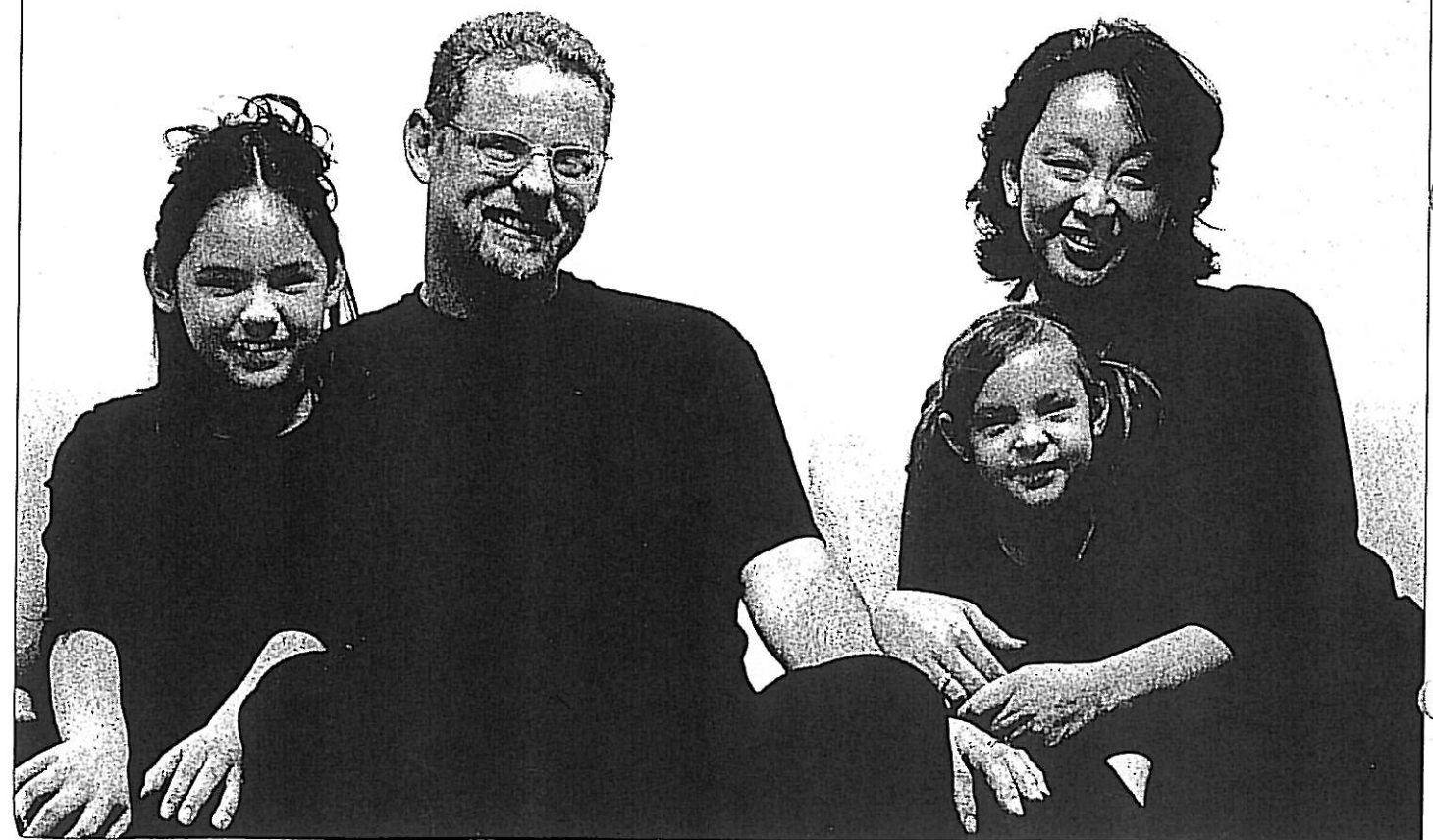


What else does parent control mean?

Ken Dickens



What does 'parent-control' mean any way?

