TEACH[R]

Rick Warren and Ellen G. White on Christian character development: An unexpected meeting of minds?

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Abstract

The article examines and discusses how two influential Christian authors from different eras perceive the importance and development of *character* in the lives of Christian believers. It is a discourse that is intended to offer 'food for thought' to Christian teachers in the context of current educational interest in character development.

> *Character building has arguably become an important contemporary educational issue in the broader educational world*

Preamble

"Character is the diamond that scratches every other stone", according to Josephson (2013). It is a claim that points to the pervasiveness and significance of character in human relationships.

Character building has arguably become an important contemporary educational issue in the broader educational world as indicated by acclaimed work, and publications such as:

- *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004);
- *Moral education the CHARACTERplus Way* (Marshal et al., 2011);
- *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance* (Duckworth, 2017); among others.

Educator and philosopher George Knight (1998) perceives character building as a remit of Christian education, and asserts it is part and parcel of Christian schools' *raison d'etre* in the "telling of the biblical metanarrative" (p. 95). That, indeed, the task of character building is taken seriously is reflected by a prospectus content (aimed at parents and carers) that is typical of many Christian faith-based schools in Australia:

> The development of *character* is fundamental to our pursuit of academic excellence and is at the heart of our teaching and pastoral care.
> … We are thoughtful about what we do, with a wholistic view of Christian education that sees community, curriculum, *character* and systems as inextricably linked
> (St. Andrews Cathedral School, Sydney, 2022; emphasis supplied).

It is expected, given the above stated goals, that include character development, teachers become crucial and indispensable role models in such schools.

Following the preamble, it is appropriate, now, to introduce two Christian authors—Rick Warren and Ellen White—and then proceed to examine and focus on what each author has written about aspects of character development that is relevant to a wide audience.

Background and context

Although Warren and White's lives (1954- … & 1827-1915) did not intersect, they have much in common. Their theological perspectives, backgrounds, and life experiences, in many ways share certain contours.

With roots in North America—Rick's in the west, in California, and Ellen born in the east, in Portland, Maine—both individuals were co-founders of their church/faith groups. Warren's Southern-Baptist-affiliated Saddleback mega-church now has a reported membership of over twenty thousand, after inauspicious and humble beginnings in 1980, while White's original, insignificant group of Christian Advent believers (officially organised in 1863 as the Seventh-day Adventist Church) has grown globally to over 20 million adherents.

The two authors have been widely published, consequently being influential and successful. Translated into more than twenty languages, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Warren,1995) and its 2002 successor, *The Purpose Driven Life*, have sold millions of copies. Correspondingly, tens of millions of White's (1892) *Steps to Christ* are still in circulation. The small book on basics of Christian living has been translated into 165 languages. White's prolific works (24 books and voluminous periodical articles and tracts) include

the five-book Conflict of the Ages series, central to which is *The Desire of Ages*, a classic on the life of Christ.

In their own time frames, neither Rick nor Ellen, in leadership roles, have been strangers to criticism or malignment (but for different reasons), and each has had to deal with family tragedy (both having lost a young son in distressing circumstances) and experienced recurrent personal health issues that impacted their lives.

There is also a number of shared theological perceptions, that may be 'distilled' from their published works, which should not go unnoticed. Some of these may be summarised as follows:

- believing that all Scripture is God inspired;
- adhering to an Arminian understanding of the gospel, i.e., human free will responding in faith and co-operating with God in salvation—*vis a vis*—predestination;
- upholding the biblical Reformation doctrine of justification by faith in Christ;
- committing to a trinitarian conception of God;
- demonstrating a missionary passion for communicating and spreading the gospel;
- advocating believer baptism by water immersion;
- professing the literal second coming of Christ;
- building and supporting faith communities that exhibit order, structure and flexibility;
- holding a penchant for order, planning, and discipline, not as an end in itself, but for the teaching and advancement of the gospel.

Moreover, as believing and practising Christians, the two hold some interesting views on *character* development and its importance in the Christian life. Prior to examining and discussing these views, it is prerequisite to 'unpack' the concept of "character" as referenced by academics, ethicists, moral education literature, Christian educators, and Scripture.

