MELOS EDUCATION

EDUCATION FOR WISDOM

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Strengthening the cause of Christian Education

Education for Wisdom

A Philosophy of Education for the Melos Group of Schools

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> *We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God (Colossians 1:9,10).*

The purpose of this paper is to outline a philosophy of education, centred on the concept of Wisdom, for the Melos Group of Schools (GoS). The formation of the Melos GoS is, to some extent, motivated by pragmatic reasons i.e., it is expedient for schools to work together for legal reasons, for the development of shared knowledge, and to enhance collective bargaining power when dealing with government. However, the Melos GoS does not wish to be defined by these pragmatic imperatives alone. Rather, the group would also like to be defined by a shared philosophy of education that guides the educational activities of the group as a whole. Ideally, this philosophy will be 'tight' enough such that schools in the group are united and characterised by a common understanding and approach to Christian education, but 'loose' enough such that each school is able to pursue its own unique vision and mission in its own context.

Wisdom as an Organising Construct

The philosophy outlined in this paper is centred on "Wisdom" as an organising construct. I have chosen Wisdom for three reasons. First, if Christian Education is (or, at least, is meant to be) centred on Christ, and Christ is the Wisdom of God, then Christian Education is centrally about God's Wisdom. One way of defining God's Wisdom is that God's Wisdom is God's plan for restoring humanity to the place He intended for humanity at the Creation i.e., as God's delegated rulers over Creation. This plan culminates, and is consummated, in Christ. In this sense, Christ can be identified not only *with* but *as* God's wisdom. In the Old Testament, God's Wisdom was *personified* as a Lady Wisdom. In the New Testament, God's Wisdom is *identified* with/as Christ. To the extent that the Christian school participates *educationally* in God's plan to restore humanity, the Christian School both promulgates and becomes part of the Wisdom of God. In both senses, Wisdom becomes central to the educative task of the Christian school.

Second, Christian schools typically market themselves as holistically preparing students to live full lives both within and beyond formal education. This preparation requires access to God's Wisdom – both in the upper case ('W') sense of the Person of Christ, and the lower case sense of referring to the will and the skill to live a godly (more specifically a *Christlike*) life. God's wisdom in this latter sense is ultimately captured in the Bible which shows how life can and should be lived to the full. As such, the Bible provides the sacred grounding for Christian schools to achieve their stated mission of preparing students holistically for life. Recognising the mission of the Christian school as grounded in God's wisdom has the effect of making the Bible (the written Word of God) authentically relevant to every arena of the work of the Christian school.

Finally, the getting of wisdom is valued even amongst those who are not committed to Christ or the Bible. Thus, every (reasonable) parent wants their child to make wise decisions leading to a full life. Moreover, while young (and older) people do not always *like* making wise decisions, in their best moments they would recognise that the *consequences* of wise decisions are much to be preferred than the consequences of foolish decisions. Finally, teachers whether Christian or not, want their students to behave in wise ways leading to

academic, vocational, and relational 'success'. Thus, inspiring and directing young people in the ways of wisdom can be given assent by all parents, students and teachers regardless of faith commitment. Of course, a faith commitment by any of these will enhance the extent to which wisdom is gained.

Limitations

The philosophy outlined in this paper is not intended to act as a curriculum or teaching document. As such, the document does not seek to specify in detail what should be taught in terms of curriculum content nor how that content should be taught. Rather the philosophy seeks to specify the assumptions, context, purpose, and nature of Christian education in broader terms. That said, this document does aim to bridge the gap between the philosophy and the practice of Christian education. Many philosophies of Christian education are disconnected to a greater or lesser extent from teaching practice. As a result, 'motherhood' statements pertaining to Christian education often remain just that – rather than manifesting themselves in teaching practice. To the extent that this disconnection is the case, much of what passes for Christian Education is Christian Education in name only (or, at least, in name *mostly*). A similar point has been made by several authors including Anderson (2013), Dowson (2014), and Hull (2003).

In order to bridge the gap between educational philosophy and practice, towards the end of this document we outline a unified theory of knowledge, learning and teaching that seeks to translate the philosophical understandings developed in the paper into epistemological and pedagogical principles that, prospectively, have application in the classroom. As such, the philosophy and theory outlined in this document are immediately relevant to 'real world' teaching contexts.

Constructing a united and uniting philosophy requires first developing a common understanding of Christian education. This common understanding of Christian education rests on a common understanding of the context in which Christian education is currently located. After stating some core assumptions, I outline a context for Christian Education. I then turn to describing the unique approach of the Melos GoS to Christian education, situating this approach within a broader understanding of Christian education.

Assumptions

Any philosophy is based on certain assumptions. This Philosophy is based on the following assumptions.

1. The primary purpose of Christian education is education not evangelism. As such, Christian schools are first and foremost *educational* (or *learning*) communities, as distinct from *missional* communities in the evangelistic sense. Christian education does, nevertheless, serve the purposes of evangelism in that (when successful) it lays the intellectual and experiential foundations upon which all of life may be based – including the life of faith. To this extent the Christian school might be seen as the 'front porch' of the church. In a culture where first-hand knowledge of Christianity is in decline, the Christian school can provide a direct experience of Christianity that students (and their families) would not otherwise obtain (Smith & Smith, 2011). This experience will, ideally, lead to a commitment of faith. However, even if a student (and/or their family) does not make a commitment of faith, Christian education can nevertheless provide students

with cognitive, affective, behavioural and spiritual resources that can facilitate a fuller and more fulfilling life than would otherwise be the case.

2. A defining feature of Christian Education is that it seeks to bridge the gap between 'sacred' knowledge (gained through special revelation) and 'secular' knowledge (gained through general revelation) to provide students with a unified and integrated view of reality. The bridge can be built both ways. Moving from sacred knowledge to secular knowledge enables us to *interrogate* and *evaluate* secular knowledge from a "Christian perspective" i.e., from the point of view of God as revealed *in Christ*. Moving from secular to sacred knowledge allows us to *identify* and *appreciate* how God has revealed himself in and through his *Creation*. This understanding is based on a long tradition in Christian thought that God has revealed himself in two books – the written word of God and the 'book' of nature. For example, Sir Thomas Browne (1605 – 1682) famously wrote: "There are two books from whence I collect my divinity: besides that written one of God, another of his servant, nature, that universal and public manuscript that lies exposed unto the eyes of all" (*Religio Medici* I.16). Moreover, while Scripture takes precedence because it *salvifically* reveals God, Scripture itself makes plain that the book of nature nevertheless *truly* reveals God (e.g., "the earth is filled with the grandeur of God" - Gerard Manly Hopkins, following Psalm 33:5). Given that much of what we know and study comes from the book of nature, the interaction of sacred and secular knowledge is critical to holistic Christian thought in general, and to the service and practice of Christian education in particular.

3. The world is preciously short of divine wisdom. Hence, a key purpose of Christian education is to build divine wisdom in students (and teachers). The wisdom of God encompasses both sacred and secular knowledge. Solomon, for example, was wise in literature, music, and biology as well as in discerning the will of God. Similarly, Jesus was wise in the religious, theological, political, and cultural influences and conflicts of his day, as well as in the Scriptures and the will of His Father. Thus, becoming wise in both sacred and secular knowledge is not only *not* antithetical to the mission of Christian education, but is a key component of that mission.

The interaction of these assumptions may be represented diagrammatically as shown in Figure 1.

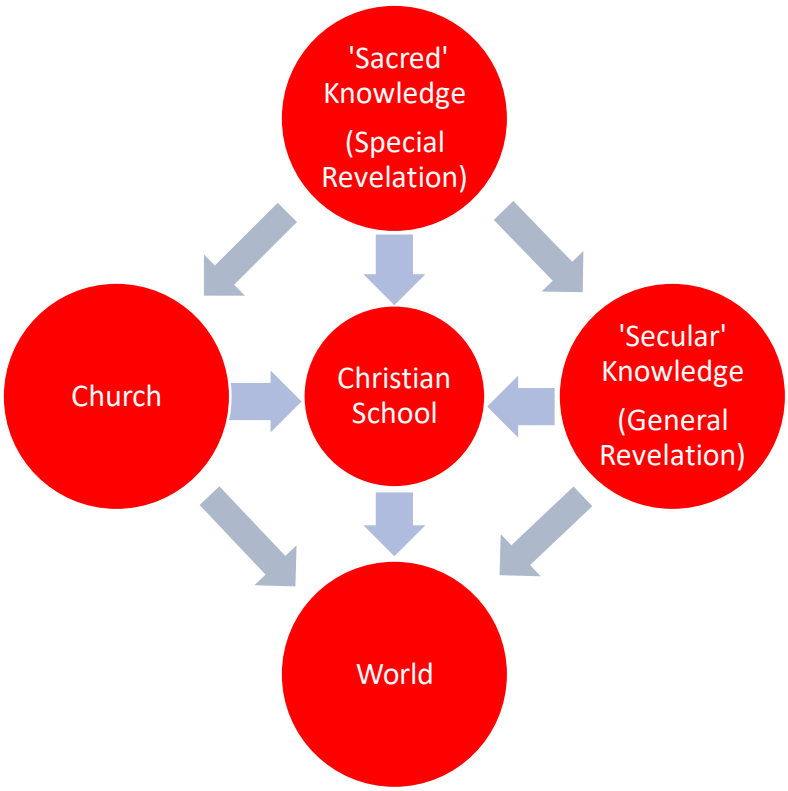

Figure 1: Interaction of assumptions

Figure 1 represents that special revelation takes precedence over the entire network of relationships represented in Figure 1. Both the church and Christian School receive, recognise, and rejoice in special revelation. The world can do no other than receive God's general revelation yet does not recognise or rejoice in this revelation as a gift from God. On the other hand, the Christian school does recognise and rejoice in God's general revelation and seeks to make the true source and content of this general revelation known to the world. Figure 1 is *not* meant to represent that the church does not receive God's general revelation. However, it is the case that the church maintains a particular focus on God's special revelation, with general revelation less explicitly and less extensively explored in the church than in the Christian school. Figure 1 also does *not* represent that that the world cannot receive special revelation apart from the church and the Christian school (the Bible, for example, can be accessed in other ways). However, Figure 1 does represent that, in current contexts at least, that the church, often working through the Christian school, mediates special revelation to the world.

The overall point here is that the church and the Christian school work together to bring both God's special revelation to the world, and to make known to the world the revealed nature of knowledge obtained through general revelation (knowledge that would otherwise be attributed to other sources).

Context

I have come that they may have life – and have it abundantly.
(John 10:10)

…the glory of God is the living man, and the life of man is the vision of God.
(St Irenaeus, Against Heresies, c.185)

God is dead…and we have killed him.
(Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science, 1882)

'But what will become of men then?' I asked him, 'without God and immortal life? All things are permitted then, they can do what they like?'
(Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov, 1879)

The current context of Christian education may be divided into its cultural and Biblical components. In this section we outline the current cultural context of belief in the Western world, particularly among young people. We then map out some implications of this belief context for Christian education. In doing so, we link the belief context of Christian education to the need for wisdom, which provides a Biblical starting point for our philosophy of Christian education.

