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# TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

## IV. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN RELATION TO TEACHER AND STUDENT

FRANK E. GAEBELEIN

If the subject of this lecture, "Christian Education in Relation to Teacher and Student," were to be written on a blackboard, we might indicate by arrows, pointing from the word "teacher" to the word "student" and back again, the relationship between the two not only in the give-and-take of the classroom but also in subsequent influence. For some students become teachers and they in turn influence others to take up teaching as their work.

The development of a Christian educational philosophy is not to be sought just for its own sake; we do not seek to know the truth merely for the purpose of admiring it, inspiring though such admiration may be. A philosophy of education rooted and grounded in God's truth always entails responsibility; it never fails to carry with it the obligation to "do the truth."<sup>1</sup> If truth is supremely centered in a Person, even our Lord Jesus Christ, then we as persons cannot escape the fact that we must do something about it. The responsibility is one that lies close to the heart of Christian education and that differentiates it from secular education.

In 1909 Arthur James Balfour was speaking at the University of Edinburgh on "The Moral Values Which Unite the Nations." In his address, he discussed the economic and cultural ties between people, the bond through such things as education and the personal ties of friendship. When he had finished, a Japanese student got up in the great hall of the university and said, "But, Mr. Balfour, what about Jesus Christ?" According to an American professor who was present, there was dead silence, as the audience recognized the justice of the rebuke. The prime minister of a great Christian nation had been discussing the ties that unite men and nations. But he had left out the one essential bond, and the rebuke had come from a student from a far off non-Christian land.

Thus it is with the difference between secular and Christian education. Secular education will not ask seriously the question, "What about Jesus Christ?" Christian education asks it and then insists upon an answer. That question has been at the heart of these lectures. Moreover, it continues to be asked of us everyday. Even though others may be silent, our Lord Himself asks it of us everyday. Even though others may be silent, our Lord Himself asks it of us. Quietly, yet inescapably, He says something like this: "What are you doing with Me and My truth--in writing your term papers, in your daily preparation, in all your other activities?" The question is being asked also of the faculty and administration in respect to their teaching, their formulation of policy, and their research. How vastly more relevant the question is today than in 1909--today when men face problems never even dreamed of in Balfour's time! Truly the measure of Christian education is its concern, not just in evangelism but all through its program, with the question of questions, "What about Jesus Christ?"

"All truth is God's truth." These lectures have stressed the centrality of that principle in Christian education. But we have now reached the place where the companion principle must be presented. It is this: "There can be no Christian education without Christian teachers." Turn back for a moment to the insight of Anselm stressed in the second lecture, "Credo ut intelligam"

(I believe so that I might know). Surely this means that, since faith is necessary to understanding the truth, education that is committed through and through to God's truth in its primary revelational sense as well as in its natural aspect depends upon Christian teachers--that is to say, teachers who have submitted themselves in faith to the Lord of truth.

Let us go on, therefore, to look at the Christian teacher, considering in particular six leading qualities that should characterize him and endeavoring to face their personal application. From a campus such as this many students go on to become teachers; in fact, a major contribution of the Christian liberal arts college is the large number of men and women it sends into the teaching profession. Thus the qualities we shall consider apply to students as well as to teachers. Just as music is part of daily life, so teaching in one way or another relates to us all.

Every Christian bears a responsibility to obey the Great Commission. And that commission, as we saw in the beginning of these lectures, is a teaching commission. "Go ye therefore," said our Lord, "and teach [the word is *mathēteusate*, literally, "make pupils or disciples"] all nations, . . . teaching them [*didaskontes*, the formal word for teaching, from which "didactic" comes] all things whatsoever I have commanded you."<sup>3</sup> We are all teachers in one way or another. Think, for example, of the most important educational situation in the world, the home. Parents--fathers and mothers such as most college students will become--are God-appointed teachers of the children entrusted to them. Furthermore, every pastor is also a teacher. This we have on the authority of the apostle Paul, who speaks in Ephesians of "pastors and teachers,"<sup>4</sup> linking the two offices in one man. Seminary students and preachers must remember that teaching cannot be separated from preaching and pastoral work. A man called to the ministry is at the same time called to a very important kind of teaching. But further elaboration is unnecessary. Teaching runs through the whole of life; whatever the vocation, in some respect teaching is related to it.

But we turn from these general implications to the leading characteristics of the kind of teacher upon which Christian education depends.

