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CHRISTIANITY AND EDUCATION

Thomas A. Thomas
Associate Professor of Theology
Baptist Bible Seminary

A student generally attends a Christian college rather than a secular institution because he wants a distinctive type of education, a Christian education, that he may be prepared to serve the Lord effectively in the area to which he has been called. But the question naturally arises, what is Christian education? Is Christianity merely the frosting that covers the cake of a secular approach to education? Is an education Christian simply because the faculty and administration of the school are Christians, because classes are opened with prayer, because in classes there is no violent attack upon the principles of the Christian faith but rather a sympathy toward them, because a Christian atmosphere is maintained for the student body by such things as daily chapel services, Christian fellowship, and Christian standards of ethics? These things, although certainly very important, are simply the fruit of the fact that we are Christians; they are not the root of that which makes an education to be Christian. What, then, is that distinguishing feature which makes an education to be Christian as contrasted to any other kind of an education?

THE CHRISTIAN THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

The Two-Realm View of Knowledge

When we speak about education we are, of course, concerned with the nature of knowledge, and how we attain it. It is quite a common approach to divide knowledge into two areas or types, secular and religious. There is one kind of knowledge that deals with reason and the things of the world, and there is another kind of knowledge that deals with faith and the things of God. One kind of knowledge may be called philosophical, the other may be called theological.

We see this two-fold division developed by Thomas Aquinas, the great 13th century Roman Catholic theologian. To Thomas there are two methods of arriving at truth, reason and revelation, philosophy and theology. Both are true methods of arriving at a knowledge of God. By revelation we can know more about God than we can by reason, but nevertheless, reason operating independently of revelation can lead us to the truth.

All of this is based on a Roman Catholic conception of the nature of man. For Romanism, Adam was not quite perfect when he came from the hand of the Creator. He had a definite

tendency toward evil. The power of the flesh in him was strong. And so to help him God gave him a superadded gift of original righteousness, what the Romanist calls the donum superadditum, to assist him in this struggle. However, in spite of this gift, Adam sinned. The result was that he lost this original righteousness. The Fall had very little more effect on him than that. Although they speak of his reason as being "wounded" it was not wounded in any sense as to prevent him from reasoning properly and arriving at the truth independently of God. The heathen Greek philosopher Aristotle, whose philosophy forms the basis of much Roman Catholic theology, arrived at the truth in many areas, according to this system.

The Christian needs to be very careful to avoid this Romanist error. Man was not simply "wounded" by the Fall. The Bible describes him as being blind, dead, and unable to receive or know the things of the Spirit of God (Eph. 2:1; I Cor. 2:14; II Cor. 4:4). The Scriptural picture of him is that he is totally depraved and totally unable to do anything good (Rom. 3:10-23; 8:7, 8; Jer. 17:9). In order to be able to know the truth man needs regeneration; he needs to be born again by the power of the Spirit of God. Only then as he is brought out of darkness into light and out of death into life, can he know the truth and enjoy freedom from the dominion of sin.

The Unity of Knowledge

Instead of the two-realm theory of knowledge the Christian would insist that there is only one kind of true knowledge. In a very real sense all knowledge is theological. This must be so in the light of our concept of God.

Our God is the creator of this world. He is also the one who controls it, operates it, preserves it. He is the one "who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11). Thus, everything in this world has the meaning or interpretation which God has put into it. No facts can be raw, brute things which just happen to be here in the world, meaningless until they are systematized and categorized by the mind of man. All knowledge is God-created, God-related, God-interpreted knowledge. Since God is the one who has created, who controls, and who preserves this world, one cannot truly know anything unless he understands it in the light of its relationship to God.

Thus, there cannot be a two-fold division of human knowledge. In order to know science truly, or mathematics, or history, or politics, or anything, we must see them as the creation of God and the product of His counsel. To fail so to relate and interpret all knowledge is to have only a limited, distorted kind of knowledge. All knowledge is God's knowledge, and thus it cannot be divided into the secular and the religious.

The Means of Attaining Knowledge

We have seen that since God is the creator and controller of this universe, everything must have the meaning or interpretation He has put into it. He is the truth and the source of all truth. So, it is only when our minds are in conformity with the mind of God that we can have

the truth about anything, i.e. about God, man, history, science, or any other subject. All our thinking must be brought into subjection to the mind of God as He has revealed Himself in His Word. Our thoughts are to be analogical to God's thoughts. We are to think God's thoughts after Him. Only then can our knowledge in any area be true.

Let us illustrate what we mean. We can look up into the sky on a clear night and see a display of the heavenly bodies in all their glory. Certainly no Christian can be consistent with his faith and think of these celestial bodies as things which just happen to be there which he must seek to understand, interpret and give meaning to, apart from their relationship to God. For these are not things that just happen to be there. Our God has created them. He preserves them. He controls them. They are what they are by virtue of what God has made them to be. And unless we recognize their relationship to God, unless our thoughts concerning this world are in subjection to and in accordance with that which God has to say about it, we are failing to approach it from a Christian perspective, and we are failing to get at the real truth concerning these things. And where do we find the expression of the mind of God? We find it only in the Bible. Since it is the inspired, infallible Word of God it is the supreme and final authority for all truth, and only that which is in accord with it is truth.

