

*Toward a
Philosophy of
Christian Education*

By John De Beer and Cornelius Jaarsma

Professors at Calvin College

FOREWORD	3
AN OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION	4
THE GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION	8
I. God-centered Living:	8
II. Self-understanding and Development:	8
III. Establishment of Responsible Civic and Social Behavior:	8
IV. Vocational and Occupational Effectiveness	8
A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION	10
Introduction	10
I. What is Christian Education?	10
II. Who Is the Educator?	13
III. What is the Christian School?	14
IV. How Can the School Accomplish this Task?	14
V. Who Is the Pupil?	17
VI. What Are the Stages of Schooling?	19
VII. What Should Guide Us in Constructing the Curriculum for the Christian School?	22
VIII. What Are the Stages in Curriculum Organization?	23
In Conclusion	25

This document has been reproduced for the world wide web by the Calvin College Education Department in July 2000 thanks to a grant from Calvin College. If you have any questions about this document or others in the Calvin College Monograph Series please contact Dr. Robert Keeley at rkeeley@calvin.edu.

FOREWORD

This booklet was first published in 1953 in response to the urgent demand for a clearly formulated statement of the Calvinistic philosophy of Christian education. Upon the request of the Education Committee of the National Union of Christian Schools, Professors J. L. De Beer and C. Jaarsma of the Education Department of Calvin College contributed these statements.

The authors do not claim these statements to be comprehensive. They refer to them as overviews. These overviews, however, have served to stimulate thinking on the basic principles of Christian education and have been used as guide lines for curriculum evaluation and revision.

The booklet is again commended to the Christian school constituency for earnest study.

- John A. Vander Ark

Published by

National Union of Christian Schools
865 Twenty-eighth St., S. E.
Grand Rapids 8, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

AN OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

John L. De Beer

Every motive or activity of man involves an underlying philosophy whether consciously recognized or not. A philosophy is simply a statement of purposes or relationships to be attained, or of the reasons or motives for activities or goals. Philosophy is man's way of evaluating his purposes to determine whether or not they are good.

The Christian evaluates the goodness of his philosophy according to a theological position. The Christian begins with the recognition of the fundamental truth that God is sovereign in all things. This means that all things originate in God, are carried on through his sustaining power, and exist to glorify and satisfy Him. The Christian gains his fullest satisfaction and attains his fullest realization by yielding himself wholeheartedly to the fulfillment of God's purposes for him. The function of Christian education is to enable the learner to know more adequately God Himself, God's purposes for man, the learner's own capacities and limitations, and the means by which these capacities may be utilized most fully toward the implementation of God's plan and for the glorification of His name.

The Christian lives in a world of men who are not dedicated to these purposes. Prevailing goals in today's world are concerned with the immediate welfare and progress of mankind. The theory of evolution, which is either frankly proclaimed or tacitly assumed, conceives of man as having risen from lower forms of animal life and as such is capable of further improvement chiefly by his own efforts. The most important good is the self-betterment of the individual and of the society in which he lives.

Much of American education has fallen heir to this philosophy of life. Many of the advances and desirable practices in education have been originated and executed by educators who have been profoundly influenced, if not dominated by the materialistic motives of a secular world. There is great danger that the Christian teacher may unwittingly imitate worldly practices, and subscribe to worldly purposes, under the influence of the methods of secular education. The Christian school may unconsciously absorb the philosophy of the world as it seeks to adopt and adapt the worthy materials and methods which have been developed by the world. One of the tasks of the Christian school is constantly to improve ways of teaching. In the process, it may borrow-freely from whatever source is available, always testing the goal, the method and the results against the framework of a God-centered view of life. It is not easy to separate the practices of the world from worldly purposes, but the Christian has not only the right, but the duty to select even from secular sources appropriate practices, and turn them to the Master's use.

The task of the Christian teacher is made simpler, though not less exacting, by the fact that God has revealed Himself and His purposes fully, through scripture, and nature. The successive "discoveries" of man in every field of endeavor are but further evidences of His continuing revelation. Therefore, the Christian teacher need not grope among theories and suppositions.

The task of the teacher is made more difficult by the presence of sin, of original guilt and original pollution. The learner is being prepared for effective living, not only in the world as a member of human society, which is the only goal of the secular teacher, but primarily as a participant in the Kingdom of Heaven. The child must grow toward effective and gracious conduct not only for this world, but through experiences in this life toward a more perfect life after his redemption has been consummated. The learner must come to know himself as he really is, even though that knowledge may be repugnant to his pride. He must be taught to exert every effort to "make his calling and election sure," and at the same time work and witness in a world of men who are hostile or indifferent to God's revelation, in such fashion that those who see his work and his attitudes may recognize, albeit grudgingly, the God he worships.

