



## **“A Christian Perspective on the Value of Debate”**

*by Michael R. Winther*

Most educationally related activities, whether curricular or extracurricular in nature, can be used to promote a variety of worldviews. Christian and non-Christian schools all teach reading, math, and science. Likewise, Christian and non-Christian schools may each sponsor extracurricular programs like music or sports. In a similar manner, debate programs can exist in any educational environment.

There is, however, an important difference between debate and other activities. More than any other activity, debate training forms the thought processes of a student and influences the way he or she views the world. Debaters learn to think, to research, and to communicate in certain ways. It is for this reason that we believe that debate should be directed and taught from a biblical worldview and that Christian schools are best served by a debate league that is composed exclusively of private Christian schools.

When considering whether to participate in an organized debate league, there are three important questions every school administrator should ask:

“Will this activity advance God’s kingdom?”

“Will it benefit our students?”

“Will it benefit our school?”

I am personally convinced that the answer our new debate league provides to each of these questions is a resounding “yes”. Please allow me to elaborate.

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**Debate is a powerful tool for the advancement of God’s kingdom.**

Over the centuries, the church has recognized the importance of training well educated, articulate apologists for the gospel. The apostle Paul “reasoned” with the Jews in their synagogues and was also able to answer the cross examination of the philosophers at Mars Hill. Martin Luther engaged in a 17 day formal “disputation” with John Eck over the issues of the reformation. Today it is equally important for Christians to be able to “reason”, “dispute”, “answer”, and “persuade” as we extend the gospel in our age.

### **Debate builds up those who will build the kingdom.**

Because we take the great commission seriously, we endeavor to give our students the best tools possible for carrying out Christ's charge in Matthew 28. The accompanying document, "The Value of Debate", convincingly presents evidence of the amazing benefits of the debate activity from a purely academic perspective. (If you haven't read through this document, please do so.) If this appraisal is true—and I am convinced that it is—there is no reason why we should deprive our Christian students of these skills and tools.

### **Debate builds and promotes your school.**

There are some secondary benefits to the debate activity that every Christian school should consider. First, it is a valuable recruitment tool. I cannot know every school's situation, but numerous administrators have told me that parents who are shopping for a school frequently ask about the available extra-curricular activities. Band, basketball, football, track, soccer, and baseball programs do seem to have a positive impact on recruitment—even for families of students that choose not to participate in these activities. Like all of these activities, debate is a draw that enhances the appeal of your school. Debate provides an important balance to your recruitment message. It tells families that your school places equal value on academic competition and sports competition—that shaping the mind is as important as shaping the body.

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Second, debate will improve the academics at your school. I am convinced that SAT/ACT test scores improve markedly for those students who participate in the debate activity. If even 5-10% of your student body participates in debate, the academic improvement will be noticeable in school averages.

### **Debate has a higher profile than you might think.**

Many schools compete in academic decathalons, spelling bees, and speech competitions. These are important academic competitions, but they typically do not generate the same level of preparation and competitive spirit that is inherent to debate.

If you are not familiar with competitive academic debate, you might be surprised by this activity. This is not merely a few students who debate a subject within their classroom. Team Policy Debate is competition between different schools, not just within one school. The debate season generally lasts most of the school year, and the level of competition encourages students to become self-motivated, to work hard, and to excel. As a debate league grows, students who experience success will find themselves debating before audiences of several hundred people. Not only is this great training for your students, but it also promotes your school and its accomplishments.