

The Presbyterian Guardian

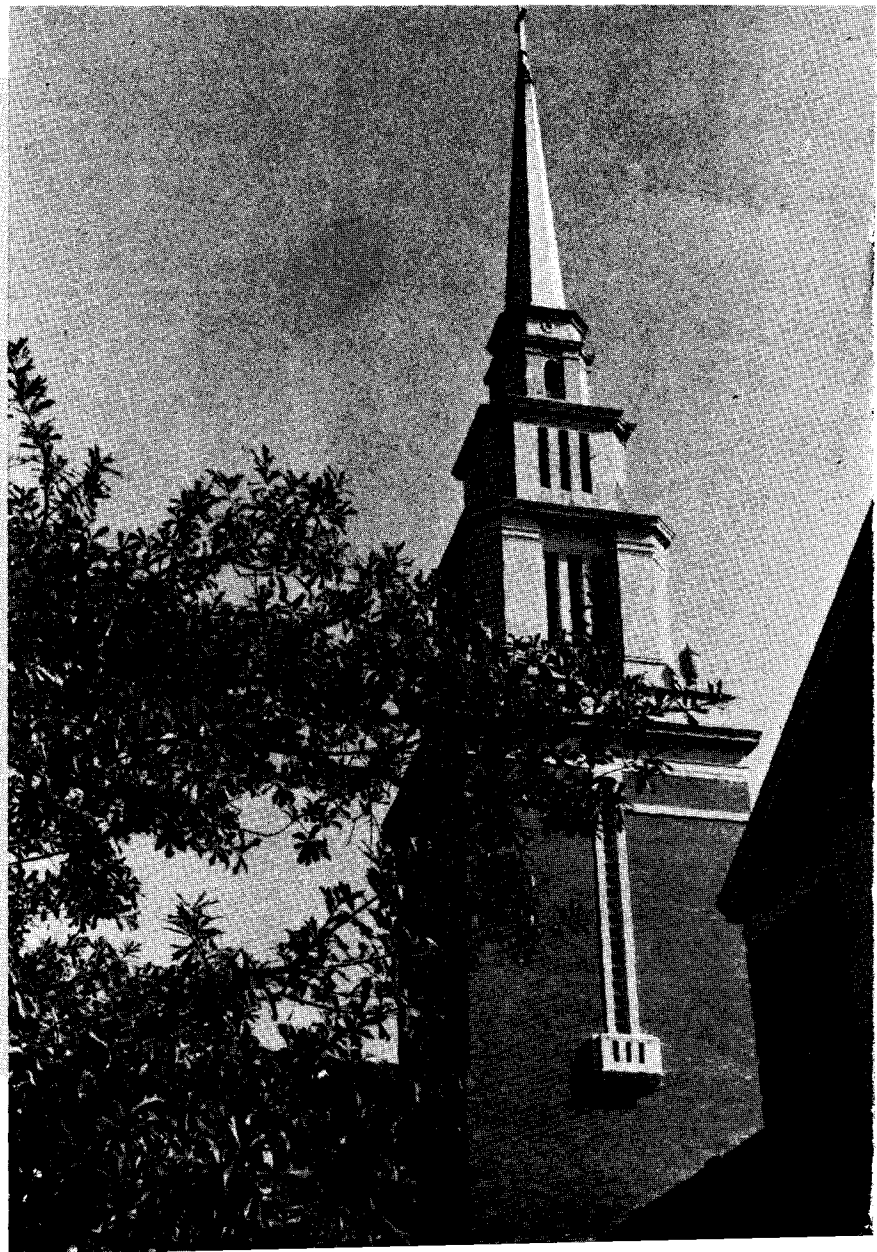
VOL. 44, NO. 9—OCTOBER, 1975

THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY

*Presbyterian
Church
in
America*

SEPTEMBER 9–12, 1975

JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI



Christian Education

JOHN MURRAY

Anyone who is alive to and reflects upon our social responsibilities knows how colossal and complex an undertaking is the education of youth. The evils encountered by education are manifold, and there is no uniformity in the problems arising. They vary from decade to decade and from place to place, indeed from individual to individual.

