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For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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The Relationship of Public Education to Christianity

Gordon H. Clark

Editor's Preface: Fifty years ago, on October 31, 1935, Dr. Gordon H. Clark delivered the following speech to the 42nd Annual Convention of the Ruling Elders' Association of Chester Presbytery in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. In the following 50 years, the burgeoning Christian school movement has sought to thwart the menace to Christianity represented by public education, but we still have a long way to go. The "complete Christian culture" of which Clark spoke is not yet in sight. But more and more people are beginning to understand the necessity of replacing public education with Christian education. Clark understood that need fifty years ago.

The subject of this morning's address is of such breadth and depth that many and important phases must be omitted. Since the theme of this conference is "Perils Confronting the Christian Church," one might expect the paper on public education to deal with accounts of young men and women whose faith and life had been ruined in college. Yet this phase of the matter is one which must be omitted. As a matter of fact, at the opening of Westminster Theological Seminary this autumn, the speaker, the Rev. John McComb, of New York, asserted he had never known a case of Christian faith ruined by college contacts. In the alleged cases, he said, the young man had no true faith to begin with; and further, wherever a boy or girl is properly instructed by parents and forewarned of the existence of enemies, the enemies do little damage.

Now while my experience has been the same as Dr. McComb's, it may well be that my experience is limited. There has been recently published a book entitled, *Crucifying Christ in Our Colleges* by Dan Gilbert. Mr. Gilbert states and then gives his evidence that "for many, a college education has meant an applied course in immorality." He quotes the anti-Christian Aldous Huxley as saying, "American college boys and girls copulate with the casual promiscuousness of dogs." And he further refers to statistics that show that a certain college town in Michigan has a greater population of venereal cases than New York City.

Although the book is distressingly extreme, the collection of incidents and cases compiled by Mr. Gilbert is probably true and accurate. The author then traces this immorality to temptations and seductions presented to the student by anti-Christian professors. He has amassed a large number of quotations from college textbooks on psychology, sociology, biology, in which the Christian religion and the Christian standards of morality are attacked and repudiated in favor of promiscuity in sex, revolution and bloodshed in politics, thievery and even murder in private affairs. Assume, if you will, that the author has collected the most outrageous statements; it is nonetheless true that this is what the students get in some textbooks and in some colleges. If other textbooks are more cautious, it still remains possible that the lectures in the classroom promulgate paganism. Lectures, moreover, have this two-fold advantage over

textbooks—they are more effective than textbooks in molding the ideas of the students, and in the case of dangerous doctrine they vanish in air and leave no accurate evidence behind.

All this is a menace to Christianity; it is an urgent phase of the problem; nevertheless it is a phase we must omit from this morning's considerations. We omit this phase for a reason, and the reason is that these distressing facts are the result of underlying causes. The causes are not as spectacular as the results, but they are the root of the trouble and require recognition in a proper diagnosis.

No doubt these causes are numerous. Perhaps the basic cause is the inherent depravity of human nature. Born in iniquity, implicated in Adam's guilt, a man is naturally a sinner. However, the most basic cause of the evil educational situation is not restricted to the field of education. Anyone who has worked in a factory knows that "one taint of nature makes the whole world kin." And so it might seem proper to pass by the subject of human depravity as being a theological consideration and not peculiar to education. On the other hand, although it is not peculiar to education, an educator's belief or disbelief in hereditary depravity determines his attitude toward school problems. The non-Christian educator who believes that the child's nature is inherently and positively good, or at very worst neutral, aims to develop that nature as it is. Restrictions and inhibitions are regarded as evil, and self-expression is regarded as good. That the result of such an attitude is often a decidedly immoral life is not surprising; but even in the very limited field of intellectual attainment, the results are disastrous, for the child chooses to learn what he feels like learning. The child chooses the project, and the teacher is there only to amuse him. The Christian educator, on the other hand, believes that every child he teaches inherits an evil nature, praises self-control rather than self-expression; he believes the teacher, rather than the pupil, knows best what lessons should be studied; and he is convinced that the popular shibboleth, learning by doing, is unmasked when we see that evil learned in such a manner does irreparable harm. The theological doctrine of human depravity, it is true, is not limited in its application to education; but certainly it has a

very definite bearing on the problem, and should be so recognized.