The Christian teacher looks upon the child as a distinctive creature, made after the image of God Himself, and given an important place in the divine scheme of things. The human being is an organism so marvelous and intricate as to defy analysis. The last generation has only just come to an understanding of man's physical structure. The present generation has just scratched the surface of the vast potentialities of man's psychological characteristics. Not only is man fearfully and wonderfully made, but he possesses an indestructible link with eternity, the soul, which gives him distinctive characteristics which forever separate man from the animal world. These characteristics, which collectively may be called personality, made man once capable of walking and talking with God and of ruling His creation as overseer.

This personality, so promising, has been twisted and warped by sin. The very characteristics which linked man with God's attributes, have been stunted, frustrated, and vilified, so that man, who was once capable of good, is now capable only of evil, and can be saved from utter destruction only by the redemptive power of Christ. It is the inescapable duty of the Christian school to create an environment which will afford every student the opportunity to come to a full realization of the plan of salvation which was conceived and executed by God Himself. The Christian school proceeds on the assumption that its membership is composed of individuals who have been included in God's covenant of grace.

The real task of Christian education is twofold: First, it must develop and bring to maturity the powers, skills, attitudes, and capacities of growing and maturing personalities. Second, it must seek to re-organize, re-integrate, and re-energize or re-direct the warped personality. While this actually can be achieved only by God, the Christian teacher is privileged to serve as His agent, and the school as His means. The Divine mandate for education was made by God to parents. The parent supported, society operated, Christian school, is a means whereby the parents may carry out this responsibility. The individual must be brought, by every desirable means, to the fullest development of all his potentialities.

The intellect, the reflection in man of one of God's attributes, omniscience, must be developed, organized, and disciplined. Subject matter is the environment or medium in which this takes place. Subject matter, in the widest sense, is the sum total of all of the best of the achievements which God has permitted man to accomplish, passed on through the educative process to each succeeding generation in turn, that each new generation may profit from the

experiences of its forebears. The stuff of subject matter is not merely information to be memorized, but living, actual experience, and by living this environment, the young mind may be developed through experiences which are in themselves worthwhile, and which contribute at the same time to the end goals of education. Since it is not possible to hand on to the new generation everything that man has accumulated in his long history, it is necessary that a selection be made out of these experiences of those elements which are most significant and typical of man's needs. If these essentials are well taught, the individual will possess a basic fund of information, but he will likewise be equipped with those skills which are necessary for the adaptation of what he already knows to new circumstances and situations which he will meet.

The physical resources of the individual must be cultivated and developed in the full knowledge of the fact that man's physical structure was created through God's design and care. It is not only the means through which the individual operates, but is itself an instrument by which man may render homage to his Maker. The school must make certain that the child grows to a certain knowledge of those things which will enable him to make appropriate use of and care for his body.

The intellectual growth of the individual, itself a proper concern of Christian education, cannot be rightly pursued apart from his emotional and spiritual development. The God-like image of man gives him the ability to love and hate, to adore and fear, to praise and condemn. Man has powers of volition and restraint. He makes decisions and acts upon them. His conduct is directed not only by his intellect but by his entire being, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, with the several factors playing varying roles in the final activity. These several factors were once integrated and unified in action and goal, even as God Himself is integrated, unified and purposeful. Sin has made the human being a bundle of disintegrated tensions and reactions.

The educative process is inseparably linked with the redemptive process. Before unification can be effected, the image of God must be restored, through redemption in Christ. Only then can the conflicts and confusions of the learner be resolved. Emotional development involves re-adjustment, first to God, then to the learner himself by an understanding of his actual nature, and finally to the environment or culture of which the pupil is a part. Such adjustment is not specific in the sense of dealing with individual and isolated problems, but is a comprehending and inclusive process in which the goals and activities of the individual are placed in proper relationship to the Divine plan and purpose.

Such re-adjustment may be described as a maturing process, through which the individual becomes increasingly more competent and able to fulfill the obligations and challenges of service in God's kingdom. There are such service opportunities for every servant, regardless of his abilities and degree of maturity. The school seeks to develop awareness of those areas and of the individual's capacity to serve. The true Christian relationship to God is expressed in his desire to do God's will at all times, to understand His mind through His revelation, to think His thoughts, and to promote the welfare and advancement of His kingdom. The redeemed and integrated mature Christian comes close to the man created in God's image who walked with Him and governed His creation before the advent of sin.

Christian education recognizes that man is not brought to maturity by emphasis on and development of separate and discrete elements either in his personality or his experience. The individual grows and matures as a whole. Christian education seeks to develop wholesomely every facet of the person, by every legitimate and effective means, through activities which are in themselves worthwhile.

The Christian school, therefore, must not only provide information and direction, but it must establish an environment in which immortal souls may grow, experience, and develop in those patterns which will make for wholesome and responsible citizenship not only in the earthly kingdom of today, but as well of the heavenly kingdom of which the child is already a part.

THE GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

I. God-centered Living:

- a. Understanding of God's eternal purposes, His means of carrying them out, and His revelation to man.
- b. Understanding of the nature of sin and its effects, and of redemption and its results.
- c. Understanding and desire for God-oriented living as proof of and gratitude for redemption.
- d. Understanding of the Christian's relation to creation.