Fullness of Life

Christians and non-Christians can agree that a desired goal for each human being is attaining and living a full (i.e., a meaning*ful*, purpose*ful*, hope*ful*, joy*ful*) life. Such a life is critical for human wellbeing i.e., it is difficult, if not impossible, to be a well-being, to possess a subjective sense of wellness, without a measure (ideally a full measure, an abundance) of meaning, purpose, hope and joy. Human beings spend much of their energy pursuing a full life. Moreover, it is hard to imagine a person who, given the option, would not *want* to live a full life – a life characterised by an abundance of good things such a meaning, purpose, hope and joy.

On the other hand, an empty life (i.e., life that is meaning*less*, purpose*less*, hope*less,* and joy*less*) is to be judiciously and strenuously avoided. Even if many lives end up being empty, no one *wants* to live an empty life. As such, while the ideal is to pursue and achieve a full life, at the very least much human activity is directed towards *avoiding* an empty life. Should this activity fail, much activity will be directed towards avoiding the negative feelings and emotions associated with emptiness. Finally, if attempts to avoid negative feelings and emotions fail, there may perhaps be activity to end life – not least because the pain of emptiness is deep, lasting and debilitating. Unfortunately, the Western world is currently in the grip of a particularly acute crisis of emptiness, with predictable consequences for mental ill-health and lack of wellbeing e.g., noticeably rising rates of suicide and depression (Twenge, Cooper, Joiner, Duffy & Binau, 2019).

God, however, wants no person to live an empty life. Jesus explicitly stated that he came that humanity might have life and have it to the full (John 10:10). Jesus' mission, then, is to provide access to abundant and, ultimately, everlasting life. Hence, Irenaeus can say that: "the glory of God is *the living man* (otherwise translated as *humanity fully alive*). Yet, the life

of humanity is the vision of God." Thus, the Christian understanding is that a full life is attained when each human, each human community, and humanity taken as a whole, is focussed on and apprehends God. Envisioning God is what makes humanity *live* as opposed to simply existing. Moreover, the words of God have the effect of focussing the attention of humanity on God. So, Jesus says that "man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

Christians and non-Christians can, then, agree on the *goal* - attaining a full life leading to authentic wellbeing. The debate, however, is with respect to the *method* of attaining a full life. There are, broadly speaking, two approaches to pursuing a full life – the godless (foolish) and godly (wise) approaches. We begin by examining the first these methods.

Godless Fulfillment

The fool says in his heart, "there is no God"
(Psalm 14:1)

140 years ago, Nietzsche penned the famous line: "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him." By this quote, Nietzsche did not, of course mean that God was literally dead. If there is a God, He cannot be killed; and if there is no God, He never lived and so, again, He can't be killed. Rather, Nietzsche meant that belief in the *existence* of God, let alone belief (as in trust) in God Himself, had been rendered implausible, perhaps impossible, by the methods and assumptions of the Enlightenment. More broadly, Nietzsche meant that all theories that claim to represent the world as it really is, were rendered implausible or perhaps even impossible by the Enlightenment.

One crucial problem that arises from the death of God, however, is that belief in God is critical for staving off the hopelessness of nihilism - a life without objective truth and without ultimate meaning. So, in his "God is dead" quote Nietzsche was not, as some have thought, taking *delight* in the death of God. Rather he was acutely aware of the negative psychological (Christians would say spiritual) effects – not just for the individual but for the whole of Western culture - of killing God. Immediately following his declaration of the death of God Nietzsche writes:

> *How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?*

Nietzsche foresaw, then, that the death of God would have profound negative effects on what we might today call psychological and social wellbeing. Specifically, Nietzsche recognised that, even assuming God did not actually exist, the loss of *belief* in God would have profound negative effects on both the social and psychological lives of people. This effect would be so great that (paradoxically) God may even have to *reinvented* in some way (through 'sacred games'), not least to counter the guilt that would flow from the 'murder' of God. For our own time we can identify and examine the effects of the murder of God more closely.

Attempts at Godless Fulfilment

In *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), Frankl said: "As to the causation, of the feeling of meaningless, one may say, albeit in an oversimplifying way, that people have enough to live by but nothing to live for; they have the means but no meaning." Without God it is difficult, at least more difficult, to know what to live *for*. As such it is harder to experience meaning and purpose. Moreover, without identifying a God-given purpose for life, one is less likely to experience the joy of fulfilling that purpose. Finally, without obtaining that which gives *this* life meaning (i.e., *eternal* life), it is hard to have hope for the future.

In the absence of God, living for self is the default disposition in Western societies. Yet living for self has only accentuated the meaninglessness and futility of the godless life. Living for self is too narrow, too confined, too limited. Moreover, in order for a life lived for self to have at least some minimal meaning, we must elevate ourselves to (or close to) the status of God. In effect, we must become God in order to replace God. Contemporary society is full of selves-made-God, and this deification accounts for the anger that people sometimes express when they are not worshipped by other human beings as if they were the God they effectively imagine themselves to be. Young people are, of course, not immune from self-deification due to loss of the real God. Many of the behaviours and attitudes teachers find so difficult to address arise from the deification of self in young people.

The problem for Nietzsche, then, was dealing with the psychological and spiritual aftermath of the murder of God – manifest in the futility of self-centredness. A related problem, as Dostoyevsky points out, is that without God anything (that is, any moral choice) is, at least potentially, permissible. In other words, without the *moral* and *intellectual* boundaries that belief in God provides, more-or-less any choice is licenced.[1] Yet, when any choice is licenced, it is hard to know what is the right choice – both in the sense of the *morally* correct choice, and in the sense of the most helpful or appropriate choice from amongst even morally good alternatives. Of course, there are legal constraints around certain choices. However, even excluding illegal choices, the personal domain in contemporary culture offers virtually unrestrained freedom of choice – with any boundaries placed on (or attempted to be placed on) personal choices being seen as an unwarranted intrusion on individual autonomy.

One might think, as many 'Enlightened' rationalists and ethicists do, that such freedom of choice is a good thing. However, the consequences of the current *lack of boundaries* (intellectual, moral, relational, and spiritual) are palpable. When more-or-less anything is permissible, the range of choices in any given situation is arbitrarily wide. Every choice is a viable contenders for selection. This *over-choice* (constantly having to choose between multiple licenced competitors) leads to exhaustion and confusion. Further, anxiety results because the chances of making a *wrong* choice i.e., a choice that results in negative

[1] This is not to say that there have not been various attempts (perhaps most famously by Kant, see Guyer, P. (2000). *Kant on freedom, law, and happiness*. New York: Cambridge University Press) to formulate a basis for moral action that does not rely on belief in God. However, even if we were to concede that these bases 'work' to some extent in the public domain, they nevertheless hold little sway in the domain of private moral choice, especially where such private choices have (apparently) little or no immediate negative effect on the body politic. As such, private moral choices often go unquestioned, even if they may have profoundly negative effects for the individual and their immediate family.

consequences for the individual even if the choice is not morally wrong against some given standard; increase as the options available increase. Conversely, if there is never a wrong choice *morally* (at least in the personal domain), then there is never the sense of having done good, or having acted righteously, that comes from making an objectively *right* moral choice. Such a choice will often be *against* personal desires and, if so, will be a choice that exhibits the strength of character necessary to choose that which is right over that which is simply (and perhaps immediately) desirable. Much of the moral weakness in Western societies, which manifests itself in weakness of character and emotional volatility (lack of self-control), is the result of a pervasive pattern of *not* choosing against personal motivations and desires. Finally, when any (and potentially *every*) choice is licenced, there is a steady reduction in volitional common ground shared between individuals and groups, leading to a breakdown of community. Hence, the present social and cultural fragmentation and division characteristic of Western societies. Where there is no moral consensus over what constitutes right choices, there is not likely to be political or communal consensus as the latter consensuses rely on moral consensus.

Truth

The hazards of over-choice are exacerbated in the absence of established and accepted truth. Western societies are characterised by an ambivalence concerning truth. On the one hand, no one wants to be deceived – to believe falsely. Yet, on the other hand, few claim to know what is absolutely true, and thus what should be *truly* believed. As a result, people end up believing whatever *seems to be* true to them at a given point in time. It has perhaps always been the case that people will sometimes arbitrarily choose their beliefs in preference to choosing beliefs based on some rational process involving the application of logic and weighing of evidence. However, in the absence of God – even God operating at 'just' the cultural level - the scope of such arbitrary choice is greatly widened. Thus, in words attributed to G.K. Chesterton, "When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything." In a similar vein, Chesterton says: "It's the first effect of not believing in God that you lose your common sense." "Thus… religion generally breaks up into *scepticism* and *superstition* simultaneously." [italics mine]. Yet, at the same time, "the opponents of Christianity would believe anything *except* Christianity." Thus, the one belief that would make sense of all other beliefs is eschewed.

The point here is that belief in God is the foundational belief that enables us to recognise what is true, and thus what *else* should be believed. Without belief in God, people paradoxically end up believing too *much*. Sceptics would have us believe that believers in God are too credulous. In fact, non-belief in God is typically associated with credulity. The result is the confused landscape of both scepticism and superstition to which Chesterton refers.

It turns out, then, that murdering God is not a wise choice. Without God, there are unlimited choices, yet no standard of truth by which to discern between beliefs and subsequent choices (choices are made based on whatever is believed – regardless of the veracity of such beliefs). The result, again, is confusion and exhaustion, yet also an unwillingness to believe the one thing that would lead to clarity and strength. Hence, without God, people are truly lost – not just lost in sense of *missing*, but lost in the sense of

not knowing which direction leads home. Into this context, Christian education can inject some much-needed clarity and direction: To believe in God is to know truth and so to be able to choose wisely.

Godly Fulfilment

In contrast to boundaryless, truth-less, and ultimately foolish wandering of those without God, the person of God has moral boundaries, based on the truth of the Word of God, that protect them from harm and protect them from harming others. These boundaries also give meaning and purpose (in the sense of *direction*) to life, and thus joy and hope in life. Thus, from the perspective of human wellbeing, it is critical not only to have boundaries but to respect those boundaries. Contrary to common wisdom, boundaries do not restrict or enslave us. Rather, not least by reducing our anxiety and exhaustion, boundaries set us free to explore, and to do good in, the world. Thus, boundaries are not a negative detractor from, but a positive contributor to a full life and consequent well-being. Choosing to operate within boundaries, then, is a wise choice. Four sets of boundaries are important for living a full life: intellectual, moral, spiritual and relational.

Intellectual Boundaries: The Boundary Between Truth and Falsehood

To enjoy a full life, we must know the truth and not give credence to false teachings (of any kind, including but not limited to theological teachings). Paul says: "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13), and "Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly" (1 Timothy 4:7). The church at Ephesus discerned truth "You have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false" (Revelation 1:2); the churches of Pergamum (Revelation 2:14) and Thyatira (Revelation 2:20) did not do so well. Yet, not discerning truth leads to confusion and exploitation: Those unable to discern truth are: "tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).

Moral Boundaries: The Boundary Between Right and Wrong

Separating oneself from evil is also critical to living a full life in communion with God: "Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6:17). Similarly, the author of Proverbs says: "Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evildoers. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way" (Proverbs 4:14–15; cf. Proverbs 22:3). In response, the Psalmist says: "I will not look with approval on anything that is vile. I hate what faithless people do; I will have no part in it" (Psalm 101:3). In particular, that which we choose to do with our bodies has an impact on our spiritual health (1 Corinthians 6:9–10). For this reason, Paul commands the young Timothy to: "flee the evil desires of youth (2 Timothy 2:22), and more generally to the Romans "do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh" (Romans 13:14). Rather, the mandate is to pursue [instead] righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Timothy 2:22).

