

PART II

Biblically-based Christian Education (BCE) as an educational model

CHAPTER THREE

The Biblically-based Christian Education model

I. Introduction

This chapter seeks to define the biblically-based Christian education (BCE) model. The first task is to provide a brief definition of the phrase *biblically-based Christian*. The remaining sections of this chapter will address the rationale for the model, the faith aims, the concept of community, epistemological foundation and curriculum orientation of the BCE model. Once the model is described, it will then be possible to critique the model. This will be done (in Part III) by examining the extent to which the model can demonstrate an orientation suitable for valid educational models in a pluralist liberal democracy; this examination will be according to the features identified in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

As this study is a philosophical critique of the BCE model developed primarily by Christian Community Schools it is worth noting here the sources used to construct the model. Most of the educational ideas considered in this outline of BCE derive from the published writings of Christian Community Schools Ltd (and specifically Rev Bob Frisken, President of Christian Community Schools Ltd). These have been published in booklet form by CCSL under the title *What is Christian Community Schooling? Introductory Lectures* (1993) and form the outline of the BCE model. However, such a limited source base would make a detailed construction and critique of the model quite difficult and so the study has been broadened to include other sources to which Rev Frisken has referred in his work. Specifically, this

includes three essays written by former Senior Lecturer in Education at the University of Sydney, Dr Bill Andersen, *A Biblical View of Education* (1983b), *From Gospel into Education - Exploring a Transition Part I* (1984a) and *From Gospel into Education - Exploring a Transition Part II* (1984b) as well as Canadian educationalist Harro Van Brummelen's *Walking with God in the Classroom* (1992) and *Steppingstones to Curriculum* (1994).⁹ Frisken's recent introduction to the work of Van Brummelen also provides a link to a secondary body of writing by those associated with Christian Parent-Controlled Schools Ltd, a link also made through Brinton's (1989) reference to the writing of Dr Doug Blomberg¹⁰ further strengthens some of these philosophical links. Other main writers associated with Christian Parent-Controlled Schools are Jack Mechielsen (1980; 1991), who is also Executive Director of Christian Parent-Controlled Schools Ltd, Dr Stuart Fowler (1979; 1990), Lecturer with the National Institute of Christian Education and Dr Noel Weeks (1980; 1988; 1991), Senior Lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Sydney and President of Sutherland Shire Christian School. The emphasis on "biblical" ideas related to education is the essential link between these two separate groups.

It must be noted that *What is Christian Community Schooling? Introductory Lectures* (CCSL 1993) is designed to introduce fundamental ideas of the BCE model to teachers within CCSL. There is much that is assumed in these documents, particularly concerning such issues as the status of faith, belief and truth, epistemological foundations and the role of the Bible in developing educational ideas. Such ideas are taken for granted rather than

⁹ The close connection between Frisken and the ideas of Andersen and Van Brummelen can be seen by the invitations offered to both to address annual conferences of CCSL. Andersen was one of the keynote speakers for the January 1993 conference, "Making Schools Relevant", and Van Brummelen was the keynote speaker for the January 1994 conference, "Educating for Responsive Discipleship".

¹⁰ Blomberg is Principal of the National Institute for Christian Education, the tertiary training body run by Christian Parent-Controlled Schools Ltd. His doctoral study, "The development of curriculum with relation to the philosophy of the cosmic idea", was undertaken at the University of Sydney under the supervision of Dr Bill Andersen and he was co-editor of *A Vision with a Task* (1993) containing work by Van Brummelen. These connections serve to identify a further common philosophical connection between CCSL and CPCS, particularly regarding the role of the Bible in educational philosophy.

carefully and reasonably argued. It is assumed the teachers reading these documents would have the same or very similar faith basis and world view. Some of these underlying assumptions of the BCE world view will be critiqued in Part III of this thesis.

In this thesis one generic term has been used to indicate the type of education offered in a Christian Community School. The phrase *biblically-based Christian education* (BCE) throughout) has been chosen to express a philosophical commonality that exists between Christian Community Schools Ltd and Christian Parent-Controlled Schools Ltd. Particular emphasis on the role of the Bible in the development of educational philosophy and the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ permeates the thinking and practice of both approaches and thus has been chosen as the identifying term that links both types of schools. However, there are distinct administrative and theological differences that exist between the two types of schools. Because of this, it would be wrong to suggest there is significant similarity between the assumptions, theological outlooks and educational practices of these two groups; as Long notes, there is a 'common agreement that is reflected in the language of "Christ-centred learning"'. Beyond these areas there is little agreement. This lack of agreement is due to the rigid manner in which each of these school organisations develops, interprets the Bible, and holds dogmatically to its own particular theological tradition' (Long 1996b, pp.14-15). However, as Long also recognises, 'the Bible is pre-eminent' (p.12) in the philosophy of both CCSL and CPCSL. It is this strong emphasis on the Bible and its role in deriving educational philosophy that is here argued as the central link between the two systems.

