

## A FORMULATION OF SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY IN TERMS OF WHICH THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IS TO BE GUIDED<sup>1</sup>

It is the purpose of this report to present an outline statement of the principles of Christian education in terms of which the work of the Committee on Christian Education will be pursued. Certain principles are singled out for fuller discussion either because of their importance or because some difference of opinion may appear to exist concerning them.

The subjects, the aims, the method and the program of Christian education must be considered.

### I The Subjects

In a broad conception of Christian education, all men are properly its subjects, but immediately a distinction must be drawn between the educative process by which members of the church are nurtured and the evangelistic teaching by which those outside the church are instructed in saving truth. The

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distinction among men made by God in the establishment of His covenant makes it essential that a thoroughgoing distinction be made by us between covenant and non-covenant subjects of Christian education, with a resultant difference between the aims of covenant education and those of evangelistic education. The emphasis of the Word of God on the depth of human depravity on the one hand, and the fulness of the new life in Christ on the other, underscores the importance of this principle.

The covenant subjects may be either communicant or non-communicant members of a true church. The non-covenant subjects are those without the church. So far as the aims of Christian education are concerned, special consideration must be given those who, while church members, are not true Christians, whether they stand in their false relation by hypocrisy or through a culpable lack of instruction or discipline on the part of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> Published in the Minutes of the 12th GA, 1945, as part of the Report of the Committee on Christian Education. Pages 42-48.

## II The Aims

Before considering the specific aims of Christian education as applied to these groups, it might be well to classify the aims in general terms. The aims of Christian education are both noetic and experiential. Since life is based upon doctrine, experiential aims are contingent upon noetic aims, and both alike are dependent upon the operation of God's Spirit. Formal knowledge and outward habits may be achieved by natural means, but only that inward education by which Christ leads His people into all truth can bring genuine understanding and new obedience of the heart. The inspired Scriptures furnish the primary noetic content of Christian education. It should include a grasp of Bible history, theology, ethics, and church practices. Christian education must teach these subjects in carefully planned curriculum graded according to the ability of the learner. One objective of our committee is to evolve a comprehensive curriculum which will integrate the emphasis on each of these subjects with the age and interest levels best adapted to their mastery. Some general norms of achievement should be established. We cannot rest content with our efforts until we have assurance of a reasonable measure of success in transmitting to those in our ministry the facts of God's revealed will. Since the success or failure of the educational program in this regard, formally at least, is capable of direct measurement we must not only develop concrete aims, but also estimate the effectiveness of our efforts in achieving them. In the anti-intellectualism of our day this transmissive instruction in a body of facts is neglected and ridiculed, but it remains the first responsibility of Christian education. Our aim must always be adjusted to the maximum of such material which can be effectively taught each learner.

In the experiential aims we seek the fruit of a knowledge of the truth, in the experience of saving faith in Christ by every non-believer and growth in grace on the part of every child of God. Of course neither of these objects can be attained by our efforts, but only by the Holy Spirit. Yet it is our responsibility so to plant and water that God may bless with increase. In pursuance of the first aim, those outside the covenant must be instructed concerning the Triune God and His holiness, the law of God, their sin, and the offer, invitation, command and warning of the gospel as revealing the love of God toward sinners manifested in His way of salvation. In aiming at the growth in grace of the believer we should train in habits of worship, with special emphasis on Sabbath observance; we should teach obedience, and train in the use of the means of grace. There must be a constant aim at the increasing realization of the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of those under our care. Finally, the teachers of the church must train and lead in Christian witnessing and service. It is not enough to teach men to know the

doctrine. There must also be every encouragement and aid to guide them in adorning the doctrine with fruitful lives.

In applying these aims specifically to covenant subjects it is with respect to covenant youth particularly that we must declare our principles. According to the Word of God and our subordinate standards, children are included with believing parents in the covenant of grace. They receive the sacrament of baptism as the sign and seal of their engrafting into Christ as members of His

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mystical body. As Charles Hodge has put it: "...since the promise is not only to parents but to their seed, children are by the command of God to be regarded and treated as of the number of the elect." ("The Church Membership of Infants", *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, vol. XXX, no. II [April 1858] pp. 375f.) And again, "The status, therefore of baptized children is not a vague or uncertain one, according to the doctrine of the reformed Churches. They are members of the church. .." (*Idem*, p. 389) And the Directory for the Public Worship of God states: "Children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers; and all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and, by their baptism, are bound to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh; they are Christians, and federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized." (Directory for the Public Worship of God, Chapter VI; cf. Directory of Worship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Chapter IV, Sections 2, 5.) Though we cannot know when and how, or in what degree the Spirit works in their hearts, we dare not regard as aliens in need of reconciliation those whom Christ has taken in His arms. Our aim must be to bring them to full realization and avowal of the covenant blessings and claims.