Spiritual Boundaries: The Boundary Between Good and Evil

Avoiding evil and doing good is critical for life present and future. "Turn away from evil and do good; so shall you dwell forever." (Psalm 37:27). Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is

good. (Romans 12:9). Thus, clearly distinguishing between good and evil is a Biblical mandate: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20). Establishing spiritual boundaries requires deliberate choice: “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Indeed, choosing to love and serve the Lord is the antithesis of evil, and the way to life: “O you who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked.” (Psalm 97:10). Finally, with well-established spiritual boundaries the righteous will be a stopping point (rather than a transmission point) for evil. Thus, Paul says: “See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.” (1 Thessalonians 5:15).

Relational Boundaries: The Boundary Between Friends and Enemies

Boundaries concerning friends are critical for fullness and wellness – and hence wellbeing. The Bible indicates that our friends, particularly our close friends, should be wise: “Walk with the wise and become wise, for a companion of fools suffers harm” (Proverbs 13:20). Our close friends should be self-controlled: “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered” (Proverbs 22:24). Our close friends should be willing to tell us the truth, even when it hurts: “Wounds from a friend can be trusted” (Proverbs 27:6), and “iron sharpens iron” (Proverbs 27:17); yet an enemy does not provide disciplined feedback (Proverbs 27:6). Young people…. Do not be deceived: “Bad company ruins good morals.” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

The point of the sub-sections above is that, perhaps counterintuitively, living within strongly established intellectual, moral, spiritual, and relational boundaries leads to a full life and, hence, wellness and wellbeing. Boundaries protect us, rather than constraining us. The Enlightenment’s emancipation is not truly emancipation, but slavery to self. Without boundaries there is limited or no escape from the anxiety and exhaustion of freedom without limits, and no particular limit to the damage that can be done to self and others through more-or-less unlimited choice. The need then is to choose an appropriately bounded life – a life that leads to life – and this choice requires wisdom.

At the same time, knowing where to erect boundaries requires access to truth. Wisdom draws on truth when erecting appropriate boundaries. In the absence of truth, boundaries become ill-defined. As a result of ill-defined boundaries, people are easily misled and exploited, experience mental health difficulties of all kinds, and go on to lead trivial lives. In response, however, Christian education can lead students to the truth in all arenas of life and learning, and so can help students to use truth wisely to draw boundaries for their own welfare and the welfare of others. An education that focusses on wisdom and truth will thus benefit students in every aspect of their lives – intellectual, moral, spiritual and relational. This observation is not meant to imply (as N.T. Wright and Tim Keller have both pointed out) that the “good news” of Christianity can be reduced to “good advice” (perhaps following the approach of Jordan Peterson, for example). Nevertheless, the good news of new life in Christ Jesus does carry with it good advice for life. In other words, the wisdom of God in Christ includes, even if it cannot be reduced to, practical wisdom for life and living. With this distinction in mind, an outline for a philosophy of Christian education centred on wisdom and truth comprises the rest of this paper.

Philosophy of Christian Education

In this section we outline a philosophy that will form a common basis for understanding Christian Education within the Melos Group.

Axioms of Christian Education

We begin with five axioms for Christian education, and then explain these axioms in the text that follows:

1. Knowledge is revealed truth.
2. Understanding is insight into knowledge.
3. Wisdom is the correct application of knowledge and understanding.
4. The purpose of all education is "the getting of wisdom".
5. The distinctive of Christian education is that, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, Christians have special access to *all* the treasures of wisdom, understanding and knowledge. Hence, Christian education is in a privileged position with respect to the getting of wisdom.

Explanation of Axioms

1. Knowledge

(a) All education involves the acquisition of knowledge. Hence, it is critical that a philosophy of Christian education begins with an appropriate, biblically grounded, definition of knowledge. If we start with a secular definition of knowledge (e.g., justified true belief) we will end with a secular approach to education. If we begin with no definition of knowledge we will end in confusion.

(b) All knowledge is truth. False things may be believed, but they cannot be known. For example, it is not possible to know there is life on other planets unless there *is* (objectively) life on other planets. It is, however, possible to believe (even to believe with justification short of objective verification) that there is life on other planets even if there is not life on other planets. Thus, belief, even justified belief, falls short of actual knowledge.

(c) All truth is revealed truth. We are used to the idea that all truth about God (supernatural truth) must be revealed truth i.e., God is known to us only to the extent that he reveals himself to us. The same is true for the natural world. We 'dis-cover' truth in the natural world only because God has made natural truth discoverable i.e., God has made the universe intelligible to us such that we are able to discover truths in and about the universe that God intends for us to know. Once discovered, we recognise truths for what they are i.e., God reveals to us not only the truth, but that the truth is the truth. For example, we discover that everywhere we observe $2 + 2 = 4$. We recognise this as a truth about the universe, and this recognition justifies the generalisation of the truth to the universe. In other words, we *know* $2 + 2 = 4$ is true everywhere and always because this is a revealed truth.

(d) The truth is either revealed to us directly through our five senses and/or through our 'natural instinct' (effectively a sixth sense, see Calvin, 1536/1960) for God that

resides in the human mind[2]; or indirectly as we reason about the 'data' accessed through our five physical senses and our instinct for God. An example of direct revelation is the knowledge that trees are green. The knowledge that trees are green is a revealed truth because: (a) trees are actually green i.e., it is true that trees are green; and (b) God has gifted us not just with a sense of sight but with colour vision. Without this colour vision we would not *know* that trees are green even though trees are, in fact, green. Thus, God has revealed to us that trees are green *through* the gift of colour vision.[3]

(e) Other truths are revealed indirectly. For example, the structure of the atom is inferred from our observations of the behaviour of atoms under certain experimental conditions rather than by direct observation of the atomic structure. As a more common place example, we might correctly infer from the lateness of a bus, and the volume of traffic at the bus stop, that the bus is caught in traffic. The point is that what is *directly* (i.e., empirically, evidentially, sensorily) revealed to us is that the bus is late. What is *indirectly* (i.e., rationally, using reason and inference) revealed to us is that the bus is caught in traffic. However, our ability to make logical inferences cannot be taken for granted. We are able to make logical inferences because God has enabled us to make these inferences. Moreover, we are able to recognise when we have arrived at a correct inference (from a range of possible logical inferences) because God has enabled us to recognise truth when we arrive at it. Thus, for example, recognition of the truth that God exists (gained by inference from his creation) can be supressed but it cannot be avoided.

(f) Despite the common grace of logical inference and recognition of the truth (assumed, for example, in Romans 1), reason can nevertheless be specially directed or otherwise by the Holy Spirt. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, Christians have access to *more* data, and can reason more clearly about the whole corpus of data available to them. As such, they gain *more* and/or *deeper* knowledge than that available to those who are not similarly informed or guided.

2. *Understanding*

(a) Not all that is known is understood. Thus, it is possible to *know* something yet not *understand* that something. To understand something, for example, implies knowing not just *that* something is the case, but knowing *why* that something is the case,

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[2] The five senses, located in five physical organs (eyes, ears, nose, mouth and skin) receive, register and transmit physical sensory inputs. In so doing, our *senses* given us a *sense of* the physical inputs we receive. The *sensus divinitas* (sense of the divine) can refer both to: (a) the *sense itself* 'located' in the human mind that receives, registers and transmits metaphysical inputs – specifically awareness of God; and/or the *sense of* God engendered by the metaphysical inputs we receive. Plantinga, for example, uses the term *sensus divinitas* in the former sense, while Calvin uses it in the latter sense.

[3] Direct revelation is not intended to imply that all sensory inputs (physical or metaphysical) are flawlessly received and, thus, that human knowledge is always 'perfect'. We can be mistaken about what we see, hear, touch, taste and smell. In a fallen world, we can also be mistaken about the nature of the God we perceive (or even profess not to perceive, see Edlin, 2006; Plantinga, 2000). Nevertheless, revelation is still necessary for perception (flawed or otherwise) to occur and, so, revelation is foundational to knowledge.

and/or knowing *what are the implications* of that something being the case. Thus, it is possible to know something is the case without knowing the causes, consequences, or constituent nature or structure of that thing. In such cases one would know, but without understanding. Rote learning is a good example of knowing without understanding. By rote learning one might be able to *recall* any number of facts, yet not have any meaningful, connected or applied knowledge of those facts. In such cases, we would say a person knows something, but not with any 'real' understanding.

(b) Insight into knowledge (understanding), then, requires that knowledge is not *just* memorised and recalled. Memory and recall have their place, but insight requires much more than simply committing knowledge to memory and retrieving knowledge from memory. Insight requires that knowledge is arranged and rearranged, considered and reconsidered, analysed and synthesised, appreciated and evaluated, differentiated and integrated, critiqued and accepted (or rejected).

(c) Understanding requires that knowledge is connected rather than fragmented *in the mind of the knower*. Unfortunately, the current fragmentation of knowledge both within and across academic disciplines leads to fragmentation of knowledge in the minds of students, thus providing fertile ground to conclude that there is no Creator. In contrast, identifying salient connections within and between bodies of knowledge, and so highlighting the overall coherence of knowledge, implicates the Creator. Connecting and thus bringing coherence to knowledge does require, however, that teachers know their disciplines well, and know how their disciplines interact with, support, and are informed by, other disciplines. A connected and coherent curriculum is, thus, an imperative for Christian Education – but implies 'deep' disciplinary knowledge by Christian teachers.

(d) The processes identified apply not just to 'secular' knowledge but to theological and biblical knowledge as well. Theological/biblical knowledge is often shielded from critique, analysis and comment for fear that such an approach will lead to a diminution of the Bible, and Christianity more broadly, in the eyes of students. Put more strongly, Christian/biblical critique is often avoided because it is associated, in the minds of some Christians at least, with atheism and liberalism. However, this association need not be the case. In fact, subjecting Christianity and the Bible to appropriate critique can facilitate and strengthen students' faith not only because Christianity and the Bible are well able to withstand *any* critique, but precisely because critique leads to *insight*. A biblical example of this process is provided in Acts 17:10-12:

> *That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to see if Paul and Silas were teaching the truth. As a result, many Jews believed, as did many of the prominent Greek women and men.*

The passage indicates that belief followed "open-mindedness" but also a sustained "searching the Scriptures" to determine if Paul (an Apostle, no less) was teaching the truth. Thus, implied in the passage is that belief followed an informed investigation of the truth of Paul's (and Silas') teaching. By extension, the truth of Christianity and the Bible can be made manifest to students by informed investigation which is one application of critical thinking.

3. *Wisdom*

(a) Wisdom refers to how knowledge and understanding are used (applied) not just in education, but in life more widely. Even revealed truths properly understood can be misapplied. Wisdom, thus, involves the willingness and ability to put revealed truth to 'good' use.

(b) Knowledge and understanding are put to good use when they are deployed to the advancement of God's glory and to the true welfare of humanity.[4] Unfortunately, knowledge and understanding are often ignored or, if not ignored, then corrupted such that their true origin (divine revelation) is disguised. Moreover, knowledge can be deployed against the will and purposes of God, and thus to the detriment of humanity i.e., knowledge can be applied unwisely rather than wisely.