II. Self-understanding and Development:

- a. Acquisition of the skills of communication: speech, reading, writing, number, intellectual curiosity.
- b. Understanding of one's own capacities and limitations and how they may be used maximally to serve man's purposes before God.
- c. Understanding of the proper care and development of human resources: health, recreation, etc.
- d. Development of higher interests and appreciations: art, music, literature, esthetic and leisure time pursuits.
- e. Development and conscious direction of attitudes and habits appropriate to the man of God. Standards of moral and ethical behavior consciously related to God's revealed standards.

III. Establishment of Responsible Civic and Social Behavior:

- a. Development of attitudes and behavior patterns toward others consistent with Christian ethics.
- b. Understanding of the forces and influences within and without which obstruct the development and application of wholesome Christian attitudes.
- c. Willingness to assume responsibility for wholesome relationships with others: at home, in school, in recreation, in governmental activities, in social relationships.
- d. Knowledges and understandings of the information and facts necessary for proper perspective in the solution of problems.

IV. Vocational and Occupational Effectiveness

- a. Understanding of the purpose of work in God's plan.
- b. Understanding of the fields of work open to the Christian.
- c. Understanding of one's own capacities and aptitudes for particular fields of service.
- d. Appreciation of the work and services of others.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Cornelius Jaarsma

Introduction

The term overview is chosen advisedly. Philosophy of education is too pretentious as a caption for this brief discussion. That a philosophy is implicit is evident from the central thrust. And this thrust has its directive in the Word of God as interpreted in our Reformed Standards. Educational theory and practice, and the related sciences, as psychology and sociology, are viewed in the light of the Word of God.

It should also be stated that we are talking about education of children and young people who have not reached the stage of maturity known as later adolescence and adulthood -- up to about the age of eighteen, therefore. In terms of schooling it is the equivalent of what is known as elementary and secondary education among us. This observation should be made for when we speak of education of the mature person we are talking about higher learning. To confuse education and higher learning is disruptive for both.¹

We shall ask ourselves the following questions in the order given:

1. What is Christian education?
2. Who is the educator?
3. What is the Christian school?
4. How can the Christian school accomplish its task?
5. Who is the pupil?
6. What are the stages of schooling?
7. What should guide us in constructing the curriculum for the Christian school?
8. What are the stages in curriculum organization?

I. What is Christian Education?

A. According to the Scriptures, education is to be defined both as a task to be accomplished and as a process to which the pupil is to be subjected.

Parents are assigned the task to "train up"² their children, "bring them up,"³ and teach them the

¹ Jaarsma, Cornelius, Education and Higher Learning, *Religious Review*, Dec. 1951 and Jan., 1952.

² Prov. 22:6

³ Eph. 6:4

commandments of God.⁴ Both instruction and discipline seem to be implied in the task of bringing up.⁵ Instruction directs itself to the thinking of the child; discipline to the willing of the child. The context in the Scripture seems to indicate that all instruction must be disciplinary, that is, direct the child in his person to the right end. This is the God-ordained *task* in education.

Education is also a process to which the child is subjected. He is to be subjected to nurture, admonition, and obedience.⁶ In the providence of God man comes into the world as a helpless babe. He is to grow up into manhood or womanhood. That this may be accomplished, the child is to be brought up in "the way of his going."⁷ The process to which the child is to be subjected must conform to the ways of child life as ordained of God. The development-urge in the child points to maturity along lines designated by God himself.

The *process* of education, as well as the task, is ordained of God. Both can be understood aright when viewed in the light of the Word of God as recorded for us in the Scriptures.

B. Christian education is education of the religious man.

The most important and most determinative statement we can make about the child is that he is a religious being. God made him a living soul who finds his fulfillment in all dimensions of his personality in the service of God. At the very center of his service stands worship which is personal fellowship with God. These, worship and service, are man's religious nature. It gives meaning and direction to everything he is and does. At the basis of a child's life is his religious motivation, his need to worship and serve his Creator. Sin has not destroyed this need and motivation. It has, however, thrown the person and his environment into such disharmony that he can no longer rightly appraise his own motivations. He dwells in darkness. Only God can effect the initial integration of the religious man.

Education is Christian when as task and as process it directs the child as religious being to his Creator. "His going" is that of the religious person. The way to God, his Creator, is Jesus Christ. Only in this way will he meet his deepest need and realize the fulfillment of his human nature.

⁴⁴ Deut. 6:7

⁵ Acts 7:22; 22:3; Titus 2:12

⁶ Eph. 6:1 - 4

⁷ Prov. 22:6

C. Christian education is covenantal.

Life is covenantal from the very beginning. God made a covenant with Adam. But man became a covenant breaker. We are all covenant breakers in that we "fall short of the glory of God."

But in Christ God has established a new covenant. In distinction from the first covenant, a covenant of works, it is a covenant of grace. In Christ God is reconstructing the human race. A new racial continuity is established; that of the redeemed. The redeemed, they who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, are one in Him, who is the Head of the new covenant.

