

Shattering a Few Myths about Christian Schools

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The re-establishment of evangelical Protestant Christian schools in America over the last few years has spawned more than its share of myths and misconceptions about "what we are up to." It is to these misconceptions and myths that this pamphlet is addressed.

Myth:

It is un-American to send your children to a Christian school. It is wrong for Christians to abandon the public schools. You should use your children to save the public schools.

Reality:

Christian schools are not un-American. Bible centered, Protestant Christian schools existed in America 230 years before public schools were established. From the first American settlement school at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, to state controlled public schools established by Horace Mann in 1837, America's schools were Christ centered and committed to a high level of literacy. It is true that many Christians and non-Christians alike have opted out of the public schools in recent years, but it must be remembered that in 1837 Horace Mann and the new public schools of Massachusetts abandoned the well-established Christian schools of New England. The re-establishment of Protestant Christian schools in America is indeed threatening to some people in the public school community, but our first concern as parents is to do what we know is best for our children. That is why we enroll them in Christian schools. There may be solutions to the public school problem, but sending our children to public schools to solve these problems is not the answer.

Myth:

Christian schools are "white-flight" academies. The only reason Christian schools are flourishing is because parents who send their children to them are avoiding racial integration in the public schools.

Reality:

The re-emergence of Protestant Christian schools (1950s through 1980s) occurring around the time of public school desegregation has created a cloud of suspicion as to the motivation for the establishment of Christian schools. While the unrest created by desegregation and by the public school cross-town busing programs may have caused parents to search for alternatives to busing, studies show that Christian schools have come into existence primarily for spiritual and academic reasons. Madelyn Murray O'Hair's dubious success at getting prayers removed from public schools stimulated many parents to seek out Christian schools.

In his study of Christian schools, Peter Skerry, a Harvard University graduate student, concluded, "These schools were established primarily out of religious, not racial, convictions (parents were concerned about 'creeping humanism' and moral relativism in the public schools) and that the quality of instruction they offer matches or exceeds that given in most public schools."¹

In 1981, James Coleman, a contract researcher for the National Center for Education Statistics, reported that a higher percentage of minority students attend public schools but that minorities who attend private and religious schools " ...are substantially less segregated in the private sector than in the public sector."² In other words, there is a higher percentage of actual segregation in America's public schools than in the country's private and religious schools.

Myth:

Christian schools cannot compete economically with the public schools. Therefore, their academic programs suffer.

Reality:

Each year, ACSI coordinates a nationwide testing program of Christian school students. The test we use is the Stanford Achievement Test and it is administered to over 200,000 students annually. The results show the average achievement level to be one full year ahead of the national norm.

The government funded "Coleman Report" revealed the following:

1. Private schools produce better cognitive outcomes than do public schools with comparable students.
2. Private schools provide better character and personality development than do public schools.
3. Private schools provide a safer, more disciplined and more ordered environment than do public schools.
4. Private schools are more successful in creating an interest in learning than are public schools.
5. Private schools encourage interest in higher education and lead more of their students to attend college than do public schools with comparable students.
6. Private schools are more efficient than public schools, accomplishing their educational task at lower cost.
7. Private schools have smaller class sizes, and thus allow teachers and students to have greater contact.³

Myth:

Only wealthy families send their children to Christian schools. Christian schools are "havens for the rich."

Reality:

This is not true. As a group, the parents of private school children belie the image of an affluent elite. A majority of families earn less than \$35,000 a year. Christian school tuition (approximately \$2,300 per year) is less than half the cost the taxpayers pay for each child in public school. Yet Christian school achievement test scores are a full year ahead of the national average.

Christian schools are not perfect. Their only claim to perfection is the perfection they find in Jesus Christ. Because of Him, they are making a major spiritual, academic and social difference in the lives of multiplied thousands of students.

¹ Peter Skerry. *Christian Schools. Racial Quotas. and the IRS*. Ethics and Public Policy Center, Washington, D.C., 1980, p.1.

² James Coleman, *Public and Private Schools*, National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, DC., 1981, p. 43.

³ *Ibid.*, p.2.