TEACH[R]

There arose a generation that did not remember

The challenge of maintaining distinctively Christian institutional cultures in an era of change

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After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things He had done…
Judges 2:10 (NLT)

Abstract

The preservation and perpetuation of core institutional vision, values, ethos and identity to succeeding generations are critical imperatives that confront all Christian educational organisations. Christian institutions have historically been prone to the dis-integration of their respective cultural distinctiveness through processes of rationalisation and secularisation, and many do not remain distinctively Christian in vision, ethos or identity beyond the second and third generations. This paper will provide a review of the literature relating to the preservation of core ideology within Christian educational institutions and will identify a range of forces that promote and inhibit the preservation of distinctively Christian identities within an ever-increasingly complex and market driven socio-cultural milieu.

Introduction

"The atrophy and dis-integration of distinctive cultural values and identity has historically impacted upon numerous orgainisations"

Throughout history, the challenge of how Christian organisations and movements can maintain and perpetuate their core cultural values and identity beyond the founding generation has both challenged and perplexed leaders. The Biblical narrative records numerous tales of how one generation serves the Lord wholeheartedly, embodying the message and core values with zeal, commitment and passion, yet within a short period of time another generation arises that "do not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things He had done". Unfortunately, the atrophy and dis-integration of distinctive cultural values and identity has historically impacted upon numerous organisations formed within the Christian tradition, and has led to difficulty in maintaining cultural distinctiveness and institutional resiliency beyond the third generation (Baker & Riordan, 1998; Belmonte, 2006; Burtchaell, 1998; Dosen, 2001; Marsden, 1994). Gardner (1986 as cited in Belmonte, 2006) encapsulates the challenge that confronts all Christian educational institutions.

> Values decay over time. [Schools] that keep their values alive do so by not escaping the process of decay but by powerful regeneration. There must be perceptual rebuilding. Each generation must discover the living elements of its own tradition and adapt them to present realities. To assist in this discovery is the task of leadership. (1986, p. 8)

To assist in conceptualising the challenges relating to perceptual rebuilding, three specific stages within the history of any institution have been identified within the literature. Table 1 summarises a selected range of these theories of cultural development.

The founding or pioneer phase

According to Schein (2004), the first phase of cultural development occurs with the founder. The vision of the founder is instrumental in establishing the distinctive culture of a given group. During this founding phase, the leader "embodies the vision" ensuring that at every point within the organisation, the core ideology, values, vision, mission and purpose are seamlessly aligned with systems of action and organisational structures (Collins & Porras, 1995). Hirsch (2007) suggests that the distinguishing feature of new organisations is a movement ethos which he contends is always evident during this founding period. Hirsch proposes that an adaptive, dynamic and fluid movement ethos that is incarnated or embodied within each member, leads to rapid growth and expansion of the enterprise during this initial phase. However, as the movement develops institutionalism sets in, which necessitates a focus upon "mere organisational and institutional survival" rather than extending and re-incarnating the original vision and purpose for the movement (Hirsch, 2007, pp. 186–187).

Throughout history, the visionary exploits of countless leaders have birthed the legacies of an untold number of Christian institutions and enterprises. What distinguishes these initiatives is invariably a founding leader or group of people that had something extraordinary to say, to do, to expose, to construct or to reveal. Trace the cultural stories of fledgling Christian schools, colleges, and universities and the tales of sacrifice, risk-taking, uncertainty, hardship, ridicule, yet miraculous and sovereign provision and leading from God repeatedly resonate in the hearts and minds of those who were privileged to experience these 'pioneering' days. Whilst ostracised within their generation, God's sovereign work was at hand, establishing and blessing the faithfulness and sacrifice of a founding generation to see a vision become a reality. Such a calling lies at the heart of most founding movements, institutions, schools and ministries. These pioneers were also driven by deep convictions of not just what needed to be done, but more specifically what had to be done, whatever the cost and despite seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

The organisational midlife phase

Inevitably, all organisations enter a second phase of historical development which Schein (2004) terms midlife. Schein (2004) reveals that this period is often marked by leadership succession and a re-defining and perhaps formal articulation of the core cultural elements that were taken for granted and assumed within the founding phase. Limerick et al. (2002) describe this subtle change in focus as transitioning from the founding vision to the development and articulation of the organisation's "self-concept" or institutional identity. Pearce describes this process by proposing that "this idea—that the firm must now know itself—is the essence of the company's self concept" (1982, p. 21).