A note of observation regarding gender biased language in some of the BCE writings is needed. It will be obvious to the reader that most reference to gender identity or to the person of God is through use of the male pronoun. With reference to human subjects, the reader is advised that where context

demands, the use of the male pronoun should be read as referring to both male and female. In reference to the person of God, the theological belief position of the writers is consonant with a conservative evangelical anthropomorphic identification of God as male. The reader is to be advised that reference to God through use of the male pronoun is reflective of a theological belief position that is contentious within the broader theological and religious community.

II. Defining the *biblically-based Christian* approach

The term, *Christian*, is very broad in its definition. It encompasses a myriad of meanings and connotations. It is claimed by such diverse groups as Roman Catholics, Baptists, Congregationalists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Seventh-Day Adventists, Mennonites, Lutherans, Mormons, the Salvation Army, Assemblies of God, Coptic Orthodox, Assyrian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Church of the Four-square Gospel, the Uniting Church and many more. It transcends national and ethnic boundaries. Yet it is due to this very broadness that a secondary term, *biblically-based*, is here used to identify a particular expression of the Christian faith. Many within CCSL and CPCSL would be content with the identifier, "conservative evangelical"; proponents of BCE have themselves suggested they can be located within the evangelical Christian tradition, and that 'Christian parents, especially from evangelical denominations' (Deenick 1991 p.249) are those for whom their schools exist. Both CCSL and CPCSL clearly state their broad identification with mainstream evangelical Christianity (CCSL 1993, ii, CPCSL 1991, p.2), but this term does not capture the distinct essence of what is understood by those within the schools to be the central element of the phrase, *biblically-based Christian*. It is important to add that the use of the term *biblically-based* does not seek to imply that such an expression of Christianity is solely correct, complete or that other approaches to Christianity are not according to the

teaching of the Christian Bible (Mechielsen 1980, p.21, Van Brummelen 1988, pp.13-15, Stronks & Blomberg 1993, pp.69-73, Van Brummelen 1994, pp.22-23); rather, it indicates a particular emphasis on how such a group locates itself within the broader Christian faith.¹¹ Such a term recognises the centrality of the Bible in the life of faith. This belief position is clearly defined by Frisken (1993a, p.1) when outlining what is a Christian school:

Christian schools seek to honour Christ as Lord in all areas of the curriculum...and to integrate the truth of the Bible in all their teaching...An education that is not centred on Jesus Christ is not a true education. The exclusion of the Bible results in a false, distorted and invalid education...It is only when [a belief and value] framework is based on reverence for God and belief in the Bible as His inerrant revelation that man is able to know the truth as he interprets the facts he discovers.

These ideas clearly place emphasis on the role of the Bible and the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ in all aspects of the believer's life. Nothing is outside the authority of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible. According to Blomberg (1980, p.5; cf. Frisker 1993c, p.1):

All activities are conducted either in obedience or in disobedience to God in Christ: there are no neutral areas in respect to the service that the whole self offers to God or to an idol. Life is the expression of a religious commitment, which shapes, directs and pervades one's entire existence...Our calling is to bring all dimensions of our lives into submission to Christ.

Furthermore, the CCSL Memorandum of Association contains a very explicit Confession of Faith. It is assumed that Member Schools of CCSL are expected to hold the same or very similar views to those expressed in the Confession. In Paragraph 5(a), relating to the Bible, the Confession (CCSL 1993) states:

We believe in the Divine inspiration the infallibility and supreme authority of the Old and New Testaments in their

¹¹ Long (1996b, pp.8-9) argues for his term, *themelic*, on the basis that it does not 'imply that other models of Christian schooling were not centred on Christ'. However, the term *themelic* is not used in this thesis as the central identifier because of its failure to denote the emphasis on the role of the Bible within the model. Long's position also seems to favour an implied position rather than the stated positions of (particularly) the CPCSL writers given above.

entirety and that the Holy Spirit so moved the writers that what they wrote are authoritative statements of truth.

This statement focuses on three main concepts that are directly relevant to this investigation. These three concepts form the basic beliefs concerning the Bible and its relevance for educational thought and practice within CCSL. The three concepts are:

- 1) the centrality of the Bible as the basis of faith and practice;
- 2) the reliability of the Bible in matters of faith and practice;
- 3) the continuing validity of the Bible for contemporary society.