Character: What it is/not

In an interview, Angela Duckworth (2022), professor and CEO of Character Lab, describes character as, "all the things you habitually do, think, say and feel that are good for others and good for you." She sees character development as a life-long project and differentiates between values and character. For instance, one might value generosity, but not necessarily be a generous person.

Academics Marshall, Caldwell and Foster (2011) perceive (good) character as a complex, multi-faceted concept. They argue, as part of their CHARACTERplus Way® approach to moral education that it extends beyond the demonstration of "'a mixed bag of virtues'" (p. 51), to one of the discerning application of virtues for the greater good, without regard to extrinsic rewards; sometimes in the face of contradictory goals and values dilemmas, and being able to employ 'sharp' reasoning and analytical skills. More will be said about this perception further on in the article, in relation to Warren and White.

Timpe (2007), in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* contends,

> what kind of person one is, is constituted by one's character; the link between moral character and virtue is clear. We can think of one's moral character as primarily a function of whether she has or lacks moral virtues or vices. (para. 3)

Regrettably, *character* is currently often understood as merely referring to *personality*. A recent case in point was sports journalist Tracey Holmes' (2022) report at the Beijing Winter Olympics. When the father of gold medallist snow boarder Ayumu Hirano was asked to explain the extraordinary success of his son, he was reported as saying: "The most important thing in the world is personality". Unless accuracy was 'lost in translation', the expressed view is a typically emasculated one.

Writing from a Christian perspective, ethicist Wayne Grudem (2018) defines character in terms of character traits and virtues as, "habitual dispositions to act, feel, respond and think in morally good ways" (pp. 107-108). For Christians, *good* being the moral standards found in God's law and a reflection of his character, as revealed in Scripture and also written (even if imperfectly perceived) on people's hearts and consciences (Grudem, 2018). By implication, responding in morally bad ways leads to negative character traits, that is vices.

Knight (1998) goes further; confronting his readers with a provocative claim: "*true* character can develop only in the born-again Christian. Character development outside that experience may be good humanism, or even good pharisaism, but it is not congruent with the Christian model" (emphasis supplied, p. 201). In Knight's view, "leading young people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ [and] service to God and other people for both the here and hereafter" (p. 203), constitutes authentic character development that also includes developing a Christian mind, social responsibility, physical health, and development for the world of work. In Knight's paradigm, Christian education should be concerned with students' salvation, where teachers are committed followers of Jesus and active agents bringing students "back to "at-one-ment" with God, other people, their own selves, and the natural world" (p. 201).

It is noteworthy that the New Testament makes several specific references to character.

> Now you must tell them the sort of *character* which should spring from sound teaching. The old men should be temperate, serious, wise—spiritually healthy through

Angela Duckworth … describes character as, all the things you habitually do, think, say and feel that are good for others and good for you.

their faith and love and patience
(Titus 2:1, J. B. Phillips, 1960, emphasis supplied).

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of *character*, and *character* strengthens our confident hope of salvation
(Rom 5: 3-4, NLT, emphasis supplied).

Yet when it [discipline—correction of behaviour that God allows or is the result of natural consequences] is all over, we can see that it has quietly produced fruit of real goodness in the *characters* of those who have accepted it in the right spirit
(Hebrews 12:11, J. B. Phillips, 1960, emphasis supplied).

Wherever that gospel [of love, truth, grace, faith and hope] goes, it produces Christian *character*, and develops it, as it has done in your case …
(Col 1:6, J. B. Phillips, emphasis supplied).

> *character development in students is a major goal of their teaching ministry, their educational priority not being to inform or conform, but to transform*

What can be deduced from the apostle Paul's inspired statements about Christian (and by implication, "good") character, noted above? First, from a biblical perspective, it is honorific and desirable. Second, character, whether bad or good, does not come with our DNA at birth, but is developed. Additionally, good character is not easily or quickly attained, for it involves struggles to bring about changes in our human behaviour that are not temporary, but which are stable and endure over time. Third, character formation is linked to behaviour; our actions. Fourth, "fruit of real goodness" suggests that the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22,23), is a basic ingredient of Christian character, as believers choose to lead Spirit-empowered lives and become transformed (Romans 12:2). The fruit metaphor also brings to mind Jesus addressing the issue of whether a bad tree can produce good fruit, and vice versa (Luke 6:43, 44).