During this period, effective institutions develop "tangible mechanisms" within their structures to ensure that core cultural values, vision and identity are not lost during this critical phase (Collins & Porras, 1995, p. 86). These elements, which include rituals, ceremonies, stories, honouring of heroes, and articulation of values and beliefs, are often made more explicit and tangible by this second generation. One particularly powerful cultural element that begins to carry great meaning within this phase is the use of meaningful signs, artefacts, symbols and documentation that suitably represent the 'essence', 'identity' or 'organisational self-concept' of the institution. Whilst these symbolic elements may be inherited from the first generation (for example crests, mottoes, chapels or logos), the mid-life phase must decide what meaning and purpose the symbol or artefact was intended to convey, and must thereby articulate and assign meaning and significance to what the first generation may have perceived as 'second nature' or 'assumed' knowledge.

Weber (1947) proposes that this second phase of development could be termed Veralltaglichung—which literally translated means "rendering into everyday" (as cited in Berger & Berger, 1976, p. 339). Berger and Berger (1976) vividly articulate this consolidation or midlife phase.

> All this changes drastically when a new generation that was not present at the inception of the movement comes into being and grows into positions of leadership in whatever structure the movement has set up... The second generation has not...participated in the great events that saw the beginning of the movement. They only know these events by the stories of the elders. Most fundamentally however, that which to the first generation was truly extraordinary, now...becomes part of the ordinary fabric of social life. (1976, p. 339)

> ***"Those in the midlife phase must articulate and assign meaning and significance to what the first generation may have perceived as 'second nature'"***

Table 1: Synopsis of theories of cultural development / dis-integration within organisations

Generation	Weber / Berger (1976)	Schein (2004)	Limerick et al. (2002)	Hirsch (2007)
1st generation pioneer generation	charisma	founding / early growth	founding phase	movement ethos
2nd generation prosperity generation	routinisation	mid life	consolidation and continuity	settling movement ethos
3rd generation perishable generation	rationalisation	maturity and decline	renewal phase: discontinuity and reconfiguration	institutional ethos

Limerick et al. (2002) highlight this 'rendering into everyday' within this mid life phase or what they term "consolidation phase".

> Because the emergent meta-strategic design is a worked-out version of the founding vision and identity, the two become indistinguishable in the minds of organisational members. The result is that, almost imperceptibly, the vital founding vision is forgotten and its configuration counterpart takes its place...instead of becoming a means to an end, they [the configuration system] become the right way of doing things. (p. 175)

During this second phase, the routine of the configuration system therefore becomes the mission and replaces the original vision in both intent and purpose. Willard (2003) comments that mid-life leaders sometimes "do not carry the 'fire'...the mission or missions that have been set afoot begin a subtle divergence from the vision that gripped the founder, and before too long the institution and its mission have become the vision" (p. 1).

"The tendency within many organisations is towards cultural decline during this third generation"

Many second generation Christian educational institutions mistakenly embrace the operational systems of action for the original vision at this critical phase of development, and inadvertently allow the "rendering into everyday" of a range of core and non-core cultural elements and ideology. Confused over the mission, operational plans, strategic goals, structural re-building and founding ideology, ethos and vision, some educational institutions fall victim to the preservation of the current mission of the Christian college or school, with all its contextualised and fluid strategies, processes and operational values, whilst inadvertently relinquishing the core cultural values, vision and identity that established these institutions and shaped a margin of differentiation within the socio-cultural milieu.

> There is a real point to saying that in religious matters, nothing fails like success. These types of movements touch the human heart very deeply and serve profound human needs. Because of this, they soon attract many who do not even want the fire of the founder—they do not really understand it. But they do need and like the light and the warmth it provides. (Willard, 2003, p. 3)

The vision that so powerfully shaped the first generation now becomes incrementally replaced by a 'mission for the vision'. Obtaining a level of reputation, status, power and prestige that the founding generation could only dream of, the second generation may seek the extension of their own colleges and kingdoms, rather than maintaining their focus and dependence upon the original vision. Put simply, too much is now at stake within the institution to revert back to founding visions and values—reputation, status, success, prosperity and wealth abound but there is a subtle and incremental 'turning of heart' and decreased devotion.