(c) As a result of its lack of wisdom and understanding, contemporary secular society has fallen victim to its own knowledge. Put another way, the world is currently characterised by too much knowledge, and too little wisdom and understanding. As a result of this imbalance, we have become a hazard to ourselves. We pollute the only world we must live on and in. We dispose and dispense with our relationships. We are enslaved by our technologies. We pursue a level of material prosperity we don't require; at the expense of the spiritual and physical health and wellbeing we do require. We kill ourselves slowly through excesses and addictions of all kinds. Sometimes we kill ourselves quickly during the despair, loneliness and meaningless of a life without God. In one sense, we do what we want to do (i.e., we follow our own desires). However, in doing so, we end up doing precisely that which we don't want to do (i.e., falling victim to the worst excesses of those very same desires).

(d) In fact, this is not a new situation. Adam and Eve fell victim to their desire to acquire knowledge, yet at the expense of wisdom expressed in obedience to God. Sinfulness, then, can be defined as the pursuit of knowledge without wisdom. In contrast, the pursuit of wisdom and understanding protects a person from sin.

> *Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore, get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. (Proverbs 4:6-7)*

(e) Ultimately, divine wisdom is not a thing, but a Person – the divine Person Jesus Christ. Christ is the Wisdom of God, and in Christ are also hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Thus, true wisdom cannot be gained apart from Christ. This is where Christian and secular education diverge. Even if secular education was to

[4] Paraphrased from the Australian Parliamentary Prayer.

desire divine wisdom, it cannot get it apart from Christ. The treasures of wisdom and knowledge are *hidden* in Christ. So, only those who are in Christ have full access to these treasures. This is not to say that, under God's common grace, that no divine wisdom, understanding, or knowledge is possible apart from Christ. It is to say, however, that the *fullness* of wisdom, understanding and knowledge are only attainted in and through Christ as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

4. *The Purpose of Education*

(a) The purpose of all education, Christian education in particular, is "the getting of wisdom". Unlike the famous Australian novel and film of the same name, however, "the getting of wisdom" does not mean the getting of human wisdom. Human wisdom (i.e., worldly wisdom - the wisdom of *this age*) is a wisdom based on the primacy of human intellect, reason and understanding. Divine wisdom (i.e., heavenly wisdom – the wisdom of *the ages* not just *this* age) is, in contrast, a gift from God made known through revelation:

> *Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;*
> *wisdom and power are his...*
> *He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.*
> *He reveals deep and hidden things;*
> *he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.*
> *I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors:*
> *You have given me wisdom and power,*
> *you have made known to me what we asked of you,*
> *you have made known to us the dream of the king*
> *(Daniel 2:20-23; see also Daniel 1:20, 2:14, 5:11, 13).*

(b) In fact, of course, the world (and secular education as part of the world) does not desire *divine* wisdom. Secular education pursues human wisdom and understanding. As a result, the world is trapped in foolishness (see 3(c) above). Yet, Christian education pursues divine wisdom (i.e., wisdom in Christ) and, as such, arrives at true wisdom.

> *Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength. (1 Corinthians 1:20-25).*

(c) It is critical for the holistic wellbeing of young people that education pursues divine wisdom. In a world where knowledge is increasingly fragmented, where moral norms have been jettisoned, and where beauty (which is a key indicator of truth and goodness) is sullied and corrupted; young people are increasingly lost intellectually, morally and spiritually. This lostness is specifically evident in the crisis of youth

mental health, but generally evident in the malaise and apathy typical of students in both primary and secondary schools. In this context, reclaiming wisdom in Christ is essential for student wellbeing, both now and in their future lives.

(d) The getting of *divine* wisdom implicates an education that is distinctly different from the typical education students currently receive. Contemporary education is typically characterised by:

(i) relational isolation such that teachers and students don't know each other personally, and students don't know other students personally. Yet wisdom is developed in learning communities where everyone knows everyone else, at least to some extent.

(ii) the compartmentalisation and fragmentation of knowledge such that connections between knowledge within and across disciplines is made opaque to students. Yet wisdom requires understanding, and hence wisdom is only developed when the connections within and between bodies of knowledge are made explicit.

(iii) the exclusion of some sources of knowledge and wisdom – particularly *ancient* knowledge and wisdom. Contemporary education, for example, more-or-less ignores the entire corpus of the Western intellectual tradition from the first century to the Enlightenment. Even amongst Christians, the works of the Church Fathers (both East and West, but particularly East), and the Christian intellectual tradition more broadly, is largely unknown or, perhaps worse, considered irrelevant.

(iv) an unbalanced focus on learning what to learn, at the expense of learning how to learn: equivalently, an unbalanced focus on what to think at the expense of how to think. Students, for example, typically graduate high school knowing certain facts about mathematics, science, English, or history – without knowing how to think mathematically, scientifically, rhetorically, or historically. Yet understanding revealed truths, and hence developing wisdom, requires that students can think in a disciplined manner – both in the general sense of a logically disciplined manner, and in the particular sense of the logic of enquiry appropriate to each discipline.

(v) a weak or absent focus on the assumptions and presuppositions underpinning contemporary culture and education. Yet, wisdom requires that assumptions and presuppositions are identified, examined and evaluated. Some of these assumptions include:

- people know what is best for them;
- if someone feels (especially if someone feels *strongly*) that something is the case, it is the case;
- all knowledge is provisional – nothing can be conclusively known;
- expert knowledge is no better, and quite possibly worse, than popular knowledge;
- we know more about everything (or everything that matters) than our ancestors;
- individual rights take precedence over communal responsibilities; and
- only insiders can validly criticise or comment on the values, beliefs, actions and behaviours of their in-group (*identity politics*).

(e) Education for wisdom, in contrast, will be characterised by:

(i) relational connectedness: Learning with and from each other – including teachers learning from students, and students learning from each other.

(ii) the integration of knowledge such that students are able to see and appreciate the unity of knowledge within and across disciplines, and the unity of the universe itself;

(iii) the potential inclusion (in principle, at least) of any knowledge relevant to the curriculum – including knowledge drawn from the Christian intellectual tradition from the first to the fifteenth centuries.

(iv) learning how to learn and how to think – not least by mastering (as appropriate to each age group) the language and logic of each subject area.

(v) a deliberate and intentional focus on identifying the underlying assumptions and presuppositions of all knowledge – including Christian/biblical knowledge. Some of these assumptions will include:

- people are a hazard to themselves – all humans have the propensity for self-destruction (the Bible calls this propensity *sin*);
- reality is independent of our beliefs and feelings about reality;
- absolute truth can be known absolutely – not least though our *sensus divinitas*;
- expert knowledge is often better than popular knowledge;
- ancient wisdom is no less valuable than contemporary wisdom, and sometimes more valuable – especially in arenas of perennial interest and concern;
- individual rights should be balanced against communal responsibilities; and
- the values, beliefs, actions and behaviours of any group (including any Christian group) can be compared against, and contrasted with, agreed standards i.e., we implicitly recognise objective and universally applicable values whether these are explicitly acknowledged or not.

5. *The Distinctiveness of Christian Education*

The search for what makes Christian education distinctive has motivated Christian educators for a considerable period. To frame this search it will be helpful to identify some aspects of education where Christian education is not distinctive namely:

(a) a holistic approach to education: Christian education often claims to be a holistic approach to education taking into account the physical, social, intellectual and spiritual needs of students. However, secular education does the same (even, more recently, including an emphasis on spirituality). Of course, Christian education would claim to be *more* and/or *differently* holistic, but the claim to holism itself is not distinctive

(b) a worldview-driven education: Christian education claims to be driven by a Biblically informed view of the world. We don't dispute this claim. However, we also recognise that the secular education is increasingly willing to promote the worldview(s) or philosophies (secular humanism, individualism, moral relativism, etc.) on which it is

based. The competition then is between worldviews, not between worldview-aware and worldview-ignorant approaches to education.

(c) an education for citizenship and service. Christian education seeks to prepare students for a life of service and 'positive' citizenship. So too secular education. It may be that service and citizenship motivated by faith and offered in Christ's name is more selfless than other types of service. However, the aim of preparing students to be positive citizens is a shared goal of both secular and Christian.

(d) an education focussed on character formation: Secular schools are increasingly concerned about the character of their students and graduates. While character education and formation fell out of vogue for some time in secular schools, aspirations to this formation are now becoming much more explicit and extensive than was previously the case. Christian schools would claim to have access to a special power (the power of the Holy Spirit) that enables authentic and pervasive character development. However, secular schools are nevertheless no less committed to the *goal* of character development, even if they do not have the same spiritual resources as the Christian school to realise such development.

(e) a values motivated education: Both Christian schools and secular school espouse certain values and are allegedly motivated by these values. Moreover, values and mission statements are not noticeably less commonplace in secular schools than in Christian schools. Again, there may be dispute over *what* values are the most important for schooling, and over the extent to which values espoused are values actually practiced. But, values themselves are not a distinctive of Christian schools.

(f) a 'safe' education: Christian schools have a reputation for being safe schools - at the very least *safer* schools than their secular counterparts. This perceived safety is still relevant for parents in choosing Christian schools over secular schools. However, with recent emphases on child protection, peer support, community involvement and the like, secular schools are becoming (at least nominally) safer than they used to be. To the extent that this is the case, this distinctive of Christian schools may be diminishing.

Given these pseudo-distinctives, the question remains as to what makes Christian education, and a Christian school as expressions of that education, distinctive. In the Introduction to this philosophy, I provided reasons why wisdom should be a central organising construct for a philosophy of Christian education. The Context section explained why wisdom is needed for a full life individually and corporately. Here I make a brief case for why Wisdom should be considered a (really *the*) distinctive of Christian Education.

I should point out that secular education has historically not always ignored the issue of wisdom (see, for example, Lawson, 1961; Sternberg, 1990) and, to some extent, wisdom is making a comeback in secular education (Ferrari & Kim, 2019; Hart, 2001; Maimon, 2012). However, the wisdom talked about in secular education is, of course, not typically the wisdom of God i.e., wisdom as the Bible defines it. Wisdom as the bible defines it

relates to the fullness of truth, beauty and goodness. Biblical wisdom gives insight into truth, heightens appreciation for beauty, and instils a desire to act in morally good (righteous) ways. Secular education has an interest in truth, beauty and goodness but not the fullness of these entities. For example, secular education is (at least) ambivalent about the absoluteness of truth and has no place, or no *formal* place, for truth about metaphysical or spiritual realities. Secular education can appreciate beauty, but does not deal (again, at least not explicitly) with spiritual and moral beauty. Secular education desires the good – but does not recognise that God is the source of all goodness. Thus, while secular education might (wisely) aspire to the fullness of truth, beauty and goodness only Christian education can deliver on this aspiration.

However, we are yet to answer the question as to why wisdom is (and should be) the distinctive of Christian education. Several reasons are presented below.

(g) The wisdom of the world is not truly wise because it is not concerned with ultimate realities and the ultimate destination of humanity. Christian education, in contrast, recognises ultimate realities, understands the true destiny of humanity, and is organised around this recognition and understanding. Thus, while secular schools may be equally or more 'intelligent' (in the sense of academic achievement) that Christian schools, assuming the Christin school is true to its Lord, they will not be wiser than the Christian school.

(h) Although I have said that the primary purpose of Christian education is not evangelism, it is nevertheless the mission of the Christian school to participate in the positive transformation of individuals, families, communities and cultures. This transformation can only and will only occur when Christ and the wisdom of Christ is bought to bear on people and cultures. Secular education may attempt to borrow from Christian wisdom to affect such a transformation, but the Christian school can and should authentically be a conduit for this wisdom.

