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## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND THE REFORMED THEOLOGY

### I

“EVERY educational theory rests on a particular view or philosophy of life ; every real educational theory rests on the whole view of life ; every true educational theory rests on the true view of life.” These statements are such simple truisms that they need scarcely be elaborated. That there is a very intimate relation between an individual’s view of life and his educational theory is a rule of history from the earliest to the most modern thinkers and writers on the subject. This fact is clearly demonstrated in Plato’s theory of education and his idealistic view of life, in Rousseau’s educational iconoclasm and his anti-social view of life, in Spencer’s naturalistic aim and curriculum of education and his evolutionary and scientific view of life. This is a rule of history that can be traced from Plato to Foerster, from Socrates to Pestalozzi, from Aristotle to Willmann, from Seneca to Rousseau. All educational theories have grown out of a Life theory ; they are so intimately interwoven in this view of life that they are practically incomprehensible by themselves. Who can understand Froebel’s theory and practice of the kindergarten without any insight into his pan-entheistic view of life ? An educational theory without a view of life, without a value of life, gives an education without a foundation, an education from which man and life are excluded, an education without a living educator and a living educand. Such an educational theory will be unreal, untrue to life, unscientific. Education is much more than applied psychology, much more than an art of teaching. Psychology is an empirical discipline ; it only describes the facts of its observation and experiment. Education is in the first and the last instance a normative science ; it must discuss the meanings of facts ; it must distinguish between the good and the bad ; it must plead for the good and against the bad. It cannot be like psychology purely indicative, it must necessarily also be imperative. Further, education is finally much more than an interpretation of educational methods and practices. These methods and practices are themselves

initiated by new ideals, new aims, new views of life. Educational practice itself rests on a sound (or an unsound) basis of theory. The inspiration for new methods, new curricula, new schools, a new education, comes from the idea of life, not from the fact of observation. The art of education never attains any complete clearness in itself without a philosophy or view of life. There is a close interaction between theory and practice of education on the one hand and philosophy or view of life on the other ; and either is incomplete without the other. According to Dewey (*Democracy and Education*, p. 386) the most penetrating definition of philosophy which can be given is that it is the theory of education in its most general phases. This interrelation between education and view of life may be taken as the central idea in all educational theories and tendencies, old and new. Idealism has one type of educational theory and practice ; naturalism another one ; pragmatism still a third, and so on ; and so has our Reformed Theology its own particular theory and practice of education. Calvinistic theory of education rests on a particular Calvinistic view of life ; real Calvinistic theory of education on the whole Calvinistic view of life ; true Calvinistic theory of education on the true Calvinistic view of life.

Our aim in this article is to discuss the influence of a Calvinistic view of life on educational theory and practice and to emphasize the fact that a true Calvinistic theory and practice of education must rest on a true Calvinistic view of life.

## II

The twentieth century is from the educationist's point of view characterized by an universal, a world-wide attempt to reconstruct education in its theory and its practice. Our twentieth century thinkers and writers on education have always one theme for their thoughts and writings : they call it differently " new education ", " progressive education ", " active education ", " industrial education ". They demand in theory and in practice a new education, a new school, a new educator, a new curriculum, a new examiner, new methods, a new discipline, a new organization ; in short a reconstruction and a reformation of educational theory and practice are demanded on all sides by liberal and by orthodox thinkers, by believer and by unbeliever, by Christian and by heathen, by nationalist and by

internationalist, by Western and by Oriental, by rationalist and by empiricist, by realist and by humanist, by the one and by the other. Our most distinguished thinkers concentrate their intellectual powers on the development and the elucidation of new theories of education; our most celebrated teachers are trying out new methods, new curricula, new types of organization; all are looking for new basic principles, new procedures and new applications.