It is also during such periods that the potential for triumphalism can usurp the original vision, and the mission for the extension of the institution becomes the goal rather than God's glory alone (Dickens, 2000). Furthermore, the 'rendering into everyday' of so many aspects of the founding generation's ideology and values creates complacency, which breeds a sense of self-satisfaction and cultural laziness towards founding principles and ideologies, and the potential for compromise, dilution of values and watering down of core ideology.

Maturity and decline phase

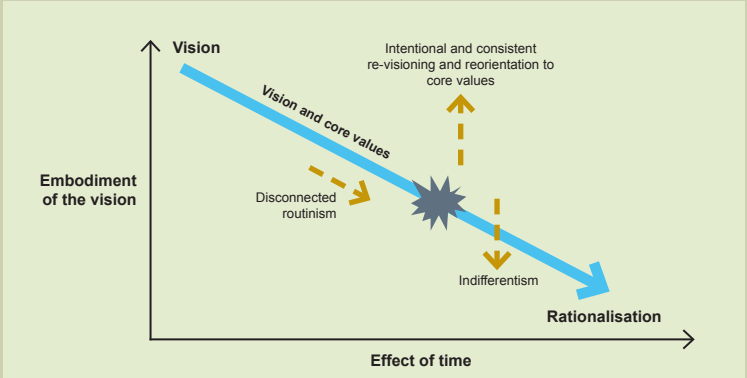
As an organisation continues to grow and develop, a third phase of cultural development occurs which Schein (2004) defines as the maturity and potential decline phase. Whilst it is not inevitable that an organisation's culture will atrophy, the tendency within many organisations is towards cultural decline during this third generation. Berger and Berger (1976) contend that this phase is merely the logical extension of the routinisation phase leading inevitably towards rationalisation. Whilst Weber (1947) saw inherent benefits in the process of bureaucratisation within institutions, from a cultural re-generation perspective, such de-personalising and systems-orientated approaches can stifle rather than stimulate both the embodiment and preservation of core ideology and identity within the organisation, and hinder innovative and divergent approaches to cultural change, regeneration and renewal.

Schein suggests that this is a primary cause of decline within organisations during this phase as long held assumptions and deeply embedded systems of action "now operate as filters that make it difficult for key managers to understand alternative strategies for survival and renewal" (2004, p. 313). Limerick et al. (2002) expand on this further by proposing that during this phase there is tendency for organisations to become locked into structured and deeply ingrained systems of action that make organisations "prisoners of the social systems" which were created during the consolidation phase.

The line of decline conceptual model

Based upon a synthesis of this research, the task of preserving and perpetuating core cultural values and identity within institutions entering a mid-life phase of cultural development would appear to be a challenging yet critical undertaking. James Burtchaell describes the historical erosion of core cultural values and identity as a slide from "vision towards rationalisation" (1998, p. 846) and proposes that Christian institutions that are not intentional and

Figure 1: The 'line of decline'—the rationalisation of Christian institutions



explicit in their engagement with core cultural values and distinctiveness will, over time, relinquish all forms of Christian orgnaisational memory and ethos from their daily cultural practices.

Figure 1 conceptualises and graphically depicts the flow within Christian institutions from vision to rationalisation unless there is an intentional re-casting and re-alignment to the core values and core ideology of the founding vision. (Benne, 2001; Berger & Berger, 1976; Burtchaell, 1998; Collins & Porras, 1995; Hirsch, 2007; Limerick, Cunnington & Crowther, 2002; Schein, 2004; Willard, 2003)

The auspicious 'line of decline' represented within this diagram, whilst not inevitable within a Christian institution or movement, would nevertheless appear to be the common trajectory beyond the second generation of cultural development (Burtchaell, 1998). As the effect of time 'renders unto everyday' what was truly extraordinary and significant to the founding generation, routinisation of cultural elements and distinctiveness occurs, leading to indifference and / or irrelevance of the core cultural elements that were the distinguishing mark of the founding phase of development. One specific study that powerfully exemplifies the line of decline is by Dosen (2001), entitled "The Intentional Secularisation of a Denominational College—The Case of Webster College". As secularisation and the routinisation of processes within Webster College became more prevalent, no intentional re-casting of the original vision was deemed necessary and the college disengaged with the original vision and core values that had shaped its cultural development in the founding phase. Dosen (2001) concludes his study by reinforcing the imperative of leadership in preserving and perpetuating core cultural values and identity.