First, the teacher in a Christian school or college must be openly and boldly a Christian. Here in personal terms is the master-key to Christian education. Christian education is impossible apart from Christian teachers. This is not a half-way policy, but one to be followed totally, in every respect, all the way. In departing from it over the years many a school and college has, while gaining strength and prestige, lost its soul. A glance at the history of American education makes the point. Our first colleges from Harvard on through William and Mary, Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth, and Brown, and later, the women's colleges--Vassar, Mt. Holyoke, Wellesley--were founded by godly men and women to provide Christian education. Likewise, with many of the older denominational colleges. If, in relation to their original Christian commitment, "Ichabod" must be written over the doors of institutions like these, it is largely because of the admission of unbelievers to their faculties. Let me press upon all who may be given responsibility for Christian education in school or college as administrators or trustees to hold fast to the principle, "No Christian education without Christian teachers." In the application of that principle let the word "Christian" be given its deep content. How does the administrator know that a candidate for his faculty is a Christian? Not just through evidence of church membership but also through the witness of the Spirit. As Paul wrote, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit that we are the children of God."<sup>5</sup> The children of God know one another; one does not have to talk long with another Christian to recognize the common bond of fellowship in the truth.

Yes, Christian teachers must be openly and boldly Christian. In a day when church membership in our nation is soaring and fuzzy thinking regarding religion blurs important spiritual distinctions, the Christian teacher must stand up and be counted for what he believes. He may well take, as the keynote for his service and witness--and the two are not separate but are actually one--the grand affirmation at the beginning of Romans, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."<sup>6</sup>

And what is the Gospel? Well, according to the great resurrection chapter of life and hope and power in Christ, it is that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."<sup>7</sup> Observe the three-fold logic of this apostolic declaration. There is the logic of the Scriptures. To be a Christian teacher means to believe the very heart of the Christian faith, the atoning death and the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to believe it "according to the Scriptures," because from Genesis to Revelation Christ is the subject of the Bible. Again, there is the logic of history, because the Gospel is rooted in History. As Paul went on to show in this chapter, the risen Lord appeared to Peter, then to the twelve, and after that to more than five hundred at once, and to James, and again to all the apostles.<sup>8</sup> These were definite, factual, historic appearances. Whereupon Paul adds, "he was seen of me also."<sup>9</sup> This finally is the logic of personal experience. Paul knew that Christ was risen. Paul knew the Gospel, because he knew the living Christ personally. So every true Christian knows the Gospel personally, because by faith he himself is a risen person.

If I may be permitted a personal illustration, I remember that one summer as I was with some friends of the Alpine Club of Canada at the foot of Mount Robson in British Columbia, a group of us in a tent were drinking tea on a rainy afternoon. There was a discussion of religion. It became highly skeptical in tone, and I felt led to say something by way of witness. At this point, a brilliant young scientist turned and said, with a somewhat patronizing air, "But you don't really believe, do you, that Jesus is the Son of God?"

"Yes, I do," I answered, as you would doubtless have answered.

"But," he said, "how can you prove it? How do you know it is true?"

What followed will remain for me an inefaceable memory. I simply did what any other convinced Christian would have done; I looked him straight in the eye and said, "How do I know that Jesus is the Son of God? I know it, because I know Him personally." For about a half minute we looked into one another's eyes. Then he dropped his gaze and the argument was over.<sup>10</sup> It is this immediacy of personal knowledge of the living Lord that is essential to the Christian teacher.

The second quality for a Christian teacher is to know the Bible. This means that not only the teacher of the Bible, but also the teacher of mathematics, science, English, languages, and any other subject must know Scripture. He must know it not just through one-half or one hour preparation of a Sunday school lesson but through living in it daily, through reading and studying it constantly. It is a fact that authority in teaching comes from a reservoir of knowledge. As Christian teachers, even of the so-called secular subjects, we need this reserve of Scriptural knowledge, for God's Word is relevant to all of learning. Not that we shall ever know all about the Bible. But we can build up a growing familiarity with it.

And what about the hard things--and there are many such things--in the Bible? Here we remember that the Bible is inspired by the Spirit of God. We rest upon the fact that He who inspired it is available to guide us into its essential truth. In sober and most wonderful truth, the Bible has its own Interpreter,<sup>11</sup> who is none other than its Author, the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup> Think of it! We read Plato or Shakespeare, and are dependent upon our own interpretation. But the Bible is different. To guide us into its truth, we have what the Reformers called the "inner witness of the Holy Spirit."