For this article, what steps were taken to obtain Warren and White's views and understandings on character?

The authors' perceptions

To ascertain their perceptions, statements about specific aspects regarding character have been taken from major works of Warren and White. With a view to potential concurrence, they were arranged in a table format (see below). In examining the quotations in Table 1 (In subsequent discussion, all numbered paragraphs cited, e.g., 1, 2, 3a etc. refer to Table 1.), and keeping in mind the set of Bible verses quoted above, several features become evident:

The significance of character

Both Warren and White recognise the importance that is placed on character in Scripture. Actually, character's import stretches from the mistrust of Adam and Eve, in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis, to the sentence pronounced on unrepentants in the concluding chapter of Revelation. Conversely, its positive import extends from Enoch and Noah, who both "walked with God" (Gen. 5:24; 6:9), to the doers of God's precepts in the ending of Scripture (Rev. 22:14).

Jesus' description of the judgement in Matthew 25 spotlights that character traits have a bearing on salvation—not that these have any salvific merit *per se*—but in that they reflect the immeasurable, unfailing love and grace that God has extended to humanity. Also, that one's responsive human acts or virtues reveal authentic living according to the Great Commandment of Matthew 22:36-40.

Statements by the writers (Table1, 1) leave the reader in no doubt about their parallel views on the *priority* placed on character development in Christian education. Education philosopher George Knight (1998, p. 200) also underscores this significance, by referring to Christian teachers as "agents of reconciliation" (following Jesus' example). For these teachers, character development in students is a major goal of their teaching ministry, their educational priority not being to inform or conform, but to *transform*.

It is of interest that an emphasis on character development, particularly in Christian faith-based schools, is meeting parents' perceived expectations and gaining their appreciation. At the turn of the century, Buckingham (2000) named ethos and discipline as contributing factors in parents' choice of non-government schools. Similarly, Justins and Sauber's (2002) research found, "parents involved in Christian Parent Controlled Schools send their children primarily for purposes that are consistent with their Christian beliefs and way of life" (p. 8). Two decades later, Spencer (2022) notes a 14% enrolment increase from 2021-2022 in Christian Schools Australia (CSA), on the 9% high of the previous year, as part of a long-term trend. While there may be diverse reasons for parents' choice of CSA schools, Spencer concludes, "there is clearly a strong desire for education built on strong and explicit values and beliefs … and the desire is continuing to grow."

Even parents without religious affiliation increasingly recognise that virtues and moral values are essential elements of character development and want these to be part of their children's formal education. This may be indicated, to a certain extent, by a continuing, long-term growth of enrolments, also, in Independent Schools (ISA) (2021; Baker, 2021), that are part of the overall Australian non-government schools sector. ISA schools are often typified by their educational emphasis on competency, conservatism and character.

Which character qualities?

Unsurprisingly, secular sources or texts about character—namely about its make-up, development, or importance—are not mentioned by either author. Their focus is entirely a biblical one. Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal. 5:22,23; KJV) are upheld as most desirable character qualities; being the fruit of the Spirit (Table 1, 2) of which many other virtues are sub-sets or derivations.

Even though one's personal efforts contribute to character development, for the Christian believer, these qualities have their grounding and source in God. Indeed, it may be argued that any and all goodness, irrespective of who exhibits it (non-believers included), has its roots in the Creator God, because human beings of themselves, are incapable of engendering it (Isa. 64:6). Jesus' disciples are encouraged to follow in his footsteps.

The perpetuity of good character

What surprises about both statements 3a, in Table1, is that a Christ-like character is the only 'possession' that mortals may take into eternity; this assertion, notwithstanding of:

- Paul, the apostle's statement, "… we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7, KJV);
- Job's agonising acknowledgement, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart" (Job 1: 21, NIV); and
- Solomon's conclusion, "People come into this world with nothing, and when they die, they leave with nothing. In spite of all their hard work , they leave just as they came" (Eccl. 5:15, NCV).

However, Jesus' parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:16-21,33), and the immediate sequel for the benefit of his disciples, differentiates between *material possessions* and an enduring, incorporeal treasure in heaven, safe from earth's familiar threats. That treasure, Warren and White would claim, is more than a metaphor, but the essence of our being, our spiritual fingerprint or DNA; more specifically, character.