> The leader and the board are the keepers of the mission. If denominational colleges are to continue their mission into the future, they must recruit and support leaders who will actively engage the college with the denomination's tradition. (2001, p. 404)

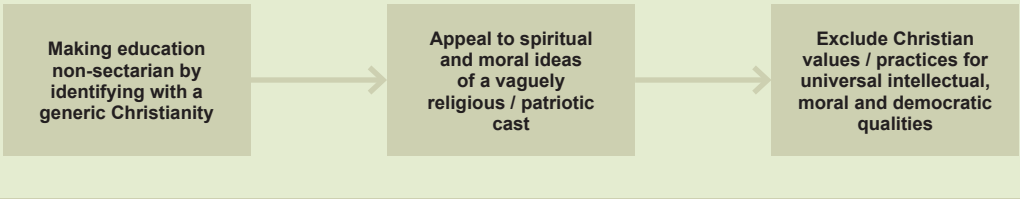
The threat of secularisation within Christian schools and colleges

The challenge of intentionally breaking this 'line of decline' within schools and colleges formed within the Christian tradition is made more complex by the historical propensity for such institutions to be prone to the dis-integration of their cultural distinctiveness through processes of secularisation.

Marsden (1994) identifies a three phase process that contributes to secularisation and erosion of core cultural values and identity from Christian institutions (see Figure 2) (Marsden as cited in Benne, 2001, p. 4). These stages of decline were articulated by Marsden after studying such prestigious institutions as Harvard, Yale and Princeton. James Burtchaell reiterates the processes that underpin Marsden's phases by contending that "Once the colleges had settled into the indifferentism their inclusivist language expressed, they were within reach of that more degraded and more incisive form of liberalism: rationalism" (1998, p. 846). Burtchaell therefore cautions all those involved with Christian educational institutions with this sobering plea:

> ***"Christian institutions that are not intentional and explicit in their engagement with core cultural values and distinctiveness will, over time, relinquish all forms of Christian organisational memory and ethos from their daily cultural practices"***

Figure 2: Marsden's three phases of secularisation within Christian educational institutions



> This study also invites reflection on…the dynamics whereby any Christian endeavour can unwittingly be decomposed. It offers enough folly at close range for readers to be stimulated to reflection about the circumspection and canniness we all require to review and renew earlier commitments without forfeiting them unawares. So much that is onward is not upward. (Burtchaell, 1998, p. xii)

Burtchaell and Marsden's extensive research into the insidious and all-pervading nature of secularisation that occurs during the consolidation and mid-life phases of Christian schools and colleges highlight how subtly the cancer of secularisation can take hold within their institutions, and how the price of sustaining distinctively Christian educational cultures must always be 'eternal vigilance' to core cultural vision, values and identity.

Preventing cultural atrophy and indifference within Christian institutions

> *Re-casting must always remain grounded within the core vision and values of the college*

Two particular studies identified within the literature provide proactive solutions for preventing cultural atrophy and secularisation within Christian schools and colleges. The first of these is Robert Benne's (2001) study of six premier colleges and universities within the United States that are effectively 'keeping faith' with their founding visions and values. Benne's excellent analysis of these six institutions is far more optimistic in its prognosis, and he perceptively identifies three pivotal components that must be cultivated if such institutions are to effectively preserve their core ideology beyond the founding phase of cultural development. These include: vision, ethos and the embodiment of this vision and ethos in its leaders and people. Benne (2001) declares,

> It is clear that each school's animating vision...has to be articulated and embedded in the ongoing life of the college. It has to be articulated in the mission statement of the college and in the school's presentation of itself in admissions and development materials. But above all it has to be embedded in its people (p. 204).

Benne's emphasis upon re-casting, re-articulating and embodiment of the college's core cultural vision for every generation is grounded upon a belief that the vision is foundational.