It is obvious that 'parent control' implies a certain kind of school governance. The rationale and the outworking of this model, however, are not always so obvious. 'Parent control' is **not** about parents' rights but about taking seriously the responsibility that the Bible gives to parents in educating their children.

The emphasis is on responsibility rather than the negative connotation of control. In our schools, this responsibility is exercised, in community, through association membership and through an elected board. Parents recognise the gifting, training and experience of teachers and they honour their office. Teachers seek to work in partnership with parents, whom they acknowledge as the principal educators of their children and whose office they honour. These relationships and roles take place within a community where submission to God and his word is affirmed.

All schools are parent controlled to some extent. It is exercised in different ways – from car park discussions and subtle expectations to voting with one's feet. The distinguishing mark between schools is how 'parent control' is controlled! In our schools, it is done openly through association membership that is dependent on commitment to a biblical vision for life and schooling. It is not individual parents who control the school but a vision driven community. Professing Christian parents are invited into this 'covenant' community to partner with teachers in pursuing a gospel vision of life and learning.

Teachers are conscious that they work with, and for, parents in this community to bring the children up, *in the instruction and training of the Lord* (Eph 6:2). This work is carried out in the context of formal schooling. Whether formal schooling is the best context to do this is a question that needs to be regularly addressed. However, many people concede that regardless of whether it is the best context, it is the one our culture prescribes and we might as well use it. But asking the question helps us see the deeply entrenched cultural constraints that we have inherited when we choose to take part in the system of formal schooling. By themselves, teachers are not the best people to critique these cultural constraints because they are so much part of the schooling culture. One of the great aspects of *parent control* is that parents can be part of the cultural critique from a different perspective. Teachers and parents together can work at creating a learning community that may not be so captive to the often, unexamined cultural givens of western schooling or even Christian schooling.

So what else does it mean?

Christian parent controlled schooling in Australia shares a heritage with a similar kind of Christian schooling in other places, notably North America. Features that distinguish these schools in Canada and the United States can be recognised to varying degrees in Christian Parent Controlled Schools here. Using Jack Fennema's reflections, this article is an attempt to describe some of the distinctive characteristics of our schools. There is a wide diversity in the way these principles are played out in our schools and many schools within other Christian schooling traditions would share these

features. The commonality, however, among our schools with these features, most of the time justifies seeing them as distinctive features. When people think about parent controlled schooling, they often think of these things as well as the way the school is governed. What are these characteristics?

1. Nurture of 'Christian' children
2. The lordship of Jesus
3. The authority of revelation
4. A biblical worldview
5. Engagement with the world.

1. The Christian school has, as its main focus, the nurture of children of Christian parents. This is not to say that these children do not need to be challenged with the claims of the gospel nor does it exclude the outreach to children of non-Christian parents. What it does mean is that the Christian school seeks to be an extension of the Christian home where the aim will be to teach and train for a life of discipleship to Jesus Christ. In this context, some children will have a sure personal faith while others will need to be encouraged to make the faith of their parents, their own. The grace of God and the lordship of Jesus will be constant themes and their implications for all aspects of life will be continually explored. If non-Christian families join the school community, it will be on the understanding that the community operates in submission to the word of God. These families should experience warm hospitality without compromising the school's basic mission. Hopefully, the quality of life in the community, the integrity of belief and practice, and the radical nature of the curriculum will be a constant challenge to the parents and students.

2. The sovereignty of God means that the salvation of people is in his control but it also means that every thing else is also in his control. The often-repeated words of Dutch theologian, Abraham Kuyper need to be restated constantly. *There is not an inch in the entire area of our human life which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not call 'Mine!'* Speaking of Christ, Paul tells the Colossians, *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together.* (Colossians 1:16&17) This is a gospel statement.

3. The reconciliation of all things to Christ was God's plan before the foundations of the earth were laid. It is not plan B because of the unexpected sin of humans. The gospel, which proclaims, that "Jesus is Lord", was always God's plan. He will work his purposes out and reclaim his creation. Redeemed men and women and redeemed girls and boys need to be seen in this light, coming under the sovereignty of God over all things.