It may be well, however, to attempt to limit this discussion to purely educational theory. At least the attempt will prove whether such a limitation is possible or not. But what is educational theory, and what is education? Disagreement on this initial question produces divergence all along the line. It should be obvious from the mere statement that a school system founded on the idea that education is a moral and spiritual preparation for all of life will train children in a manner totally different from a school system which conceives education as a preparation for getting the most money in the shortest time. It would be difficult if not impossible to find in the United States a public school system whose operation is based on the supremacy of moral and spiritual values. It would be relatively easy, however, to find more or less open proponents of an education completely materialistic in its philosophy and purely vocational in its contents. It sees only this world, and in this world it knows only economics.

Aside from any religious implications, this type of education tends to turn men into machines. As long as the victims of this type of instruction are actively engaged in following their own little rut, as long as they are occupied by their business, the machine works smoothly. But take away the business, get the machine out of the rut, give the man an evening of solitude or leisure, and his essential poverty of spirit is revealed. If he can find no acquaintances to prevent him from boring himself, he must turn on the radio. What noises the radio transmits is irrelevant, at least it fills the vacuum between the ears.

Other educators attempt to substitute a view of education more plausible to common sense. They assert either that there is no ultimate aim of education, or, if they are more cautious, declare they know of no such aim. Enamoured with scientific experiment and observation, they have discovered, so they say, that education has many disconnected and unrelated ends. Discarding what they consider impractical metaphysics, they hold that everyone agrees that spelling is useful, and

arithmetic, and, let us say, football. To develop the student along these unrelated lines, then, is the purpose of education. Of any synthesis of human activities, of any primary purpose in life, they profess ignorance or disbelief.

Plausible as this theory is, the person who reflects stumbles on some embarrassing questions. In any list of unrelated aims of education, one may ask, has anything been omitted? Is the list complete? Certainly every consistent Christian would regard the list of a pagan educator woefully inadequate. Does the professional educator, in particular does the public school system of our country, wish to force on Christian people a type of schooling from which all spiritual values are banned? When the educator composed his list, what was the motive behind his omissions? Was it his concealed conviction that certain ends, especially the more comprehensive ends, are valueless? It may be that such lists occasionally include subjects omitted from the purely materialistic vocational theory; but on the whole, these two theories—the dogmatic materialism of the one and the dogmatic skepticism of the other—amount to much the same thing.

A third theory, however, seems definitely more promising. It is precisely the opposite of the first theory. If the aim of vocational education is to make man into a machine and to regiment him in a rut, the aim in this case is to prevent man from becoming a machine and to save him from a rut. The aim is to make him independent of radios, in short to make him a man, a complete man instead of a dependent child in need of amusement.

A pertinent suggestion for modern school systems is that they banish everything vocational, and banish it on the ground that it is not education. Technical schools are to be encouraged—the finer they are the better; but let not the common confusion remain that technical training and education are the same. Education, properly understood, does not prepare a youth for this or that specific type of life; education is not for the purpose of producing chemists, brokers, or engineers; it is for the purpose of producing men. It does not prepare for any one type of life in particular, but for any and all kinds in

general. Its lessons are applicable to all life, not to just some life.

Let it be perfectly well understood, however, that this education can be and should be as thorough as technical training. The theory does not imply that the school year is a holiday, that hard intellectual labor can be dispensed with, or that college is a young gentleman's finishing school. A course at the Sorbonne will impress one with the thoroughness of French education, and while their system is not ideal, American systems would improve if they should copy some of the French thoroughness. Education should be as thorough as technical training, but not so narrow and restricted; for the aim is a complete man and a well-balanced life.