To the redeemed and their children is the promise, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and thy seed after thee."⁸ Likewise, "For to you is the promise, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call unto him."⁹ In all covenants however, there are contained two parts. In this case the promise of God and the obligation that promise brings with it constitute these parts. The obligation is the life of the "new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in him, and love him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life."¹⁰

Education is Christian when it leads youth to accept the life of "new obedience."

D. Christian education develops the child to maturity as a child of God, personally responsible to him.

Because the child is religious in the nature of his being, he is rational-moral-social. He is rational, that is he can know the truth and accept it. He is moral, that is he can know or value the good and do it. He is social, that is he can commune and enjoy it. In accepting truth or rejecting it, in doing good or evil, in seeking or avoiding fellowship, he is free, that is determined by the direction of his chosen way of life. The nature of his freedom is defined by the direction he takes as a religious being. This direction is either the service of God according to his Word, or the service of his autonomous self. In this action he is responsible, that is he is called upon to give answer to the God who ordained his way.

In the covenant of grace the parent assumes the responsibility of giving immature child-life the direction of the "new obedience." Parents faithful to their covenant obligation "bring up" a child "in the way of his going" to maturity. Maturity is the stage when the child assumes this

⁸ Gen. 17:7

⁹ Acts 2:39

¹⁰ Form for the Baptism of Infants. Liturgical Forms of the Christian Reformed Church

responsibility for himself. The way of the "new obedience" must become his own commitment, his freely chosen way.

Christian education in home, school, and church develops this responsibility. When the youth has come to accept life in the "new obedience," he is said to be mature. Education as task and as process as taught in the Scriptures has terminated. The learning process will continue in the normal person. The formal learning process continues in higher learning.

Christian education is the covenantal task by which a child is brought up to maturity in the "new obedience." This task is to be realized along the lines of child nature as ordained of God.

II. Who Is the Educator?

A. The parents.

There is no doubt that the Scriptures address the mandate of the education of a child to the parents. Theirs is the responsibility and theirs only. Our form for infant baptism recognizes this scriptural mandate, especially in the questions asked of parents. Only parental neglect or incompetence may cause us to set aside this divine ordinance.

A child needs the security of home and family life where, all things equal, genuine love is experienced as nowhere else on this side of heaven. In the fellowship of love the potential of child-life can come to maximum development. There is no substitute in human relations for parental love. It is the most spontaneous and unselfish.

B. The teacher.

Though, according to the Word of God, the parents are the only responsible educators, this does not preclude the parents' right and duty to seek assistance in their God-assigned task. At baptism parents promise to seek the necessary help when their own means prove insufficient. Because of the complexity of life today, the parents need much help to acquit themselves of their task. Parents have neither the time nor generally the qualifications to lead children to maturity in the complexity of modern life. Whatever help they seek in this difficult task must be the kind that can assist them in carrying out their divine mandate as parents.

No one can qualify as assistant to Christian parents in the Christian nurture of their children who is not committed in his whole person to the "new obedience." This qualification is primary. In addition to this essential quality, the educator must have the necessary professional qualifications, and the freedom and opportunity to exercise himself in his task as aid to parents.

It is at this point that we enter the area of the Christian school as extension of the Christian home, and the area of the Christian church as mother of the saints of God. We confine ourselves in the following discussion to the school.

III. What is the Christian School?

A. A cultural institution.

The school as we know it today is the product of our modern culture. It employs the cultural product of man to accomplish a cultural task. Since the development of the modern school, about one hundred years ago, society has looked to the school to prepare youth for successful living and creative action in our time. The school has come to occupy a most strategic place in the education of youth. The impact of the modern school upon child life exceeds that of every other influence, including the home.

The Christian school, too, is a cultural institution employing the cultural product to attain a cultural task. It is precisely the cultural task which makes it a school in the current sense of that term. But what makes the school Christian? This, that as a school it seeks to give the "new obedience" relevance to the total life of the child. The "new obedience" calls upon youth to exercise his three-fold office of prophet priest-king to Jehovah. He must come to know himself as a child of God, to render his life to God in humble service, and to order his life in keeping with God's will. It is in the medium of the cultural products as afforded by the school that a child can learn the life of service acceptable to God.

B. Extension of the Christian home.

Because parents cannot effectuate this cultural task in the complexity of modern life, they rightfully call upon the school to help them carry out their responsibility. The Christian school is organized and equipped to give them this assistance. Standing in the midst of the cultural life of our time, the Christian school focuses the total life of the covenant child upon God, to worship him supremely and to serve him humbly and faithfully.

The Christian school finds its justification in the broader cultural responsibility of the parents. They, and they only, are charged with the responsibility of bringing up their children to maturity. They delegate that part of their task to the school which they can in modern times not effectively discharge themselves. But the cultural task of the school is an integral part of the educational responsibility of the parents, to nurture their children in the "new obedience." The work of the home and the school has one aim, namely to bring up the covenant youth to exercise the claim of God upon his life.