This principle involves a great responsibility for Christian parents and for church sessions. The conditions of the covenant which we claim must be met. We must place before even the command to evangelize the lost this prior responsibility of bringing up the children of the church in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The distinctiveness of the position of children in the covenant demands a separate program of covenant education designed to reach these aims. While this of course does not mean that covenant youth must be segregated from others in classes open to both, nevertheless our responsibility to them cannot be discharged unless a separate program is first established.

In applying the general aims of Christian education to non-covenant subjects the proper order must be observed. The primary aim must be to bring the subject to the point of saving faith in Christ. To this end the law of God must be enjoined, but always as a tutor to bring men to Christ, never as a means of pleasing God by good works. To gloss over the crisis of decision for Christ and then to instruct in Christian virtue as though the unsaved subject had the power to please God is to heal his wound but slightly, confuse the issues of eternal well-being, blunt the sword of the Spirit, and expose the subject to the dangers of hypocrisy and self-righteousness to his infinite loss and our judgment. However, the common grace of God must be recognized, and effort should be made to curb vices and instill relative virtues in the hearts and lives of the lost, even while teaching them of their total inability to reform themselves or please God in their own strength. In dealing with non-covenant children too young to make a creditable profession of faith we must remember that God's work in the heart need not await the years of discretion. We must seek to elicit from the youngest such child some indication of love toward Christ, and insofar as such evidence is forthcoming, we must regard them in the judgment of charity as babes in the Lord. Of course we must recognize the provisional character of such childish responses, and seek to strengthen and intensify them, but it would be a great wrong to regard a child as an alien and enemy of God's, simply because his tender years prevent the evidences of his Spirit-wrought love for Christ from assuming that form which the Word of God demands for adults. No formula of teaching can here supply that sympathetic yet faithful care which the consecrated teacher must provide.

### III The Method

Two requirements are demanded of Christian educational method: it must be sound in principle and efficient in operation. The primary canon for the

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soundness of a method is that it must be Scriptural. Among the Scriptural requirements a few may be mentioned: first there must be a recognition of the authority of God, speaking in His Word. This eliminates certain methods, curtails others. Religious norms are not to be arrived at, for example, by a discussion method appealing to experience, though this method is widely used in religious education today. Methods of so-called creative religious expression in which worship services are aesthetically planned for the devotional "experience" they afford, without regard to the authority of Scripture must similarly be rejected. While the initiative of the child must be stimulated for successful

learning, there must be a wholesome reverence in the atmosphere of Christian instruction in which the authority of God, and of the teacher as God's representative, is acknowledged and respected by the child. Our methods and program must emphasize the God-given authority and responsibility of the parents and the church officers in training the youth.

Another Scriptural principle affecting our method is the privilege and duty of the Christian Sabbath. Seeking our "own pleasure" on His Holy Day is improper, as our Standards declare. Cf. Isaiah 58:13 and Conf. Ch. 21, sec. 8; Shorter Catechism Q. 60; Larger Catechism Q. 117, 119. Therefore, all activities permitted children under our care, much more those enjoined upon them, must be carefully scrutinized. It is admittedly difficult to define in all cases the boundary between that which is one's own pleasure and expressional activity of pedagogical value. The spirit in which the child enters upon a given activity will often be determinative. But it is our responsibility carefully to instruct the child in the meaning of the Sabbath and to refrain from placing any stumbling-blocks in his way. Educational activity can be made pleasant and effective without violating this principle. The child who learns to sanctify the first day of the week has committed himself to a lifetime of intensive Christian education. The teaching of Sabbath-keeping may prove difficult, as is the teaching of other commandments, but it cannot be omitted or made subsidiary. Some methods of teaching perfectly proper on other days ought not to be used on the Lord's Day.

The field of Christian pedagogy and psychology is both vast and in great measure undeveloped. A few principles may be stated, however. Christian teaching method must be God-centered, with the glory of God as its final aim. The "modern" method in education makes much of its child-centered approach in distinction from the curriculum-centered approach of the older method, in which the material to be taught allegedly received more attention than the pupil. Obviously abuse in either direction is possible, and certainly the chaotic futility of almost uncontrolled "self-expression" in the extreme progressive school presents a much more alarming picture than the evils it pretends to correct. Proper balance can be achieved only when neither the materials nor the pupil are regarded as ends in themselves, but are alike subordinated to God's glory. The material of our teaching cannot be subordinated to the child, for, unlike the curriculum of modern pagan education, it is not prepared from sociological considerations for utilitarian goals, but is God's eternal truth. But on the other hand, it was Christ who set the child in the midst, warning against causing such to stumble, and who commanded His apostle to feed His lambs. No humanistic theory can claim a

concern for the learner comparable to that which springs from the zeal of the Christian teacher for fruit to the glory of God in the life of each pupil.