As an extensive description of each position is beyond the limitations of this present study, it is intended to provide brief descriptions only of the significance of each idea. It must be noted that the following descriptions will not be critiqued in this section of the thesis; this is provided in Part III of the thesis. It is also important to note that these descriptions are faith positions and must be recognised as such. Therefore a number of contentious assumptions will not be explored here either. However, these matters also will be addressed in Part III.

i. The centrality of the Bible

For the biblically-based Christian, the Bible is the beginning point of faith, held to be God's 'revealed truth' (CCSL 1993, p.1) and necessary for all that is required for the exercise of faith in day to day living. It is the standard by which all other forms of knowledge and other truth claims are judged. The Bible is seen as the 'ultimate normative authority' (Fowler, *et.al.* 1990, p.16). It guides the Christian in epistemological, ontological, axiological and teleological issues. Its authority is held to be absolute and accountable to no person or institution (CPCSL 1991, p.5). Yet it is not considered as a prescriptive rule book; rather it is seen to outline principles from which are derived answers to the questions of life. Although it is held to be the final authority on matters, the Christian also recognises the Bible does not always

mention the many complex and ever-changing questions of contemporary society (Van Brummelen 1994 pp.24-26). Nonetheless, the Bible is held to provide the basic foundational principles by which life is ordered such that the Christians are then able to apply them to their own particular situation.

ii. The reliability of the Bible

The biblically-based Christian holds the Bible to be correct in its communication of God's propositional truth to man. The Bible is referred to as 'the Word of God in written form' (Byrne 1977, p.40). It is believed to be the express communication of God, given to humanity by God through His Holy Spirit (CPCSL 1991, p.5). Because it is believed God has communicated, and God is believed to be truthful, it is believed this communication is also truthful and thus reliable. The faith position of the biblically-based Christian also recognises that the correctness of such communication existed in its original form. It is further believed that subsequent editorial intrusion may have led to some minor yet insignificant changes; however, the biblically-based Christian believes this revealed knowledge of God has been safeguarded from gross error by the continuing function of God's Holy Spirit who (it is believed) has overseen translation and editorial work throughout the centuries. Consequently, it is believed that the Bible in modern form is still held to be the revealed propositional truth of God.¹² Thus it is with conviction that the biblically-based Christian can believe the transmission of revealed biblical ideas down to this day to be trustworthy.

¹² This is still a contentious debate within evangelical circles. Some thinkers, such as Schaeffer (1990), take it to be logically evident that if God had communicated propositionally and spatio-temporally locatable through the prophets and writers of the Old and New Testaments, then the validity of that communication remains. This is based on the assumption that the communication from God is Truth, that is, by its nature it is true and must therefore always be true. Others take the position that hermeneutics, or interpretation of the original biblical material, must dictate the understanding modern Christianity should have. Still others take a more liberal position that biblical scriptures do contain mistakes that are by and largely cultural in perspective but not in theological truth. This thesis is not intending to debate these positions but rather to recognise that these positions are likely to exist within the two systems. Both CCSL and CPCSL take the faith position that scripture is true historically and theologically but also that its knowledge is not exhaustive. They also make the point, as with Schaeffer, that the Bible is essentially a theological book, not an historical or scientific book (Schaeffer, 1990, 99-101).

iii. The continuing validity of the Bible

Because the Bible is taken to be the reliable communication of propositional truth by God, the biblically-based Christian is bound to submit to the teaching of biblical principles. Schaeffer (1990, pp.178-182, p.218), one of the influential evangelical Christian thinkers of the latter twentieth century,¹³ argues that because the Bible claims to teach about reality, humanity and the cosmos as they truly are, that is, objectively true, the teachings remain valid for all time. Blomberg also indicates that the normative principles of the Bible help the biblically-based Christian 'struggle for ways of obedience in our own historical context' (Blomberg 1980, p.8). Fowler reinforces the same point that the biblically-based Christian looks 'to the Scriptures to guide us constantly in looking for the answers to every question' (Mechielsen 1980, p.30). Thus the biblically-based Christian recognises the need to consult the Bible for principles that are believed to remain valid in contemporary society. For the biblically-based Christian, then, the Bible is believed to be the revealed communicable propositional truth of a transcendent God, correct and true in its original transmission, and the authoritative and normative base for living.

III. The Rationale

Having noted the importance of the Bible for the biblically-based Christian, it is now necessary to consider the rationale for the existence of Christian Community Schools. The primary rationale for the conduct of Christian Community Schooling is derived from 'the responsibility [of parents] for the training of children' (Frisken 1993a, p.2). This is taken from a belief that God created the family as the most basic social unit and it is through the family that God expects parents to provide social, moral and spiritual training. Justification for such a position is given by reference to a

¹³ See Blomberg (1976) as one example of the relationship of Schaeffer's views to this present study.

number of Biblical passages related to these issues (Deuteronomy 6:1-12; Ephesians 6:1-4; Proverbs 22:6). The training outlined in these passages was intended to be faith training, that the children were to be brought up 'to love God...as a whole person, with every expression of his life - mental, spiritual and physical - being an expression of love for God' (Friskén 1993a, p.3). In conjunction with 'many other Bible passages', Friskén (1993a, p.3) derives from this the understanding that:

parents are to provide training that will enable their children to live according to God's requirements of justice and righteousness; to love Him with all their heart and soul and strength; with every aspect of their growth to maturity being "of the Lord", rather than of the world which is passing away.