(i) The generalised mission of all schools is to love, support, nurture and develop young people and their families. However, Christian education has a distinctive diagnosis as to what currently threatens individual and family life i.e., a broken relationship with God that leads, not least, to a lack of wisdom in living. Given this diagnosis, the Christian school (and church) is focussed on connecting or reconnecting individuals and families with God – but for the Christian school the benefits of godly wisdom experienced in learning and the school community may be the particular doorway through which students and families begin this (re)connection with God. In other words, experiencing the wisdom of God may motivate individuals and families to (re)connect with God.

More could be said here about wisdom as the distinctive of Christian education. However, the points above are sufficient for the purposes of this philosophy and so we can move on to how the Christian school pursues the getting of wisdom.

6. *The Theology of the Getting of Wisdom*

Christian Education is in a privileged position to pursue the getting of wisdom because it (ideally) follows the character and example of Christ, and is inspired by the Spirit of Christ, who is the Wisdom of God. Some key theological insights that underpin an educational perspective in wisdom are incorporated below.

(a) God is the source of wisdom, yet Jesus is the repository of all wisdom. Thus, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:3), particularly those treasures relating to knowledge of the Father.

> *All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Luke 10:21,22).*

(b) Jesus as the wisdom of God does not mean that Jesus is 'simply' wisdom personified (as in the Old Testament). Rather, Jesus as the incarnate Word of God is the also the incarnation of God's wisdom. Christ is God's Wisdom, because Christ is God's Word. As the Wisdom of God, Jesus also the Way, the Truth and the Life i.e., as Wisdom Jesus provides direction to lost souls, manifests absolute truth, and so guides anyone who will submit to Him to *the* (eternal) life.

(c) The Spirit gives us access to the repository of wisdom in Christ because the Spirit:

> *…searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God...This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit- taught words... for, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:10-16).*

(d) As befitting the one who is the Wisdom of God, Jesus is described in the gospels as both a person of wisdom, and a teacher of wisdom. The young Jesus was filled with wisdom, and grew in wisdom (Luke 2:40, 52). The Wise (men) worship Jesus at his birth, and the wisdom of Christ surpasses even that of the wisest King of Israel (Solomon).

> *The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here (Luke 11:32).*

(e) Further, Jesus challenges his disciples to be wise, with wisdom being defined as hearing and doing Christ's words, not in order to accumulate knowledge, but to avoid destruction.

> *Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and*

the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash (Matthew 7:24-27).

(f) The acquisition of wisdom requires fearing God as per the instruction of Christ (Matthew 10:28). Thus, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 111:10).

The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high;
he will fill Zion with his justice and righteousness.
He will be the sure foundation for your times,
a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge;
the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure (Is. 33:5,6)

(g) It is no mistake that the Bible contains a whole genre called Wisdom literature. Proverbs, for example, observes the way the world works, analyses human behaviour, and shows the benefits of thoughtful reflection on the world and on individual action. Proverbs shows the way of God's wisdom, and warns of the dangers of not following that way. Proverbs invite us to know God and receive life through wisdom, yet warn us of that lack of wisdom ("folly") leads to death. Wisdom is also communicated by means of inspired songs (the Psalms, and the Song of Songs), by narrative and debate (Job), and by reflection on (often bitter) personal experience which becomes instruction for others (Ecclesiastes).

(h) Importantly for teachers, God gives wisdom to those who desire it ("God gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to the discerning" Daniel, 2:21) so that they may teach others. Moses, for example, said:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." (Deuteronomy 4:5, 6).

Similarly Paul says:

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"— the things God has prepared for those who love him— these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:6-10)

Moreover, the wisdom that God gives for the benefit of others does not 'just' concern spiritual things but things of the world. It may surprise some to know that Solomon, for example, was a wise biologist as well as wise ruler!

> *God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. .... And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He spoke about plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also spoke about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. From all nations people came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34 and see 5:12, 10:1-9,23,24, 11:41, and 2 Chronicles 9:3,22,23).*

Given the preceding analysis of knowledge, understanding and wisdom, the unique approach of the Melos Group to Christian education is explored in the next section of this philosophy.

The Unique Approach to Christian Education of the Melos Group of Schools

The Melos group's defining approach to Christian education is to make the getting of wisdom an explicit and intentional outcome of all aspects of each member school's curriculum – as appropriate to the context of each school. Thus, the getting of wisdom is neither an accidental or incidental outcome of education in the Melos Group, but is rather the intended result of the Group's, and each school's, educational goals, strategies, and specific programs.

Specifically, the Group's approach to education will be characterised by the following practices.

1. A focus on the getting of wisdom.
   Practically this means:
   (a) exploring the applications of knowledge and understanding – particularly those applications that directly benefit the welfare and wellbeing of human beings both individually and collectively.

   (b) making good choices i.e., choices that bring us into *harmony* with God, others, the earth, and the self.
   "Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different than it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing into a heavenly creature or a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state of the other." (C.S. Lewis)

   (c) being humble – recognising that others (including but not limited to teachers) often know better than we do what is best for us and for others. Teachers model humility

by making the limits of their knowledge and understanding explicit to students, and learning from students where possible.

(d) establishing a range of fluid learning communities in and between classrooms, predicated on the understanding that wisdom is caught *from* others as well as taught *to* others. Learning communities may be pairs, small groups, inter-class groups, Year groups, etc. Teachers may or may not be part of any given learning community at any particular time.

2. A focus on understanding
   Practically this means:
   (a) teachers and students forge connections within and between bodies wherever possible. Teachers, perhaps especially in secondary school, conceive of themselves as teaching (at any given time) one aspect of a unified curriculum that spans not only all of *their* subject(s), but all of *all* subjects. As far as possible, the unity of the universe is made explicit to students.

   (b) teachers teach for insight: Teachers look to create 'aha' moments (see Pilcher, 2015) for students, by identifying patterns and relationships that form part of the structure of knowledge in any given area. Some historical examples of 'aha' moments that can be used in the classroom include:
      (i) determining the volume of *regular* shapes (e.g., cubes) is relatively easy, and the ancient Greeks knew how to estimate these volumes. Whether in bathtub or not, Archimedes nevertheless discovered that displacement can be used to measure the volume of *irregular* shapes (like human bodies).
      (ii) Newton realised that objects don't so much 'fall' in the one universal direction, as much as being 'pulled' towards the centre of the earth regardless of where on the earth's spherical surface one might be. Thus, falling objects on opposite 'sides' of the earth in fact fall *towards* each other.
      (iii) Alexander Fleming accidentally discovered that mould (usually considered a 'bad' thing) in fact contained the growth of a worse thing (staphylococcus bacteria). Thus 'bad' mould became the basis of 'good' penicillin.
      (iv) Descartes realised that number lines could be arranged perpendicularly to represent position (coordinates) on a surface. In so doing Descartes integrated arithmetic with geometry (and later algebra) to form what is now known as analytic geometry.

3. A focus on knowledge as revealed truth.
   It should not be taken for granted that:
   (a) we are able to 'sense' the world. From a Christian perspective, our senses are granted by God, but this need not be the case. God need not have granted us colour vision. If so, the greenness of trees would remain hidden from (un-revealed to) us despite the fact that trees are green.

   (b) the universe is intelligible to us. Even given that we have operational senses, these senses need not yield to us information that makes sense. To use an example from fiction, Alice was very much confused by much that she encountered in Wonderland,

even though her five senses remained properly operational. The universe could have been to us as Wonderland was to Alice. Yet, it is not. The universe is intelligible to us *because* it is largely (i.e., despite the presence of randomness) orderly and predictable. Again, the universe need not be this way. The universe could be such that randomness 'outweighed' order. Moreover, the apparent universal orderliness of the universe (pun intended) provides the justification for our epistemic models and assumptions. For example, the assumption that scientific method applies in all places at all times is justified because the orderliness of the universe is assumed not to be just a 'local' phenomenon i.e., a phenomenon only applicable to our corner of the universe.

(c) we understand the essence of things. For example, we understand *intuitively* from a very young age what constitutes a tree. A five-year old will label any number of different types of trees (pines, oaks, willows, etc.) as trees i.e., understanding that all *types* of trees are members of the *class* of things called trees despite their differences. This intuitive understanding of "treeness" (and the essence of any number of other *classes* of objects) is, from a Christian perspective, a revelation from God i.e., it is not a function of reason or intellect because treeness is known and understood by all normally functioning children and adults even though few adults, let alone children, would be able to explicitly define what qualities constitute the class of things called trees. Moreover, even if specific qualities defining treeness could be identified, even fewer adults or children would be able to explain *why* a given quality or qualities defines treeness.[5]

(d) humanity's sixth sense – sense of the divine – is ubiquitous. Most people at most times across the course of human history have believed in gods of one sort or another. The simplest explanation for this ubiquity of faith is that humans do indeed have a sense of the divine, and that this sense correctly identifies that there is a domain of the supernatural. Of course, Christians would disagree that other religions have identified the *right* God. However, Christians would not disagree that identifying a God, and hence the existence of the supernatural, is the correct course of action. The point here is that the existence of the sixth sense should not be dismissed, even if data from the sixth sense may sometimes be misinterpreted. Given the correct operation of the sixth sense, theology is a legitimate arena of enquiry whose results should be respected in the same way as theoretical understandings in other fields. All fields of knowledge, including theology, are properly based on evidence gained via the senses and inferences from that evidence. As such, theology as the study of God can form an authentic part of the school curriculum, and understandings from theology may be integrated along with understandings gleaned from other bodies of knowledge.

[5] It should also be noted that our sense of treeness (or any other category) is mediated and/or moderated by culture. For example, some cultures don't differentiate conceptually between green and blue, even though they physically see these colour differences i.e., they have normal eyesight. Hence, while the capacity to recognise categories is a universal trait underpinning knowledge, there is clearly a cultural element involved in mediating/moderating where specific categorical boundaries are determined to lie.

Learning, Teaching and the Curriculum

In this section, we outline a theory of learning, teaching and the curriculum that relates directly to the philosophy outlined above. Specifically, this section seeks to link the philosophy to learning, teaching and the curriculum via a Biblical epistemology. We begin with that epistemology before moving on to examining each of the theoretical elements.

A Christian-Biblical Epistemology

Everyone (theist, deist, atheist, agnostic) can agree that education *is* about, but is not *only* about, acquiring knowledge. Hence, any philosophy of education must, minimally, deal with the issue of knowledge - specifically, what it is and how it is gained. A key missing link in previous attempts to provide a philosophical basis for Christian education is that the issue of a Christian/Biblical epistemology has either been ignored or underdone. As a result, there is typically a disconnect between the theology and the theory of Christian education espoused in any given philosophy. Here I outline a Christian-Biblical epistemology, that complements the philosophy of Christian education outlined previously, and that leads to a Christian/Biblical theory of learning. In doing so, the transition between the theology and the theory (and, ultimately, the practice) of Christian education is prospectively made seamless.

A Christian-Biblical epistemology may proceed as follows:

1. Both the natural universe and (to some extent at least) the realm of the supernatural, are intelligible to human beings. Yet this need not be the case. To the extent that the worlds of the natural and the supernatural are intelligible, God has made them so and, in so doing, God has established the pre-conditions for knowledge.