This means that Christian education must outstrip any pagan methodology in seeking pupil response, not only after learning but in the learning process itself. It is no news to the Christian that learning involves activity: how often has it been declared that every hearing of the Word of God is accompanied by some reaction either of faith or unbelief. Christians attending to a sermon are not regarded as passive hearers, but as active worshippers. But the response at which we aim is primarily inward, so that the learner becomes a faithful hearer and doer of the Word of God. Artificial devices for pupil activity often' not only fail to advance real learning, but even constitute a barrier by making the lesson theme trivial or ridiculous. We must utilize the non-voluntary

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attention gained by interest-catching methods and devices, but the attention we covet as of lasting value to the learner is the voluntary attention given out of a desire to know God's truth. Our aim is not only the direct learning of the material, but also the concomitant learning of salutary attitudes and responses. We must beware of long-continued forced attention which may produce aversion to the material and the teacher, and even foster rebellion against God.

Christian pedagogy cannot concur in the undue emphasis on the sensory and motor faculties which is so prevalent in modern education. The plethora of methods featuring manual activity and sensory motor experience have a strictly limited usefulness in Christian education. Verbal and conceptual methods must remain the mainstay of the work of teaching spiritual realities. Where manual methods give concreteness to the particular lesson subject or provide real expression of the lesson truth they ought to be used, but they must not be elevated to a ritual in themselves.

Memorization occupies a God-appointed place in Christian education. The Word of God must be written on the heart of the learner. It must become his meditation day and night. Scripture portions, catechism, hymns of the church should be committed to memory in general accordance with a graded schedule. An effort should be made to help the child to understand the material to be memorized.

Christian education must be keenly aware of individual differences among pupils as well as differences in age and sex. The multiform character of God's Word and the example of Christ's teaching are potent reminders that God expects us to adapt the truth to the level of the learner. Teaching is personal work, and the teacher must not

only study about children, he must study his own pupils and draw from the infinite variety of the Word to meet each individual need. The Biblical picture of the teacher is that of a shepherd who knows and loves his sheep, not merely a herald proclaiming a message.

Studies in child psychology agree in little more than a declaration of the vast variety of children's capabilities and interests. What norms may be established are so broad that they are of little value to the particular teacher, whose pupils are likely all above or below the plotted curve. The major task of lesson adjustment must be made by the teacher, not in the standardized lesson materials. The most practical policy would seem to be a planned variety in lesson helps, sometimes aiming to help the teacher with the advanced pupils, sometimes with the retarded ones. The eventual aim should be to equip the teacher to adapt the lessons and supply him with background material rather than to attempt the presentation of a "lesson" verbatim.

Methods employed must be efficient in operation as well as sound in principle. The very limited time in which the pupil is in our care places the strictest requirements on method. Many teaching practices entirely sound in principle must be rejected simply because they are not economical enough with respect to time. The project method, for example, may have great values, but as a rule it is far too time-consuming for use in our program. The time factor puts a premium on the lecture, story-telling, question and answer, and limited discussion methods. Where these sustain sufficient attention and interest, they are the most efficient.

With regard to method generally it must be remembered that it is never an end in itself. Variations in the lesson material and the learner will call for variation of method. Instruction should be kept flexible, so that method may be subordinated to lesson aim. A fixed schedule demanding a certain method will often result in inefficiency.

Specific teaching methods of use in Christian education include: lecture and story-telling, discussion, catechizing, interrogation, supervised study, memorization-recitation, assignment-research, project, and dramatization. Of these, no particular method of teaching can legitimately claim to be the sole method meeting with divine approval. Nor can any one of these methods in and of itself be adjudged contrary to Scriptures. There is considerable illustration in Scripture of the lecture method and to some extent of the discussion and

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interrogation methods. Because the aims of Christian education demand the communication of a body of revealed truth, the lecture method has obvious prominence. However, its effectiveness is conditioned by the attitude and mental alertness of the listener, and it must often give way to other methods, at least in part, so that these conditions may be secured. In the final analysis, method is but a vehicle for the conveyance of truth, and if used in accord with Scripture the particular method is justified which brings about the desired results. If the project and dramatization methods are used, they must be used with care, lest the Sabbath be violated, or the study proceed upon other than Scriptural bases.