The goal of parental upbringing within this context is to help children grow to become faithful believers. Part of this task finds expression in the home and part of it in the context of the local community of believers, the church. Ideally, the faithful believer will be one who is actively committed to the Church, or the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ exists to fulfil 'the Great Commission to go into all the world to make disciples, to baptise and to teach' (Friskén 1993a, p.4). This work has two phases: to build up the Body, or 'to be equipped for this important ministry' (Friskén 1993a, p.4) and to go out and 'make disciples'. Thus the church has an important role to play in first equipping believers that they may then implement God's plan. This equipping is the right and proper spiritual task of the church. Thus the BCE rationale derives from a combination of the two important Biblical principles of nurturing the child (parents) and equipping for ministry (the church).

However, this does not say anything concerning the role of the Christian Community School. Friskén (1993a, pp.3-4; 1993c, p.3) recognises there is no specific Biblical reference to schooling as a formal activity, a point also recognised by various critics (Hill 1978; Hogg 1980; Judge 1983) and advocates (Weeks 1988; Fowler *et.al.* 1990; Edlin 1994) of this type of Christian

schooling. Debate over this issue is strong. Those like Hill and Hogg maintain that the absence of explicit Biblical reference to formal schooling means justification for the existence of Christian Schooling is on tenuous grounds. Frisken, along with other advocates such as Weeks and Fowler, argues that on account of the enormous complexity of contemporary society, parents 'need help and support in giving their children the full range of training required in that society' (Frisken 1993a, p.4) and thus the Christian Community School helps fill that need. The school is able to assist parents in their task of bringing up children in such a way that 'each child will acquire the full range of skills and information he needs to take his place as an effective member of the Body of Christ and the community' (Frisken 1993a, p.4). In this way, the school needs to be seen as a support tool for both the parents and the church. Frisken (1993a, p.5) sees this relationship as a three way partnership that:

brings together these three separate but closely related responsibilities in a close working relationship, to provide children with an education that enables them to grow up into Jesus Christ in every area of their lives.

The phrase, "Grow Up Into Christ", has been adopted by CCSL (and many of its member schools) as their motto and is seen to signify the essence of Christian Community Schooling. Having considered the rationale for the existence of Christian Community Schools it is now appropriate to examine the educational model used by these schools.

IV. The Educational Model

Description of the BCE model will focus on four main components: faith aims, the concept of *community*, epistemological foundation, and curriculum orientation. It seems appropriate to begin with faith aims as these are the aims that assume greatest importance within the model and represent the greatest proportion of the CCSL literature. Examination of the concept of *community* is necessary due to its central role within the model; this is clearly evidenced by its inclusion in the names of both CCSL as well as a number of their member schools. Addressing the epistemological foundations of the model seeks to identify what is considered knowledge according to the BCE model as well as what is worth knowing. This question of what is worth knowing according to the BCE model has major significance for the central concern of this thesis. After outlining these other philosophical elements of the model, this section concludes with an outline of the curriculum orientation. This will be referred to in the critique of the BCE model in Chapter 4.

i. Faith aims: Grow Up Into Christ

The BCE model is to be considered a confessional model of education. It is very obvious that the central concern of the model is that children come to faith and continue to grow in their faith. Because the model takes the position that responsibility for education belongs primarily to parents and the church (Friskien 1993a, pp 1-4; 1993c, pp.1-2), the Christian Community School exists to help parents in this task. The primary purpose for which Christian Community Schooling exists is to help parents and the church in the task of enabling children to ‘Grow Up Into Christ’. All educational aims, philosophy, strategies, curriculum development and selection of curriculum resources flow directly from this concept. It is necessary, then, to unpack the meaning of this phrase before looking further at the epistemological foundation and curriculum orientation of the model. There are three phrases

that characterise this goal of the BCE model: the measure of the gift of Christ, the measure of maturity, and the measure of effective membership of the Body of Christ (the Church). Each of these phrases represents a particular emphasis of the overall faith aim of the BCE model.

a. The Measure of the Gift of Christ

An important goal of a Christian education is...to achieve the fullest possible development of each child's spiritual, mental and physical gifts, and to see these used in obedience to Jesus Christ. (Friskens 1993a, p.5)