Who Can Attain Truth?

We must always keep in mind that the unregenerate man is spiritually dead, he is totally depraved, and cannot receive or know "the things of the Spirit of God." He is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can he be. These "things" are discerned or understood only through the illuminating power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:1; I Cor. 2:14; Rom. 8:7, 8). This means that only the one who has been regenerated by the Spirit of God can receive or understand the "things of the Spirit." So, only the Christian can have real truth, for only the Christian can subject his mind to the mind of God and give God that place in his thinking which He should have. The unregenerate man has deliberately "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25).

And those "things of the Spirit" enter into every area of thought. No area is excluded. As we have emphasized before, knowledge is a unit. All knowledge is in a real sense theological. There can be no division into the secular and the religious. All knowledge has its origin in God and its relationship to Him. All of creation is revelational of God (Psa. 19:1; Rom. 1:20). All that transpires in the history of men and of nations shows His guiding and controlling hand (Acts 17:26; Rom. 13:1; Dan. 4:25; Job 14:5).

This does not mean, of course, that the Christian can be perfect in his knowledge and never make mistakes or misunderstand. Although we have been regenerated by the Spirit of God, have become new creations in Christ Jesus, and can now "think God's thoughts after Him," nevertheless, we still have the sin nature which remains with us throughout this life. And so, as long as we are here in the flesh, we will at times err.

Neither does this mean that the unregenerate man does not have truth of a kind. We would not be so foolish as to say that. Certainly the non-Christian research scientist can

discover many truths as a result of his investigations. But unless he recognizes that God is their creator, that He is their controller, that they receive their meaning or interpretation from Him, then he certainly has only a very limited and distorted kind of truth. And that truth which he has is true in spite of himself. It is true because Christianity is true. Two plus two equals four in spite of the non-Christian's assumption that that is just the way things happen to be in what he considers to be this chance-controlled world. Rather, two plus two equals four because that is the way our God has created and controls this world of His. He is the one who makes it to be so.

THE OBJECT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In the Academic Realm

If we are to have truly Christian education in the light of what we have said, our object must be that in every course which is taught the divine origin, the divine relationship, and the divine interpretation of our knowledge should be recognized. This means, for example, that in the study of history it must be pointed out that none of those things which have transpired down through the centuries have ever taken place by chance. All is a part of God's all comprehensive plan and purpose for this world. He "ruleth in the kingdom of men" and "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." The hand of the Lord must be recognized behind all events to accomplish His sovereign purpose.

So also in the study of science. If we are to offer a truly Christian education we cannot approach any area from a supposed neutral point of view. There is no neutral point of view. This world is either the product of chance, as the non-Christian says, or it is the creation of our God. And if it is His creation, and is controlled by His providential power, then we are denying and insulting our God if we do not recognize this in all things that take place, whether in the physical, biological, chemical, or any other area of the scientific world. Any education which neglects to acknowledge God's creative activity and His providential hand is to that extent not Christian.

Another illustration may be taken from philosophy. Only in the light of the Word of God can we properly evaluate non-Christian systems of thought. The unbeliever is always wrong in his conclusions because he begins wrong: he begins apart from God. He is not an innocent babe searching for the truth, but a rebel against God. He has changed the truth of God into a lie, and worships and serves the creature more than the Creator (Rom. 1:21-25). Any approach to philosophy which fails to recognize this Biblical truth certainly has no right to be called Christian.

In Other Areas

There is more to Christian education than the so-called academic. We should be concerned with training and developing the whole man; not only the mind, but the body and spirit

as well. All is to be brought into subjection to our God. Thus, in a Christian school or college it is well to have athletic teams. These should not be simply to provide an opportunity for the students to let off steam, although they certainly do that. Rather, they should teach such things as teamwork, loyalty, enthusiasm, discipline, to the glory of God. They should help to strengthen these bodies which God has given us, and relax these minds He has given us, that we may be better fitted to serve Him.

So also should all other activities have a similar purpose. Such things as daily chapel services, spiritual life and missionary conferences, prayer meetings, a Christian standard of ethics, social events, and the many opportunities for Christian fellowship should all be directed toward the spiritual edification and strengthening of the student that in all our God may be glorified. All these things are vital part of a Christian education.

CONCLUSION

The object, then, of Christian education, is to bring the whole person, mind, body, and spirit, into complete subjection to the mind and will of God, to the end that He may be glorified (I Cor. 10:31). Only that education which gives God that all-inclusive place in our thinking which He should have can be called Christian. And only that person whose mind is in complete subjection to the Word of God, whose attitude toward the body is that through it he may glorify God, and who in his spirit knows the reality of true communion and fellowship with God, can be called a truly educated person.