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ARCHIVES

## BRIEF STUDIES

### THE NEED AND THE MEANING OF A PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

[This essay was read to the Commission on Research in Christian Education of the National Sunday School Association, October 12, 1953, Minneapolis, Minn. — Ed.]

Any attempt to cover the topic under discussion within the time allotted is truly an ambitious task. I sincerely hope that the members of the Commission will not fault me for being so rash as to try to cover the implications of the subject within the thirty-minute period. Yet this brief sketch may serve in an elementary way to provoke some discussion, stimulate a little more thought, and perhaps even encourage some worthy colleague to make up a more complete study on the need and especially the meaning of a philosophy of Christian education. Should this hope be realized, the attempt will have been amply rewarded.

A study of the philosophy of Christian education is not a luxury for those impractical minds who seek to avoid the day-by-day encounter with the realities of life. Some conception of a philosophy of Christian education is absolutely necessary for everyone who attempts to teach, even though it be in a most perfunctory way. For the serious teacher a clear formulation of one kind or another is absolutely essential.

Why so? A philosophy of Christian education is necessary because it gives the educator his point of departure. It clearly sets forth the basic principles which are, or at least should be, axiomatic for him as a Christian. These are his unargued principles, from which no appeal is possible, because they are drawn from revelation and are therefore entirely in the realm of Christian faith.

Besides giving the teacher a point of departure a philosophy of Christian education indicates precisely in what direction he should go. The Christian cannot be satisfied simply with nurturing growth, or encouraging creative activities, or producing a vague change. He must know clearly in what direction this growth, this activity, or this change should proceed. Christian education is not busy work on a grand scale, nor is it a baby-sitting program under the auspices of the Church. It has a positive purpose in mind and proceeds in a planned way.

With a point of departure before him and a knowledge of the general direction in which he should move a philosophy of Christian

education provides the teacher with a unifying principle which draws together every type of experience for a single ultimate purpose. It proposes to answer not only the "how" and "what" but also the "why" and the "what for" of our human existence. In short, it provides a Christian *Weltanschauung*.

The Christian teacher with a sound philosophy of education is able to make decisions because he has general principles to guide him and moral truths and axioms to serve as valid criteria for action. On the basis of his philosophy he can formulate good policies and practices in every area of Christian education. His philosophy provides him with norms for setting up day-by-day objectives, organizing the curriculum, selecting teaching material, determining methods, establishing administrative procedures, and evaluating the teaching task.

When an educator has drawn up and formulated his philosophy of education, he is in a position to tell others precisely what his philosophy is, describe the distinctive nature of Christian education, and avoid being absorbed by current anthropocentric philosophies, all of them creatures of the human mind.

No doubt other reasons can be adduced for formulating a philosophy of Christian education. These will suffice for our purpose.

It should go without saying that while most Christian teachers have not formulated their philosophy of Christian education, every one of them has consciously or unconsciously worked out some plan in general conformity with some Christian principles as he has interpreted them. I do not mean that every Christian has always organized his philosophy properly. There have been many vagaries, many inconsistencies, and frequent digressions from the principles which Christians firmly believe. Christian teachers have frequently made decisions as to curriculum and teaching methods which are diametrically opposed to their principles. Because they have not clearly formulated their philosophy, they have not discovered their own inconsistencies. Christian leaders have likewise not clearly thought through the implications of their philosophy in many areas of human experience, so that our teachers have been forced to refer to sources written from a wrong point of view. This has led them astray or has left them dissatisfied. This failure is notably true in the field of psychology, sociology, and all other areas directly concerned with the study of man.

What do we mean when we speak of a philosophy of Christian education? A philosophy is a formulation of principles into a single point of view, a *rationale* of the principles pertaining to Christian education. By a principle we mean, as the term implies, that from which

anything proceeds, namely, the truth or truths which are absolute or axiomatic. They are the unargued assumptions accepted as truth. Hence they cannot, within the most accurate meaning of the term, simply be opinions. Principles, and therefore also our philosophy, are concerned not with the details of the curriculum, the methods, the techniques, or the material, but only with the bases upon which all these rest. We may therefore differ in the details, but we should not differ in our principles.