The focus of BCE is the nurturing of children to the point of total and willing obedience to Jesus Christ and his teachings as recorded in the Bible. The spiritual needs of children are here expressed as important as mental and physical needs; it may be argued that in many respects the spiritual needs are of more importance than the mental or physical on the basis that without spiritual wisdom which comes from God, children will have a darkened view and understanding of life (Brinton 1993, pp.7-10). The BCE model does not consider there is any area not governed by God in Jesus Christ and therefore no area that does not require a spiritual response. The pursuit of intellectual and physical excellence which ignores belief in God and Jesus Christ is inappropriate for BCE; it is considered futile (Friskens 1993b, p.4). The development of spiritual, mental and physical gifts is not seen as an end in itself, for this would be to value the creature (humanity) more highly than the creator (God). Instead, these gifts are to be used in such a way that demonstrates obedience towards Jesus Christ. Thus the first aim of faith development within BCE recognises that all aspects of a child's education must be focused on developing obedience towards Jesus Christ. All other educational endeavours of BCE flow from this primary aim.

b. The Measure of Maturity

A further important goal of a Christian school is...to train children towards...spiritual maturity so that they will be able to

exercise perceptive spiritual judgment that is based on the knowledge of God and His Word. (Friskén 1993a, p.5)

If the primary aim of BCE is development of faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ, the corollary is developing maturity in that faith. The ability to discern spiritually is the mark of that maturity. This comes by 'attaining the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God' (Friskén 1993b, p.3). This involves cognitive as well as experiential elements. Knowing what is taught in the Bible and what are the characteristics of the biblically-based Christian world-view is understood to lead to deeper knowledge of God. This in turn leads to love for others and an attitude of service to others. Friskén refers to this as the 'transforming power of God changing people's minds by the renewing of their minds' (Friskén 1993b, p.5). This renewing, or reorienting of one's mind to be in line with the mind of Christ as expressed in the Bible, cannot take place through an educational experience alone as it is a spiritual experience. Teachers will not be able to create a reoriented mind, but it is their task to take that reoriented mind and train it to discern what is in accordance with the mind of Christ. On the basis of such training children are then able to exercise 'perceptive spiritual judgment' (Friskén 1993a, p.4) as they mature. Thus the BCE educational aim is seen as a faith aim; that is, to educate is to grow and mature in faith.

c. The Measure of Effective Membership of the Body of Christ

The goal of a Christian Community School is...to train children towards an obedient and responsible Christian life of service within the Body of Christ and to the community. (Friskén 1993a, p.5)

The mark of the mature Christian who has attained the measure of maturity is service towards the rest of the Body of Christ (the Church) as well as the wider community. If the primary faith aim of BCE is "To Grow Up Into Christ", then the life and teaching of Jesus Christ should characterise all they

do. Effective membership of the Body of Christ is characterised by love for one another, a desire to help those in need, a willingness to serve one another and a striving to bring peace. It is expressed in the 'fruit of the Spirit...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Galatians 5:22-23, New International Version). Again here, the identifiable outcome of the BCE model indicates its strong faith basis. Any curriculum or methodological practices derive specifically from these aims.

Taken together, these three measures clearly indicate a strong faith aim as the dominant idea in the BCE model. Frisken argues that these three concepts may be linked under the idea of 'Education as Edification' (Frisken 1993c, p.6); that is, education is an endeavour that is planned and effected in order to strengthen the faith life (i.e., spiritual obedience to Jesus Christ) of the student that the Church might be strengthened so that 'effective service for the whole community' (Frisken 1993c, p.7) might result. This only exists, argues Frisken, within a genuine, functional community 'where people care for each other, share with each other and support each other' (Frisken 1993c, pp.6-7). The importance of this concept is constantly reinforced through its inclusion within the name, *Christian Community Schools Limited* (emphasis added). It is necessary, therefore, to outline details of how community is understood and why it is such an important element of the BCE model.

ii. The concept of *community*

The idea of *community* as outlined in the BCE model is functional. The *Christian Community School* is not intended to be an institutional or organisational community but one that is characterised by particular types of relationships. It is not a community of cohabitants bound together by culture; rather, it is a community that seeks to 'demonstrate to people [both inside and outside the Church] how they are meant to live under the Lordship of Jesus and in a relationship of love to one another' (Frisken 1993c, p.1; Van

Brummelen 1988, pp.153-154). In this sense, it is not just a social group to whom an individual, or a family, is attached by some type of initiation or membership ritual; it becomes part of the very identity of the member and vice versa. There is an interdependence between the life of the community member and the life of the community itself (Fowler *et.al.* 1990, pp.26-28). It is therefore a concept that transcends social, ethnic and intellectual identity. Importantly, the community of the School includes the parents, the students, the staff and the sponsoring church. None of these groups is considered less important or more important than any of the others. All work to serve one another as a demonstration of God's love. Thus it is also apparent that the development and maintenance of community is as much a faith aim of the BCE model as is the nurturing of faith itself.