2. The natural and the supernatural are intelligible for two reasons:
   (a) Ontologically, both the natural universe and the supernatural realm are orderly and predictable. If the natural and supernatural were completely, or even mostly, random and disordered then, even with fully functioning senses, the natural and supernatural would be largely unintelligible.[6]
   (b) Epistemologically, God as endowed us with senses such that we can gather data from both natural and supernatural sources, and reason such that we can organise sense data and make correct inferences from that data.
   (c) Further, through our faculties of reason and *imagination* we can generate and think about ideas, using ideas as cognitive data, and making inferences from and to those ideas.

3. Regarding the senses:
   (a) some of what we know comes directly to us through our five senses. Without our five senses we would not know that certain facts about the natural world are true. Thus, knowledge gained through out five senses is revealed knowledge.

[6] The orderliness of the universe is, from a Christian perspective, descriptive not normative - meaning that the *general* orderliness of the universe does not preclude randomness or the intervention of the supernatural. For this reason, the orderliness of the universe cannot be used as an argument against, say, the occurrence of miracles. This observation applies even if it is deemed more *likely* in any given situation that a miracle has not occurred that is having occurred.

(b) more of what we know comes to us through our sense (used in the sense of 'natural instinct') for the divine. Without this sense we would not know directly (i.e., personally and experientially) certain facts about the supernatural world (such as the existence of God, and at least some of God's divine qualities - see Romans 1). Thus, any personal/experiential knowledge of the divine gained through our sense of the divine is also revealed knowledge. Moreover, this information is complemented by other sources of information about the divine, such as Scripture, which are also revealed.

(c) in Christianity, knowledge about the supernatural also comes also through our five senses, specifically through the Word of God spoken, written and Incarnate. Thus, Christianity is not only a mystical religion epistemologically, but also a historical and literary one.

4. With regard to reason:
   (a) yet more of what we know comes through reason – either by reasoning about empirical data gained through our six senses, or by reasoning about ideas generated by abductive reasoning and/or imagination. Either way, without the gift of reason, we would not be able to make sense of sense-data or ideas. To this extent, all knowledge gained though reason is revealed knowledge.
   (b) the Holy Spirit guides the reason of Christians (both individually and collectively) such that they can obtain more knowledge, especially but not exclusively knowledge about the supernatural, than would otherwise be the case.

5. Whether intuition is an aspect of reason, or something separate from reason, through our intuition we can:
   (a) recognise truth when we see it. For example, we recognise intuitively that $2 + 2 = 4$ long before we are, if ever, able to prove the fact. The recognition of truth extends to the most important matters of faith and life. The faculty to recognise truth is essential because not many have the capacity or desire to rigorously prove each truth. Moreover, in many cases proof may not be possible, even for the most gifted and willing. Hence, in every arena of knowledge, assumptions are made that certain things are true. The success of our investigations based on these assumptions suggests that these assumptions are actually true – supporting the contention that we have the capacity to recognise truth. For example, every scientific investigation proceeds on the assumption that the universe is orderly and consistent and, as such, that results that hold in our neighbourhood of the universe hold in every neighbourhood the universe. This assumption cannot currently, and may never be able to be, proven. Yet the success of the assumption in underpinning scientific investigations suggests that the assumption is true. If so, then this truth is revealed through our intuition i.e., it is not only revealed by observation.

   (b) gain insight into the nature (or essence) of things. The nature of things is that which defines an object as part of a class of similar objects. Hence, by intuition, we know that any particular tree is a member of the class of things called trees. Yet "tree-ness" (that which makes a tree a tree) itself is not observable. Without God-given intuition we would not know that a tree is a member of the (divinely established not

just nominal) class of things called "trees". Thus, the knowledge that a tree has tree-ness and, as a result, *is* a tree is also revealed knowledge.[7]

(c) given (i) and (ii) above, understand not just *what* the case is, but *why* something is the case. Our recognition of truth, and insight into the nature of true things, means that we come to understand things as they really are. Nevertheless, we always know more than we understand. Many know that $2 + 2 = 4$, but not many know why $2 + 2 = 4$. Many know that planes fly, yet not as many know why planes are able to fly. However, when we do come to understand something, that insight (understanding) along with the knowledge of the thing itself is also revealed.[8]

6. Wisdom can be thought of in both cognitive/metacognitive and ethical terms. In cognitive/metacognitive terms wisdom refers to the *capacity* to make wise decisions. This capacity implies investigating, understanding, and discerning between even complex issues. In ethical terms, wisdom refers to the *desire* to make wise (and thus *good*) decisions. One could, theoretically, have the capacity to make wise decisions (and so be wise cognitively), yet not desire to exercise that capacity (and so not be wise ethically). The biblical ideal for wisdom, in contrast, is to not only to make wise decisions, but to desire to do so. Moreover, God rewards the desire to think and act wisely with the actual wisdom to do so. Hence, the first step to becoming wise is to seek wisdom (Proverbs 4:7).

7. As a *characteristic of a person*, wisdom is the desire and ability to apply knowledge and understanding for "good". In Christian terms, "for good" means for the glory of God and the true welfare of humanity (including, but not limited to, self). Wisdom implies procedural knowledge concerning how to apply knowledge and understanding. This procedural knowledge, like all other knowledge, is revealed. In other words, while wisdom itself refers to a motivational disposition and a skill-set, this disposition and skill-set rests on revealed knowledge. The extent to which God reveals procedural knowledge underpinning wisdom may vary. However, when a person acts wisely, God has revealed to that person *how* to act wisely.

8. As a *program of action*, wisdom is the plan or procedure that a person follows to achieve good ends. Thus, the wisdom of God is Christ – Christ is God's program of action for bringing about the redemption of the universe (the good thing in question). In contrast, the wisdom of the world is the plan of action followed by the world to achieve its

[7] This view of our perceptual ability daws on the work of Duns Scotus. Scotus (e.g., Scotus, J.D. (2014). *Questions on Aristotle's categories*, translated by Lloyd A. Newton, Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press.) distinguished between haecceity and quiddity. Haecceity refers to individual properties of a thing that make that thing a *particular* thing. Quiddity refers to the common properties of a thing shared by other things that form the class (or genus) to which the thing belongs. For example, I have certain individual properties that make me a particular man (my haecceity) and certain common properties that I share with all men (my quiddity). God give us the ability to recognise both haecceity and quiddity.

[8] This observation is not to be critical in any way. Often, the reasons *why* things are the way they are a buried deeply in theoretical speculation or empirical investigation not presently open to all (or sometimes *any*). It is to say, however, that we should not assume that because something is known it is understood. Moreover, the recognition that something is not understood often provide the motivation for further speculation, investigation and learning.

desired ends. Essentially, the wisdom of the world is to prioritise and gratify self to achieve happiness. This "plan" ultimately leads to self-destruction The wisdom of Christ is to prioritise God and others, and to postpone or eliminate self-gratification, so as to achieve wholeness and fulfillment. This "plan" leads to salvation i.e., rescue from self.

9. The point of the preceding observations is to the effect that all knowledge is revealed knowledge i.e., there is no knowledge other than that gained through revelation. Revelation may be direct to the mind of the person or indirectly through the six senses. Either way, the source of knowledge is God. Moreover, in addition to sensation, and reason, imagination and intuition play a vital role in the development of knowledge and understanding – including the procedural knowledge underpinning wisdom. One might also say that the Holy Spirit inspires wise action - and that people can learn from their wise (and less than wise) action in the world. Thus, sensation, reason, imagination, intuition, and inspiration all play their part in the development and application of human knowledge for good.

A theory of learning that descends directly from the epistemology (theory of knowledge) outlined above follows.

Learning Theory

Learning is, ultimately and Biblically, the getting of wisdom. Learning requires the accumulation of knowledge and the development of understanding. Yet the accumulation of knowledge and the development of understanding by themselves is not enough to constitute learning. Learning properly occurs when the individual or group applies its knowledge and understanding in the pursuit of some intended good effect. More specifically, learning occurs when the individual's or group's experience of the *actual* effect of their actions corresponds or otherwise to the intended effect. Thus, individuals and groups learn from mistakes (when actual effects do not match intended effects), as well as from successes (when actual effects do match intended effects). Of course, it is possible *not* to learn from our mistakes – and so to repeat the production of unintended effects. It is also possible *not* to learn from our successes if, for example, we do not reflect sufficiently on our successes to ascertain how these successes may be repeated. Ultimately, then, learning (in the positive sense) has occurred when an individual or group has made some more or less permanent cognitive, affective, behavioural or spiritual change in response to their attempts to bring about good outcomes.

Learning, thus, occurs through the process of accumulating knowledge, developing understanding, and applying knowledge and understanding in the pursuit of good outcomes i.e., in the pursuit of truth, beauty and goodness; and reflecting on the outcomes of this pursuit. In each of these activities, learning is scaffolded by language, and in this sense, learning occurs *through* language. However, learning does not occur as the result of exposure to language alone. Thus, exposure to language is a *necessary* but not *sufficient* condition for learning.

<u>Language and Learning</u>

The reason we make a point about language is because a generic theory of learning underpinning much teaching and learning in formal school/classroom settings in Western

contexts assumes that language *alone* is, or at least can be, sufficient for learning. This theory posits that, in any given teaching situation, the teacher encodes knowledge in words (written and/or spoken), communicates those words to students, who then decode those words, and so gain access to the knowledge they would not otherwise have. This theory of learning is not wrong – but it is inadequate. The problem with this theory is that much of what we know does not come to us by language *alone*, but rather by observing and acting (and, thus, gaining experience) in the 'real world'. Moreover, learning requires more than just the *acquisition* of information, but also the interrogation and application of information. For these reasons, language alone does not provide a sufficient causal model of learning.

Observation as the Basis of Knowledge

Let's take an example to the contrary: Imagine we are having a classroom lesson on *tribbles*. Some students (like some readers of this paper) will know already what *tribble*s are. Those who do not know what *tribbles* are will be none the wiser for simply hearing the word *tribble*. Moreover, assume the teacher was to explain that a *tribble* is a (fictitious) small, furry alien 'animal' from the 1960's version of Star Trek. This description might allow the *tribble*-ignorant student to form some sort of mental picture of a *tribble* but will still be insufficient for the student to come to full, or even adequate, knowledge of *tribbles*. However, if the teacher was to show the relevant episode from Star Trek (pictured below)

then tribbles would become part of students' direct sensory (i.e., observational) experience. Then, and only then, would the words of the teacher *about* tribbles make sense. In other words, only when *tribbles* have been *observationally* and *experientially* revealed to students will students *know* what a tribble is, and only after revelation will a teacher's words about *tribbles* make sense. To take a more serious example, simply hearing about (say) the love of God (or any other spiritual reality) will not mean anything to students unless and until they observe (ideally in the behaviour of Christian teachers) and experience the love of God. Words, even the words of the Bible, are not enough to communicate the love of God observationally and experientially. Once students observe and experience the love of God, however, words (including words in the Bible) about the love of God will make sense. This example explains, for example, why a person can hear (or even read) the Bible (just like some people could hear the very words of Jesus) yet *not* respond positively to those words.

The effect of the above is to suggest that the process of learning, no matter how well scaffolded by language, requires observation and experience which reveals something about the world not previously known to the student. Typically, a surprising observation will begin the process of learning, and then language can be used to explicate that observation. In the current fictional example, the surprising observation is the tribbles and, once observed, language can be meaningfully used to meaningfully explicate tribbles and tribble behaviours.