Statements 3b in Table 1 assert the connection between the present life and a future one, with character being a significant link. Readers are reminded of Jesus' declaration: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), prefixed by Martha's strong conviction, "I know that he [Lazarus] will rise and live again in the resurrection on the last day" (John 11:24, NCV). Scripture does not provide us with details of the process of the character 'transfer'. However, at death, the 'breath' of God that gives life (Gen. 2:7) returns to the Giver, together with our 'spiritual DNA' to be reunited with our resurrected bodies—transformed and perfected in Christ—with the time and circumstances outlined in 1Thes.4:13-17 and 1Cor.15:52; yet to be realised and fully understood.

Character and conduct

Not 'walking the talk' is a common criticism of some of today's public figures—politicians, business leaders, celebrities, and sporting greats. In the latter category, to mention merely one recent example, a former Olympic kayaker and his younger brother were sentenced to 28 and 25 years jail respectively, for trying to smuggle an estimated $200 million worth of cocaine into Australia (Siganto, 2021).The failure to live up to promises and meet exacting standards of conduct is increasingly becoming acceptable, common-place practice, with the resulting compartmentalisation of private lives and public lives, as if two distinct kinds of water could be drawn from the same source.

As statements 4 indicate, Warren and White are in agreement that for Christians, in particular, there should be no gaps between words and deeds. Good intentions or lofty rhetoric are insufficient, while assent unaccompanied by action is usually insincerity or worse—hypocrisy—for which, in spiritual matters, Jesus repeatedly reserved his strongest criticism.

> *Good intentions or lofty rhetoric are insufficient, while assent unaccompanied by action is usually insincerity or worse—hypocrisy— for which Jesus repeatedly reserved his strongest criticism.*

Habits and character

Another area of concurrence is the role of habits in character formation as indicated by statements 5a and 5b. Habits are regarded as behaviour patterns of thinking, acting or feeling that have become established over time, through frequent repetition.

Warren and White's references to the nexus between habits and character assumes a *moral* context. This precludes mannerism and routines such as sniffing and nail-biting or brushing one's teeth after meals and making a daily to-do list, among others. Rather, for example, it has to do with habitual dishonesty, arrogance, abusive conduct or malicious Twitter gossip, when these behaviours have become 'second nature' to an individual. Jesus touches on this in teaching his disciples, "from a man's heart, come the evil ideas which lead him to do immoral things, to rob, to kill, commit adultery" (Mark 7:21, TEV). How is such a low point reached?

Character, according to the authors, is not established by a significant single act, but a multiplicity of minor actions and behaviours (see statements 5a). In turn, actions are prefixed by thought patterns which lead to distinctive behaviours; hence the apostle Paul's counsel to the believers at Philippi to think on the things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and respected because, as Proverbs 23:7 (KJV) frames it, "as he [man] thinketh in his heart, so is he."

Table 1: *Selected quotations about character from the published works of Rick Warren and Ellen G. White (italics supplied)*

Note: The quotations below have been taken from Warren's two major books; the White quotations come from her books, and also from compilations (sourced from White's articles, tracts and letters) posthumously published.