IV. How Can the School Accomplish this Task?

A. The Christian teacher.

The first requisite for the Christian school is the Christian teacher. The Christian teacher is a person committed to a life of faithful service to God in Christ, and to man for God's sake. He has established such balance and integration in all dimensions of his personality that youth can feel secure under his leadership. He has the academic and professional learning necessary to carry

on his task. He has come to view this learning in dynamic relationship to the development of child-life. He is covenant-conscious as representative of the parents in the fulfillment of their task in the second part of the covenant of grace. Motivated by love of youth for Christ's sake, he directs the learning process according to the best educational theory and practice known in keeping with the God-ordained way of child-life.

B. The Christian educational structure.

As task and as process Christian education operates in the structure of love, faith, and obedience. Love is the motive, faith is the chart, and obedience is the goal.

Love is the motive. In love the whole-person gives himself without asking in return. It is the love of the teacher for the child that burns into the hearts of youth to kindle the fire of love in his life. Love begets love. It is what we come to love in the understanding to which we commit ourselves in our hearts. This seems to be the teaching of the Scriptures. It is not in knowledge and skill that we fail most in achieving effective Christian living, but in the exercise of love. It is not knowledge and skill that determine the maturity of the person as much as his capacity to love.

Viewed thus love is more than emotion. Love involves the whole-person as he opens himself to its rightful object. Only as we build love in the life of the child will he come to express himself in love. It is in the expression in love that he develops a life of love. Education cannot be Christian without the love of God in Christ reflected in all human relations involved in the classroom.

Love affords the child the security he needs in the most trying situations of the learning process. The child will be threatened in his personal security time and again. Such is life. It is unavoidable. In the classroom, too. But when he feels the undergirding arm of love, the life of another opening himself to him, parent and teacher as mature persons, he can normally weather the storm and come to accept life.

Faith is the chart. It is by faith in the living Word that we chart our course. Only the living Word of God has the life-giving property we need to express ourselves in love. The Word must come to live for the pupil as the self-revelation of God to him to enlighten him in the way of truth. The life-giving Word is essential if the Christian school is to focus its cultural task upon God. Our man-made systems have their place. Our creeds are the confession of the church made under the guidance of the Spirit of God. Our systems of thought oriented in the Scriptures have rich significance for us. But our creeds are man-made guides to enlighten us with reference to life. They point us to the Word. We believe in the Word as our only infallible rule for faith and life. In the school, too, the life-giving Word as God's self-revelation to young hearts, to covenant youth, is the fountain of living water. From it they must drink daily. They must learn to live by faith.

Obedience is the great objective. When a child comes to know and accept the truth in love and by faith, he can render his life to the Lord in humble obedience. True obedience is the fruit of love and faith, for it is the voluntary act of conforming to the truth. The love of God in Christ

Jesus established in the new life implanted by the Spirit enables the child of God to exercise the "new obedience." The Christian school authoritatively presents the truth that equips the covenant-child to express himself in the "new obedience."

Love, faith, and obedience constitute the structure we seek to build into the life of the covenant youth that they may come to express themselves in this structure. As they in their development-urge come to express themselves in this structure, they grow in the "new obedience." They learn to give expression to their heavenly citizenship. Love is placed first in the structure for the same reason that Paul says, "the greatest of these is love."

C. A distinctive learning process.¹¹

The Christian school can provide a learning process which is distinctive because it accepts divine ordinances for child development as we observe them in life in the light of the Scriptures. "Bring up a child in the way of his going" has reference to God-ordained ways of child-life as well as to the "way" of life. These ordinances for child-life are to be honored if we are not to "irritate" or "harass"¹² the child. The very nature of the child in his soul-life prescribes a theory of learning in keeping with man as a religious being, as made in the image of God.

The learning process involves the steps a child takes in "the way" to which he is subjected. When these steps take account of the development-urge of the person as he expresses himself in child-life, he will take an active part in accepting both process and end. He thus comes to know the truth, love it in the understanding, master it, and accept it in his heart. He comes to commit himself to it and order his life accordingly. No truth is learned until a child accepts it in his heart. As he accepts the truth it affords him emotional security and sets him free to do it.

D. A unique medium.

As we said above, the Christian school too is a cultural institution employing the medium of the cultural product to effect a cultural task. The cultural product is the medium. Without it the school is no school in the current sense of the term.

It is not in employing the cultural product that the Christian is distinctive and its medium unique. No. It is to be found in the fact that the curriculum has its life-giving principle in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ. We place the Bible and the message of Holy Writ to the heart of the child in the center of the cultural product organized as the curriculum. It, Holy Writ, is not part of the cultural product. God speaks authoritatively in love from his Word to the heart of the child. The child must mature in the Word as he matures in his culture. Every area of the cultural product (subject matter) is related by the teacher to and integrated in life according to the

¹¹ For a fuller discussion of this subject see my Syllabus in Educational Psychology which can be secured from the Calvin College Book Store, Calvin College.

