

# IMPLICATIONS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE

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We are concerned today with the system of education commonly called Christian Education as distinguished from other education commonly called secular education. The very word secular in its first meaning is "of or pertaining to this world or the present life".<sup>1</sup> Hence its usage is sometimes applied as "not concerned with religion"<sup>2</sup> and is used in contrast to that which is religious or spiritual. The use of the term Christian Education refers primarily to the philosophy of education in the teacher-pupil relationship. The form of that expression in school organization is secondary.

The first premise in any educational system rests upon an assumption or a set of assumptions. These statements of truth accepted without proof shape the conclusions that the system produces. Our common body of knowledge, therefore, is dependent upon the common denominator of accepted fundamental truths and the rules of inference that are applied to these truths. Whenever a person or a group changes its accepted first premise or body of assumptions or changes the rules of inference the conclusions will be affected.

Immediately it is perceived that the first premise of secular education limits itself to matters pertaining to human observations in our physical world, social development, and such like. To this mass of observable and experimental matter, human reasoning is applied and the result is a body of knowledge that is a mixture of theory and facts, truth and error, constantly subject to revision and possessing differing degrees of acceptability.

In this world of expanding knowledge religion with its concerns for a life hereafter, a holy God, and similar subjects is brushed aside by science as irrelevant. A religious person engaged in a secular study becomes a dichotomy with a soul concerned with the supernatural which phenomena the intellect thrusts aside as though it did not exist.

Christian education on the other hand has its first implication of difference from secularism in the fact that it holds some axioms or first truths that secularism either ignores or denies. These first truths of knowledge have a relevancy to all branches of learning in Christian Education. Science confronts a Force other than of this world and must relate its findings to that Force. Philosophy has a confrontation with Revelation that drastically affects its viewpoint concerning the meaning of things. The Humanities must face the record of an intervention into history and the affairs of men from an outside source. In the Fine Arts, Music and Art find an object of portrayal which transcends the realm of matter and concerns itself with things of the spirit. Likewise the Literature of men gives rise to its noblest expression when its concerns are of another world. Christian Education brings the focus of eternity into time and the mark of infinity into the realm of finiteness. A true Christian Education does not deny a truth or fact of secular education, but rather frames that fact in a larger area of relevancy. Nevertheless, Christian Education may frequently find objection to the theories of secularism because of their ignoring or denial of the things Christian Education holds to be relevant.

Let us consider a few basic first-truths in Christian Education and their implications to Theology and Science.

Our first axiom is, "There is a God". Beyond this body that each of us calls "myself" and beyond the mountains and oceans of this planet there exists, God. To the Christian, God is relevant to creation, to the mystery of life, to the innermost

spiritual nature of man, to the laws of nature, to the unfolding of history both personally and nationally, to the death of the individual as well as to the end of the age, and to all other knowledge of man.

The assumption of the existence of God affects Theology in its most vital function for its very name suggests the science or knowledge of God. And yet, strange as it may seem, some theology virtually denies the existence of God. Nevertheless, it seems to the writer that the pendulum of Theological thought will need to swing away from all forms of nebulous, impersonal, and pantheistic expression to the definite, the personal, and the transcendent God.

As man learns more of the secrets of the natural world, the vistas of knowledge increases. Already small compartments of knowledge require a lifetime of study for a single man to understand. How then can such wonderful order be logically attributed to a force or being less than man? Our alternative is to reach out into the direction of that which is greater than man. As man faces the understanding of nature in its most elemental form with the attendant power of man to destroy the world as we know it and of the possibilities of reshaping by men of things to come, the impending crisis will be so great, frightening, and awesome that only the concepts of a definite, personal, and transcendent God will in the opinion of the writer, give meaning and relevancy to the events of our time.

At this hour in history the Christian assumption, "There is a God" gives us hope for the future. Without a concept of Someone transcending man in his ascendance over the inanimate powers of nature, the picture is most bleak. Man's selfishness and love of power are hurling the world civilizations in a collision path and possible human annihilation. Only a God transcendent in power and authority over His creation can either alter the course of self-destruction or bring salvation to the human race in a life beyond death, in eternity beyond time, and in a realm beyond this world. The acceptance of the simple four word sentence, "There is a God" transforms the interpretation of the course of events in our day. Science without Theology spreads fear and gloom. Theology coupled to Science gives confidence and hope in the ultimate triumph of right over wrong. And so the first of Christianity's axioms has implications of the highest order in the day in which we live.