The community, in the BCE model, serves two primary functions: i) to support its members, and ii) to reconcile the rest of the world to God in love. The function of the community is to be committed to the welfare of all members so that all may "Grow Up Into Christ". These two functions are closely interrelated, for as the community supports its members (and as they grow up into the measure of the gift of Christ, the measure of maturity and the measure of effective membership of the Body of Christ as outlined above), it should follow that the resulting benefits will include the demonstration of love, care, service, justice and mercy for all, including those outside of the Christian community. It is a consequence of the community's mutual edification that relationships between the community and those outside the community will be improved. As Frisken notes, 'for the Church, being is fundamental rather than doing, but doing is the natural consequence of being' (Frisken 1993c, p.2). Community thus has great significance for the BCE model for it is in community that spiritual growth occurs for the individual, that equipping for acts of service takes place, and that the value of the Christian community is demonstrated to those outside the community.

Friskén (1993c, p.3; 1993d, pp.7-9) argues *community*, as outlined above, has relevance for the school as a formal institution in the following ways:

- i) the emphasis on *relationships* and their quality ought to characterise the Christian Community School;
- ii) the school ought to be an agent for *reconciliation*, between God and members of the school community, between members of the community and other members, between members of the community and those outside the community and between those outside the community and God;
- iii) the school is primarily concerned with *doing*, that is, putting into action what is learnt and experienced;
- iv) the school is an *environment* within which one is able to express what one thinks without shame. (emphasis mine)

Within the context of such a community children are able to reach their full potential spiritually, physically and mentally. In a sense, the quality of the education is only as good as the quality of the community. When the community functions as it ought (i.e., serving one another, edifying one another, etc.), the aim of the Christian Community School, to have children “Grow Up Into Christ”, is more likely to occur. Conversely, when the quality of community is weak, biblically-based Christian education is not likely to result. The breakdown of community further results in the growth of impersonalised institutionalism (Friskén 1993c, p.7). The needs of administrative efficiency take precedence and the needs of others, as well as opportunities to serve others, become less important. This, argues Friskén, is contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ and must be repudiated.

iii. Epistemological foundation

In his paper, *Effective Christian Teaching*, Friskén (1993d) makes extensive reference to the work of Harro Van Brummelen. Friskén recognises there is great depth in Van Brummelen’s work and recommends his work (to

the BCE teacher) as being valuable. A consideration of Van Brummelen's two important works (1992; 1994) is thus worth undertaking for Van Brummelen attempts a more explicit analysis of what constitutes a biblical view of knowledge than does Frisken. This involves explanation of some presuppositions Frisken assumes as understood. It is therefore more helpful to outline Van Brummelen's work rather than Frisken's. Van Brummelen's work also enables a more specific critique to be made (in Part III) as he tries to place the BCE epistemology within the broader context of other epistemological positions. This indicates he is aware of epistemological positions outside the BCE world view whereas Frisken is writing from within the BCE world view for an audience that is sympathetic to this position. Having described the BCE view of knowledge, it will be necessary then to outline how such a view informs the curriculum orientation of the model.

It has already been noted (Chapter 3, Section II) there is no neutrality of knowledge, according to the BCE model. As a beginning point, it is recognised that 'facts are always chosen and interpreted within a paradigm of beliefs and values' (Van Brummelen 1992, p.87; cf., Blomberg 1980; Brinton 1993; Van Brummelen 1994, p.39, Edlin 1994, Chap 2). The BCE writers reject the position that facts exist independently of values. For them, knowledge must be understood in terms of presuppositional world view positions. Underlying beliefs significantly impact how knowledge is interpreted. The BCE paradigm is that 'God has created a reality with inherent meaning and with a law structure about which we can reason' (Van Brummelen 1992, p.87). All knowledge claims must be assessed by how well they correlate with revealed knowledge of the Bible. However, it is recognised that 'while Scripture is neither a philosophical treatise nor a curriculum textbook...it contains norms and general guidelines that apply to life' (Van Brummelen 1994, p.93; cf. Fowler, *et.al.*, 1990, pp.15-19). As outlined above in Section II, i, *The centrality of the Bible*, the Bible is the beginning point of all matters of faith,

including questions of what is knowledge and what is worth knowing. There are four aspects to Van Brummelen's idea of the Biblical view of knowledge.

a. it is based on revelation

The strongest element of the BCE view of knowledge is revelation. The role of Biblical revelation is fundamental to the BCE view of knowledge. Without revelation, there is no true knowledge, according to the BCE view (Van Brummelen 1992, p.88). Through the Bible, God has revealed information about Himself, His world, His creatures (including human beings), how we ought to treat one another (morality), and our ontological position. This revelation has taken place over long periods of time and in a variety of ways, but has been centralised in the writings of the Old and New Testaments. The nature of the revelation is such that it accords absolute authority to Biblical ideas. Schaeffer (1990, p.100) argues that, in the Bible, 'God has spoken, in a linguistic propositional form, truth concerning Himself and truth concerning man, history and the universe'. However, he hastens to add that although God has revealed ideas about humanity, the universe and, importantly about Himself, these ideas are not exhaustive (Schaeffer 1990, pp.100-105). Thus knowledge may be understood without reference to Biblical revelation (scientific laws, logico-mathematical proofs, sensory perception, imagination and thought) but it will be complementary to, and in accordance with, revealed knowledge, according to the BCE model.

