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The Aims of Christian Education

In discussing this topic, it may become necessary to touch upon a number of points which are closely related to it. Such points are matters pertaining to the transmission of information, teaching processes and procedures, the problem or task involved in the various acts connected with the stimulation of self-activity and the motivation of learning, and other considerations pertaining to curriculum construction. All these points are properly included in what the German educators are pleased to call the *Aufgabe* of education. At the same time it would seem possible to distinguish between this and the objectives, or aims, of Christian education, those known in the technical vernacular of Germany as *Ziele* in the proper sense of the term.

It may serve to clarify the discussion if we, first of all, quote definitions of a number of authors in the field. We shall do this without any particular order, our object here being merely to present various viewpoints. Emme and Stevick (*An Introduction to the Principles of Religious Education*, chapter VI) state: "The ultimate aim of religious education should be: (a) To guide the growing personality into experiences that will entail a progressive discovery of the deeper meaning of the world and of human nature; (b) to guide the growing personality in the continuous process of reconstruction which his ideals and standards of action for self and fellows must undergo, stage by stage of his development; (c) to foster a consciousness of God and a loyalty to His will, for its untold value as a motive in the right control of conduct; (d) to help the growing personality to develop a resourcefulness of its own in the discovery of ways of putting his ideals and his loyalty to God into action. . . . The ultimate aim of religious education is to help the individual in his own continuous reconstruction and readjustments of his experience, increasingly to understand, appreciate, and participate in, the Christian way of living fruitfully in this world." Of course we do not accept these views.

In an effort to bring out both the individual and the social bearings of Christian education, G. A. Coe writes (*A Social Theory of Religious Education*, p. 55): "The aim of Christian education becomes this: growth of the young toward and into mature and efficient devotion to the democracy of God and happy self-realization therein." The general objectives of religious education are discussed by W. C. Bower (*Religious Education in the Modern Church*, chap. II) under four topics: "The statement of general objectives might well assume four forms: in terms of personal life, the development of a complete, satisfying, and effective Christian personality; in terms of knowledge, such acquaintance with racial religious experience as will help the learner to arrive at convictions of his own concerning the religious values of life; in terms of the Christian institution, an aware and effective Church as a specialized agency for the interpretation and promotion of Christian ideals and purposes; in terms of the great society, the gradual and progressive reconstruction of social relations and functions on a spiritual basis."

In his book *How to Teach Religion*, G. H. Betts, in chapter III, sum-

marizes the threefold aim which he has proposed in the following words: "The aim in teaching is therefore definite, even if it is difficult to attain. This aim may be stated in three great requirements which life puts upon the child and every individual: 1. *Fruitful knowledge*; knowledge of religious truths that can be set at work in the daily life of the child now and in the years that lie ahead. 2. *Right attitudes*; the religious warmth, responsiveness, interests, ideals, loyalties, and enthusiasms which lead to action and to a true sense of what is most worth while. 3. *Skill in living*; the power and will to use the religious knowledge and enthusiasms supplied by education in shaping the acts and conduct of the daily life."

One of the most comprehensive statements of aims in religious education is presented by P.H. Vieth (*Objectives in Religious Education*, p. 80 ff.):

"I. To foster in growing persons a consciousness of God as a reality in human experience and a sense of personal relationship to Him.

"II. To lead growing persons into an understanding and appreciation of the personality, life, and teaching of Jesus Christ.

"III. To foster in growing persons a progressive and continuous development of Christlike character.

"IV. To develop in growing persons the ability and disposition to participate in, and contribute constructively to, the building of a social order embodying the ideal of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

"V. To lead growing persons to build a life philosophy on the basis of a Christian interpretation of life and the universe.

"VI. To develop in growing persons the ability and disposition to participate in the organized society of Christians, the Church.

"VII. To effect in growing persons the assimilation of the best religious experience of the race as effective guidance to present experience."

To this L. L. Carpenter adds, in chapter II of *Introduction to Religious Education*, edited by Price: "A school of religion in a Christian church would certainly have as its primary purpose so to teach and guide the pupils that they will live the Christian life in the fullest sense of the word. This is in harmony with the Master Teacher's Great Commission 'Go ye . . . and make disciples . . . , teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' Christian discipleship is surely an ultimate end for which we must strive."