To sum up this point, the Christian teacher needs to be under the discipline of the Word of God. Do you--and I speak to you all, faculty as well as students, laymen as well as ministers,--preserve inviolate your daily reading of Scripture? You may be a scholar and teacher without the discipline of the Bible; but you will never be a deeply Christian scholar and thoroughly Christian teacher without it. May I share this with you out of the experience of my own life? As a small boy, I began daily reading of the Bible. On through school, college, graduate school, and many years of teaching, I have continued its daily reading. And this one thing has meant more in forming my mind than all of my formal education in school, college and university.

The third characteristic of the Christian teacher may be treated very briefly, because it has been discussed so fully in the other lectures of this series. It is that the Christian teacher must be committed in every aspect of his life and work, in all his being, to the truth. But to what has already been said about commitment to the truth one thing should be added. Along with devotion to the truth theologically, philosophically, and in practical subject matter, the Christian teacher and the Christian student--in fact all Christians whatever their work may be--must be sensitive to the truth in respect to plain, every-day honesty in word and deed. It is an old-fashioned but rock-bound principle that a lie is never under any circumstances justified. Not even "social" lies or so-called "white" lies may be tolerated. Nor is a lie ever permissible in teaching. What shall it profit us, teachers and students, if we are able to work out the integration of literature, and science, and mathematics, and music, and all the other subjects, with God's truth, and if we at the same time are trifling with the plain truth in our every-day living?

Next, a fourth qualification of the Christian teacher engages our attention. Just as Christian education must seek excellence, so must the teacher. We who are really committed to God and His truth must believe in the best to the extent of preferring it to the better. We must not be satisfied with anything less than the first-rate. To the glory of the God of truth we must join the battle against mediocrity.

This means that the Christian teacher must be an intellectual person.<sup>13</sup> Blaise Pascal, one of the most Biblical of all the great scientists and philosophers, says in his *Penseés*: "Man is but a reed ... but he is a thinking reed. All our dignity consists ... in thought."<sup>14</sup> In other words, one of the great marks of our humanity is the God-given capacity to think. It follows, therefore, that every Christian teacher and student ought to take seriously his obligation to live his intellectual life to the glory of God.

The challenge of the intellectual life for our Christian teachers and students is not an easy one. It costs to have a mind that is really committed to the Lord. One reason why there are on every Christian campus some students who are not going on intellectually is not that they are of

inferior ability but rather that they refuse to pay the price. And the price is nothing less than self-restraint and hard work.

One day Dr. Allan Heely, the distinguished headmaster of Lawrenceville School, was asked by a voluble lady this question: "What, Dr. Heely, is your idea of the ideal curriculum for growing boys?" His reply was brief and to the point: "Any program of worthwhile studies so long as all of it is hard and some of it is unpleasant."

It was a severe but wholesome answer, relating in principle to the whole range of education on through graduate school. For a great fault of education today is that much of it is too easy--and this applies to college as well as school. To you students let me say that you will never go on deeply in learning if you begin to choose courses merely because you think that they will be easy. What kind of books, if any, do you read voluntarily; what kind of music do you listen to; what pictures do you look at, now that television has invaded the campus as well as the home? What are you doing with your leisure time? These are probing questions. No Christian, no matter how pious, will ever achieve excellence if, aside from his required courses, he feeds his mind on trash, if he never of his own volition reads some hard books, or listens to some great music, or converses seriously about profound subjects.

If I could go to the home of a prospective teacher and examine his bookshelves, I could tell much about his quality as a teacher. If I could visit a student's room and see what he reads for leisure as well as for study, I should have an insight into his educational growth. What is the most important piece of educational equipment any school or college has? It is certainly not the gymnasium, nor the student center, nor even the laboratories or the classroom building. It is the library. That is the intellectual heart of a school. When I visit a school or college, I always want to see, along with the chapel, the library.

Do you students have your library, even a small one of your own? Are you beginning to build a personal library? With the advent of good paperbacks, the development of a student's own library has been greatly facilitated.

Christian education is poor compared with secular education. In many communities schools are being built on a multimillion-dollar scale that overshadow the equipment of most Christian colleges. But first-rate thinking, the development of Christian intellect, has no dollar sign attached to it. Its price is the higher one of hard work, and therefore it is within your reach and mine.