This universal movement for a reconstruction of educational theory and practice is happily not confined to modern and modernistic thinkers and teachers, but we can discern a similar activity on the part of orthodox Christian thinkers and teachers: Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Calvinistic. That the Christian thinkers and teachers are at the present moment called upon to do some hard educational thinking and practical application can easily be explained as a reaction against the activities of the non-Christian, atheistic thinkers and teachers, who plead, for instance, for a non-religious, non-sectarian, non-Christian education in theory and practice. This activity from the other side demands a fundamental exposition of our Christian view of life and education. And in the midst of this general revival amongst Christian thinkers and educators the Calvinists are taking a prominent part: we notice throughout Protestant countries an activity on the part of Calvinistic thinkers and practical men that is really remarkable, and we notice in particular an application of Calvinistic principles to educational theory and practice. I suppose that readers of *THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY* are fairly well acquainted with the educational activities of English-speaking Calvinists. I propose to draw the attention of the English-speaking readers of this *QUARTERLY* to what has been and is happening in Holland, that land of Calvinism *par excellence*. The late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century have produced in Holland some outstanding Calvinistic educational thinkers and writers. I invite my readers to consider the writings of four of the most outstanding men (these are Woltjer, Bavinck, Los and Waterink) and the hundred years' struggle in Holland for "free" education (education free from the interference of the state), for "particular" education in schools which are subsidized by the state but practically wholly controlled by like-minded organizations of parents, and in which the parents decide upon the

spirit of the education given to their children. This hundred years' struggle ended in a glorious triumph for Christian national education, for a school education with the Bible. At the present time even neutral-minded parents are demanding "particular" schools, i.e. schools for their particular view of life. This hundred years' struggle has successfully demonstrated the most intimate and pertinent interrelation between view of life and the theory and practice of education, because in Holland the struggle concerned itself not only with the theory but more particularly with the practice of education. Both Woltjer and Bavinck played a very prominent part during the last phases of this century of school struggle. Woltjer, who was during the greater part of his life a Professor at the Free University, Amsterdam, wrote extensively on educational problems, more particularly on problems of organization and methods of teaching, and gave us the clearest and most concise exposition of what Christian national school education is. This little book which bears in translation the title *What is Christian National School Education?* has become a classic in Dutch-speaking countries. Bavinck, another former Professor of the Free University, may be considered to be *the* philosopher of the new Calvinistic educational theory. He has given us the first systematic exposition of the principles of education on Calvinistic lines. This standard work bears (in translation) the title of *The Principles of Education*. Two other outstanding educational works of his are *The New Education* and *The Education of the Adolescent*. His *Principles of Education* is by far the best of his educational writings and thus far still the best single volume on the principles of Calvinistic education. In this book Bavinck discusses in the first introductory chapter educational problems of a general nature, viz. the necessity of education, the definition of education, the value and the character of a science of education. In the second chapter he gives an historical and a critical review of the aim of education: he points out that the aim of education has changed with the ages, that it stands in very close relation with the general culture and that it is determined by the religious or philosophical view of life; finally he formulates the true Christian aim of education according to 2 Tim. iii. 17 as the formation of the man of God so that he "may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works". In analysing this ideal of a perfect man of God, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, Bavinck comes

to a threefold aim, viz. genuine piety, organically united with thorough knowledge and real culture. In the third chapter he discusses the starting point of a Christian education and critically reviews the various schools of psychology and their conclusions and views as regards the origin, nature and destiny of man. To the Calvinist, man is the creature of God, made after His image, of His nature, the image of God, His son through Jesus Christ. This is an absolutely different starting point to that of the modern, evolutionistic educationalist who considers man a product of evolution and not a creature of God. In the fourth and last chapter Bavinck gives a fundamental exposition of the method of education. He critically evaluates the contents of education and states that any curriculum should have as its centre religious instruction and grouped round it the linguistic, the scientific and other subjects. Then he discusses and evaluates the general and the particular methods of education. Finally there follows a discussion of the problem of authority and freedom in education, of the problem of discipline in education, the place of observation in teaching and the problem of the correlation and concentration of studies. The more one studies this book, this little mine of information and principle, the more one discovers in it. I consider it as one of the finest, most complete and scientific studies on the Principles of Education. As a philosophical and an historical introduction to the principles of Christian education it stands unrivalled; no other book in Dutch, English, French or German that I know of stands any comparison with it. Bavinck has given us in this short book the counterpart of what Sir Percy Nunn has given us much later in his *Education, its Data and First Principles*, the latter, of course, being in no sense a work on Calvinistic education. May I suggest that Bavinck's *Paedagogische Beginselen (Principles of Education)* be translated into English?

