The Christian and Education

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The administration has chosen wisely in giving us this subject for study. There is such emphasis on education today. In Northern Ireland (from which some of us have come to this conference) there is a tremendous building program—more than half of the children are in new schools—and thousands of young teachers are being trained for a total population of 1,400,000. In Russia, and fifty years ago she was in the Dark Ages, such strides have been made in education that she is challenging the world. This very fact has given a hefty boost to education in America—not that we are doing it simply to beat the Russians, but that our present generation and the next generation of citizens be as equipped as possible to meet their responsibilities. We need to have our thinking clear on this subject then. We need to be able to take a position on it. We need to be so strongly convinced of the rightness of that position that we shall be able to guide others.

Before we go any further we need to get a clear understanding of our terms. What do we mean when we talk about Education?

1. What is Education? The word comes from Latin—from the Latin word “educo,” which means to “lead out”—so education is intended to lead a person out into realms of knowledge that he has never entered—also, it is intended to bring out his potentialities and abilities into full exercise, and so enable him to be fully effective as a person. As Dr. J. G. Vos has put it, “The educated person has a grasp of things, a sense of values, an appreciation of life, an ability to judge and appraise questions... in other words, a balanced all-round effectiveness as a person—which the uneducated person simply does not have.”

Having said that, it also has to be said that much of what people receive at our schools and universities today is not education—it is simply training in certain skills. We are living in days of specialization—people feel that they haven’t time to be educated any more. Dr. Gregory Zilboorg, a Christian psychiatrist in New York State Medical College said recently, “I remember when I was in my second medical school there wasn’t a member of the class of 120 who didn’t think that it was absolutely silly to occupy oneself with reading a book outside medicine, because you had to study and think already about six years hence, when you would hang out a shingle.” Then he went on to say, “This is true of engineers in M.I.T. and this is true of lawyers in the best law schools, and this is true of all the schools, because our schools have become, not centres of education, but centres of training.” And this you will agree is a very serious indictment of our present educational system—and it is true, no matter what country we may have come from to this conference. Let’s be clear then, education aims at helping a child or man attain his full formation or his completeness as a man— it does not aim to give him only a particular skill.

Let it be roundly said that a good education,
liberal learning, honest scholarship, can be of
tremendous value to Christianity. This has al-
ways been recognized in Christian circles. "A
wise and persuasive piety should be the aim of
our studies," wrote John Sturm of Strasbourg
centuries ago. "But were all pious, then the stu-
dent should be distinguished from him who is
unlettered by scientific culture and the art of
speaking." Luther knew the value of education
to Christianity. He maintained strongly that
there must always be scholars in the
Church. When he was urging officials of
German cities to establish schools, he
expressed his regret that he hadn't had more of
the liberal arts and less of theological soph-
sicity, in his own education. And Calvin estab-
lished the tradition of an educated ministry in
the Reformed Churches by optics the curricu-
um of his Academy at Geneva firmly upon the
liberal arts. All other things being equal, if a
man has a better opportunity to be a servant
of his Lord if he has received full education.
And let me point out in passing that education
as a principle has been sanctified forever by the
fact that our Savior's instruction was teacher,
proving to his disciples as they walked the
hills and valleys of Galilee and Judea, all these
truths that they needed to be His effective
servants.