In the excellent book *Catechetics* by Dr. M. Reu, Section IV (§ 23) is devoted to "The Aim of the Church in Religious Instruction," and the author defines his own aim in religious education in these words: "The aim is (1) faithfully to imbed and anchor in the *intellect* of the rising generation all the holy truths upon which the life of the mature congregation fundamentally is based, by which alone it is constantly renewed, and without a knowledge of which one cannot possibly participate in its entire life; (2) to stir the *emotions* to a vital interest in those truths; (3) to bend the *will* so that it may run in the paths in which the Holy Spirit, turning to account those truths in His own season, leads to personal faith and to participation in the life of the mature congregation." (P. 280.)

For the sake of variety and completeness we might include also the "second" great definition of the aim of education given by the English poet and educator John Milton when he writes: "The end of all education is for a child to gain the knowledge of God in Christ and out of that knowledge to love Him, to imitate Him, and to grow like Him."

Turning now to the field of German works of recent date in the field of catechetics, we find that Steinbeck (*Evangelische Religions-paedagogik fuer Kirche und Schule*) has included the thesis: "Das Ziel der christlich-kirchlichen Jugenderziehung ist ein religioes-sittliches: Erweckung des Glaubens und der Liebe als Prinzipien der Gemeinschaft mit Gott und des Dienstes am Naechsten." (P. 64.) And the discussion offered by Fendt (*Katechetik: Einfuehrung in die Grundfragen des kirchlichen Unterrichts der Gegenwart*) presents: *Aufgabe* (was ich lehren will), *Darbietung*, *Erklaerung*, *Anwendung*; and *Ziel* (was ich damit erreichen will), *Erlebnis*, *Bewertung*, *Antrieb zur Tat*. (P. 60 f.)

These definitions and explanations, taken from authors whose interests show a very wide divergence and an interesting dissimilarity of viewpoints, were offered at the beginning in order to stimulate thought along the lines of Bible information. For, although we well know that the Bible is not a text-book of pedagogy, nevertheless both its pedagogical maxims and its specific statements of objectives must be studied with painstaking care if we would understand what the Lord Himself demands as the objectives of Christian education.

At the very head of our list we place the passages in which the Lord Himself states certain objectives in connection with the office and ministry of preaching and teaching. In the Great Commission we are told: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you," Matt. 28, 19, 20, or, more literally: "Make disciples (learners) of all nations by baptizing . . . , by teaching them to observe all things." In Mark 16, 15, 16 the commission reads: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Another fundamental passage is 2 Tim. 3, 15-17: "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." We should take note here in particular of the $\sigma\tau\iota$ $\alpha\lambda\delta\alpha\varsigma$, for $\sigma\tau\iota$ expresses procedure, process, task, problem, function, or result, and of the $\iota\nu\alpha$, since this particle expresses aim or object. In other words, the first part of the sentence offers the *Aufgabe* of religious instruction, the second part the *Ziel*. For the sake of completeness we may add here at once the other passage which is commonly adduced when the purpose of teaching and learning is discussed, namely, Rom. 15, 4: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." The Lord Jesus Himself states in His

last instructions to His disciples "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations," Luke 24, 47. A most illuminating passage is found in the Letter to the Romans, where that great teacher the Apostle Paul states: "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? . . . So, then, faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God," Rom. 10, 14, 17. A similar important declaration is found Eph. 4, 11—16, where the apostle speaks of the gift of apostles, pastors, and teachers: "for the perfecting of the saints (πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων), . . . that we henceforth be no more children . . . , but may grow up into Him in all things."

Although these passages would already be sufficient to present the aims of Christian education, a few additional statements may well be added in order to show what God Himself expects by and through the work of the ministry. We offer them in their approximate chronological order, since it is interesting to note that the same thought runs through all the writings of the New Testament. Luke 1, 74, 75: "That we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life" (ἐν δούλει καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ). 1 Thess. 4, 3, 7: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification. . . . For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." 2 Cor. 5, 15, 17: "He died for all that they which live should henceforth not live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again. . . . Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Rom. 6, 4, 22: "Even so we also should walk in newness of life. . . . But now, being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life." Eph. 2, 10: "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Eph. 5, 25—27: "That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word . . . , that it should be holy and without blemish." Phil. 3, 8—12: "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord, . . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." Titus 2, 11—14: "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that (παιδεύουσα ἡμᾶς ἵνα), denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." 1 Pet. 2, 24: "That we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness." 2 Pet. 3, 18: "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Heb. 12, 14: "Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." The number of passages could be augmented by dozens, but this may suffice for the present, a few additional verses being alluded to in a summary of aims offered below.