Rick Warren	Ellen G. White
1. Christlike *character* is the ultimate goal of all Christian education. To settle for anything less is to miss the point of spiritual growth (PDC, p.359).	1. Its [true/Christian education's] goal is *character* building. The highest class of education is that which will give you such knowledge and discipline as will lead to the best development of character … (CG, p.296).
2. The fruit of the Spirit is a perfect picture of Christ … If you are going to develop Christ-like *character* you must have these qualities in your life as well (PDC, p. 361).	2. In our *character* building we must build on Christ. He is the sure foundation … In our character building, Christ is our example (CG, p.166). "[The fruit of the Spirit comprises] the elements of the Christian character" (CG, p.173).
3a. Developing the *character* of Christ is life's most important task because it is the only thing we'll take with us into eternity (PDC, p.360).	3a. A *character* formed according to the divine likeness is the only treasure that we'll take with us into eternity (MYP, p.100).
3b. Jesus made it quite clear … eternal rewards in heaven will be based on the *character* we develop and demonstrate here on earth (PDC, p.360).	3b. The harvest of life is *character*, and it is this that determines destiny, both for this life and for the life to come (Ed., p.109).
4. The Christian life isn't just a matter of creeds and convictions; it includes conduct and *character.* Beliefs must be backed up with behavior. Our deeds must be consistent with our creeds (PDL, 336).	4. A profession of religion places men in the church, but the *character* and conduct show whether they are in connection with Christ. If they bear no fruit, they are false branches (DA, p.667).
5a. Even the smallest incident has significance for your *character* development. Every day is an important day, and every second is a growth opportunity to deepen your character, to demonstrate love, or to depend on God (PDL, p.43).	5a. Faithfulness or neglect in what are apparently the smallest duties may open the door for life's richest blessings or its greatest calamities. It is little things that test the *character* (PP, p.155).
5b. Your habits define your *character.* There is only one way to develop habits of Christlike *character.* You must practice them—and that takes time. (PDL, p.221).	5b. *Character* does not come by chance ... It is the repetition of the act that causes it to become habit, and molds the character either for good or evil (MYP, p.163).
6. *Character* development always involves choice. When we make the right choice, our *character* grows more like Christ. Whenever we choose to respond to a situation in God's way instead of following our natural inclination, we develop *character* (PDC, p.360).	6. Without freedom of choice, his [Adam's/human] obedience would not have been voluntary, but forced. There could have been no development of *character* (PP, p.32).
7. God is far more concerned with our *character* than he is with our comfort. … For this reason he allows all kinds of *character*-building circumstances: conflict, disappointment, difficulty, temptation, times of dryness and delays (PDC, p.361).	7. Christ has given us no assurance that to attain perfection of *character* is an easy matter. … A noble *character* is earned by individual effort through the merits and grace of Christ. … It [character] is formed by hard, stern battles with self (MYP, p.99).

Key to abbreviations used in Table 1
PDC - *The Purpose Driven Church* PDL - *The Purpose Driven Life* MYP - *Messages to Young People**
Ed - *Education* CG - *Child Guidance** DA - *Desire of Ages*

* Indicates a posthumous compilation sourced from the author's articles, tracts and letters

"Character is an edifice that is perceived as being built 'brick by brick', resulting eventually in virtue or vice; good or evil. Moreover, the building venture is intentional, rather than fortuitous;"

Character is an edifice that is perceived as being built 'brick by brick', resulting eventually in virtue or vice; good or evil. Moreover, the building venture is intentional, rather than fortuitous; it takes time, practice and repetition, before it becomes permanent and part of our real self.

A determinant of character

"Character development always involves choice", declares Warren (1995, p. 360), which is foreshadowed by White's (1898, p. 32) statement, "Without freedom of choice … There could have been no development of character" (Table 1, 6). The Genesis 2:16-17 (NLT) statement, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil", plainly illustrates that freedom of choice within clear boundaries (*vis a vis* 'programmed' behaviour) has been the

immemorial privilege of human beings. Thus, neither writer subscribes to predestination, but each upholds humanity's free will to respond to God's unmerited offer of salvation.

In making choices, we weigh up alternatives. The quality of our moral and spiritual choices has eternal consequences so clearly seen in Scripture; for instance, in the lives of Ruth, Absalom, Judas, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, and the Philippian jailer. Furthermore, as mentioned above, when our repeated moral choices become habitual, when weighing up alternatives no longer becomes necessary, they form part of our character; of who we are.

However, when it comes to decisions, Christians should not become self-reliant; there is no place for hubris. Believers are challenged to claim Jesus' promise, "I will not leave you orphaned. ... I will love him [you] and will make myself plain to him [you]" (John 14:18, 21; The Message); the promise applying not merely to spiritual matters but our everyday life, guided by the Spirit. Hence, one is always able to avail oneself of God's guidance in perplexing situations. Divine Providence, through the Spirit, may use various means to direct us, including clarity of thought, verses of Scripture, trusted friends, pastoral counsel, or professional help, in dealing with whatever circumstances we may be faced with.

Character development's woes

Both White and Warren piggyback on the apostle Paul—who invokes the analogy of a foot race (1 Cor. 9:25, Heb. 12:1) and the associated necessary athletic training and self-discipline—to describe their view of character development. The apostle readily admits to his own struggles with character formation in his letter to the believers in Rome (Rom. 7:15-19).