Which are some of the areas in which Christians should come to an agreement in formulating a philosophy of Christian education? At least six may be listed.

1. *The Focal Point.* The focal point of education must ever be Jesus Christ. Everything we teach, everything we learn, every experience we have, must be evaluated in terms of Jesus Christ. In Him we live and move and have our being. With Paul we say: "I am determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). By Him was the world created (John 1:13), by Him it is preserved (Heb. 1:3), and it exists today to serve Him and will eventually also be judged and destroyed by Him (Acts 17:31; 2 Peter 3:10). On that day the Christian will cast off all that is earthly and earthy and live in body and soul with Him and in Him forever (Job 19:26, 27).

In speaking of Jesus Christ we do not mean a second Moses, but the One who was crucified for all mankind, the Redeemer of the whole world. Thus we do not speak vaguely of God as being the focal point, nor merely God as the Creator and the Righteous Judge, but the God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.

This Jesus Christ, our focal point, is also the dynamic in every phase of our life. The Christian lives the life "in Christ." That means he lives the life of the love of Christ which has been engendered in him through the power of the Holy Spirit.

By stating that Jesus Christ is to be our focal point we do not only reject all anthropocentric concepts of education, but we are emphasizing that God cannot be ignored nor become an elective in any educational structure. As all the lines converge on a focus, so all the lines of our life must come to a point in Jesus Christ.

2. *Source of Truth.* While the Christian recognizes several sources of truth, he sets up two distinct categories: a primary source and secondary sources. His primary source is the Holy Scriptures. By primary he means not merely that it is the first source of truth but also that it is the only absolute and unchallenged source of truth. No other source

can ever be placed in judgment over the Scriptures. The Christian refuses to accept the dictum that nothing is to be believed that cannot be grasped or understood. This concept places revelation in subjection to the judgment of human reason.

When we accept the Holy Scriptures as the only primary source of truth, we are at the same time assuming the responsibility to study this source and, in studying it, to make every effort to divorce ourselves from our own environment and allow the Scriptures to interpret themselves. We cannot speak of Scriptural authority unless it actually exists in Scriptures. It is disastrous to confuse Scripture principles with private opinions or even with good rationalizations and verifiable experiences.

The Holy Scriptures, however, are not simply a code of divine regulations or even merely a source of truth. They are a means of grace creating and sustaining saving faith and sanctification.

Yet the Christian is not an obscurantist. He recognizes the secondary sources of truth which God has given him, namely, reason, experience (science), and intuition. He turns to these in purely temporal matters when Scriptures do not give him an answer or for truths to supplement God's revelation. Secondary sources are never absolute in the sense that revelation is. They dare never trespass on the holy ground of the Word. Secondary sources of truth may at times cause us to go back to re-evaluate our interpretation of the Scriptures, but they can never become the deciding factor. Because of man's own limitation and sinfulness he can never allow a secondary source to become the final judge. He uses the secondary sources within their restrictions, because they are divine gifts to declare His glory and to show His handiwork.

3. *The Nature of Man.* With Scripture as his source of truth, the Christian educator has developed certain well-defined principles concerning the nature of man, the learner. Man was created by God and is not the product of evolution. He was created with a living soul and a perfect body (Gen. 2:7). Through the Fall, man became a sinner and thoroughly corrupt in his natural state. The Christian rejects every idea which pictures man to be by nature without sin or declares that original sin implies only the loss of the "supernature."

Though the Christian believes that man is by nature born in trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:1), at enmity with God (Rom. 8:7), and a child of wrath (Eph. 2:37), this depravity is to be understood primarily in terms of his relationship to God. Man has no free will in spiritual

matters (1 Cor. 2:14), but this fact in no wise implies that he has been deprived entirely of a free will in temporal affairs.