If God is there and has communicated, then the ideas He has communicated are surely of great significance. The question to be asked, then, is whether God is there.¹⁴ Schaeffer (p.267) argues it is reasonable to believe the revelation of the Bible, given that it has been communicated in

¹⁴ It is not intended to undertake a philosophical exploration of this question as it is outside the concerns of this thesis. Rather, the question is posed to reveal an underlying assumption held by Schaeffer. In providing an answer to the question, a number of contentious claims are made, particularly concerning the epistemic status of tradition based evidence. This question is dealt with in Part II, Chapter 4.

time and space to humanity through verbalised propositions. Many of these communications can be attested to by reference to historically identifiable evidence. Many of the kings and prophets of Israel existed in time and space, the person of Jesus of Nazareth existed in time and space, experiences of the early Christians as recorded in the New Testament can be verified using evidence external to the Biblical record. These factors, argues Schaeffer, add weight to the claim of the Bible's validity as the communication of God in propositional form. In Schaeffer's words, 'the infinite-personal God is there, but also He is not silent; that changes the whole world' (Schaeffer 1990, p.275). For the biblically-based Christian, and thus the BCE model, the Bible is believed to be the revealed communication of a personal God, the creator and sustainer of all of life. Because its communication comes from outside humanity, it is possible to achieve objectivity and to know truth. Schaeffer refers to such knowledge as *true* truth: 'we know true truth about God, true truth about man, and something truly about nature....while we do not have exhaustive knowledge, we have true and unified knowledge' (Schaeffer 1990, p.218).

According to the Bible and the BCE model, it is possible to know only when 'enlightened by means of the Spirit of truth' (Van Brummelen 1992, p.88). True knowledge, according to the BCE model, is that which is revealed by God through the Bible and made known by the operation of the Spirit of God. Thus it is possible to read the revelation of God (i.e., the Bible) but not understand it on account of a lack of enlightenment by God's Spirit. It is not until the facts are "revealed" that it becomes *true* knowledge; empirical evidence and reasoning alone are not enough and they will never produce true knowledge. Whilst they are not excluded from the Biblical view of knowledge, they fall short of being acceptable on their own as they do not recognise the spiritual dimension that permeates the BCE model. Such evidence must be assessed further in light of the teaching of the Bible as the

revealed Word of God. Friskén (1993b, p.10) makes this point very strongly and it is worth here reproducing at length to demonstrate the full significance of revelation to the BCE mode :

The Bible will also be the integrating factor - the measure of truth - in all areas of learning. There can be no conflict between what is taught and what the Bible says. Current and difficult issues, such as evolution, must be faced in the light of what the Bible says, with the assurance that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible and authoritative Word of God.

b. it is God-related

Because knowledge is from God, it has an obvious relationship to God. This relational aspect of the BCE view of knowledge brings every aspect of knowledge, and every type of knowing, into the faith orientation of the BCE world view. God has revealed Himself to humanity 'in creation, in His Word, in Jesus Christ, and through His Spirit' (Van Brummelen 1994, p.93). Therefore all aspects of life are related back to knowing God as He truly is. It involves 'not so much *believing that* as it does *believing in*' (Van Brummelen 1994, p.96, emphasis in original). Nothing exists outside of God and therefore everything is within God's domain. The sensory world conveys the creative beauty of God. It is an ordered world that has inherent meaning and is able to be studied in the systematic scientific disciplines. For the BCE model, scientific study of this world is concerned with knowing how God's created order operates. Its outcome should be reverence for God, appreciation of His creativity, respect for His creation, 'to unfold and develop our culture, encouraging and helping it to function as a loving and just society' (Van Brummelen 1994, p.94). Failure to approach the universe and all that is within it in this way represents a breaking of relationship with God. Schaeffer (1990) argues that the rejection of a view of knowledge that is God-related ultimately produces meaninglessness, uncertainty and despair, for we cannot know anything objectively outside of ourselves with any certainty. This lack

of objective knowledge results in the search for meaning that never produces a satisfactory answer and thus results in despair. However, the revelation of God's truth in propositional form and through the incarnation of Jesus Christ means that true truth can be known, that meaning can be found and that there is hope. According to the BCE model, only knowledge that is related to God in Jesus Christ will provide this meaning and hope.