Schools which acknowledge God's sovereignty as shown in the gospel of Jesus, are places where his lordship over every aspect of creation is celebrated. Children are encouraged to discover, develop and use their gifts and talents in service of God in every part of their life. These schools are places where service is promoted before success and where success is seen in the light of God's grace.

The lordship of Jesus affects not only the way we use things such as technology, mathematics, and economics. It changes the very way we think about the nature of these things. They are not things that exist in their own right. They are part of the creation that Jesus owns and died to redeem. As we engage with these things, we worship Jesus, the Lord, or we worship another lord such as economic rationalism. Lordship is all embracing.

4. Crucial to the whole business of education is the authority that we place on the source of knowledge. Christian parent controlled schools claim that the ultimate, authoritative knowledge is what God reveals. This revelation comes to us as God's word in creation, Jesus and the Bible. Romans 1 asserts that creation reveals a creator. The human response is to suppress the truth of this revelation. But once our eyes are opened through God's initiative, we see his handiwork in all of creation. Although the image of God in humans has been marred by our refusal to submit to him, God's 'common grace' enables, to some extent, all people to discern norms in the creation. Wisdom is responding rightly to these norms. Yet Proverbs reminds us that, *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*. No one can be truly wise without acknowledging God as he reveals himself in the Bible and supremely in his Son, Jesus.

Other ways of knowing need to be evaluated in the light of the Bible. This, however, is not as straight forward as it seems. It is not so much that we reject the authority of the Bible; we simply put other authorities on equal footing. It is easy to do this when we don't believe the Bible is relevant to most of life. This is why many Christians can't understand the notion of a Christian school. They believe that the Bible is not relevant to most of the business that goes on in schools. The tragedy is that they are not left with 'neutral' pieces of information and activity but with a system of knowledge and behaviour laden with religious assumptions and homage to other gods.

5. A feature of Christian parent controlled schooling has been a deliberate attempt to use worldview terminology to demonstrate the relevance of the Bible to how we view all of life. A Christian may have a theology that has little effect on the 'nitty-gritty' of every day life. A worldview implies interest in more than the 'spiritual' dimension only. However, it is a mistake to draw too strong a distinction between theology and worldview. If our theology or ideas about God are informed by the Bible, then we will be interested in every aspect of his world. Thus to have a biblical worldview is to have a set of beliefs about the nature of things that is consistent with the Bible's message.

6. The problem of asserting the relevance of the Bible where specific issues are not addressed is overcome, to some extent, by using a worldview framework. The aspects of this framework are: **creation**; **fall**, and **redemption**. These categories seek to encapsulate the overall story of the Bible. As long as we keep being immersed in the Scriptures themselves and recognising the centrality of Jesus in the whole story, the framework can be very helpful. When considering a unit of work or thinking about a subject discipline, one can ask, "What implications do creation, fall, and redemption have for this

unit or subject?" Rather than using a proof-text, this exercise can help teachers to think more biblically about their task.

7. The world belongs to God and he has a plan for it. Christian parent controlled schools are not about avoiding the world but engaging with it. A biblical worldview is life and world affirming. Creation is good. God cares for it. He will restore it. We teach children to approach the world this way aligned to his agenda. We seek to prepare them for a life of service, which is expressed in every area of life to God's glory. Even though **we** cannot create the kingdom on earth, we need to be about our Father's business when **he** does. Christian schools, which do not encourage and inspire their students to work for a more just and compassionate world are not worthy of the name.

We prepare our children to engage with the world knowing that it will inevitably involve, as it did for the one they serve, suffering. We let them know that there is a deep antithesis between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this 'world' which is the kingdom of darkness. We teach that each must choose to which kingdom he or she will belong and the responsibility to urge others to be reconciled to God through Christ – to be redeemed from the kingdom of darkness. Living as citizens of God's kingdom will mean that we are misfits as we pursue his priorities in a world which belongs to him and over which he has made us caretakers.


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