A second assumption of Christian Education is, "God reveals Himself." The idea of a Supreme Being out of communication with the lower orders of His creation leads to a world concept equally devoid of understanding of things supernatural as the atheistic assumption, "There is no God." To the Christian, God not only exists, but He reveals Himself to man. This revelation is of a two fold nature, through natural revelation in the world of creation and through special revelation by the Word manifest in Christ and the Scriptures.

Natural revelation is the subject matter of Science. A dissection of the wonders of nature brings men to the threshold of faith in One who creates, designs, and provides. A shepherd lad accustomed to gazing at the stars and studying the hills burst forth with this classical statement, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard." (Psalm 19:1-3).

Modern scientists pride themselves on a relentless search for truth. Without question Truth is the goal of vast efforts in research. From this searching there is a multiplicity of facts to increase our body of knowledge. Their search is in an empirical world, bounded by the physical senses of man. A world that is becoming increasingly vast, profound, and complex, nevertheless our common depository of knowledge is growing. This world of the scientist is the world of natural revelation.

Theologians possess through special revelation a Truth to be declared to the world. From the world beyond the empirical knowledge of man comes a revelation of the Truth which man seeks. "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God." (I Corinthians 2:9-10).

Out of this wealth of revelation a few things stand out and should be considered. The first of these is that God is True. "He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." (John 3:33). Also the writer of Hebrews declared, "It is impossible for God to lie." (Hebrews 6:18). We can expect then that in God we will find truth unmixed with error. A second revelation concerning truth is that Christ is the Truth and the way of Truth. The Beloved Apostle John quotes Jesus as saying, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6). Our route to God the Father, the Truth is through Jesus who himself is Truth. Then in a third point of revelation we understand Christ to be the depository of all knowledge. In his famous sermon on Mars Hill, Paul pointed out concerning Christ, "For in him we live, and move, and have our being; . . ." (Acts 17:28). Thus the very world of our physical life, the empirical world of the scientist is attributed to Christ. Perhaps this truth is expressed more clearly in the Colossian passages referring to Christ. "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Col. 1:17). Also, "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." (Col. 2:3).

In the light of the above revelation, it is the responsibility of Christian Education to relate all knowledge to Christ. He becomes the unifying force in the curriculum.

The third axiom of Christians is, "Truth is self-consistent". No system of Christian Education needs to withdraw from any fact of God's creation as unveiled by modern science. The truth of natural revelation is consistent with the truth of special revelation. Distinction needs to be made frequently between fact and theory and between fact and hypothesis as all too often the prejudice of a non-believer shapes his conclusions in a manner adverse to the Christian understanding. In other words the inferences of theologians from the Scriptures and the inferences of scientists from science may clash even when the supporting facts are in agreement.

It is precisely at this point that there is today a great implication of Christian responsibility. Only occasionally like a voice crying in a wilderness do we hear a truly Christian appraisal of the known facts of science. Our Christian educational system needs more textbooks, lecturers, and magazines devoted to the interpretation of scientific knowledge in the framework of Biblical Theology. We have assumed that this task is done by teachers of science in our Christian schools. But the sad truth of the matter is that few science teachers are trained in theology, and few theologians are serious students of science. Our American mania for specialization has created a gulf of misunderstanding and poorly integrated knowledge in the fields of Science and Theology. The hour is late and the task is of highest importance in Christianity is to rise in power and influence in an age of space.

A second major implication of Christian Education is that it must take an increasing concern with man as a person in this modern world.

We have already seen that God did not stop with natural revelation. While it may be accepted that a man may come to the knowledge of the existence of God through a telescope, or a microscope, or a cyclotron, he can only know the attributes of God through special revelation. The holiness of God, the justice of God, the love of God, the mercy of God, man's relationship to God, and many more concepts come to us through special revelation. We see the personality of God in the record of the written word and we see the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ.

