

AN INTEGRAL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION ¹

THE Christian religion teaches us that we have been made by God for Eternal Life; that is our supreme and final purpose. Here we have no abiding city; we are travellers on our way to our home, and our journey is designed by God to fit us for our home when we get there. That is why to the Christian this world is supremely important; not as an end in itself; so considered it is worthless and to be despised; but as the means by which our personalities and characters are prepared by God for the eternal happiness of Heaven. This life then prepares us for Eternal Life and the purpose of education is to prepare us to live this life in such a way that we may be made fit for Eternal Life.

A Christian believes that each human person is specially made by God, specially endowed with certain qualities and capacities; set in particular circumstances, in a particular family, belonging to a particular nation with its own peculiar tradition and culture. That is the Christian doctrine of vocation; the belief that God calls each of us to a particular place and work in his scheme; and that our place and work is of supreme importance because it is the means by which we fit ourselves by the power of his grace for Eternal Life. What that place and work is to be should be decided largely by the circumstances in which God has placed us, and by the capacities with which he has endowed us; our family, the culture and tradition into which we are born, our education in home and in school; all these should play their part in the great decision: 'What is God's vocation for me?' To most men and women, as they enter upon adult life, a further question comes for decision. 'Is it God's will that I should marry; that I should carry on my life's work in partnership; that I should make myself jointly responsible for a family—for bringing other human beings into existence and educating them for life?'

Vocation then, to the Christian, means the belief that God calls us to a particular way of life best suited to us because he has given us qualities and capacities which fit us for it, and has set us in circumstances which make it possible for us. The following out of this way of life faithfully and in accordance with God's laws is the means under God by which we are built up into the kind of character and

¹ The substance of a speech made at the Rugby Christian Life Week, May 11th, 1943.

personality that he wants us to be in order that we may be fit for Eternal Life. And this doctrine of vocation lies at the very heart of a true understanding of Christian education. Every human being created by God is above all else a person, with a human nature common to us all and yet each an individual with his or her particular characteristics and capacities. And since at birth a human being is undeveloped capacity, to be made or marred by life, education is of supreme importance because through it these capacities are developed. It is the primary function of Christian education to teach that they cannot be developed by human power alone; that human nature is fallen; that evil and sin are terrible realities which must be fought with and conquered; but that Christ our Lord has entered our life and identified himself with it in order to redeem it, and that in his power alone can we become the personalities God wants us to be. 'I live, yet not I but Christ liveth in me.' The first aim of Christian education should be to develop the human person as such, preserving its individual characteristics, without allowing them to disturb the balance of the personality by over development. It must make human persons into full men or women, grown to full stature, moral and mental, in the power of God's grace; having drawn the material of their growth from the culture and surroundings in which God has placed them, however humble these may be.

Christian education will render the mind keen and critical, sensitive to truth, with its awareness and discrimination highly trained; at the same time the affective side of human nature, the heart, will not be starved but allowed full scope under the strong command of the will; the imagination will be fed and yet disciplined; the body controlled and exercised so that it becomes a fitting instrument of the spirit. As the process of education goes forward first of all in the family and later also at school, individual capacities and aptitudes appear more and more clearly; and gradually, without detriment to the personality as a whole, vocational training, the secondary aim of education, will be introduced. The human person is approaching maturity and is ready to begin learning the special craft or skill which is to be his or her vocation in life. It is in the lifelong exercise of this craft or skill that the character and personality are built up and perfected for Eternal Life. A doctor makes himself into the man he becomes largely through the exercise of his profession; through contacts with his patients, through his conscientious and self-sacrificing efforts to save life and relieve human suffering. If his professional ideals become lowered his whole character will deteriorate and to that extent he will be unfitting himself for Eternal Life. And

what is true of the doctor is true also of the dustman, of the engineer and the coal miner, of the merchant and the factory worker. All must glorify God who made them in and through their vocation, and all in doing so will build up their lives and characters in accordance with God's will.

That is the ideal of Christian education. By way of contrast let us set over against it the ideals of a secularised education, an education from which religion, as basic principle and energising force has been banished. Such an education must of necessity be materialist in this sense; that it envisages only this life and the things of this life. It may value the things of the mind, but it values them only as the crowning achievement of man in this life. It may put forward ideals of unselfishness, brotherhood and love of the community, but it derives these ideals partly from an observance of the Natural Law and partly from the Christian tradition, the relics of which still permeate our national life. But it can offer no solid reason why these things should be practised by all men, still less can it supply any dynamic force which will urge them to do so. It clings obstinately to the belief that, given knowledge and a favourable environment, human nature will become perfect. It remains blind to the fact that left to themselves and unaided by God's grace men turn all too easily to self-worship with its accompanying greed and selfishness. And because of this it encourages, often unconsciously, a love of the luxury of material things and in this way comes to worship money because money alone can buy them.

And so the materialist conception of life promoted by a secularised education tends to make money the most important thing in the world. Work, instead of being loved for its own sake as the vocation by which we are sanctified, often becomes primarily an avenue to money-making. Quality, whether in actions or things, takes second place and the important question becomes 'Will it sell?' Work is undertaken and things are made not because they fulfil a human need but because they bring in profits; and every means, moral and immoral, is employed to sell them. What is worse, neither the making of them nor the selling of them can be anything but degrading to the dignity of human nature, and therefore quite unfit to be a vocation which of itself can prepare those who follow it for Eternal Life. This lowering of the dignity of human nature is the result of the exclusion of God and God's Law from human life, for high ideals of human nature and the purpose of human life depend in the last resort upon a recognition of the sovereignty of God who created man and gave him that nature and purpose.