But now we must face the realities of our
present educational situation. Once again I be-
lieve that this is true of all or nearly all the
countries we represent. We have to admit that
in the field of education there are two radically
different and utterly irreconcilable philosophies
of life—the humanistic and the Christian. Hu-
manism, of course, is man-centered, as its name
implies. Man is an end in himself—the aim of
education is to prepare a person best to serve
his fellow-man. The Christian philosophy of life
is God-centered—a person is to be prepared best
to serve his God, which, of course, will involve
serving his fellow-man. As Dr. Vos has put it,
"There can be no compromise or harmony be-
tween them; for in the one, God is regarded as
irrelevant, while in the other, God is regarded as
all-important." And said to say, it is the hu-
manistic philosophy which has the stronger in-
fluence today. This has been illustrated by Dr.
W. G. Pollard, executive director of Oak Ridge
Institute of Nuclear Studies, in his paper, "Dark
Age and Renaissance." "We have a double her-
tage in education," he says, "Our Graeco-
Roman and our Judaico-Christian. Our civiliza-
tion has lost its capacity to respond to its Ju-
daico-Christian heritage. In most universities
the literary treasure and our Graeco-Roman is
offered by a department of classical languages
and literatures and the humanities, while the
Judaico-Christian is offered as a course in Bible
by a department of religion. From a reading
course in the great Greek or Latin works any
student can move without strain or perturba-
tion into any of the other courses of his curricu-
um, in history, science, philosophy, mathematics,
business or engineering. This he can do
because the general ideas, framework of thought
and view of reality which he encounters in clas-
sical authors are entirely agreeable to those
which he finds in all aspects of his own contemporary culture. But another student who enrolls in a class in Bible finds himself in a totally different situation. Whatever his reaction to his course may be, he cannot fail to feel the tension between the whole framework of thought and view of reality which he encounters there, and all the rest of his university experience. This will be because the framework of thought and view of reality which he encounters in Biblical literature belong to a heritage now lost to his contemporary culture. Is that painting the position in too dark colors? I don’t think so. We have to agree with Dr. Henry L. Finch of Sara Lawrence College when he says that in many of our universities today we have a positive onslaught against religion in the fields of psychology, sociology, philosophy, and so on. He says that the subjects implicitly attack religion and the students understand that religion has been demolished, that we no longer need it, that it is simply a lost phase of our culture.

If that is the situation it is imperative that we ask ourselves our second main question:

2. What is Christian Education? Perhaps it would be best to state some things that it is not—and so clear away some common misconceptions. It does not mean simply education in Christianity. That is a supremely important part of it, of course. The student must be taught in every facet of the Christian faith possible to him—but we must not limit Christian education to religion—for then we shall fail to glory God in all of life and knowledge. There must be a Christian view of chemistry and history and politics and business, for God is Lord of all life. And it is the glory of Reformed doctrine that it doesn’t limit experience of the Christian faith to simply an experience of personal salvation, but claims, as the Bible claims, that Christ is to have the pre-eminence in all things.

Again, Christian education does not mean secular education with some external features added on. I don’t want to be misunderstood here, but it seems to me that much of the present outcry in fundamentalist circles to get the Bible back into our schools is based on a misconception. People seem to think that this would give us Christian education—and the simple fact is that it would not. Surely we want the Bible back in our schools—surely we want schools to recognize the sovereignty of God over them by acts of worship—but such things added on externally would make little difference to our educational system as a whole. They would not give us Christian education—at best they would give us education in some Christian things.

What is Christian education then? It is education that recognizes that Scripture is the revelation of the mind and will of God. It is education that is under the authority of Scripture. It is education which recognizes that the God revealed in Scripture is sovereignly active in every aspect of His universe. It is education which makes an honest attempt to integrate the whole of human knowledge under the authority of Scripture, and to show that Scripture is relevant to all departments of human thinking and every
aspect of human action. It is education which is based on God’s covenant with his people — you remember how the Covenant is described in Hebrews — “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days saith the Lord — I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.” This is the education that we want — this is the education we want provided for our children and ourselves — an education in which the principles of Scripture are normative for every field of study. To quote Dr. Vos again — “God, the God revealed in the Bible, must be the great assumption in every classroom. God must be the person whose handwork is investigated in every laboratory.” Why, an academic community in which a truly Christian education was being given would see every aspect of study as investigating the work of God, and would have a right to expect the leading of the Holy Spirit in that investigation.