It is the wonderful province of Theology to systematize doctrine thereby giving increased understanding of the Scriptures. Concepts of sin, forgiveness, atonement, justification, sanctification, righteousness, and such like strike at the heart of man's relationship to God and his fellow human beings. Evidences of God's intervention in history through transformed lives of believers, miracles, revivals, providences, and the rise and fall of nations, give implications of hope against today's backdrop of communistic doctrines of inevitability and non-recognition of God. The Apostle Paul placed a premium upon theologians by paying them this tribute, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the Word and doctrine." (I Tim. 5:17). He also instructed Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." (I Tim. 4:16). Let every theologian be aware of the delightful responsibility that is his.

But the great implication of theology in the twentieth century is the concern for moral and ethical advancement to keep pace with scientific technology. Man can circle the globe today in about one hour. Recent news tells us of rocket belts capable of hoisting a single man through the air. Today, special devices magnify light 100,000 times and transforms the darkest night into the brilliance and clarity of a television screen. Man is adjusting to the emptiness of outer space and to the pressures in ocean depths. An entire city recently used sea water transformed into drinking water for an entire week without knowing the difference. This wonderful age of science can create a push-button world. Increasingly the man who pushes the button is our great concern. Basic honesty is deteriorating by popular acceptance of clever forms of cheating. It is reported that crime in the U.S. has doubled in the last 13 years. Whole continents cringe before a man who in a fit of temper could order the destruction of western civilization. Our most important question is not "Who will reach the moon first?" but rather, "Will man be a slave to sin or a servant of righteousness?" It is the role of Christian Education to bring men face to face with the erosive force of sin and the glorious possibility of living, "soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." (Titus 2:12) as well as the expectation of a "new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." (II Peter 3:13).

There is a third difference between Christian Education and secular education and that is in the method of forming conclusions. Christian Education considers revelation and insight given by the Holy Spirit as contributing to our storehouse of knowledge as well as experience and reason.

Scientists today seek to confine all knowledge within the realm of experience and reason. However, the area of experience is not confined to personal participation but may also include public experimental verification. From this great body of observable phenomena transmitted from one to another through scientific literature and history conclusions are drawn by the aid of human reason.

Christian Education does not decry the benefits of human experience and reason, but it does claim that faith in God and the revelation of Himself to man and the insights of the Holy Spirit are contributing factors in the formation of conclusions. Frequently, within the realm of scientific thinking the insufficiency of evidence affects the outcome of human reasoning. How can a truly scientific mind seeking for truth and all possible evidences to establish that truth conclude by assumption that no evidence other than human experience applies to the case? This is the fatal error of Science. Theology must contribute to science the additional ingredients necessary for correct reasoning and true conclusions. Theology must accept from science the substantial benefit of experience and reason not inconsistent with revelation. Apparent discrepancies must be resolved by faith in the self-consistency of Truth which a more

complete understanding will bring forth. Through the medium of a more complete knowledge, theology gives to science a balance toward truth and a guard against error that secular education does not possess.

Permit me to repeat in conclusion a concise statement for each of the main points of this paper.

1. Christian Education must begin with a different set of first-truths or axioms than those used in secular education. This implies different conclusions in all areas of human knowledge. Some first truths that have been presented as a sample of the implications of Christian Education are:
  - a. "There is a God" which implies a control of history and a hope in the present critical hour.
  - b. "God reveals Himself" which implies both natural and special revelation, the former as the basis for science and the latter as a basis for theology.
  - c. "Truth is self-consistent" which implies a reconciliation between the facts of Science and the truth of Theology.
2. Christian Education has a primary concern with a moral control over man, a control that is increasingly lacking in a purely secular education. This implies a grave and urgent responsibility to our modern life.
3. The method of Christian Education differs from secular education in that Revelation and Insight contribute to the store house of knowledge as well as experience and reason. This implies the responsibility of Theology to be a balance wheel to Science.

These implications of Christian Education in Theology and Science are presented as a springboard for your personal meditation and development of thought rather than as an exhaustive treatment of the subject.

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1. Standard Dictionary of the English Language, International Edition, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1959).
  2. "*Ibid.*"

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