With these passages the practise of the great teachers of the Bible agrees. Of John the Baptist the evangelist reports that he "did baptize in the wilderness and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission

of sins," Mark 1, 4. Or as Matthew reports the sum of his preaching, it consisted in the cry: "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," Matt. 3, 2. Concerning the Savior we receive the same information; for the evangelist states with regard to the beginning of His ministry: "Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the kingdom of God and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the Gospel," Mark 1, 14, 15. It was evidently the Lord's aim to bring men to the knowledge of salvation through the Gospel. And the same objective is evident in the ministry of St. Paul. He writes: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth," Rom. 1, 16.

The gist of these passages, then, and of many others which could be adduced may be given in the statement: The aim of Christian education is to bring men to faith, to train them in a life of sanctification, and to keep them in faith unto life eternal. This is usually stated by the old Lutheran dogmaticians in some form like this: *Finis theologiae salus hominum per gratiam Dei in Christo Iesu*. This one principal aim is frequently subdivided by speaking of *finis externus* and *internus*. Baier puts it this way: „*Finis theologiae revelatae duplex est: INTERNUS, qui consistit in actibus cognoscendi obiecta theologiae, non quomodo-cunque, sed quatenus accurate explicanda, confirmanda ac defendenda sunt, fidei et salutis hominum causa; et EXTERNUS, qui est ipsa fides et salus hominum, quaeque cum fide sunt coniuncta.*” (Ed. Walther, I, 36.) In this connection Walther adduces statements from Calov, Quenstedt, Gerhard, and Meisner, who express themselves much along the same lines, as when Gerhard writes: „*Intermedius ac proximus finis est vel internus, INFORMATIO hominum ad vitam aeternam, vel externus, ipsa beatitudinis sive vitae aeternae CONSECUTIO, Luc. 1, 77; Joh. 5, 39; 20 ult.; Rom. 15, 4; 2 Tim. 3, 16.*” Hoenecke (*Ev.-luth. Dogmatik*, I, 255) considers the objective only in connection with that of theology in the strictest sense and therefore states: "Der Zweck der Theologie ist die eigene Seligkeit und die des Naechsten (1 Tim. 4, 16; 1 Kor. 9, 22; Jak. 5, 10; Jud. 23). Doch ist die Seligkeit des Menschen nur beziehungsweise Zweck und soll einem hoeheren Zweck dienen, naemlich der Ehre Gottes, 1 Kor. 3, 10; 12, 3; 2 Kor. 3, 3."

Referring now to Christian education alone, it is fully Scriptural to state as its aim the salvation of men through the grace of God in Christ Jesus as revealed in the Gospel. To this chief aim all other aims are ancillary and subordinate, although we may follow the suggestion of some of the educators whose definitions have been quoted at the beginning of this article. That is, we may roughly divide the aims of Christian education into two (or three) sections. For this function of the Christian ministry includes, first of all, the imparting of the knowledge of sin and grace (*instruo*), to which may be added the need of making the information thus imparted functional (*educio*). In other words, cognition and emotion go side by side. But the training in sanctification (*doceo*) must be connected with these two aims in the most intimate manner, so that volition will be the natural outgrowth and concomitant of cognition and emotion.

A fact which clearly appears from our study of the Scripture-passages quoted above is this, that in the subordinate aims we may not insist upon a mechanical sequence. For these aims are not separate objectives, but they are closely connected, interrelated, and integrated, and the emphasis placed upon the one or the other of these objectives will depend upon the pupils, upon the agency, and upon the attendant circumstances. In connection with the First Commandment, for example, the aim with reference to such as are still without Christ is to work the knowledge of sin. The aim with respect to such as are already children of God, but know the strength of the Old Adam, is to work daily contrition and repentance on account of the absence of true fear, love, and trust in God and on account of the presence of various evidences of fine idolatry. And with regard to the Christians as such the aim in teaching this commandment will be to present a knowledge of the will of God pertaining to sanctification in the narrow sense as connected with this specific ordinance of God. Presenting justifying grace in connection with the First Commandment cannot possibly be a primary aim, but can merely be regarded as secondary, concomitant, and subordinate, with the purpose of making the application functional.