¹² Eph. 6:4

Word. Thus the "new obedience" is made relevant to a child's world. Only the Christian school has a life integration for its course of study that can meet the needs of child-life in his most basic and comprehensive motivation, namely, his religious nature.

E. A praying fellowship.

I add this advisedly. Every Christian activity has its fellowship of prayer. The school is no exception. Prayer and the Word give the school its power. The Christian educational structure we desire to build in the life of youth is based on prayer and the Word. In the Word God speaks to us. In prayer we speak to God and seek his fellowship.

The school joins the home and the church in the prayer that the Lord may lay his hand on the covenant youth early and implant the new life that must ever constitute the basis for Christian nurture. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." "God must give the increase." The Christian teacher takes the needs of her pupils to the Lord in prayer in her personal devotions. Parents pray for their child's teacher in the presence of the child. The child is encouraged to pray for his teacher. We are indeed a fellowship of prayer. There can be no Christian education without it.

V. Who Is the Pupil?¹³

A. A creative unity.

A child must be viewed in his unity, in his wholeness. He is an organic unity. Organic means a self-sustaining structure interrelated in all its parts.

In the I, the spirit, we understand him as a religious being whose greatest need is acceptance of and commitment or surrender to God his Creator. This is his security. Because he is religious, he is rational, that is he can know the truth and commit himself to it. He is moral, that is he can value his knowledge as good or evil and choose. He is social, that is he can have fellowship in the spirit. He is free, that is he can choose from within his person. He is responsible, that is he acknowledges accountability with reference to others, above all to God.

It is in his soul-life in relationship to his physiological life that we understand the child in his thinking, feeling, willing, purposing, and the like. This is the psyche operative in the physiological life. In his physiological life he externalizes the person in his totality. The I is the life-principle of the psycho-physiological. The I in organic relationship with the psycho-physiological constitutes the whole-person or total personality.

¹³ For a fuller discussion of this subject see the following: Jaarsma, C., *The Child -- His Nature and His*

Needs, The Christian Home and School Magazine, Sept., 1951-June, 1952 Also my Syllabus in *Educational Psychology*.

In life we view the child in three dimensions or in a three-fold magnitude. We view him in his physiological-life, in his social-emotional-life, and in his knowing-life. They are the dimensions of his personality. They constitute his selfhood. The I as life-principle organically united in the psycho-physiological externalizes the person in the three dimensions of his personality.

The child is not only a unity in the I as life-principle, but he is creative. He was created to be the self-expression of God in his total personality. As the self-expression of God, he can form himself in the dimensions of his personality and order his ways of life from the given in experience. To be creative is the opposite of being passive or docile. In his apparent docility, the child actively as person orders his self to meet his conscious or unconscious needs for personal security.

A child must be understood in his creative unity motivated as a religious being by his need for security. His desires for expression and satisfaction are qualified by his need for security in the fellowship of love.

Only in his relation to God is the child in his whole-person passive or docile. The new life, faith, is implanted in the person without any action or expression on his part. But this is not education, but regeneration. Only God can regenerate the person, make him over, redirect him in the I.

We, on the other hand, work with a child through the psycho-physiological in response to which the person, the I, expresses himself in the dimensions of his personality. The child is a creative unity.

B. He is educable in his whole -person.

A child is born as a unity in his person, largely undifferentiated in the dimensions of his personality. Differentiations in body structure took place in prenatal life as structure and function became specialized in tissues and organs. Some differentiations may be taking place in the emotional-life before birth, especially in the violent ordeal of birth to which the child is submitted following a long period of quiet development in the uterus. The greater part of differentiation in the physiological-life, and comparatively all differentiation in the social-emotional-life and in the knowing-life take place subsequent to birth. The child's continuity in the fallen human race and his continuity in the race as reconstituted in Christ (the covenant promise) are determining factors in the differentiation of the whole-person.

As a creative unity the child is possessed of a development-urge for maturity. He has a right to be a child in the various stages of his growth. God so ordained. But he has no right to remain a child. In his development-urge he comes to express himself in the differentiation of the dimensions of his personality, It is his means of maintaining his identity in a community. For example, the child begins to vocalize, which is largely an undifferentiated activity in his development-urge. As organs mature, articulations become possible. Social-emotional relations

with parents and other members of the family and expression in the knowing-life come to be integrated by the I with physiological maturation, and the infant begins to say "mamma" meaningfully in his person. His own identity and the security of his identity are established as he and his community mutually accept one another in the calling of "mamma." He has come to express himself acceptably.

Here we have the key to a child's educability. In his creative unity he expresses himself according to his development-urge in the differentiations of all dimensions of his personality. As he comes to accept life and is accepted in it he integrates his self in the total personality.