Although natural man is without holiness and righteousness and has lost a blissful knowledge of God, he nevertheless retains even after the Fall a knowledge of the divine Law and of God, inadequate though this may be (Romans 1 and 2). Man even in his corrupt state possesses a personality different in nature from that of animals and has a dignity which is not shared by the animal kingdom (James 3:9).

This condition of natural man is always the same in every age and clime.

Though all men are by nature lost, yet God in His love brought about a universal redemption in Christ Jesus (John 3:16) and rendered a complete salvation (2 Cor. 5:19). God was prompted to save man solely by grace (2 Tim. 1:9). The benefits of this redemption are received by us only through faith (Eph. 2:8,9), which is worked in us only through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:3), through the means of grace (1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Peter 1:23; Titus 3:5).

Thus the Christian is a reborn creature and stands in a transformed relationship to his God (2 Cor. 5:17). He has a new vision, a new power, a new life (1 Peter 2:9). Only in this new condition can there be truly good works (Eph. 2:10; John 5:15), and Christian education is concerned with training this new life.

Though the Christian by the righteousness of Jesus Christ has become a child of God and a member of the communion of saints, yet he is at all times still a sinner. His life ever manifests this paradox of being a sinner and yet a saint (Rom. 7:15-25; 1 John 1:7-10), of being a saint while still a sinner (Eph. 5:25-27). To assist the Christian in his battle against sin and to acquire the Christian self-discipline, this is the great task of Christian education.

But the Christian is not only a child of God from the cradle to the grave, he is that for an eternity with God. Heaven is the eternal destination of God's children, and eternal damnation is the lot of those who have rejected His only-begotten Son (John 3:18).

4. *The Goal.* Christian education has for its ultimate objective the perfection of the saints (Eph. 4:12, 13).

For the unregenerate the initial step is unification with God through Christ Jesus. Natural man's objectives are not God's, but in Christ the natural man has become a new man and is united with God (Rom. 12:4, 5).

The Christian is already at one with God and his education should help him to grow in this relationship. The final purpose of Christ's

redemption was man's sanctification to the eternal glory of God. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). This fact does not mean that we can separate justification from sanctification, for the two ever go hand in hand. He who is a child of God (justified) will by the very nature of things, once made wise unto salvation, grow toward being thoroughly furnished unto all good works (sanctification) (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Rom. 12:1). As Luther has put it, Jesus has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature "that I may be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness" (Small Catechism).

5. *The Scope.* Christian education is relevant to the whole life of man and penetrates every phase of his existence. We err when we believe Christian education to be merely a matter of religious courses or classes or a matter of defining various religious concepts. It does and must include all these things, but it must go farther and show what implications lie in the Christian doctrine in every phase and activity of life. Education does not only deal with the "know-how" but also with the "what for." Thus Christian education is able to give man his real values and set up his goals. Such moral values are not rooted in man, in society or in religion, but in the Triune God.

Christian education must be relevant to the whole personality of man and strive towards its harmonized development. Man always acts as a total being, for there is constant interaction between the intellectual, the emotional, the volitional, and the physical. Hence every God-given gift within man's make-up must be developed in harmony with God's purposes.

Christian education is concerned with all kinds of people, for as God has "made of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26) and is no Respector of persons, so Christian education respects the dignity and personality of all men and is concerned with every human being regardless of race, nationality, intelligence, social level, or any artificial strata developed by the human race.

Since education is continuous, the Christian teacher must be concerned with people of all age levels. Christian education never ends (1 John 2:13).

6. *The Agencies of Education.* Christian education recognizes that the home (Deut. 6:4-9), and particularly the father (Eph. 6:4), has the primary responsibility for the education of the child. The Church, too, has received a commission to teach and should ever be ready to

assist the home and the community in accomplishing their task in harmony with the will of God (Matt. 28:18-20).