Unfortunately, just as we are arriving at an apparently satisfactory view of what education aims to do, we are confronted with the most basic and most serious problem of all. Education may well aim at a well-balanced life and a complete man; but what is a well balanced life, and what constitutes a complete man? No strictly educational theory can answer these questions; the attempt to exclude all but purely educational material fails, because each educator adopts a particular philosophic worldview and bases his educational theory on his philosophy. Some educators hold that man and the world he lives in should be humanistically conceived. They do not believe in God; religion in their estimation is superstition; and the well-balanced life becomes the gratification of as many senses as possible. Some of the worst results of this view give Mr. Gilbert material for his book mentioned above. Other educators, too few in number, hold to a theistic worldview. They assert that God is, and is Sovereign; that disregard of God results in inevitable calamity; and that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. On the one side we have John Dewey and most of the professional educators: on the other side, the Christian.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the educational policies of a public school system derive their character from the philosophy of its higher officials. Let these directors, superintendents, and principals claim they base their views on

experiment and observation; their claim is untrue. Experimentation in psychology and pedagogy may indeed improve the technique of teaching, but it cannot choose ends or goals. And ends or goals are far more important than technique. Scientific technique can only be a curse when it is headed in the wrong direction. No better illustration of this truth could be desired than the constantly improving technique in chemistry. Improved chemistry can work wonders in medicine; but if improved technique in chemistry is used to produce poison gas for war, we may well wish chemistry less success. Technique in education will make the teaching of children more efficient, but if the educator teaches wrong ideals, the more efficiently he does so, the worse. Scientific experiment may tell us how children learn, but no amount of observation of children will tell us what they ought to learn. And this is the most important phase of education; not the description of the learning process, but the goal of the process. In philosophic language pedagogy is not a descriptive science, it is a normative science. It deals not so much with what is, but with what ought to be. And views of what ought to be do not come, as some educators envious of a scientific reputation claim, from observing how children learn. Views of what ought to be depend on the underlying philosophy. The anti-Christian educator wants to produce one kind of man; the Christian has chosen a far different goal. They may both talk about a complete man, but that they mean different things is obvious when we quote perhaps the best verse in Scripture on the goal of education: "All Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for teaching ... for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."

If now as Christians we have some idea of our goal, it is time to pay attention to the methods for providing children with the education we favor. Methodology could be discussed indefinitely; its intricacies are infinite. This morning only certain very general principles of method can be mentioned. First of all, education is and should be regarded as the responsibility of the family. It is primarily to parents, not primarily to the State, nor even to the Church, that God has entrusted the children and their upbringing. This principle needs

emphasis in these days because so many educators neglect or deny it. There are powerful forces at work in the world and in these United States to destroy the family and to make children, yes and adults too, the creatures of the State. Loose morals and easy Nevada divorces go hand in hand with dictatorship to destroy the family and to exalt the State. Americans need not point the finger of scorn at immoral, atheistic Russia, nor at the efforts of Hitler and Mussolini, to make of public education a means of political propaganda. Centralization of authority is well developed in this country, too. Never before in this country has so much power been put into the hands of one man. If these tendencies toward loose morality, exemplified both in easy divorce and in the repudiation of national debts, and toward dictatorship exemplified again in the repudiation of debts and laws concerning potatoes, if these tendencies are not combated and overcome, the family stands to lose. Dictators never have and never can annihilate the family, simply because it is an institution established by God and ingrained in the human constitution; but dictators can ruin many families, cause widespread misery, and even civil war. In education, the dictatorial policy is pursued with every centralization of authority. A federal Board of Education which could control local systems would turn the schools into instruments of party politics, and in short would be the most effective method possible for preventing any true education. All this, too, is in line with the so-called Child Labor amendment, which—if it should ever become a part of the United States Constitution, at least in the form in which it was originally presented—would take the control of children from the parents and give it to Congress. If I am correctly informed, its sponsors are Communistic and they emphatically rejected limiting the scope of the amendment to industrial employment, but insisted on including the power to take control of children away from the parents. In these troubled times, the Christian must make himself vocal and reassert the responsibility of the family for the education of the child.