This topic may be approached from the angle of an evil of which I fear too few are aware, but one that is the bane of all education. It is the bane of fragmentation. By fragmentation I mean that the pupil is not provided with what imparts a sense of unity, of wholeness, of correlation. This may most properly be called the need for and aim of *integration*. There is ground for suspicion that this directing principle is frequently absent and, therefore, those responsible for education need to address themselves to this question for self-assessment.

Perhaps the most germane example of the thesis that integration is a paramount concern of education is the place that education occupies in the fostering and development of character. Culture, however highly cultivated, has failed of its chief end if it contributes to the promotion of evil rather than good. The more highly educated the boy or girl becomes the more dangerous the education acquired if it is brought into the service of wrongdoing.

It is easy to say that fostering and cultivating good character is not the concern of the school but the function of the home and the church. Admittedly, the home and church are basically responsible and it is obvious that when they neglect this cultivating or are even remiss in it, then the school is faced with a well-nigh impossible task.

But it is apparent how devastating to the best influences exerted by the home and church will be the influence of the school if it pretends to be neutral on moral issues or if its teaching is alien to the ethical principles inculcated by home or church or both. And how chaotic for the pupil if opposing ethical norms are fostered in the same school. We know only too well to what depraved human nature inclines.

A Christian integrating view

Underlying the plea for integration and coordination in education is the need for a unified world view, a common conception of reality. If there is basic divergence in world views there cannot possibly be integration in education.

I am assuming that in this audience there is the acknowledgement that the Christian faith is ultimate for thought and outlook, that the Scriptures are the Word of God and the infallible rule for faith and practice, and that for us now special revelation from God comes to us only in these Scriptures. And I submit that on any other premise our Christian faith cannot be maintained.

I am well aware that in Christ we have the supreme revelation of God. He is God incarnate, the effulgence of God's glory and the express image of his being; he is the

If boys and girls are in the image of God, their chief end cannot be anything less than to glorify God and enjoy him. Education that is destitute of this objective has lost its direction.

focus of revelation. But this in no way displaces or prejudices the finality of Scripture because only in Scripture do we have the revelation that Christ is and only through Scripture do we come into saving contact with him.

Now if the biblical revelation is ultimate for thought, outlook, and practice, we must readily see the implications for education. Education must aim at integration and this integration must rest upon and proceed from a world view, an integrated conception of reality. The Christian, unless he is afflicted with intellectual schizophrenia, derives his integration and his world view from the Christian faith, and this means from the Christian revelation which is the Holy Scripture.

A Christian world view

The thesis is not that of religious education in schools and not simply that of Christian education in schools. The thesis does imply the latter. But there may be Christian education in schools and yet the education may not be Christian.

The reason is that the subjects which are the main business of the school curriculum are not taught from the standpoint of the world view derived from the Christian revelation. Christianity gives us a world view; it enunciates principles that underlie all our thinking if we are Christian; it prescribes the governing conceptions in terms of which we are to interpret reality. Christianity is not something tacked on to our world view; it is itself a world view. And the central features of our Christian faith are conditioned by and in turn condition that world view.

Two examples will suffice, the teaching of history and science.

History is the unfolding of God's plan in the world he created, that he sustains by his power, and that he directs in wisdom, justice, and grace. It is not that we can scan the hidden purposes of God or fathom the depths of his counsel. But how important for life to know that history is not the product of aimless fate but that God's counsel stands and he will do all his pleasure.

The grandeur of God's sovereignty must govern our view of history. No greater service can be rendered by the school than to insure that children and youth become imbued with this conception. By the same token, it is tragedy if we fail.

In respect of science, there are two principles that have

(Continued on page 142.)

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

(Continued from page 135.)

to be borne in mind. The first is that the pursuit of science is in fulfillment of God's mandate to subdue the earth and therefore to bring its resources into the service of man. This should impress upon us the dignity of the vocation of scientific research. This is the Christian attitude and it is not too early for pupils at the primary level to be imbued with this attitude as their teachers seek to demonstrate the wonders and treasures of the world in which they live and from which they derive their sustenance.

The second principle is that "the highest aim of scientific investigation" is "to glorify God by bringing to light the wonders which God fabricated into the structure of this marvellous world and the universe of which it is a part" (G. H. Girod in *Torch and Trumpet*, Sept. 1967, p. 4). We should be constrained to exclaim at every stage of scientific progress, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom thou hast made them all: the earth is full of thy riches" (Psalm 104:24).