It is especially in the knowing-life that he is capable of great differentiation and corresponding integration. In his knowing-life he comes to understand and love the truth he must accept in his heart. The school is especially equipped and organized to deal with the child in the differentiation and integration of his knowing-life. This is true because the school is in the nature of the case a cultural institution. However, the child's knowing-life cannot be lifted out of the unity of his personality for the educational task in the school. The knowing-life can function freely only when the I is secure in his social-emotional-life and enjoys reasonable comfort in his physiological-life. A threatened child seeks escapes. A hungry child is physiologically determined.

Teaching addresses itself to the I, spirit, in his religious motivation as rational-moral-social to develop freely and responsibly in "the way" of life. In teaching we guide (inspire, instruct, and discipline) the whole-person-in-life to know (understand, love, and accept) the truth as it comes to him in the self-revelation of God in Christ in the inscripturated Word and in the cultural product viewed in the light of the Word.

VI. What Are the Stages of Schooling?

A. Childhood.

A child comes to school in his life-style. He is a child-with-a-history. Three factors have been operative as he in his development-urge came to extend himself in the dimensions of his personality. In the I the Lord endowed him with a given potential. In the psycho-physiological he inherited an ancestral background for good or evil, essentially evil. He entered a given parental and cultural milieu. At approximately the age of five he arrives at school sufficiently matured to avail himself of the new environment for continued development in his total personality. The school, as we saw, has a special task to perform in this respect.

Normally the pre-school years have developed in the child a readiness to learn which the school is prepared to meet in organized play, in construction, in reading, etc. Beginning in the kindergarten with life in its totality, the school gradually differentiates areas of learning according to the maturity of the child. If the child is reasonably understood in his life-style and directed wisely he begins to express himself with security and confidence in these differentiated areas. By the end of the elementary school period, about the sixth grade level as the school is organized today, the child has matured in his knowing life to a degree that selected areas of learning closely

related to the totality of life as he lives it as a child are effective media for his continued development.

B. Puberty.

If the developmental process during the years of the elementary school has been one of the whole-person-in-life, the pupil is reasonably well prepared for this stage which ushers in the adolescent period of life. Major changes are taking place in the physiological and social-emotional dimensions of his personality. These changes are reflected in the knowing-life with increasing potency as a child matures.

A growing desire for freedom and responsibility becomes evident. The child wants greater independence of action. To thwart this expression of developing maturity will have disastrous results in a child's total personality. However, unrestrained expression results in insecurity in the social-emotional dimension of his personality, as much and more than undue restraint. The youth wants direction, but he wants to be able to accept it as his own. Firm, understanding guidance is necessary to avoid inner tensions in a child's life.

Areas of learning should be organized to make personal commitment to basic truth emphatic. But the child must meet such truth in the context of his life. This is best accomplished in broad, inclusive areas of learning, and under the guidance of teachers assigned to each area. Departmentalization in extreme form violates this basic principle of continuity so essential at the level of early adolescence or puberty.

C. Adolescence.

As the former period corresponds to what we know as the junior-high-school period, so this period finds the youth in the senior high school, and possibly in the first two years of college.

The exploratory tendencies of the earlier period are continued into this stage of development. The demand for freedom and responsibility becomes even greater. But firm guidance cannot be relaxed until well toward the close of this period. As major commitments are made, there is less need for firmness, but the degree of maturity of the young person will determine how firm guidance should be. Even the more mature adolescent appreciates a firm hand by the teacher and the administrator, for the young folks themselves understand best the wild outburst of their immature associates.

Here too the development of the person in his knowing-life must be understood in organic relationship to the physiological and social-emotional dimensions of the developing personality.

It is particularly among our covenant youth who have been brought up "in the faith" in home and school that we may observe major conflicts and tensions. In the dimensions of his personality he has conformed to moral and religious practices in the home, school, and church. At times he is prompted to break through the wall that has been built about him in the psycho-somatic. But it is easier to conform. The threat to his security is too great to break with his past. However, has the I come to accept the truth on which all his conformance is based? Public confession in church may or may not indicate a full commitment in the ego. The unrest of

an uncommitted I in a conforming personality creates havoc with the life of the adolescent. Our Christian high schools have many such young people today.

Major commitments are inevitable. Delay will often prove frustrating and a threat to the young person's security. The schooling on this level is still an extension of the home and the teacher is function in *loco parentis* as skilled professionals in their respective teaching areas to lead young people to maturity. For some young people this level of schooling will be terminal, for others preparatory. Some are ready to make vocational commitments; others are not. Some experience consciously a call of the Lord upon their lives, others are struggling with it. Many, it seems, do not even hear a call, but ask only "What do *I want to do?*"

Areas of study should be organized to bring adolescents face to face with truths that guide them in their whole-person-in-life such that the I comes to order the activities of the psycho-somatic toward integration and balance in the religious person. This is a basic principle in curriculum organization and a pointer for all methodology on the high school level.

VII. What Should Guide Us in Constructing the Curriculum for the Christian School?

From what I have said so far it should be clear how I view the aim or purpose of schooling on the elementary and secondary level as it pertains to our Christian schools based on the Reformed faith. This purpose may be summarized as follows. The Christian school seeks to mature the covenant youth in his total personality in the cultural medium appropriate for this purpose. As a school it directs its work primarily to the knowing-life of the child, but is always conscious of the organic relationship of all dimensions of his personality in the I or person.