Less penetrating but nevertheless valuable are the educational writings of Los, three only of whose outstanding books I want to mention, viz. *Great Educators, Character Formation in the Child up to Six, Modern Educators and Tendencies*. The first is not much more than a collection of short critical essays on the great educators of the past. The second gives from a Calvinistic standpoint an exposition of the character education of the pre-school child: Los is a keen student and observer of child life and, being a well-informed student on ethics and

religion, has given us a valuable review of the character development of the child. The third book may be considered to be the best and is at the same time his latest. In this book he gives a masterly and critical exposition of modern educational schools and their most important representatives. This is a book worth studying and deserves translation into a more world-widely used language, like English. He gives in every case a Calvinistic evaluation of each representative writer.

The last, but really in no sense the least, of these Dutch writers is the present holder of the Chair of Education at the Free University, viz. Dr. J. Waterink. He is the first Professor of Education who distinctly and definitely accepts and propagates the Calvinistic theory and practice of education. Besides being a theoretical exponent of the science of education, he is also Director of a very promising educational clinic and laboratory in Amsterdam. His principal works are firstly his doctor's thesis, *The Place of Method in the Pastoral Subjects*, secondly his inaugural address, *Berekening of Constructie* (translated *Calculation or Construction*), and thirdly his monumental *Introduction to Theoretical Education* of which Volume I in four parts and Volume II Part I have so far been issued. This work promises to become the standard work on theoretical education written from a purely Calvinistic standpoint.

### III

The founder of the Calvinistic view of life himself was keenly interested in education and in the schools. Calvin's fundamental doctrine concerning the absolute sovereignty of God brings him in obedience to the revealed truth immediately to a conscious attempt at a truly Christian education of old and young. Calvin recognized from the very beginning of his administration in Geneva the essential value of education as a means of promoting religion in individual and social life. In his political, economic and social programme was included also a programme for the education of all citizens of Geneva. The decree of God demands that the man of God shall be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, and to become thus thoroughly furnished he must be educated—hence there is in Calvinism always a powerful and inherent tendency towards the education of the man of God so that he shall be thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Calvin always worked for a sound education for all.

In the governmental programme of 1537 which he drew up with Farel for the religious-minded republic of Geneva he laid down that learning was a public necessity in order to secure a good political administration, to sustain the Church unharmed and keep it pure, and to maintain humanity among men. In the programme for the schools of Geneva, which Calvin drew up in 1538 with his old teacher Mathurin Cordier, he outlined a system of elementary education with religious instruction as the core and centre. The children were to sing psalms for an hour a day in school, so that they may be able to lead the congregation in public worship in singing; they were to be taught the elements of the Christian faith, a brief and easy outline of the Christian faith at home on which they were afterwards to be examined by the ministers. This brief and easy outline of the Christian faith was presented in the so-called Catechism drawn up by Calvin himself in 1537. Besides the religious instruction Calvin also demanded special attention to be given in the schools of Geneva to the secular side of education. Although he accorded the first place to the Word of God, as he stated in the school prospectus, he did not reject good training. The Word of God is indeed the foundation of all learning to him, but the liberal arts—and for that Calvin was enough of a humanist—are aids to the full knowledge of the Word and cannot and may not be despised. In this spirit he also provided in his programme for instruction in the mother tongue, reading, writing, arithmetic, careful grammatical drill and for training in civil and ecclesiastical leadership. Calvin with Cordier may thus be considered to be the founders of elementary education on reformed lines.

From 1538 to 1541 Calvin was banished from Geneva and worked in Strassburg at the Gymnasium of J. Sturm where he taught theology, especially exegesis, to the older pupils. This personal and direct contact with the child mind and with actual school problems and organization became to him of great value after his return to Geneva. In 1540 he married a widow who had several children from her first marriage. The duties and experience of step-fathership brought him some more needed insight into the mind of the child.