It is readily seen how radically different the classroom becomes when these two principles govern the thought of the teacher and are therefore communicated to the pupils. And let it not be forgotten that no other orientation is compatible with the world view our Christian faith provides and demands.

In other words, every thought is brought into captivity to Christ and therefore to the revelation of which Christ is the focus. And the Christian teacher abandons his or her faith at the point of vocation in life if he or she fails to bring this integration to bear upon the education conducted. In a word, education must be Christian. And this means far more than that the teacher acts as a Christian; it means that the subject matter must derive its integrating principle from Scripture.

Christian view of creation

It is not difficult to illustrate how this orientation comes to expression and conditions the character of instruction. No tenet is more basic in our Christian faith than the doctrine of creation, that God created the heavens and the earth. This is the answer to the whence of our world.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." That God made the world and all things is close to the first, if not the first, element of nursery instruction. And it is a capital mistake to think that this concept diminishes in relevance as education advances. No question is more urgent than that of whence. Whence our environment? Whence the universe in which we live?

Correlative is the doctrine of God's providence, that not only did God make the world but that he sustains it by his power and directs it by his wisdom, and that, as we have derived our being from him, so in him we live and move and have our being.

We are painfully aware of the extent to which aimlessness, frustration, and despair have gripped our generation. Life for so many is devoid of meaning or purpose. Are we to suppose that our schools have no responsibility? Admittedly the family and church bear a large share of the default creating this situation. But unless the school fosters the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom, the influence of the home and church, even when it is highly exemplary, tends to be negated. It is common knowledge that in many cases the school has undermined what home

and church have sought to establish and develop.

On the other hand, it is to the credit of teachers and schools that when home and church have gone by default, these teachers and schools have done the greatest service in filling the vacuum left in the cultivating of the pupils.

Christian view of man

I have referred to creation by God and to his all-sustaining and directing providence as basic to the world view that Christian revelation provides and, therefore, as indispensable to the integration a biblically oriented education will furnish. But there is another aspect of the Christian revelation that is fundamental to this same objective. Education is concerned with human beings. But what is, who is man?

Education apart from any conception of man as to his distinguishing identity, purpose, and destiny is inconceivable. Many teachers may not be intelligently aware of the theory underlying their teaching practice. But theory there must be. If it is not determined by conscious reflection on the part of the teacher, it has been shaped by tradition, or by the training the teacher received, or by the educational system in which the teacher plays a part.

If education is to be Christian, it must be based upon and conducted in terms of the Christian view of man. Otherwise it is not Christian, and if not Christian, it is alien and opposed to Christian interests.

What is man? What is his distinct identity and office? Here the Christian faith is unequivocal. The whence of man is, with all other things, the creative action of God. But what is his identity? It is that man was made in the image of God—not that the image of God is in man, but that man is in the image of God, man *is* God's image.

This is man's definition and it involves his function and purpose. The implications for education are obvious. Of paramount importance perhaps is the observation that education is hereby placed in an entirely different perspective by reason of the dignity belonging to the being of man and the corresponding responsibility devolving upon those concerned with the cultivating of that being.

To put it pointedly, education is concerned not with entities but with persons who are the image of God, persons with respect to whom this is most ultimate: they are made in the image of God. When teachers become imbued with this conception, then their vocation comes to be viewed in an entirely different perspective.

Christian view of man's goal

When the Westminster Assembly began their Shorter Catechism with the answer, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever," it was giving not only the keynote of a sound theology; it was enunciating a foundation principle of sound pedagogy.

If boys and girls are in the image of God, if that is their identity, their chief end cannot be anything less than to glorify God and enjoy him. Education that is destitute of this objective, or has allowed it to suffer eclipse, has lost its direction. That the glory of God and the enjoyment of him is the goal of all life is surely an axiom of Christian profession. Education cannot be an exception.

Christian view of redemption

If education is to be conducted in terms of the viewpoint provided by the Christian faith, then to ignore what is central in the Christian faith would be impossible. *To



Professor and Mrs. John Murray, with Logan and Ann Margaret, in picture taken in early 1975.