Together with Paul, our two authors (see Table 1, 7) perceive character development for the Christian as an enduring battle with self. In listing the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-23, it is instructive to note that the KJV's "temperance" is rendered as "self-control" in the NIV. Thus, character development is perceived not as 'happening' to us. It is not a passive experience, but an active process in us; it is a dynamic involving choice, our will, and requiring decisions—including amidst trials, turmoil, and temptations—in the context of, "I can do all things through Christ, because he gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13, NCV). But believers may yet have to endure some fiery experiences in 'the kiln of life' before the beauty of the finished artefact by the Divine Potter is realised.

It should be noted at this point that Warren and White look at character development from an angle of practical and foundational Christianity (as a Spirit-empowered faith endeavour, where Christ is the embodiment, *par excellence*, of good character) rather than looking at it through a theoretical, academic lens. The two authors focus on principles and essentials of good character for the edification of their audiences. Thus, they emphasise character development's eternal significance, the contribution of habits, making good and noble choices, exhibiting conduct that confirms exhortation, while acknowledging the day-to-day struggles inherent in this challenging human project.

Marshall, Caldwell and Foster (2011), hold to a much more complex and academic approach in their CHARACTERplus Way® education model. On a secular platform, it features a whole school and community curriculum-integrated K-12 character education program with specified elements, content and pedagogical processes, adapted from several sources. If extended to its logical extremity, the ideal type of character development suggested by this model would incorporate student growth towards idealised states of being, specifically:

- *self-actualisation* (acting consistently according to an internalised belief system), a part of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs;
- *integrity* (an end of life stage reflection that fully accepts oneself), a feature of Erikson's (1950) stages of psycho-social development;
- *universalising faith* (i.e., individuals' personal systems of meaning) in Fowler's (1981), or similarly, an *universal ethical principled orientation* in Kohlberg's (1984), stages of moral development);
- *characterisation* (i.e., internalising values and consistently acting on these), as in Krathwohl, Blooms and Masia's (1965) affective domain, a section of their taxonomy of educational objectives.

> *"character development is perceived not as 'happening' to us. It is not a passive experience, but an active process in us; it is a dynamic involving choice, our will, and requiring decisions"*

In comparison, Warren and White's 'character projects' probably rate in the KISS (Keep It Simple Samantha) category. Aimed at a different audience, the projects' comparative modesty, however, project a powerful biblical worldview about transformation of human behaviour. Also, speaking prophetically (as in 1Cor 14:3), i.e., forthtelling, and in a teaching-pastoral capacity, the authors are building up, encouraging and comforting for the purpose of seeing changed lives patterned after Christ. Warren and White are thus clearly engaged in a faith-grace project, vis a vis a secular initiative that is not biblical-virtues-focused and which aims to teach ethical conduct and behaviour to develop good character, through a formal whole-school curriculum program.

Conclusions

In review, Warren and White, surprisingly, turn out to be fellow pilgrims. It is evident that they have a

remarkably similar outlook on Christian character development, according to the tabled texts and the ground covered in this article. On the authors' part, there is particularised concurrence—rather than a display of differentiated, denominational viewpoints—despite their contrasting formal educational levels. Warren has a DMin from Fuller University, whereas White was self-educated, not having gone beyond an elementary education; yet they communicate a mutual message. This raises an interesting and important question; why the similarity in outlook?

Given Warren's background, history and *modus operandi*, it is most unlikely (although not an impossibility) that he has read some of White's work or that he has a 19th century theological mindset. So, one should look elsewhere to explain the similarity.

> *faithfully interpreting the text of Scripture leads to an understanding of the importance of grace in the development of Christian character. It also inevitably points to the centrality of Christ*

Initially, one should focus on the part played by Scripture. It is extensively 'mined' by both authors. Albeit there are no direct Bible quotes in Table 1, the influence of Scripture is keenly felt. Neither author specifically refers to their method of interpreting Scripture; their assumed approach being not unlike using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral—a variety of tools for theological reflection, namely, Scripture, tradition, experience and reason. A progression of this approach is what today's theologians call the historical-grammatical method—a hermeneutic that takes various aspects into account, e.g., author's intention, language, context, culture etc. to arrive at a faithful interpretation of the text. Furthermore, Warren and White are writing about timeless principles articulated in holy writ. It is contended that accepting these constant principles, when coupled with a similar approach to interpreting Scripture text, would lead to shared viewpoints and additionally result in compound flow-on effects as considered below.