The secularisation of society leads inevitably to a growing sense of purposelessness and frustration. Human nature must have something to work for; deprived of the knowledge of its true purpose which is God, it will put other things in his place and worship them as gods; money, power, pleasure and the rest. War can provide us with a purpose and ideal; self-defence in the face of common danger. That is a high aim because it is a self-sacrificing one, but of its nature it can only be temporary, and when the tension and effort of war has passed away, unless our world can regain its belief in God and in the Christian way of life it is doomed to fall back again into that sense of purposelessness and frustration which is the inevitable result of secularisation.

That secularisation has already penetrated deeply into our contemporary civilisation. The process has been a subtle one; the very gradual disintegration of a civilisation and culture which we have inherited from the past; a culture saturated with the Christian spirit and Christian values. It embodied Christian standards and took Christian virtues and the Christian character as its ideal. For a very long time disintegrating influences had been doing their unseen work, and suddenly, after the shock of the last war, we woke to the fact that we were surrounded by the dry bones of a culture from which the life-giving Christian spirit had been almost drained. In its place we found a man-centred materialist spirit with aims which spell death to the building up of Christian character and life.

It is true, thank God, that considerable areas of Christian culture remain. Up and down the country are to be found homes and schools which are strong pockets of resistance to the inroads of the materialist spirit. But the forces of that powerful enemy, like the Nazi panzer columns, have driven deep into our lines and have cut us off and isolated us and bid fair, unless our resistance can be reorganised, to swamp us altogether.

It is through our Christian education that this resistance to the inroads of materialism must be organised, and to effect this we must first be aware at what point in our present system of education the spirit of materialism has already found entrance. It is a truism that education begins in the home, and the ideal of Christian education is that the school should be an extension of the home. Where home life is sound the work of the school is made easy, but where a sound home life is lacking religious teaching in school can seldom fully make up for its absence. One of the most obvious signs of the breakdown of our Christian culture is the disintegration of family life which is characteristic of our time. This breakdown affects in some degree

even those homes where religion is professed and practised. If the life of the family is based on a true spiritual companionship between the parents, if as a result of this companionship that life is saturated with a deep sense of spiritual realities, the children from their youngest years will imbibe a consciousness of the reality and nearness of the unseen world. Its inhabitants will be their constant companions, and their young intelligences will be trained by precept and example to judge the world around them by the standard of values of Christ and his saints. In this way a Christian character will be built up in them which by God's grace will be proof against the inroads of materialism.

But if in the lives of the parents there are two competing areas; one, and that perhaps the larger one, ruled, often unconsciously, by false standards drawn from the materialistic spirit with which they are surrounded; standards which cut across the Christian idea of vocation and make work nothing more than a means of money-making, and position and material welfare the supremely important things in life; and the other area consciously governed by the precepts of religion, where explicitly Christian standards obtain, the result will be a tension caused by conflicting loyalties. The consciousness of God's sovereignty and the realities of sin and grace will grow dim, and the life of the family will become saturated with a spirit which is an uneasy compromise between the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world; an attempt to serve both God and Mammon. The characters of children brought up in such a family will be unsettled characters, part Christian and part pagan. Christian life has broken down and in all probability the children in adult life will fall easy victims, in a greater or lesser degree, to the materialism that surrounds them.

That this breakdown does occur, and occur widely, seems to be proved by the fact that so many families which profess and practise religion are indistinguishable in their attitude to daily life; to vocation, to work, to money; from families which make no such profession. There ought to be a wide gulf of separation between the two; in practice their seldom is.

I think that this is the main educational problem that our schools must tackle, and the tackling of it will involve setting before our young people the dangers that lie hidden in an uncritical acceptance of materialist standards. To counteract this acceptance there is a great need for definite and explicit instruction in a pattern of Christian living in a world which if not hostile to Christian standards is quite indifferent to them. They must be taught, and taught explicitly,

that the following of Christ involves self-sacrifice of a high order; that they cannot be real Christians and at the same time expect not to differ in their standards in regard to everyday things from the companions among whom they live. Moreover, the pattern of Christian living should include instruction both for boys and girls on marriage and on the building of a Christian home and family. The difficulties which they will meet with in the modern world if they are to make these things their ideal must be made plain to them. I believe that in tackling this problem great use could be made of a really living Christian Youth Movement, and I think also that the Old Boys' and Girls' Associations attached to our schools, instead of being purely social affairs, might be made the medium of a real revival of Christian Family Life.

Of Christian family life we have in England a splendid tradition which is by no means dead, but the seeds of its disintegration have been sown. It is based on Christian principles and it can only be kept alive by a vigorous revival of Christian life. School and family should be bound together with the closest of ties. In the family education proceeds from the intimate and loving companionship of the persons that compose it. It is out of the loving companionship of husband and wife that the atmosphere of home is first created, and as the children are born and grow up the circle of that companionship is extended and enriched. It is an intimate contact of personalities at every level; of parents with children and children of differing ages with parents and with each other. At every level: there is instruction and development of the intelligence; and these are not isolated, for there is also loving affection, the powerful force of good example, of unselfishness and co-operation in a common life, of a deep spirit of community fostered by love. In a Christian school all these elements must be present. There must be instruction and development of the intelligence, but there must be also intimate contact of personalities between teachers and taught; in classroom, in recreation, in hobbies and in the deep confidences of friendship and affection. There must be a strong community spirit fostered by love of Christ and of each other in Christ. In this atmosphere the danger of a divorce between religion and the realities of everyday life is reduced to minimum, and the spirit of Christ will penetrate into every department of life.

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