First Scottish Christian School

During the last few years of his life, Professor John Murray became very involved in the cause of parent-controlled Christian schools in Scotland. He helped organize a committee of teachers and parents who shared these convictions, and he spoke in a number of places in the Highlands on the nature and need of Christian education. He also arranged for the Rev. Geoffrey Thomas of Aberystwyth to speak at a number of meetings in October 1973 in Inverness and Dingwall which he chaired.

As a result of this activity and Professor Murray's leadership, the first Christian school in Scotland opened on September 10, 1974 at Balvraid, Dornoch, with six pupils ages 4 to 8 years. Professor Murray drove his son Logan the 14 miles to the school each day, where he was very happy.

This new school has incurred con-

siderable expense for furnishings and in purchasing a car to transport the children. On April 29, 1975, a meeting was arranged in Glasgow to explain to the Christians of southern Scotland the nature of Christian schools and to seek their support. The speaker again was the Rev. Geoffrey Thomas and that morning he was privileged to spend a little time with Professor Murray. The committee of the Christian School Society is certainly going to miss Mr. Murray's counsels and leadership. Their secretary is R. W. M. Mackenzie, Hilton of Cadboll, Fearn, Ross-shire IV20 1XP, Scotland.

We are indebted to the Rev. Geoffrey Thomas, pastor of the Alfred Place Baptist Church in Aberystwyth, Wales, for sending us this information and the lecture by Professor Murray reproduced here.

ignore what is central would nullify the Christian character of education. What is central? It is redemption, and redemption presupposes the need for redemption—sin in its guilt, defilement, and power.

Education is directed to those who are natively in rebellion against God. The essence of sin is to be against God and against our fellow human beings. This is its extreme gravity and the judgment of God is correspondingly extreme. If we fail to take account of our definition as human beings made in the image of God, then education misses its chief end to glorify God. But it is the fact that man is in God's image that makes sin so serious and makes all the more indispensable a specifically Christian instruction, an instruction centered in the realities of sin and redemption.

All of this is implicit in the term "Christian education." If it is Christian, it is Christ-centered and must find its focus in all that is involved in the person and work of Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Lord. Only the provisions of God's grace in Christ meet our need. To withhold from pupils the elements of the Christian faith is not only to conceal from them the realities of life but also to deprive them of the only means of meeting the exigencies and crises of life and of fulfilling the great end of their existence. To put it bluntly, it is to damn them to godlessness.

A Christian view in all subjects

It is plausible to maintain that, although the implications of the Christian faith have a close bearing upon the teaching of history, for example, yet in the teaching of languages, arithmetic, or mathematics, there could not be any difference between the secular school and the Christian school. Are we to suppose that there is a Christian Latin as distinct from non-Christian, a Christian arithmetic as distinct from non-Christian? This is not the contention of those espousing the cause of Christian education and it is a misunderstanding or misrepresentation to suppose or aver that it is. But the implications of the Christian faith have, nevertheless,

the most intimate bearing on instruction concerned with such subjects.

For example, in the subject of language it is a platitude to say that language is a most interesting phenomenon. But I submit that it is not a platitude to say that it is an astounding phenomenon. I also submit that there is a lamentable hiatus in the teaching of language if this feature is not impressed upon the student. For this hiatus neglects what supplies the highest motivation and incentive to language study. The point here is: Why does man speak? Why is there for man the privilege of such diversified and enriching communication? The reason is that God speaks and man speaks because he is made in the image of God. This is the foundation of Christian education as it is concerned with language and literature.

Or let us think of mathematics. It is not that there is a Christian and non-Christian mathematics. It is that in the Christian school mathematics is integrated with the world view provided and demanded by the Christian revelation. And the difference is concerned with this integration and the bringing of every subject into the service of the kingdom of God and of his Christ.

To conclude then, the sum is: "The whole range and content of education must be God-centered; that is, God must be the unifying principle and the interpreting principle of the whole curriculum" (*Blue Banner Faith and Life*, July-Sept. 1967, p. 128).

Professor John Murray, after a long and fruitful ministry of teaching at Westminster Theological Seminary, returned to his beloved Scotland. His interest in Christian schools goes back many years and he was an active supporter of efforts to establish such schools in the Philadelphia area. We rejoice that his own son may benefit from this interest. Professor Murray was called home to the Lord on May 8, 1975; a Christian school in Scotland is a fitting memorial to his life.