> The Christian story as a comprehensive, unsurpassable, and central account of reality must be held strongly and confidently enough to shape the life of the college decisively *in all its facets*... That is why these six colleges have maintained their religious identity in face of powerful secularising forces. The persons responsible for them...have had enough confidence in the Christian account of life and reality to insist that it be the organising paradigm for the identity and mission of the college. (Benne, 2001, p. 96–97)

Such an all-encompassing vision enables each generation to hold fast to non-negotiables, but also emancipates the institution from the fetters of systems of action that are often mistakenly perceived by those within the organisation to be 'not negotiable'. In reality, such systems MUST change and adapt to socio-cultural shifts and emphases for the school or college to survive, but Benne contends that such re-casting must always remain grounded within the core vision and values of the college. This contributes to the breaking of the 'locked flywheel' within such institutions, whereby second generation schools and colleges often become prisoners of their social systems and empty traditionalism; they cannot innovate and change their 'way of doing things around here' because their focus is no longer upon the central vision as an organising paradigm but rather the fluid expressions of such a vision through functional, culturally embedded and operationalised systems and design mechanisms and structures.

Benne's research also reveals a range of key foci that facilitate the preservation of Christian distinctiveness and core ideology. These include the maintenance of denominational alignment, preservation of chapel services as central to the institution, and careful attention to staffing and

student enrolment policies. Benne concludes his study with the following imperative for all leaders within Christian institutions seeking to preserve their core ideology within the current educational milieu.

> A tradition, in the words of G. K. Chesterton, is a democracy in which the dead have a vote. Perhaps it is time for those partly secularised colleges to hear those ancient voices, take responsibility for the cause they championed and reconnect with the heritage of those who have gone before and those who enliven that heritage today. (Benne, 2001, p. 214)

Within a specifically Australian Christian school context, the work of Justins (2002) identified similar findings and proposed a range of challenges and recommendations for preserving core ideology for succeeding generations within Christian schools in Australia. Justins' study, contextualised within the Christian Parent Controlled Schools (CPCS) sector, provides a revealing snapshot within this specific expression of Christian schools in Australia. Justins' study found clear evidence that the foundational values were being perpetuated, and that the prevailing practices of these CPCS schools were generally holding fast to core vision, values and assumptions. However, Justins' study also identified the challenges that confront the new Christian schools movement regarding the perpetuation of foundational values. Justins warns:

> The foundational values of CPC schools will not continue to provide impetus and direction to their practices without deliberate intervention. The values face too much competition and are in a sense too demanding, to survive without being nurtured and explicitly promoted and esteemed. (Justins, 2002, p. 247)

To assist in this process, Justins (2002) proposes thirteen recommendations for perpetuating core values within Christian Parent Controlled Schools in Australia that include (among others): an explicit and repeated communication of foundational values, staff induction processes, prudent enrolment policies, the centrality of Christ and the use of the Bible within classrooms, professional development within a Christian worldview and the employment of Christian staff (Justins, 2002).

Consumer sovereignty and the preservation of core cultural distinctiveness

Justins' (2002) findings also highlight that the expansion of the non-government sector has led to a volatile and highly competitive educational market place within contemporary Australian education. As a consequence, Justins contends that market forces and the highly competitive educational milieu within which schools compete for the "student-consumer" are significant threats to the preservation of core cultural values within Christian schools in general, and the CPCS movement in particular.

> If the marketplace assesses the commodity, which is education, on the basis of academic performance...CPC schools make a decision to compete in that marketplace, then they are in real danger of displacing their foundational values. (2002, p. 248)

Christian educational institutions are no longer perceived as isolated havens of teaching and learning, but are intricately tied to economic forces of supply and demand, financial profit and viability, and the strategic positioning of an educational product and commodity within the marketplace of education (Evers & Chapman, 1995; Marginson, 1997). Benne also reinforces the difficulty of balancing market forces with core ideology.

> [When a Christian college] is in a fight for its life or even for its relatively good 'market position', it responds to what the market demands and then tries to squeeze in its own specific contributions that may transcend those demands. It is a difficult balancing act. But if it accedes too easily to the former, it loses what made it distinctive in the first place—its soul. (2001, p. 21)

Benne reveals that "the external demands of the market create an internal culture of caution about religious matters" (p. 24), particularly in schools that are struggling to attain or maintain their market share. He contends that such atrophy of the founding vision will inevitably continue unless either "a traumatic crisis" forces a re-alignment of the school's identity or strong leadership steer the vision and direction of the school back to their founding values and mission (p. 25) (see Figure 1). The pervasive effect of applying the 'consumer sovereignty' model to education and the prevalence of such a hotly contested educational marketplace means that market forces will continue to be a critical factor in any Christian educational institution's continued success and marketplace viability and will fundamentally impact on the preservation of core cultural values.