Parents, however, because of the exigencies of life, cannot personally give the children the instruction they need. Schools are necessary. But to what sort of school should Christian parents send their

children? Does it seem reasonable that a Christian child should be given pagan instruction? There are Christians, even Christian ministers, who refer to Moses as being learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and from this fact conclude, by some sort of private logic, that there is no need for Christian schools. We agree that Moses' character was so formed by his mother's training that his Egyptian education did not ruin him, but if pagan education did not ruin Moses and does not ruin true Christian young men today, we should give glory to the power of God's grace instead of being satisfied with pagan education. Just because a young man survives pagan instruction is no reason for subjecting him to it. Children sometimes survive diphtheria or infantile paralysis, but we do not try to give it to them.

Now, in public schools, children receive a pagan education. One hardly expects the public schools to teach that most compact and most consistent expression of Christianity, the *Shorter Catechism*. But the teaching of the Bible is also prohibited, and in some places even the reading of the Bible is outlawed. Obviously the public schools are not Christian. But many people reply, though they are not Christian, they are not anti-Christian, they are neutral. But, let one ask, what does neutrality mean when God is involved? How does God judge the school system which says to him, "O God, we neither deny nor assert thy existence; and O God, we neither obey nor disobey thy commands; we are strictly neutral." Let no one fail to see the point: the school system that ignores God teaches its pupils to ignore God, and this is not neutrality but the worse form of antagonism, for it judges God to be unimportant and irrelevant in human affairs.

Any Christian, it seems to me, should have sense enough to see that subjection to pagan influences works an injustice to the child. Any Christian should see that, but a Presbyterian should see it still more clearly. Unfortunately the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. is dominated by men who share the views of the heretical Auburn Affirmation. The Bible is repudiated and the chief events of Christ's ministry—his Virgin Birth, his vicarious Atonement, his bodily Resurrection—are called unessential to the Christian religion. The

Westminster Confession with its glorious Calvinism is a dead letter. But a true Presbyterian, one who really believes the system of the Confession—one to whom total depravity, limited atonement, perseverance of the saints, mean something—such a one can see more clearly than any other type of Christian the injustice of subjecting a child to pagan instruction. With his profounder and more consistent understanding of Christianity, the Calvinist sees this more clearly because he more fully appreciates the Covenant of Grace.

In *Genesis* we read that God established a gracious covenant between himself and Abraham, but it was not with Abraham alone that God established the covenant. The words are "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee" The covenant therefore definitely included the children. Hence the children of Abraham stood in a relation to God different from the relation of heathen children to God. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, God teaches us that the New Testament dispensation is but the revival and fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham. This does not mean that actual salvation is a natural inheritance from father to son. Much less does it deny the need for regeneration. But it does mean that God ordinarily works through families; and for these reasons Presbyterians administer baptism to infants, just as the Hebrews circumcised their sons, to show their formal inclusion in the covenant. The parent at baptism promises to bring up the child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, or in some other terms promises to educate the child along Christian lines. It is inefficiency to say the least to restrict this education to Sunday School and the little at-home training the public school educated children of Christian parents might receive; logically the day school also should be utilized for Christian instruction.

Now once upon a time our country was two-thirds Calvinistic, and the civilization in a large sense was Christian. This unfortunately is no longer true, and schools and colleges are accused—with some degree of truth—of giving the students courses in applied immorality.

What suggestion can be made to help the parent in the present situation? There is one very concrete suggestion—whether it is practicable or not the parents must decide for themselves. Suffice is to be said that the suggestion is in actual operation in a number of places. The suggestion simply is that Christian parents band together to form Christian schools. A single family cannot provide a Christian education for its children, but a large number of families can. Some financial sacrifice, no doubt, would be needed; but Christianity in general and in particular its most consistent form, Calvinism, are not known for shunning sacrifice. Christian civilization and Christian culture are disappearing. Large groups of earnest orthodox Christians are totally unaware of the rich heritage that is theirs; they are as babes drinking milk, and they need strong meat for maturity. They believe the fundamentals, they preach the heart of the Gospel, and souls are saved through their instrumentality. We praise God for that. But they are not completely furnished unto every good work. A system of Christian schools will give us a knowledge of Christianity as it embraces the whole of life, and will produce a complete Christian culture for a complete man.