Visual, auditory, manual, and other sensory aids are, like the various teaching methods, but vehicles to help in the communication of truth, and as such are justifiable, so long as they do not become ends in themselves. If they serve no such useful purpose, they should not be used. The teaching methods of Christ appear plainly to endorse some use of teaching aids. It is therefore advisable to exercise a moderate use of such aids, especially in view of the fact that they help to arouse interest, promote attendance, and make lasting impressions.

A word of caution is in order with regard to the use of pictures and portraits of Jesus Christ. When such pictures are used, the teacher should be careful to state that they are not true likenesses of Jesus as He lived on earth in Palestine, but only the artist's picture of how he imagined Christ appeared while on earth. Such pictures should be accompanied with the statement of the biblical facts regarding Jesus Christ, and by emphasis on the fact of His deity. While very few hints, if any, as to the physical appearance of the incarnate Christ are found in Scripture, the very fact of His incarnation makes it unnatural not to picture Him in human form. Of course the use of pictures as objects of worship is forbidden in the second commandment, and any danger of a superstitious or mystical reverence for such pictures should be guarded against by insistence on the imaginary character of the pictures, and on the worship of the Triune God only in a spiritual manner.<sup>2</sup>

Projects and other expressional activities correlated with or growing out of class teaching are recognized as desirable weekday activities under the supervision of the teachers. While too time-consuming for classroom use, such activities have real teaching

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<sup>2</sup> Later in the same GA this approach to using imaginary pictures of Jesus was opposed, "A motion that the Committee on Christian Education be instructed to refrain from using pictures of the Saviour in its program was defeated. Dr. William Young and Messrs. Freeman and Rankin requested that their affirmative votes be recorded." Minutes, p. 54. The GA returned to this subject in 1957, and the current position is published on the OPC website, <https://opc.org/cce/PicturesOfChrist.html>



value, are attractive to the pupils, and form fixed associations for truths outlined during class periods. They also help pupils to use leisure time with profit.

#### IV Program

The chief problem in organizing a program which will be adequate both to the aims of covenant education and those of evangelistic education lies in the necessity of maintaining the distinctiveness of the two aims in practical situations which demand overlapping and integration. The accompanying outline contains a suggested grouping of the major responsibility for covenant education is placed where the Scripture places it: With the home and the church. The responsibility of the church must be borne particularly by the minister and other elders. The evangelistic program is conducted with the help of lay teachers in the weekly evangelistic school (usually the Sabbath School) and daily vacation school. The officers of the church, in order to discharge their responsibility in the matter, should provide an adequate teacher and leader training program. In administering the program it is of vital importance that children who respond to evangelism in accordance with their level of development receive the benefits of Christian nurture either by inclusion in the covenant program or through a special transitional class of instruction. On the other hand, covenant children should be required to attend the evangelistic schools, as a witness and example to others, but also to receive instruction intended to supplement specifically covenant training. The evangelistic program must therefore be integrated in curriculum with the covenant program.

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#### Outline

##### I. Subjects

- A. Covenant subjects
  - 1. Communicant
  - 2. Non-communicant
- B. Non-covenant subjects

##### II. Aims

- A. General
  - 1. Noetic: knowing the doctrine
    - a. Bible history

- b. Theology
    - c. Ethics
    - d. Church government and usages
  - 2. Experiential: adorning the doctrine
    - a. Saving faith
    - b. Growth in grace
      - (1) Worship (inc. Sabbath observance)
      - (2) Obedience
      - (3) Use of the means of grace
      - (4) Realization of the fruit of the Spirit
      - (5) Christian witnessing and service
- B. Applied
  - 1. With respect to covenant relation
  - 2. With respect to age, ability, background

### III. Method

- A. Requirements of method
  - 1. Sound in principle
    - a. Scriptural
    - b. Pedagogically and psychologically sound
  - 2. Efficient in operation
    - a. Conserving time
    - b. Utilizing best means available
- B. Specific applied methods
  - 1. Specific teaching types
  - 2. Aids to teaching.
  - 3. Expressional activities

### IV. Program

- Problems of integration
  - A. Chiefly designed for covenant subjects
    - 1. Guided parental instruction
    - 2. Pastor's instruction of covenant youth
    - 3. Teacher and leadership training program
  - B. Chiefly designed for non-covenant subjects
    - 1. Sunday Bible school

2. Weekly classes
3. Club program
4. Evangelistic meetings and propaganda

C. Dual-purpose programs

1. Weekday religious education
2. Vacation Bible school
3. Summer Bible conference
4. Young People's Society
5. Home Study programs

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