In 1541 he was recalled and in his Ecclesiastical Ordinance of the same year he laid down that a College (i.e. a secondary school) in which children should be taught languages and secular sciences



as a preparation for the ministry and for public service was absolutely necessary for the welfare of the Church and the whole community. At the head of this College was to be a man of learning and experience ; he was to be assisted by readers to give higher instruction and by bachelors to teach primary subjects to the younger children. The teachers (readers and bachelors) were to rank as officers of the Church and to be subject to ecclesiastical discipline just like the ministers of religion : there was to be very little distinction between the secular and the religious teachers and leaders. In this proposal Calvin maintained the principle that the liberal arts and a good secular training were essential means to a fuller knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. In it he sketched the organization of secondary education which has particularly as function the preparation of leaders in Church and State. In the same year (1541) he issued a revised version of his Catechism of 1537 : this was a great improvement and came much nearer the level of children than the older one, although it was still far too lengthy and too difficult for young children to understand and to learn readily by heart.

Unfortunately, owing to constant internal troubles in the city itself, the scheme for his College did not materialize. But Calvin never gave up the hope of realizing his scheme. In 1556 he paid a second visit to the school of Sturm at Strassburg and returned with new plans and ideas which he realized in 1559 in his Leger Academiæ Genevensis. On June 5th, 1559, Calvin saw the fulfilment of one of his dearest wishes in the establishment of a school for the sciences. This College or Academy was opened under the very able principalship of Theodore de Beza with 900 students on the roll, coming from all parts of the world ; from England, Holland, France, Switzerland. This College became the model after which other Colleges in all countries which adopted the Calvinistic creed were established and organized. At the time of Calvin's death in 1564 it had an enrolment of 1,200 pupils in the primary (the private) school and 300 in the higher (the public) school. This College—and the others modelled after it—attained an immense influence in all those lands where the ecclesiastical polity and doctrines of Calvin found adherents, especially amongst the Huguenots in France, in the Reformed Church in Holland, amongst the Puritans in England and the Presbyterians in Scotland. They became world-famed and the

men who went forth from the Colleges of Geneva to teach and to preach the Calvinistic gospel were numbered by the hundreds. In 1625 a list of the famous men of the city of Louvain, in Belgium, was printed: more than one-fourth of those listed had studied in the Colleges of Geneva (Cubberley: *The History of Education*, footnote on page 331).

In conclusion we may quote a rather interesting and valuable opinion by H. D. Forster in Monroe's *Encyclopaedia of Education*, Vol. I, p. 491, on the character of Calvin's educational work at Geneva. He summarizes this work as follows:—

“The strenuous moral training of the Genevese was an essential part of Calvin's work as an educator. All were trained to respect and obey laws, based upon Scripture, but enacted and enforced by representatives of the people, and without respect of persons. How fully the training of children, not merely in sound learning and doctrine, but also in manners, ‘good morals’, and common sense was carried out is pictured in the delightful human Colloquies of Calvin's old teacher, Corderius (once a teacher at the College of Guyenne), whom he established twice at Geneva. . . .

“Calvin's memorials to the Genevan magistrates, his drafts for civil law and municipal administration, his correspondence with reformers and statesmen, his epoch-making defence of interest taking, his growing tendency toward civil, religious, and economic liberty, his development of primary and university education, his intimate knowledge of the dialect and ways of thought of the common people of Geneva, and his broad understanding of European princes, diplomats, and politics mark him out as a great political, economic, and educational as well as a religious reformer, a constructive social genius capable of reorganizing and moulding the whole life of a people.”

#### IV

In this final paragraph I propose to discuss the significance of the main doctrines of Calvinism for educational theory and practice.

Calvin has given his followers a systematic exposition of his philosophical and religious thoughts and doctrines in his monumental and masterly treatise on *The Institutes of Christian*

*Religion.* His ideas and doctrines have been interpreted and applied and in certain directions expanded upon by modern Calvinists, notably by the Dutch theologians Dr. A. Kuyper, Dr. H. Bavinck, Dr. V. Hepp and many others. The exposition that follows is based on his work and on the writings of his modern exponents.

The fundamental problem in Calvin's life and thinking may be stated in this one question: How does God attain to His glory and right? This central problem is distinctly different from the main problem in the life and thinking of the other great Reformer, viz. Luther. For Luther the fundamental problem was: How does man attain salvation? Calvin's thinking may thus be called theocentric while that of Luther's may be called anthropocentric.