Investigation as the Basis of Understanding

Let's say now that students have the requisite revelation, via a surprising observation, sufficient to *know* what a tribble is i.e., the teacher and their students now have a shared experience of tribbles. At this point the teacher can *explicate* the experience further using words. By explicating students experience, students can come to know *more* about tribbles through the words of the teacher. For example, students can come to know through their teacher that tribbles can (under the right conditions) multiply prodigiously, and that tribbles have a violent reaction to immediate presence of Klingons (a hostile race of aliens in Star Trek). Yet even possessing this explicated knowledge doesn't mean that students yet *understand* (in the sense of having *insight into*) the nature and functioning of tribbles.

A further step, however, that is required for understanding is to move from *observation* to *investigation*. Investigation occurs when we seek out the underlying structure and/or causes of our observations. Jesus, for example, modelled this kind of approach to developing understanding. In the gospels Jesus asks his disciples: "who do you say I am" (Matthew 16:13-16, Mark 8:27-29, Luke 9:18-20). Effectively, Jesus asks his disciples to provide the results of their (albeit informal) investigation as to who he is based on their observations of what Jesus has said and done in their presence. Essentially, Jesus is proposing that his *identity* is the underlying cause of his words and actions. Jesus implicitly affirms the correct answer given by Simon Peter ("You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"). Jesus also gives an *explanation* as to how Peter came to this answer i.e., Jesus affirms Peter's answer was not the result of revelation by human reasoning but was, instead, the result of divine revelation: "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven." (Matthew 16:17). Interestingly, however, Jesus doesn't say that this understanding *could* not have come about as the result of human revelation, but the fact that it didn't come about by human reasoning in this case is a blessing to the person concerned.

More generally, much of what is now affirmed about Christ by the Christian church is not stated explicitly in Scripture - and indeed took many years of investigation and explanation to define. For example, the deity of Christ (Council of Nicaea, 325), the Trinity (Councils of Nicaea, 325, and Constantinople, 381), the two natures of Christ (Councils of Ephesus, 431, and Chalcedon, 451) and two wills of Christ (Councils of Constantinople, 553, and Constantinople 680-681) were all worked out in the centuries following the close of the New Testament. Presumably, God wanted it this way. God could have made each of these doctrines explicit in the Bible – yet chose not to. We could speculate that God wanted the church to work these doctrines out, presumably so that the church could develop its own insights into the nature of God and Christ. Yet, at the same time, the church affirms that these doctrines are revealed, both in the sense that the raw material from which these

doctrinal insights are developed is revealed and in the sense that the church is guided by the Holy Spirit in developing its doctrines. Thus, development of the church's understanding of Christ implies both an act of reason and an act of revelation.

The point for the present context is that, by investigating and explaining observations of Christ in Scripture, the church comes to *understand* the true nature and identity of Christ. Language scaffolds the process of developing this understanding, but the real work is done in the reasoning processes (based, of course, on the ongoing *experience* of Christ in the church through the Holy Spirit) involved in conducting the investigations and framing the explanations in the first place.

Application as the Basis of Wisdom

Finally, to the development of wisdom. Once understanding has been developed i.e., we not only know *what* the case is, but *why* something is the case; then we can apply that knowledge and understanding to real world problems. In the case of the tribbles, Dr. McCoy (one of the crew of the star-ship *Enterprise*) can deduce that a supposedly human passenger on the Enterprise (Darvin) was in fact a Klingon because the tribbles react to Darvin's presence *as if he were* a Klingon i.e., McCoy uses deductive reasoning from his knowledge and understanding to correctly identity the true nature of reality. In the case of Christ, the church can follow Christ as "Lord and Messiah" because of knowing and understanding who Christ really is.

The getting of Wisdom is scaffolded by language but, like knowledge and understanding, language itself is not sufficient for the getting of wisdom. Any application of knowledge and understanding can be evaluated through discussion and reflection before, during and after the application. However, any discussion or reflection relies on the application itself being made (at least prospectively). Interestingly, *thought experiments* (imagining what would or could be the case under a given course of action) can act as vicarious applications of knowledge and understanding. Vicarious applications are, of course, very helpful in formal school settings where the application of knowledge and understanding cannot always be conveniently facilitated.

In summary, learning may be defined as the getting of wisdom – resting on the acquisition of knowledge and the development of understanding. Knowledge, understanding, and wisdom are developed through a process of observation, investigation, and application – which is scaffolded by but is not based on language itself. Thus, through language a teacher can *explicate* student's experience gained through observation, can help students *explain* investigations of their observations, and can help students *evaluate* applications of their knowledge and understanding - even vicarious applications. These roles by no means belittle teachers' contributions to learning – but they do situate teachers' contributions to learning in the context of student observation, discovery, reasoning and problem solving. Students learn by engaging with, attempting to explain, and working within the real world. The engagement is supported linguistically by teachers and, when done so successfully, students learn to act wisely in the world. We explore the role of teachers in this process of learning further below.

Model of Teaching (The Role of Teachers in Learning)

Following Pierce's epistemology (e.g., Pierce, 1877; Pilcher, 2015), a model of teaching consistent with the learning theory described above may be outlined as follows. Essentially this model proposes that students should be active in learning by carefully observing the world, systematically investigating observations, and applying the results of investigations to 'real world' problems and situations. The role of the teacher in this active approach to learning is to scaffold each stage of learning using language. Specifically, teachers should (and should help students to) explicate observations, explain the results of investigations, and evaluate applications knowledge and understanding derived from observation and investigation. The role of the teacher is to immerse students in language that matches and deepens their observations, investigations, and applications. In this way, over time, students will develop not only the ability to engage practically with the world but will also develop the ability to describe and analyse that engagement in increasingly complex ways using both written and spoken language. We now explore the model in a little more detail.

Teachers bring to students' attention new, hopefully surprising observations. Ideally, these observations effectively represent interesting issues to be understood or important problems to be solved. Teachers can then explicate these observations such that students are aware of all the relevant, surprising or problematic features of a given set of observations. Together, the observation and explication get the student as far as *knowledge* - or at least the beginnings of knowledge.

Once, through observation, knowledge is acquired, the task is to develop an understanding of knowledge. Understanding is developed when students investigate the surprising or problematic features of an observation or set of observations. Investigating involves proposing and then testing hypotheses and proposed solutions to problems. Teachers help the students frame likely hypotheses and solutions, and then helps students test these hypotheses and solutions. The process of testing could involve formal experiments, thought experiments, trial-and-error analyses, reading and research, or any number of other modalities.

When the results of any given investigation are 'in', teachers help students explain these results – usually in terms of some underlying theory or assumptions. At this point the 'real' work of Christian Education begins. The role of the teacher at this point, consistent with the subject matter and the age/stage of the students, is to provide the widest and deepest explanations possible. The problem with secular education is that it often provides narrow, reductionistic explanations of reality. Christian educators want to provide the exact opposite i.e., expansive, and deeply connected explanations of reality that encompass spiritual realities as well as material, cultural, social, psychological and any number of other realities. For example, let's say that we are conducting a Visual Arts class and students have been investigating what makes certain artworks beautiful, or more beautiful than others. The role of the Christian teacher here is to explain not just what makes some artwork beautiful (e.g., the interplay of symmetry and asymmetry, perspective, colour, subject matter, etc.) but also to explain the origins of beauty, why we should recognise and value beauty, why we are drawn to beautiful things, etc. In other words, the Christian teacher, drawing on the resources of the Christian faith, can and should provide the widest and

deepest explanation possible and appropriate for (in this case) beauty. The same applies for any other subject matter.

Christian teachers should not be reluctant to provide these broader explanations. To take the current example, beauty and the recognition of beauty are both more likely given theism than naturalism, even according to non-Christians (e.g., Draper, 2002). We should insert a cautionary note that Christian teachers need to move beyond "God did it" when framing explanations. Explanations involving spiritual or supernatural causes need to be nuanced in order to be convincing to secular audiences. Again, for example, Christian philosopher Paul Copan (2007, p.10) makes the case that beauty fits better in a theistic world than in an atheistic world dictated by the forces of naturalistic evolution in the following way:

> *[I]mpressive natural beauty is in no way linked to survival. So why think this overwhelming beauty should exist given naturalism? Why isn't everything functional, monotonously textured, and a battleship-gray color?*

Christian teachers don't need to be philosophers, but they do need to understand their disciplines in ways that allow them to show that (at least) theism, and preferably Christian theism, furnishes relevant and persuasive explanations of phenomena. Much more could be said here about framing such explanations, but the basic point is for Christian teachers to provide wholistic (expansive and interconnected) explanations of reality rather than the more limited explanations characteristic of secular education.

Finally, once an observation is understood, knowledge can be properly applied. In general terms, to properly apply knowledge means to put knowledge to some desirable end i.e., to some end that benefits the flourishing of individuals or the wider society. Such applications will highlight truth, beauty and goodness. For this reason, these applications don't have to be practical (although they may well be). Thus, theoretical, moral, and aesthetic applications are all to be valued. Whatever the application, when a person or groups has applied knowledge and understanding in the pursuit or truth, beauty and/or goodness they have acted wisely and demonstrated the acquisition of wisdom. Applications can (and should) be scaffolded by teachers. In particular, teachers help students *evaluate* proposed applications to determine their potential support or identification of truth, beauty and goodness. Here again, the thought experiment is a useful tool. However, it will also often be possible to apply knowledge tangibly and evaluate the effects of such application.

The model described above is represented in Table 1 below. Very simply, the generalised model is that *students act,* and *teachers talk* so that students themselves can begin to talk in increasingly complex ways about their observations, investigations and applications.

Table 1: Model of Learning and Teaching

	Knowledge	**Understanding**	**Wisdom**
Students	Observation	Investigation	Application
Teachers	Explication	Explanation	Evaluation

The Table indicates that students develop knowledge through observation, understanding through investigation and wisdom through application. Teachers scaffold this process by explicating student observations, explaining the results of student investigations, and evaluating student applications. Effectively, this scaffolding casts teachers in the role of intellectual, aesthetic, and moral *coaches*. The MLT implies that knowledge, understanding and (ultimately) wisdom are acquired and developed when students are actively engaged learning, and when teachers linguistically (and thus conceptually) deepen and extend active learning.

In each stage of the model (developing knowledge, understanding and wisdom) the aim is that teachers would, in the first instance, provide as few answers as possible – but will nevertheless be critical in assisting students to arrive at detailed observations, insightful explanations and cogent applications. In other words, the aim wherever possible is that students will (under the teacher's guidance) discover answers for themselves. Even if students are assisted *almost* all the way to an answer, and then a student takes just the final step, this is far better that the teacher giving students the answer and the role of the students devolves to just memorising that answer. On other occasions, students may only need to be given minimal scaffolding to beat their own pathway towards wisdom.

One critical reason why teachers should avoid giving answers relates to student motivation. Students will be more motivated when they are provided with the opportunity to understand material for themselves. Perhaps more importantly, if students are not given the opportunity to make observations, investigate and frame applications they will not learn the skills implicated in lifelong learning. Too often schooling turns motivated observers and investigators of reality (e.g., young children) into demotivated consumers of teachers' answers (e.g., bored teenagers) devoid of both the motivation and the skill to investigate the real world. Under these circumstances, it is no surprise that learning, and hence the acquisition of wisdom, is impaired. Moreover, teaching demotivated students is hard work. The burden of teaching is much lighter when students are actively engaged in observing, investigating, and acting in informed ways in the world.