c. it encompasses the whole of one's being

This aspect of the BCE view of knowledge rejects the idea that knowledge is only conceptual. Knowledge is that which is understood and which motivates into action (Van Brummelen 1992, p. 88; 1994, p.94). Understanding conceptual ideas alone is not knowing, for no idea exists in isolation; it is the use to which an idea is put that determines its value. There must be opportunity for knowledge to be put into use. For the BCE model, this must be clearly demonstrated in loving service to others. Until 'our innermost center (sic) of conscious life, our thoughts and our motives, and our resulting actions are all firmly grounded in the will of the Lord' (Van Brummelen 1992, p.89), the knowledge remains merely factual and of limited value. True biblical knowledge is knowledge that brings the Christian to act lovingly towards others. Such action is far from being merely a feeling or emotional hyperbole. It is found in action that seeks the upbuilding of others and is best expressed in the life of the community (Andersen 1984a, pp.26-29; cf. Chap 3, Section IV, b above). A biblically-based view of knowledge, then, will help 'provide a balance between *knowledge-that* and *knowledge-how*, i.e. between conceptual knowledge and cognitive skills' (Van Brummelen 1992, p.94, emphasis in original) that leads to deeper commitment to God in Jesus Christ and loving service to others.

iv. Curriculum orientation

Friskén (1993b) provides three broad elements of what is considered a Christ-focused orientation to curriculum: it is pupil-related, it is socially

applied, it is Bible-integrated. He argues that these three 'strands' (p.10) properly integrate the 'characteristics of a biblical view of a person and the three measures of growth' (p.10) discussed above. Van Brummelen (1994, pp.92-114), operating from a similar philosophy of curriculum, suggests that 'the curriculum nurtures students to be and become responsive disciples of Jesus Christ' (p.114).

a. it is pupil related

There is an emphasis on the importance of the pupil's learning in the curriculum. The BCE curriculum orientation recognises that academic, physical and spiritual development is important but also recognises that each student is an individual and must therefore be treated and respected as an individual. Accordingly, the curriculum must provide for different ways in which children learn, different rates at which children learn and, importantly, recognise that each child is not necessarily gifted in the same way as any other. The goal of pupil-relatedness in the BCE curriculum orientation is to prepare students for 'ministry to both the Body of Christ and the world' (p.10).

b. it is socially applied

Because the BCE curriculum aims to prepare students to become effective members of the Body of Christ and society more generally, any learning that takes place must incorporate a strong sense of "otherness", that is, the attitude that it is in cooperation with others that true service exists. Therefore there is a strong element of cooperation, collaboration and 'a strong emphasis on group work and even whole school activities' (p.10). This emphasis is vital to avoid an imbalance on individualism that may result from a purely pupil-related curriculum orientation.

c. Bible integrated

The Bible is seen as the 'measure of truth' (p.10), the arbiter of what is acceptable to learn. Those things that are seemingly contrary to what is

taught in the Bible must be considered erroneous on account of the believed truth of the Bible. Where other curriculum discipline content accords with what is taught in the Bible, it is to be recognised as such. However, where conflict occurs, it is the teaching of the Bible that must stand as truth. On this basis, the teacher in the BCE school can judge non-biblical material according to the extent to which it is commensurate with the biblical message 'with the assurance that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible and authoritative Word of God' (p.10).

Van Brummelen (1992, p.95) argues that the BCE curriculum orientation helps 'students learn about and experience a Christian vision of life as it relates both to personal and to societal issues and phenomena.' All of life is seen in its significance to faith. It is believed that the underlying structures of knowledge, when discovered and understood, bear witness to the truth of the Bible. The BCE curriculum therefore attempts to help students 'experience both the unity and diversity of God's marvelous creation, to foster Biblical attitudes and dispositions, and to see its relevance and application in life as they serve God and neighbor (sic)' (p.95).

IV. Conclusion

It seems very obvious that the BCE model is essentially concerned with the development of faith. It aims to present a coherent unified vision of life and meaning, one that identifies growth in faith as true education and considers academic learning useless outside of a faith framework. It strongly emphasises communitarian learning, favouring collaboration and cooperation in place of competition and individualism. It grants enormous authority to the Bible, its message, and its interpretation by leaders within the Church.

The BCE model has commendable elements: concern for the needs of the whole community, an emphasis on social justice and mercy, and a belief

in the intrinsic value of all people. These elements have much in common with the criteria argued for in Chapter 1 for models of education in pluralist liberal democracies. However, there are other critical difficulties with the model particularly when the model is carefully considered in light of the criteria argued for in Chapter 1. This critique follows in Part III.