Second, faithfully interpreting the text of Scripture leads to an understanding of the importance of grace in the development of Christian character. It also inevitably points to the centrality of Christ in character development in the lives of Christian believers. We are not the 'architects' of our own characters, as Warren and White believe and point out, notwithstanding a measure of self-determination, our personal input, and co-operation with Christ.

Importantly, no measure of character growth on our part should be conceived as meriting salvation; it is wholly a free gift! Hymnologists precis this viewpoint fittingly, "On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand" (SDA Hymnal, 1986). Thus, in character formation, dependence on Christ is seen as paramount by Warren and White; both are entirely Christ-focused. The corollary of their mutual belief in justification by faith in Christ alone, together with their attendant commitment to sanctification (as suggested by statements 2 and 4), is a harmonised view on Christian practice and lifestyle, that extends to character development.

Third, it can be inferred from statements in Table1 and as a flow-on from the authors' orientation to Scripture, that they hold to the understanding that human beings were created in the image of God—the *imago Dei* (Gen. 1:27). Human beings are perceived as having been created to be image bearers, having the immense potential to reflect God's divine nature in their moral, spiritual, relational, creative and intellectual essence! The staggering implication and outcome of God's original act of creating humans becomes crystal clear in light of a recent statement regarding the human brain by the New Scientist Academy (2022, p. 26), "Your head holds the most complex object in the known universe."

What is more, Warren and White's perspective on character development, in essence differs from a secular viewpoint in that it not only has a distinct spiritual, moral, and eternal dimension but, even more important, it is a Christ and Spirit empowered endeavour rather than a solely human self-constructed undertaking.

Fourth, another already noted shared feature is the effort and time taken to develop a Christ-like character. The latter is developed—like diamonds from coal—under pressure! Not only can this be deduced from the lives of Jesus' original disciples but also their present-day counterparts. Warren and White identify with all believers who struggle with sanctification; our need and willingness to be made holy—set apart—by God, as a loving response to Jesus' saving sacrifice. It is very likely that in their own Christian journey, both Warren and White have experienced deeply the reality of the adage, "God comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable"; leading them, again, to shared insights—the upshot of similar experiences.

Having put forward some reasons that underpin Warren and White's surprising shared perspective on Christian character development, one might safely conclude that they would also jointly declare with the apostle Paul, "I am certain that God, who began the good work in you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns" (Phil. 1:6, NLT).

Finally, what is the key takeaway message? God is the source of gifting the ministry of teaching (1 Cor. 12:28). Teachers (and parents) of students in Christian faith-based schools have been placed in a privileged and challenging position of responsibility of being co-workers with Christ. In performing their many teaching tasks and duties, teachers, over time, play a critical role in shaping students' learning and character development. Through modelling of an authentic Christian lifestyle, teachers also bear witness to the

power of the gospel and the agency of the Holy Spirit in character formation.

As respective leaders in their faith communities, Rick Warren and Ellen White in writing about aspects of character development have offered teachers, as well as educators and parents, some valuable insights about a 'project' that ultimately has eternal consequences. TEACH

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> *Through modelling of an authentic Christian lifestyle, teachers also bear witness to the power of the gospel and the agency of the Holy Spirit in character formation.*

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Wellbeing needs to take into account client expectations of 'who we are', and then build a program that supports that. We have tried many things and spent lots of money and time,, but one thing stands out to us. There are no quick fixes or copy/paste programs that will do what you want. There are no end of people and programs out there that are willing to take your money with the promise of creating a wellbeing space in your school. To be honest - nothing works better that looking at what your community needs and responding to that with intention, care and compassion.

Our theme, one that guides all of our Student Leadership, Chaplaincy, Counselling, Bible and all our general teaching, wellbeing and campus church is an adaptation of Micah 6:8

"Love God, Love Others, Love Yourself and Always Be Kind. TEACH