We also recognize the right of the State to teach, but not to make men wise unto salvation. Education is the responsibility of the State only in order to produce civic righteousness and thereby foster the general welfare of the State (Rom. 13:3-5). In this way the State is working inadvertently in the interest of the Church. Civic righteousness in spite of its limitations, particularly its inadequacy for eternal life, is recognized and blessed here on earth by God because civil righteousness makes it possible for the Church as an institution to carry on its work. The Church can exist under the fire of persecution; in fact, persecution is its greatest challenge for self-expression. But the Church as an institution can carry out its program of activities, such as public preaching, education, and an active mission program, only if it is protected in its endeavors by a measure of civic righteousness, because this righteousness insures at least some semblance of law and order.

These then are the major areas of interest with which a philosophy of Christian education is concerned. Everyone of these has important implications for the educator, for in the formulation of these into a single philosophy the educator is able to set up his goals, develop his curriculum, choose his material, determine his methods, and evaluate the results.

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#### THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND JOHN

A friendly communication sent by one of our young brethren, Mr. Arthur C. Kreinheder, who is studying at the University of Lund, Sweden, draws attention to the interpretation of Matt. 11:11 sponsored by Professor Hugo Odeberg of the University of Lund. In my meditation published in the *Lutheran Witness* of September 15, 1953, I adhered to the customary exegesis of this passage to the effect that John the Baptist himself was not in the kingdom of God, but announced its coming, and that the term "the least who is in the kingdom of God" refers to any Christian, and that his being greater than John the Baptist is due to his having insights and privileges which the forerunner of Jesus did not have. Dr. Odeberg, known as a staunch conservative Lutheran, in *Erevna*, Vol. VI, No. 3, 1949 (pp. 130—132), submits a different interpretation which certainly deserves careful consideration. His comments appeared in Swedish under the title "Testimony of Christ about John," and Mr. Kreinheder submits the following translation of them.



Matt. 11:11-19 is a difficult text. When Jesus, in v. 11, points out that "among those born of women" there is none greater than John, it shows us John in the human situation. Here, according to Jesus, John's greatness lies not in his great personage nor piety, but in his office, which was to prepare the way for Jesus; he received the authorization through which he can say, "Behold the Lamb of God," precisely the designation of "the One who should come." John the Baptist also used the expression "the One who should come," about Him: "He who cometh after me." (Matt. 3:3, 11 ff.) When Jesus continues with His statement, "He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he," He looks no longer at the human situation, but comes with His valuation in the kingdom of God. We must be on our guard against interpretations that are foreign to the words of Jesus and the New Testament, for example, such an interpretation as that John certainly is the greatest in his period, but that now something completely new has come, with a new epoch. The new epoch would be the kingdom of God, and the consequence would be the absurdity that John should not at all belong to the kingdom of heaven. Instead, one should come nearer to the right interpretation if he considers the following:

Against the customary human valuations, which at that time must have considered the Roman Caesar as the greatest, Jesus places John highest. In the human situation, among those of women born, according to Jesus, not the Roman Caesar of that time or any ruler in any historical period is the greatest, but precisely John the Baptist. But thereafter Jesus comes to the valuations in the kingdom of heaven. Who are the least in the kingdom of heaven? "He who receives the least of My brothers, he receives Me." "He who will be greatest must be the servant of others." The least in the kingdom of heaven is, in the deepest sense, according to Jesus' own exposition, Christ. The least in the kingdom of heaven, "Christ," is greater than John himself. When John the Baptist, in the power of his office as a "voice crying in the wilderness," announces the appearance of Christ, he identifies Him with the words, "He who cometh after me." — Thus far Dr. Odeberg.

The weakness of this interpretation in my view is this, that according to the presentation of the Gospels John the Baptist, though he proclaimed the coming of the kingdom, was not a member of it. A passage of importance in this matter is Luke 16:16: "The Law and the Prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." John, of course, was a child of God, very dear and precious in the sight of the heavenly

Father, but he did not belong to the Messianic kingdom, which Jesus established. He still belonged to the old dispensation, that of the Law and the Prophets. With the coming of Jesus something new was brought into existence, the gracious reign of God, based on the redemptive work of Christ, constituting a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, a reign which operates through the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments. The interpretation of Dr. Odeberg is, of course, altogether in agreement with the analogy of faith, but it seems to me that the view taught by the New Testament writers is a different one.

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