And this is where we find a question asked— and since it is a fair question and a very practical one it has to be answered — what can a teacher do to bring into actuality the Christian idea of education? Here, for example, is a person whose job it is to teach Chemistry 101, or Economics 202, or American history 102. This person asks for specific practical suggestions for making the teaching of his particular subject more Christian. What is the difference between ordinary chemistry, economics, or history, and Christian chemistry, Christian economics and Christian history? In answer to this I want to say two things. One is that there is something to avoid — the idea that it is only science or scholarship itself which has to exercise the task of instructing minds. Because they hold this, some Christian teachers believe that it is their duty to put aside as far as possible their own convictions, which are the convictions of a given man, not the pronouncements of scholarship. And since these pronouncements exist only in the form of conflicting statements, the task of the teacher is to bow himself modestly into the shade, and to present to the student a carefully prepared picture of incompatible opinions, and let him choose for himself. This ought not to be. The first duty of the teacher is to know where he stands and to present his own deeprooted convictions concerning the truths which Christian education presents. And this brings me to the second thing I want to say in answer to this question. There is, of course, no Christian chemistry, or Christian engineering, or Christian mathematics, as such — but if the teacher is ordering his life under Christ, and if his teaching flows from a soul dedicated to contemplation of his subject in Christian terms, the way in which his teaching is given will convey to the student something beyond mathematics or astronomy or engineering — it will convey a conviction that behind all truth is God Himself, who has indeed revealed something of Himself in this particular subject. So it is possible for a Christian teacher to present his subject, no
Now let us move on to our third question.

3. What is the purpose of Christian education? Is it to equip people to be well-rounded members of society, able to contribute much to the welfare of society? That is what many people today would say is the function of education. And that is part of it, but only a part, and by no means the most important part. For man is not an end in himself, as humanists claim—"Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." So the purpose of all education is to advance the Kingdom of Christ. We set up our educational systems for the glory of Christ. We train our teachers for the glory of Christ. We present even the most mundane subjects to our pupils for the glory of Christ. Dr. Arnold De Graaf has put it very well—"We are to become fit instruments for the work of the Lord. The pedagogue is bound to this revelation concerning man's vocation in life. The final aim of all forms of Christian nurture and instruction can be nothing else than the provision of fundamental guidance with regard to this calling. Wherever the child or adult is placed, whatever his abilities or limitations, he must learn to submit his life to God's will. His one and only task is to serve God according to His ordinances, unfolding and developing His creation for the benefit of mankind, to the praise of His Lord and Redeemer. To prepare the child for this service, and to give the adult guidance with regard to this calling must be the final aim of Christian education." So the purpose of Christian education is not to produce skilled or cultured persons, nor self-reliant nor well-adjusted persons, not even devout Christian persons. If we go for that we are going for the glorification of man. We have one aim only—through Christian education may God's name be hallowed. May His Kingdom come. May His will be done on earth even as it is done in heaven.

Our aim then, is to teach all truth. Sometimes when people are thinking about Christian schools and Christian education they talk as if there were some reserved area known as Christian truth which is to be added to the regular kind of truth—as if, say, physics belonged to the area of general truth, and then, there is an optional extra for some people about, say, the duty of loving one's neighbour. No. Truth is one. There is only one kind of truth because there is only one God. The history the Creed relates to is part and parcel of exactly the same history as Winston Churchill wrote so well about. It is subject to the same tests and requires the same understanding. Our aim is to teach the whole truth.

Our aim is to teach the whole truth to the whole man. It is easy to forget that man is whole and single. He has many desires, and they are often conflicting. We are tempted to take them one by one and try to answer each one separately. He wants a useful job—we try to find him one. He wants a home and children. We try to get him that too. He wants national self-sufficiency and prosperity—and at the same time he wants world peace. He is a bundle
of desires. We aren't there to satisfy his desires — our aim is to lead him to see that God made man for Himself — his whole life is God's.

And just because there is so much error in the world as well as truth, and just because it is hard for him at times to know which of his conflicting desires is in line with God's will, it is our aim in Christian education to develop his powers of perception and discrimination. And this is where we recognize his need for regeneration — for sin has darkened his mind — and only by regeneration can he see things in the light of God — so the thought of his regeneration is basic in all our thinking regarding aims.

Our final question is this:

4. What are the implications arising from our assuming this position on education?

First, let us consider the realm of responsibility. And without doubt the first responsibility for education rests on the parents. As De Graaf has put it — “The natural helplessness of the child, his dependence upon nurture, and the unique bond of love between parents and children makes the training in the home irreplaceable.” This is eminently scriptural. God revealed his covenant with the family first to Abraham. “And I well establish my covenant with the family first to Abraham. ‘And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.’ Genesis 17:7. But what did God say concerning Abraham? “I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.” Genesis 18:19. Perennial responsibility for the education of children is bound in with the covenant. “Thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down and when thou risest up.” Deut. 6:7. “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6.