"Christian educational institutions are no longer perceived as isolated havens of teaching and learning, but are intricately tied to economic forces"

Cultural accommodation

The research literature also identifies that the actual cultures of many perceived 'Christian' educational institutions in the second and third phases of cultural development are, in practice, not really that distinctive at all. Wagner's research of American Christian schools revealed that the extent of compromise was the most surprising feature of her

findings and the compromises evident within the schools' day to day operations belied the rhetoric of the schools' distinctive philosophy and espoused worldview assumptions (Wagner, 1990, p. 206). John Hull sought to identify why deep structures of schooling are left unchallenged within Christian educational institutions.

> When confronted by all this evidence, my own allegiance to the ideal of Christian education sometimes wavers. The challenge of implementing a different, biblical model of schooling appears so far out of reach that I am tempted to think that the whole idea might be wrong-headed. At times I wonder if there really is such a thing as a Christian model of education. (Hull, 2003, p. 207)

> ***"The actual cultures of many perceived 'Christian' educational institutions in the second and third phases of cultural development are not really that distinctive at all"***

Furthermore, Hull argues that Christian educators regularly compromise and "habitually settle for something less than Christian education", leading to what he describes as "visionary downsizing" regarding the purpose and function of Christian schools (Hull, 2003, p. 219).

In stark contrast to these findings, research by Twelves (2005), Justins (2002) and Riding (1996) have each identified a distinctive and vibrant cultural ethos and identity within the Christian schools involved in their respective studies. Furthermore, Chittenden and Lowney clearly reveal the potential for distinctive core ideology to be perpetuated within institutional cultures that endure across generations (Chittenden, 1993; Lowney, 2004). These findings provide an optimistic caveat to the general tale of secularisation and atrophy that all too often befalls Christian institutions and their engagement with changing societal mores and cultural trends.

Further challenges to preserving distinctively Christian institutional cultures

Apart from the challenges of a highly competitive educational marketplace and cultural accommodation, a range of other internal and external factors that inhibit preservation of core cultural values have been identified. These challenges include compromises due to tight government controls in relation to funding, market driven enrolment policies and financial viability (Benne, 2001; Carper & Layman, 1995; Justins, 2002; Twelves, 2005). Internal factors identified within the literature also include school governance and accountability structures, staffing policies and leadership succession processes and priorities (Benne, 2001; Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; Mills, 2003; O'Donoghue & Hill, 1995; Wagner, 1990). The challenge confronting leaders within Christian educational institutions is therefore an administratively complex one—how can these schools and colleges, ideologically strong on vision, values and the explicit promotion of a specifically Christian cultural ethos and identity, continue to preserve and perpetuate their core cultural distinctiveness whilst simultaneously responding to the ever-changing demands and expectations of the social-cultural, political, and economic milieu in which such institutions are situated?

Carper and Layman succinctly encapsulate this generational challenge by asserting, "Christian schools are here to stay. Their character and effectiveness...will depend upon how well they negotiate the perilous path between adolescence and adulthood" (1995, p. 17). Will a generation arise "that does not remember the Lord and his ways" within our Christian educational institutions? The response to this question is one that must compel and inspire current leaders of any Christian education institution to be vigilant, prayerful and pro-active during their watch for the inherent dangers of not "holding fast to that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21), and to "stand *fast* and *hold* the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle" (2 Thess. 2:15). This necessitates that leaders intentionally and purposefully re-cast the founding visions and core values of their institutions within each generation and seek creative, dynamic and inspirational ways to re-orientate and re-articulate their core vision and values during each phase of cultural development. Furthermore, the research would also indicate that the cultivation of a generational embodiment of core cultural vision and values, will ensure that a lasting and living legacy remains within our Christian schools and colleges, a legacy that will "acknowledge the Lord and remember His ways" in all that is undertaken in the name of Christian education, both now and into the future. TEACH

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