The most profound answer given by Calvin and Calvinists to this fundamental problem of life and thinking is the dogma of the self-sufficiency of God. What does this doctrine mean and what is its significance for education?

God is perfect and self-sufficient, and hence the perfection of righteousness and love. He is wise, good and just, holy, veracious, glorious, mighty and blessed. He realizes Himself in these qualities and for His self-realization He requires neither man nor thing. The existence of earth, man or thing does not in the least add to His glory; He makes His name glorious throughout the universe without the assistance of anybody or anything, because He is in Himself self-sufficient; He creates man and has called him to serve Him, and yet His glory does not depend on the service of man. What, then, may we ask, is the significance of the world and of man? Upon this question the Calvinist cannot, and does not wish to, give an answer, because to him it is a mystery, and in this he finds for his thinking and living rest. This fundamental doctrine determines for the Calvinist not only the aim of his life but also the aim of his education: he is called upon to serve his God, not thereby pretending to add to or increase the glory of God but only fulfilling his calling in life: to live so that God may use him for His eternal purposes. God is everything; man is nothing, yes, less than nothing. God is self-sufficient; man finds his life's destination only in God's will.

Intimately related to this fundamental doctrine of the self-sufficiency of God is a second doctrine of Calvinism, viz. the

doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God. God is the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, the absolute Sovereign of all and everything. Besides the Lord, our God, there is no other god. He is not only the Creator of everything, but also the Supporter and the Provider. God is known only through His revelation ; no creature, man or beast, can of himself or itself arrive at any knowledge of God. It is only through grace that man may know anything about God as He has revealed Himself in His Word, in history and in the conscience of man. God is not only holy, mighty, righteous and just, but also the font of wisdom, goodness and love, grace and pity. His grace reveals itself in the fact that man may know and serve and love Him. God has over against His creature only rights, no duties ; His creature has only duties toward God and not a single right. He demands unconditional obedience to His laws which He enacts for all and everything. Man must serve and obey God with body and soul, in life and death, in prayer and labour.

From these two fundamental doctrines of Calvinistic philosophy and view of life there follow the following principles, pregnant with significance for education.

The first principle concerns the authority of man on earth. By nature man is a creature and hence neither ruler nor ruled has any authority in himself. God alone is sovereign ; all creatures, man included, are compared to Him less than nothing. The authority of one creature over another is only borrowed, or rather given, authority, an act of grace. This principle is of fundamental importance in education where the problem of authority plays such a central rôle : the authority of parent over child, of teacher over taught, of employer over employee, of government over parent, teacher and taught. It is only in the light of this principle that we can come in our theory and practice of education to a true reconciliation of authority and obedience, to a solution of the fundamental problem of discipline and freedom.

The second principle concerns the status of man as creature. Through Jesus Christ man becomes the child of God. Calvin himself laid special stress on the fatherhood of God and the childhood of man as a supplementary doctrine to that of God's sovereignty. We are also His offspring (Acts vii. 28). According to Calvin this fatherhood of God reaches out just as far as His sovereignty. Like a father God cares for His creatures, for man

and for beast, for animate and for inanimate. By virtue of his creation man is a son of God. This doctrine is of fundamental significance for education, because it definitely determines our starting point in education : man is not a product of evolution, but a creature of God, the son of God, called to serve Him and glorify His name.