But then, parents themselves need instruction — and this is where part of the responsibility of the Church for education comes in. Parents must be built up in the faith and instructed in the central meaning of God's law as revealed in Scripture. Only the Holy Spirit can reveal it to them, of course, but the Holy Spirit is pleased to use the teaching ministry of the church to this end. The New Testament church from its earliest days had an order of pastors and an order of teachers — and teachers themselves depended on the Holy Spirit to teach them through the insights of others — as it has been put — “Each of us constantly depends on further instruction and on the leading of others for the fulfillment of our calling and the reformation of our lives.” The Church has responsibility for education.

Has the state a responsibility for education? Now we are entering the region of debate. It must be said that in every country of the world which has attained a fair degree of develop-
ment the state has taken on this responsibility. And it must surely be agreed that the state has a responsibility for the welfare of its citizens to see that they are given every opportunity to be at their best for God. It is an unfortunate fact that there are parents who are unwilling or unable to bear their responsibility for the education of their children — and children in such cases would not be given a fair chance if the state did not step in. This could not be state intervention in the sphere of parental responsibility; here the state is related as state to children who are at the same time citizens. So the state has a responsibility for education — and the more Christian teachers we have in our public schools the better. However, two things must be recognized: 1. That the responsibility of parents is to provide a CHRISTIAN education for their children, where possible and 2. that under our present set-up the state does not provide it.

This brings us to the question of Christian schools — schools provided and controlled by the Christian community at which Christian education as we have described it is the aim. Theologically their position is justified by the doctrine of creation. It is in that doctrine that we see the original purpose of God for man. Man was created to be Lord of the natural order, to found a society, to create a culture within this society, and to understand creation. And remember — the entrance of sin did not negate the original purpose of God for man in His creation. Man is still called to dominion over creation, still under the ordinances of creation. Art is still a function of the power of imagination divinely given at creation. Science is but one of the ways man exercises the dominion given him at creation. Our Christian schools provide a means by which redeemed man can achieve God’s creational purpose for him, by His grace. Christian schools are justified also by the doctrine of common grace, for they are formed and sustained for the good of the human race.

Let me say that our Christian schools must be permeated with a Christian world view or life system. There are Christian schools today which are founded on a minimal creed — having as their concepts the irreducibles of the Faith, and so, it is felt, all evangelical denominations can support them. But is this enough in view of the sternness of the battle for the student mind? Surely we must have a scriptural, clearly thought-out world view such as Calvinism, as our basis. Only such a basis can meet the pressure from humanism, or religious liberalism.

Yet another implication of our position on Education is that a Christian school must have an actively Christian faculty. This is clearly brought out by Sir Walter Moberly in his book, “The Crisis of the University.” He is known as a dedicated Christian and is a very important man in Christian education. “The real threat on a faculty,” he says, “is not the atheist or the communist or the naturalist — it is the non-committed intellectual. His radical disease of non-commitment shows that he has not been educated, and the persistence of non-commit-
ment into this stage of his life shows that he is non-educable. If the faculty is not Christian in a deeply committed sense then there is little hope of maintaining a Christian college." Nobely lays it down that a faculty member must have more than an amateur's knowledge of the Christian faith. He must have an understanding of Christian doctrine. He must know the world situation and how to interpret it from a Christian perspective. He must see the correlation between his own subject and the Christian faith. Not only must he be completely dedicated, but he must bear witness in his academic life. You can see how true all this is when you remember that a stream can't rise higher than its source. You can't expect an educational institution to rise higher in Christian things that what its faculty and administration does.

Such are some of the implications arising from our assumption of this position on Education. In conclusion let me ask another question, or a series of questions. Is it fair to our children and young people that they be taught facts from a purely humanitarian standpoint only? Are they not bound to absorb some of this philosophy without realizing it? We have to remember that those of us who belong to the older generation did not have to face a school environment as strongly humanitarian as they are facing. Surely we must make every effort to have as many committed Christians work in our public schools as possible — and surely our main effort must be to provide our children with schools where their education will be according to the will of God.