But there is a fifth quality that should mark the Christian teacher. It is his attitude toward students. Teaching depends in large part on how the teacher looks at those whom he teaches. Here we have a very exalted example indeed. It is nothing less than the example of our Lord Jesus Himself. For Him, the child was peculiarly precious.<sup>15</sup> To mislead or harm a child was in His sight a very grave thing indeed.<sup>16</sup> For us, too, childhood must be precious. Said a great headmaster to me at the beginning of my career, "Every headmaster should think of every boy as having been sent to him by God." The Christian principle of love, even the truth is love, must be central in our approach to our pupils. This does not mean sentimentalism. Sometimes love, as exercised in necessary discipline, is very stern. Yet it still remains love. And in respect to you

and me and youth, love entails also liking children. The truly effective Christian teacher must like children. As Christians, we are obligated to love everyone. But we do not always like those we love. Some good people love children and will sacrifice drastically for them, but they do not actively like children. Such people should not be teachers. If children bother you, if you lack in your heart an interest and liking for them, then do not be a teacher. On the other hand, if you want to grow in your liking and understanding of them, God will help you do so.

In addition to the love and liking of children, a Christian teacher must have a hopeful view of youth. He is familiar with the Biblical doctrine of original sin; he knows that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."<sup>17</sup> Yet he expects good things of youth, because he knows that God is working through Christian education. Tolerant and patient, he never makes the mistake of judging youth by adult standards. He knows what God can do with a life, because he knows what God has done for him.

Here I should add a word about the understanding of youth, especially in these troublous days when young people, Christian young people included, reflect the tensions of our times. Simply because of these tensions and the uncertainty of this age of crisis, youth needs for its emotional and spiritual well-being a firm and kindly structure of authority. Consider particularly our adolescents, for this is the group I know best. There is a good deal of unconscious existentialism in our teenagers. Ours is a day when the search for personal identity looms large, especially for young people. Have you ever been alone in a strange city, perhaps in a hotel waiting for a call from home?<sup>18</sup> If so, you know the sense of loneliness and of expectation that may come over you. Truth in the Person of Christ, who alone meets the deepest needs of the heart, this is the call that fully satisfies the longing of youth and of us all for identity.

But with all his understanding of youth, the Christian teacher must respect the boys and girls he teaches. As a great educator once said to his teachers in a faculty meeting, "Remember, gentlemen, that when you go into the classroom you may well be in the presence of your intellectual superiors." The selflessness of the true teacher! A teacher may never, never be jealous of his pupils. He must be willing to lead them forward and remain himself in the background. One of our famous Eastern schools, the Pingry School of Elizabeth, New Jersey, recently celebrated its centennial. As I attended the celebration, I was impressed by the school's motto: Maxima reverentia debetur pueris. Yes, the boys--and the girls too--entrusted to us by God are worthy of our highest respect.

And now we consider the sixth and last of the qualifications of a Christian teacher. He must submit himself wholly to the one greatest Teacher. And who is that? Well, as Bishop Stephen F. Bayne, Jr., put it in his address at the semi-centennial of the Kent School, "God is the Teacher."<sup>19</sup> In this Christian college and seminary--and herein lies the inestimable value of a committed Christian institution such as Grace Theological Seminary--the living God is recognized as the source of all wisdom. And how does He teach? He teaches us all daily, as we pay the price of hard thinking. He teaches us through His Word. He teaches us teachers sometimes through our pupils. He teaches us all through discipline of trial and disappointment and suffering--all of which comes and will come to you on a campus like this--and through our successes too. But most of all He teaches us through a Person, through the One who is most excellent in all things, our Lord Jesus Christ. "This is my beloved Son; hear Him."<sup>20</sup>

7. I Corinthians 15:3,4.
8. I Corinthians 15:5-7.
9. I Corinthians 15:8.
10. Cf. "A Great Question and Its Answer," Frank E. Gaebelin, Christianity Today, 23 June, 1958.
11. John 16:13.
12. II Peter 1:21.
13. For extended treatment of the obligation to excellence and Christian intellectualism cf. "The Christian's Intellectual Life," Frank E. Gaebelin, Christianity Today, 8 May, 1961, and "The Obligation of Excellence in Christian Education," Frank E. Gaebelin, Gordon Review, Winter, 1962.
14. Penseés, Blaise Pascal, London, 1931, VI 347.
15. Matthew 19:14,15.
16. Matthew 18:6.
17. Romans 3:23.
18. Cf. W. H. Auden's moving lines:  
    "To be young means  
    To be all on edge, to be held waiting in  
    A packed lounge for a Personal Call  
    From Long Distance, for the low voice  
    That defines one's future."
19. In the Christian Idea of Education, Edmund Fuller, ed. New Haven, 1957, pp. 255-65.
20. Luke 9:35.
21. Habakkuk 1:1.