In view of this objective certain principles for curriculum construction follow. The implementation of these principles may be difficult because of other factors. But these should be brought in line with basic principles if we are to take Christian education seriously.

A. Life is a continuity and can be understood only in its relatedness. In the learning process, therefore, the pupil must deal with life in its relationships if he is to come to acceptance of life.

B. As the pupil matures he can begin to handle abstracted areas of life meaningfully. In circumscribed learning areas he comes to recognize basic truths in life and for life.

C. It is in understanding and in acceptance of truth that the I comes to order all dimensions of his personality according to a line of action.

D. Areas of study should be organized to cause the child to experience the impact of truth in his life.

E. Only long-range planning by the teacher in keeping with the development-urge in child life can effect the total integration of the pupil's personality for it affords security to teacher and pupil.

VIII. What Are the Stages in Curriculum Organization?

I am setting up the major stages according to current grade divisions. This does not place the stamp of approval upon our present graded system but merely recognizes its existence as a basis for operation.

A. Primary grades (kindergarten - grade 3).

1. Emphasis should fall on community life in the classroom in the family spirit. The personal loyalty of the child to the teacher is strong. The child must still feel the security afforded by the solidarity of family life as represented in the parents, and he comes to feel this in the teacher. In school this security transfers to the teacher.

2. Bible stories should center around persons in Bible history in whose lives children come to see God in his self-revelation. The child is still largely affected by persons rather than events.

3. Reading should provide the pupil an approach to people and to living things. Everything is so much alive to children at this level of development.

4. Skills as writing and number work should be given a social or community setting for the same reason.

5. If feasible a teacher should remain with a class for at least two years. A teacher's intimate knowledge of pupils will prove of inestimable value on this level.

B. Intermediate grades (4 - 6).

1. Classroom citizenship should be emphasized now, for a child begins to feel more secure in his peer group. What the group, of which he is a member, says is becoming increasingly important for him. Hence, citizenship in the new-found group consciousness is of primary importance.

2. Bible stories told by the teacher and guided Bible reading by the pupils are planned to bring out God's plan of salvation as his self-revelation. God comes to be known to the pupil in his dealing with his people.

3. Areas of living are developed: language, both comprehension and expression; social studies;

number; natural science in life situations, as hygiene, eggs and the chickens, the garden, etc. The arts are related to these areas, more as medium of expression than the study of the fine arts.

4. Skills are mastered in connection with the development of these areas.
5. Pupils should have one teacher for at least a year. Understanding of the child in his life-style as a basis for teaching is still very necessary.

C. Junior high school grades.

1. Life now becomes exploratory in character. The child breaks out of his peer group once again to forge ahead as an individual, but he wants to be accepted in his individualism. For this purpose he may tie up with a gang whose interests he has in common. Major life commitments are in the making. Curriculum organization and methodology must take account of this fact.
2. In Bible the work should be concentrated in the study of Bible truths as the self-revelation of God in their meaning for life.
3. Four unified areas of study can be meaningfully distinguished on this level:
 - a. Language: comprehension, appreciation, and expression.
 - b. Social sciences and history.
 - c. Natural sciences and mathematics.
 - d. Arts.
4. Teachers should be assigned according to these areas that they can organize each area meaningfully in the child's life.

D. Senior high school grades.

1. This is the age of major commitments in the life of young people. The call of the Lord upon each life should be stressed that they may envision their future lives. Both terminal and preparatory needs of pupils will have to be taken into account.
2. In Bible the introduction to Bible books as generally understood and the history of the Christian church can deepen and enrich the meaning of Scriptural truth as the self-revelation of God. The Word of God becomes vitally normative on this level and must be treated as such.
3. Areas of study should be organized as much as possible with reference to terminal and preparatory functions. There is a general cultural basis that should be continued for all.
4. Teachers should be assigned to facilitate correlation and integration of areas.

5. Co-curricular program within the schedule for the day to provide opportunity for exploration and expression of a more informal, student-initiated nature than classroom study permits.

6. Wide staff-participation in a guidance program that focuses itself upon the call of the Lord upon young lives.

In Conclusion

We recognize that the success or efficacy of Christian education does not first of all rest with us. We are only obedient laborers in the vineyard of our Lord. However, the Lord has shown us "the way" which includes both the process and the goal. It is our responsibility to come to a better understanding of the way that we may labor the more earnestly.

Some one among us raised the question recently in one of our periodicals whether we are successfully passing on and enriching our Calvinistic heritage. He proceeded to answer the question with an emphatic *no*. Why is our Christian education not more effective?

We need a better understanding of our task and a vigorous and consistent implementation of our understanding in the classroom. May the Lord grant us the wisdom and may we all labor humbly and obediently.

First printing 1953
Second printing 1958