The third principle of great educational value is that of predestination and election. God as Almighty, Eternal and Absolute Sovereign has determined all His works from eternity to eternity. He has predestinated all that takes place in this world. This is what revelation teaches us. As absolute Sovereign God is almighty in His works and also unlimited in His power : He can do just what pleases Him. He saves whom He likes and condemns whom He chooses. This principle of election is thus a direct consequence of the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty. If God so willed, He might condemn every one ; but it has pleased Him to elect, before the foundation of the world, a new humanity in Jesus Christ. This principle of predestination and election is of fundamental significance for our educational theory and practice. The first aim of education is to the mind of the Calvinist not the salvation of man's soul, because salvation is the work of God, but the formation of the man of God so that he shall be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, furnished so as to seek the glory of God's name. The aim of education can never be in man himself, but must be found in God, in the service of God. The principle of election frees the faithful in God from all earthly worry and brings him to prayer. It gives to the man of God the invaluable comfort concerning the security of his salvation in Jesus Christ after which his heart yearns ; it is the driving force in his life of service to God ; it brings him to a wholehearted acceptance of God as his Saviour. This knowledge of election and condemnation does not cause him to be fatalistic and indolent, but it develops in him the highest activity, because he feels the call of his work, because he knows that this work has been given to him by the grace of God ; it gives him the necessary feeling of rest and submission to God which makes his work light and rewards it. This principle is the basis of the Calvinist's view about his work and vocation : a vocation is to him a calling from God, a life's work given to him through the infinite grace of God. Work is never a drudgery, but always a calling. Just consider

the significance of such a conception in vocational training and education !

A fourth principle that directly follows from the two fundamental doctrines concerns God's Providence. God directs and controls everything : everything is directed to a destiny laid down by God. This principle also is of great value in education. The faithful educator—parent and teacher—lives and works in the knowledge that God will provide, that the provident God has an aim and that He directs everything towards the fulfilment of that aim.

A fifth principle is the Calvinist's view concerning sin and the responsibility of man. To the Calvinist sin itself is not excluded from the predestination of God ; but he does not make God the author of sin. He acknowledges that without God's will man cannot so much as move, that without God's decree Adam could not have sinned. But this does not excuse man. Calvinism just as strongly emphasizes the responsibility of man as it does the predestination of God. Sin has come into this world not out of God but through the inexplicable will of God : man has through his own choice, as a free self-determining agent, sinned and remains responsible for all the evil that has been wrought and brought into the world. This principle determines our views in education : man is not pure, innocent and irresponsible for the evil ; he is by nature sinful and depraved ; his nature always works in opposition to God's will. It thus becomes one of the main tasks of education to lead the man of God to the path of righteousness, to a knowledge of God, to the performance of all good works. Man must be taught to fight against the evil that is in him and to strive after the good that he has lost.

Closely related to the doctrine of sin stands a sixth principle, viz. the fulfilment of the decree of God. God, as the absolute Sovereign, enacts His laws and demands that man shall fulfil these enactments. These laws of God give to man in his sinful state the norms of his life : he must be perfect like God in heaven Who is perfect. Man is called upon by God to direct his depraved nature to its predestined and original end, viz. harmony between man and God. In this principle the Calvinist sees the fundamental significance and necessity of education, but also the final aim and possibility of all earthly education.

But as a necessary corollary and supplement to this doctrine of God's decree and the subjection of man thereto Calvin also

posits another, a seventh principle, viz. the doctrine of grace. Calvin teaches that man is conceived and born in iniquity, by nature tends to do only evil, but he also acknowledges that there is still some good left in this world of evil. Therefore he maintains the impressive doctrine of the grace of God over against a fallen creation and creature. Furthermore, however much Calvinism insists on the depravity of man's nature, it also acknowledges that the God of election is also the God of the covenant of grace. The doctrine of the covenant of grace weighs just as heavily with the Calvinist as that of election. In this principle of grace the Calvinist finds another proof for the possibility of the education of the man of God; in it he finds proof for the educability of the child: it is only through the grace of God that the man of God, fallen in sin and depraved in nature, can be educated to become thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

From the doctrine of the sovereignty of God follows finally another principle, viz. the sovereign authority of Holy Scripture. God has revealed Himself to man more particularly in His Word and this Word has a divine origin and authority. Scripture in all its parts is inspired by the Holy Spirit. It reveals infallibly not only the way to salvation, but it also contains, as the testimony of Christ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden, the fundamental principles of all scientific knowledge. It is only from Holy Scripture that we know how the world and man have come into existence. Holy Scripture is the Word of God and carries His authority: it is the eternal, true Word of God in which He has revealed Himself and through which man may come to a knowledge of God. This principle determines the curriculum for Christian education; the school with the Bible as the ideal principle of school organization; religious instruction as the core and centre of education.

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