Another critical reason why teacher should avoid giving answers is that, in order to develop both understanding and wisdom, students need to practice formulating and evaluating answers even if, initially, some of these answers my not be correct or, at least, *completely* correct. By making mistakes, students learn judgement with respect to their own thought processes, and so develop both an accurate appraisal of their current capabilities while developing the capacity to learn for themselves. Moreover, in many arenas of knowledge, there is more than one 'right' answer. For example, there may be many ways to prove a particular mathematical theorem or result. Thus, students should not be constrained (by themselves or by their teachers to provide only those answers than conform to the teacher's thought or initial ideas.

Content of the Curriculum

Having outlined a model of teaching connected to a theory of knowledge and learning, the final stage in the analysis is to examine the content of the Christian school curriculum. This analysis is intended to show how the 'secular' subjects of the school curriculum (e.g.,

Mathematics, English, the Sciences, the Humanities, and the Arts) inform and are informed by the 'sacred' studies of the curriculum (e.g., Biblical / Christian Studies).

It was once common to refer to the sciences as natural theology. By the term *natural theology,* it was meant that God could be known in and through the natural sciences. By extension, God could be known in and through any academic discipline. Philosophy is an obvious candidate discipline as it both deals with fundamental issues of human and divine existence (e.g., the nature and characteristics of God), and because philosophy has long been deployed to explicate and defend the Christian faith. However, in principle, all subjects say something about God. One key task of the Christian school and the Christian teacher, then, is to highlight to students what each of the academic disciplines tell us about God.

What follows is an explanation of how natural theology complements and extends supernatural theology in the context of the Christian school curriculum. It is often thought, if not directly expressed, that Christian schools teach the academic disciplines because 'that's what schools do'. Under this presumption, the 'real' business of Christian schools from a *faith* perspective is not in teaching the academic disciplines but teaching Biblical Studies and managing participation in Christian co-curricular activities such as chapel or devotion groups. Instead, we want to make the case to teach English, Mathematics, the Sciences, the Humanities, the Arts, and every other academic discipline *is* to teach about God (albeit, often indirectly). Thus, every academic discipline is *theology*. For this reason, reclaiming the place of natural theology in the Christian school curriculum is central to the mission of the Christian school and to the unification of the curriculum.

<u>Natural Theology in the Context of the Christian School</u>

The central assertion of natural theology is that certain truths about God can be learned from created things by reason alone. This is not to say that *all* truths that are known about God are revealed in creation. Clearly, there are many truths known about God that are only known by special revelation (sometimes called *revealed* or *supernatural* theology). However, neither is it the case that *no* truths about God can be known through Creation. Thus, across Christian history, it has always been affirmed that God has revealed himself in two ways: supernaturally *and* naturally. For this reason, God can be known from created things by the 'natural light' of human reason.

Natural theology, including philosophical discourse about God, does not replace faith in the grace of God as revealed in Christ. Grace and faith remain primary for all believers. However, natural theology offers the opportunity to establish certain truths about God by means shared by all persons. Moreover, while naturally revealed truths do not provide grounds or foundations for supernaturally revealed truths, naturally revealed truths can and do make supernaturally revealed truths more plausible. For this reason, truth should be seen as a whole, where that which is revealed through natural theology (i.e., that which is known by the light of natural reason), complements and supports that which is revealed through supernatural theology (i.e., that which is known by the light of faith) and *vice versa*. In this way faith and reason are not, and are not seen to be, in conflict in any way.

Much work in Christian education has been directed towards providing a "Christian perspective" on the academic disciplines i.e., a sacred commentary on secular knowledge.

This work is valuable and helpful. Yet, in contrast very little work has been done on the contribution of the academic disciplines to an understanding of God i.e., the secular contribution to sacred knowledge. This deficit is much to be lamented – not least because many students in Christian schools do not and will not engage with Christianity because, so it is thought, the academic disciplines have rendered God implausible if not impossible. Moreover, many students in Christian schools are resistant, if not completely closed, to explicit discussions of God on any level. The implicit route to God through natural theology, however, remains open.

In addition, encouraging Christians to think only in terms of their perspective on the world can lead to a cherry-picking approach to the data i.e., focussing only on that which easily and explicitly conforms to a Christian worldview and ignoring everything else. Cherry picking can lead to a narrow understanding of the world. This danger may be avoided if all the data (all of which has been supplied by God, of course) is considered to have relevance to God and to life. This is not to say that a Christian perspective is not important (certainly it is). Rather, it is to say that a Christian perspective must be fully informed by all that God has provided for our understanding.

The academic disciplines study different aspects of God's creation. As such, the academic disciplines reveal different aspects of God's invisible qualities. While we will not engage in a full-orbed analysis at this point concerning how the academic disciplines contribute to an understanding of God, the following Table (Table 1) indicates how various disciplines (e.g., Mathematics and English) and sets of disciplines (e.g., the Humanities and the Arts) can contribute to revealing God.

Table 1
The Academic Disciplines and the Revelation of God

Subject	Focus of Study	Nature of Creation	Divine Qualities Revealed
Mathematics	Mathematics studies quantitative patterns, structures, and relationships	Mathematics reveals that there is an underlying, quantifiable order and consistency to Creation as a whole	By inference, Mathematics reveals that God is orderly and consistent i.e., God's creation can be no more orderly and consistent than He is.
English	English studies the meaning, uses and conventions of language	English reveals that ordinary human language is meaningful, powerful, and intelligible	By inference, English reveals that God's words and God's Word (and, hence, God Himself because God's Word is God) are meaningful, powerful, and intelligible i.e., God's words can be no less meaningful, powerful and intelligible than human words.
Sciences (e.g., Physics, Chemistry, Biology)	The hard sciences study physical, chemical, and biological structures and processes	The hard sciences reveal that the underlying order and consistency of Creation is manifest differentially yet harmoniously (integrally) across physical, chemical, and biological domains	By inference, the hard sciences reveal that God is both logical and creative, and that his logicality and creativity are harmoniously integrated i.e., God's creation cannot be more logical, creative, or integrated than the intelligence that bought about that creation.
Social Sciences (e.g., Anthropology, Sociology, Economics, Human Geography)	The social sciences study social, cultural, and economic structures and processes	The social sciences reveal that human cultures, societies, economies, and communities - and hence human beings themselves - are relational entities.	By inference, the soft sciences reveal that God is a relational entity i.e., God's creation cannot possess any positive ('good') quality that God himself does not possess; God cannot be less in goodness than his Creation.
Applied Sciences (e.g., Design, Technology, Sport Sciences, Physical Geography)	Applied sciences study the uses of 'hard' and 'social' sciences for specific purposes and in specific contexts	The applied sciences reveal that humanity desires to use its scientific knowledge and understanding is useful for good purposes – even if this desire it not always fulfilled	By inference, the applied sciences reveal that God desires to use his knowledge and understanding for good purposes i.e., God cannot be less well intentioned that humanity and God's intentions are always fulfilled.

The Arts (e.g., Visual Arts, Music, Dance)	The Arts study aesthetic design, movement, composition, and communication	The Arts reveal that creation is beautiful, and that human beings are sensitive to, and desire to replicate, the beauty of Creation	By inference, the Arts reveal that God is beautiful i.e., God's creation cannot be more beautiful, or more sensitive to beauty, than He is.
Humanities (e.g., History, Philosophy, Languages, Media, Studies, Studies of Religion)	The humanities study human history, thought, communication and devotion.	The Humanities reveal that human beings are, at their best, purposeful, insightful, thoughtful, and devoted creatures.	By inference, the Humanities reveal that God is the font of purpose, wisdom, insight, faithfulness, and all other good qualities that human beings possess and display i.e., humans did not evolve their best moral, intellectual and relational qualities; these qualities are gifts from God

The point of the Table is that much can be known about God from the academic disciplines. Yet, admittedly, the process of thought in arriving at this knowledge can be stretching. Nevertheless, unless Christian teachers can make at least a start on identifying the contribution of their disciplines to the knowledge of God, it is unlikely that students will do so. Moreover, unless teachers and students came to see the linkages between natural and supernatural theology, the 'great divorce' between secular and sacred knowledge will continue. Under such circumstances, it is unlikely that students (and teachers) will develop the sort of wisdom evident in the Bible i.e., a wisdom that understands the world, yet is not captive to the world.

Student Engagement and the Culture of Learning

Using the getting of wisdom as its core organising construct, this document has thus far outlined the theological, philosophical, and educational bases of Christian education in general, and has explored how these bases support the unique approach of the Melos GoS to Christian Education. To some extent, this document has presupposed that, if presented with an approach to education based on observation, experimentation, and application; students will engage in learning and thus develop a culture of learning that will permeate the context in which such education occurs – specifically the Christian school.

Despite this presupposition, however, we recognise that in contemporary culture students are very often superficial consumers of information, whose willingness and ability to deeply engage in even 'good' education is limited. As a result, many students are seriously disengaged from learning. Such disengagement may present as:

(a) talking in class i.e., treating the class as a social space rather a workspace;
(b) seeking to leave the classroom when possible e.g., needless toilet breaks;
(c) superficial cognitive and metacognitive engagement with assigned tasks, including in-class tasks, homework tasks, assessable assignments and examinations;
(d) disorganised study habits and personal habits relating to study;
(e) poor productivity in study periods and Library time;

(f) lack of initiative in seeking teacher assistance and/or feedback, including feedback prior to assignment submissions; and
(g) unambitious and/or poorly defined vocational intentions.

To some extent, then, a culture learning may need to be developed *before* (or at least *as*) students engage in learning directed at wisdom. The development of such a culture relies on teachers themselves being active and engaged learners, who share amongst themselves a culture of learning. Teachers need to read, be engaged in ongoing formal and informal study and learning, discuss concepts and ideas (not just the practicalities of running a school), share their recent insights with students and with each other, be actively involved in peer-review and evaluation processes, and value the pursuit of ancient and modern wisdom. In particular, teachers should practice and preach Biblical literacy – being engaged in study of the Bible (not just devotional practice involving the Bible) and, as each is able and gifted, pursuing a range of formal and informal Biblical studies.

It will be obvious to students if teachers are not also learners. Curriculum content, teacher enthusiasm, and student motivation will all be compromised under this circumstance. On the other hand, when teachers are learners, and are recognised as such by their students, schools are much more likely to be and become centres of learning, underpinned by a unified and unifying culture of learning.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to provide a philosophy of education for the Melos Group of Schools that integrates philosophical, theological, and educational aspects of Christian education and situates these within, and in response to, the missional context of the Group. Specifically, the philosophy has centred on the idea of *wisdom* as the key output from Christian education. Wisdom, it was argued, is critical to the welfare and wellbeing of students both now and in their future lives. Moreover, the getting of wisdom is mandated biblically and theologically. Wisdom will be developed under a model of learning and teaching that recognises the need for students to observe, explain, and act in, the world – supported by teachers who help student explicate, explain, and evaluate their observations, experiments, and applications. Finally, wisdom should be bought to bear across the whole curriculum – with both natural and supernatural theology making mutually supportive contributions to each other, such that students are presented not only with an integrated curriculum, but with an integrated view of the world.

It is hoped that reflection on this philosophy by individuals and groups within the Melos GoS will lead the Group to develop a unique, robust, and productive approach to Christian Education that not only fully equips students for life, but also equips students for a full and fulfilling life.

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