The concept *salus hominum* as the Scriptural aim of education comprises, according to the passages consulted, contrition over sin, acceptance of the Savior, together with a life of sanctification, and perseverance in faith. If we should desire to analyze this chief aim (*Endzweck*) of Christian education more specifically, we might, under the heading of subordinate or concomitant aims, suggest the following objectives. There is the *evangelistic* aim, which is employed in the case of such as have never heard of the Savior or as have not yet come to faith. In their case we must try to effect a knowledge first of sin (antecedent aim) and then of grace (consequent aim). Unless a person acknowledges himself to be a sinner according to the description given in Holy Scripture, he cannot take hold of the salvation wrought by Christ for all men. But just as soon as the repentant sinner turns to the cross of the Savior, as did the thief on the cross or the jailer of Philippi, the aim and object of Christian education is effected, and if such a person should be called into eternity immediately after his conversion, he would most certainly be saved.

But in the case of such pupils, both young and old, as have come to the knowledge of the Savior and have accepted the salvation offered in the Gospel, a second subordinate aim should be kept in mind, namely, that of the continuation in the Word. This might be called a concomitant aim of justification or the *functional* aim. It must keep in mind the Christian's need of a daily renewal, by which the Old Adam, through daily contrition and repentance, is drowned with all sins and evil lusts, so that a new man may daily come forth and arise who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever. This objective may be said to include, above all (a) daily regeneration, Rom. 6, 4, which may frequently be identical with the first conversion, namely, when a person is fallen from grace (David; Peter); (b) growth in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Pet. 3, 18, which may either

be a steady process or one with crests and troughs; (c) sanctification and all good works, including prayer and worship, Titus 2, 11; 1 Thess. 4, 3, 7; (d) ability to try the spirits, 1 John 4, 1; cp. John 10, 5; (e) giving an account of one's faith, 1 Pet. 3, 15; (f) contending for the faith once delivered to the saints, Jude 3; (g) ability of examining oneself before partaking of the Holy Communion, 1 Cor. 11, 23—29. With all these objectives is connected the aim of the preservation of the believer in the faith of the Savior to a blessed end, Rom. 1, 17, cp. with John 17, 3; Phil. 3, 12—14; Eph. 1, 3; 2, 6; Col. 3, 2, 4; Rom. 6, 22. The last-named passage, as a matter of fact, contains a summary of all the subsidiary objectives under the general aim of the *salus hominum*: "But now being made free from sin and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life." If our teaching can reach this goal, we may regard ourselves as successful teachers of the Gospel.*

1. Concerning God.

- a. A conscious relationship with God as Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the universe and the affairs of men, and a life philosophy based upon such relationship.
- b. A firm trust in Him as my loving Father through Jesus Christ.
- c. A response to His sustaining power and majesty, which leads to worship and service.

2. Concerning Jesus Christ.

- a. Recognition of Jesus as Redeemer of the world, my personal Savior, my Substitute, and my Advocate with the Father.
- b. Loyalty to Him and His cause.
- c. Following His example in submission and service.

3. Concerning the Holy Spirit.

- a. Appreciation of full dependence on Him for faith and spiritual life.
- b. Acceptance of His life toward a life of sanctification.
- c. An earnest effort to make my body His temple.

4. Concerning the Bible.

- a. Belief in the plenary and verbal inspiration.
- b. Acceptance of the Bible as the only guide of faith and life.
- c. Disposition to seek in the Bible the solution of all life problems.

5. Concerning the Church.

- a. Understanding of the invisible Church as the communion of saints.
- b. Understanding of the nature and function of the so-called visible Church.
- c. Disposition to participate in, and cooperate with, the work of the Church.

6. Concerning Self.

- a. An ever-deepening consciousness of my sin and the inability of working out my own salvation.
- b. A constant striving for growth in grace and in a sanctified life.
- c. The growing practise of seeking "joy in the Lord" and meditating on the evidences of God's infinite grace and goodness as these appear in my life.

7. Concerning My Fellow-men.

- a. Concern about the spiritual welfare of my fellow-men.
- b. Concern about the needs and the welfare of men in temporal affairs.
- c. Desire to reflect in my conduct and attitude toward my fellow-men my fellowship with God.

8. Concerning Eternal Life.

- a. Belief in the reality of a life after death.
- b. Firm hope in eternal life as my heritage of grace.
- c. Leading my life as a child of God, who, as a pilgrim here, seeks the heavenly home.

(From the deliberations of the Committee on Sunday-school Teachers' Training.)

P. E. KRETZMANN

* NOTE.— If we should want to analyze subordinate objectives with reference to content or subject-matter rather than with regard to the chief Scriptural aims (*Aufgabe* vs. *Ziel* oder *Endzweck*), we might suggest the following list: