

# Toward a Definition of Christian Education

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

BY

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### **Toward a Definition of Christian Education--**

Dr. Nease, Dr. Moulton, Dr. Wiley, members of the Board of Trustees and faculty, honored guests, members of the graduating class of 1949, and friends:

The theme for this address has been chosen in part because it may face two ways. It may address the class of 1949, whose members have within this hour become graduates of Pasadena College, in the hope that its ideals may have become real, at least to some extent, in them. And it may also address the Board of Trustees, the faculty, the alumni, and the many friends of the college here gathered, with a declaration of the ruling purpose in the heart of the present speaker as he accepts the mantle laid aside tonight by Dr. Wiley. Ordinarily, of course, a commencement address and an inaugural address are two quite different types of discourse. Their combination, therefore, is very apt to leave somewhat to be desired. For this, I beg your indulgence.

When our General Superintendents, in their last quadrennial address, challenged the educators of the church to present a definite philosophy of education, they did not mean that we have not had one, but that we have not said enough about it. To this end, then, I offer you tonight what must be taken as strictly a preliminary definition of what I conceive to be the nature and scope of Christian higher education.

May I be pardoned right here for yielding to the temptation to suggest first a denotative definition. There are two kinds of definition: the connotative, which defines in terms of other concepts or meanings; and the denotative, which defines by pointing to or denoting typical instances of that which is under consideration. At Pasadena College we have been fortunate in having exemplified before us for a quarter of a century an outstanding example of the Christian scholar. Edgar Guest wrote, "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one, any day;"—and if you would rather see my commencement address than hear it, I can bid you look at Dr. H. Orton Wiley, educator, author, scholar, and exemplar of the prophetic ideal of one who should "do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly" with his God. Mrs. Stanley's beautiful words could be applied to no one better than to our own Dr. Wiley, "He has achieved success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of little children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who has left the world better than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem, or a rescued soul; who has never lacked appreciation of earth's beauty or failed to express it; who has always looked for the best in others and given the best he had; whose life was an inspiration, whose memory a benediction." We trust that the blessing of Dr. Wiley's presence on our campus may be ours for many years to come.

Our title, Christian education, is, of course, synthetic. That is, it joins together two ideas not essentially related, however well they may go together. Many have taken them to be contrary, and have supposed that one excludes the other. It is certainly possible to be educated, highly educated, and not be Christian. And it is equally possible to be Christian without the advantages of much, if any, formal education. But it will be the point of this address

that education is not what it ought to be and can be without a vital sense of spiritual values; and that the Christian faith finds its best examples and strongest proponents among those who have disciplined their minds to an unending quest for truth.

Critics of higher education are legion in our day, and the almost monotonous theme of their criticism is the sense of indirection, of uncertainty, which pervades the educational scene. Modern educators do not seem to know exactly what their goals are. There seems to be a strange lack of any clear concept of what the educated man should be like. We are much like the cavalier in Stephen Leacock's essay, who, being in a hurry, jumped on his horse and rode rapidly off in all directions.

In contrast, the Christian educator should have a definite conviction as to the scope of his task. He must envision clearly its goals, lest he, too, lose the forest in the abundance of the trees of academic trivia.

We in the Church of the Nazarene believe in higher education. The fact that we have invested three-quarters of a million dollars on this campus to build an accredited college bears witness to the sincerity of this conviction. But we are convinced that education alone will not solve our human predicament. As City Manager Don Mc Millan said just a few weeks ago on the occasion of the groundbreaking ceremonies for our new library, "Education without God but gives us greater capacity to get into trouble."

Therefore, with us, higher education must first of all be Christian. We do not mean by this merely that in a college otherwise secular there shall be maintained a department of religion, or that a few units of Biblical literature shall be required for graduation, or that chapel attendance shall be compulsory. We mean by this that our educational program shall be unequivocally and unashamedly Christian to its very core.

I realize the vagueness often associated with this wonderful term, but it is here used very explicitly and definitely. At risk of seeming to elaborate the obvious, let me point out that there are two aspects of the Christian life important for a proper understanding of its significance. These may be termed the subjective and the objective, the inner and the outer, the crisis and the process.

To us, the term "Christian" shall always carry the connotation of the experiential. We shall ever hold in focus the primary truth that a person becomes a Christian only by coming into a vital, personal relationship to God wherein he receives an infusion of divine life we identify as a new birth. And we shall ever lay equal stress upon the necessity of a complete commitment to God on the part of the regenerated individual wherein his moral nature is completely cleansed of all depravity, and his total being so integrated in harmony with the will of God that he loves the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and his neighbor as himself.

It is to this latter element of entire sanctification that we feel called to give special emphasis. The Christian way of life seems destined to face unprecedented challenges in the days that lie ahead. On one hand is atheism, which now finds its most vigorous embodiment in the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and Russian communism, and which seems avowedly embarked on a program of world-conquest, as another swaggering anti-Christ. On the other hand is secularism, that insidious practical

atheism which does not deny the existence of, but simply ignores the claims of God, and which is the moral and spiritual termite boring from within our foundations. Hunter Blakely, president of Queen's College, put it in sharp focus when he declared last fall, "Democracy is deeply rooted in Christian faith. The most dangerous blind spot in modern life is the impression that we can preserve the fruits of democracy without its roots. The concepts of democracy—freedom, respect for life, the worth of the individual, a sense of personal responsibility are not basic but are derivative, flowing out of our Christian heritage." (*College and Church*, fall, 1948, p. 4).

This is not said to inject any note of pessimism or fear, but to indicate that this age demands Christianity at its summit. A weak, vacillating, uninspired and unimpassioned church has no future in a world such as we face in the early tomorrows. We must have normal, not nominal Christianity. We must have religion in the vigor and intensity of the New Testament standard, pure and undefiled before God, and Spirit-anointed to face fearlessly a decadent age. These are times cut to order for genuine Christianity. Anything less than Christian holiness is subnormal. Anything other than Christian holiness is abnormal. This, and this alone, is normal—and this, and this alone, is sufficient for a generation like ours.

But the objective or process side of our Christian heritage is of equal concern. To question which is the most important of these two, the subjective or the objective, is much on a par with the question as to which is the most important wing of a bird in flight. The objective is impossible without the subjective; and the subjective is worthless without the objective.

Much that should be said here must remain implicit rather than be made explicit, for sheer lack of time. As the term "Christian" connotes a vital experience of regeneration and sanctification, no less does it connote the attitudes, skills, and knowledge essential to enable the individual to be an active and constructive participant in the program and work of the visible church.

There is a tendency to separate these two aspects of religion. It is sometimes made a matter of either/or, when in truth it is a question of both/and. To be Christian, one must not only have a subjective religious experience, he must be disposed, trained, and constantly encouraged to find his place of service in the Christian community. By crisis—a subjective experience—one becomes a member of organism, the true Church of Christ. By process—objective training—he becomes a member of the organization, the visible Church of Christ. "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

So, in this sense, education must be, for the Church of the Nazarene, truly Christian. But it must be more. It must be education of the highest quality. The Christian educator has not less to do than others, but more. We can no more allow the substitution of good intentions and pure motives for objective achievements in the realm of educational activity, than we can allow it in the realm of the Christian life. A newspaper classified advertisement carried a request for a maid, with the added note, "No objection to a Christian, if she can cook." It is not hard to read between these lines the story of what had previously happened in that home. Someone had substituted piety for efficiency, with sad gastronomic results. We

must have consecrated teachers, but they must be good teachers. Our school must always be Christian, but it must also be a good school. When young people graduate from this college, they must have had such educational experiences as will enable them to compete on equal terms with the graduates of any other liberal arts college, in life, in business, in the professional schools, or in university graduate schools.

Now, I do not propose to attempt a complete statement of the goals of higher education, as they are recognized among us. If the volumes which have been written on this subject have neither solved nor settled these problems, they shall certainly not be solved to-night. In fact, Lowry Harding has recently written in good-humored sarcasm, "The major role of Leadership in Education is said to be the meeting and solution of problems . . . Problems in education must be recognized and faced, but left unsolved in a masterful manner. If the problems were solved, there would be no need for Leadership. Where would education be without Leadership? And where would Leadership be without Problems?" (*Educational Leadership*, VI (February, 1949, 299), as reported in *Educational Digest*, May, 1949).

The function of education at any level is to conserve, enrich, and transmit the distinctive culture of the society which supports it, and we have come to believe that the liberal arts college is the type of higher educational institution best fitted to accomplish this end. This insight, however, has not been gained without some trial and error. We have tried the Bible school organization, but found that it could serve the interests of too few of our young people. We have even attempted the university type of organization. There was a period when our own institution was known as Nazarene University, and later, as Pasadena University. It was not only the obvious difficulties the undergraduates must have experienced in referring to "good old P U" which led to the change in organization and name some thirty years ago, but the recognition that it would be better for us to say with Paul, "This one thing I do," than to be forced to confess "These dozen things I dabble in."

It is true, of course, that the college is an instructional rather than a research institution. Its primary task is to sift, select, and interpret rather than to enlarge the borders of existing knowledge. But this selective and interpretative function is, after all, as important as the creative. We must have facts, but we must also be sensitive to what those facts mean in the light of the whole life of man. It is for this task that the college of liberal arts, as distinct from the university or research institution, is peculiarly fitted.

What then, must our educational effort accomplish if it is to succeed? What outcomes may it envision? The specific goals of higher education in general, and Christian higher education in particular, may be enumerated as six:

First, a command of the communications skills, the ability to read and understand, and to write and speak the English language clearly, correctly, and forcefully. This is certainly not solely the task of the English department, nor of the speech arts. To generalize and cultivate such abilities is the task of the entire college, and must be a major objective of every department.

Second, an understanding of the social process, of the principles of group life as worked out in the institutions of local, state,

national, and international communities, with a view to contributing, in Professor John Vieg's nicely turned phrase, "A sound mind to the body politic."

Third, a grasp of the basic concepts of mathematics and the natural sciences, with special emphasis on the nature of scientific method as dealing with the descriptive and quantitative aspects of the universe, as contrasted with those normative and qualitative aspects which are the concern of philosophy and religion. Our young people need to realize that while scientific men may sometimes be irreligious, in the nature of the case there can never be any conflict between science and religion. Science is morally neutral, and whether it shall work for us good or ill depends entirely upon the ends to which we devote the almost limitless means with which it has provided us.

Fourth, the ability to weigh and discriminate values: aesthetic, logical, moral, and spiritual values. In every area of life, we must learn to discriminate between judgments of fact and judgments of value. We must be alert to the situation that everything which is, not necessarily ought to be. We must recognize that the relativity of morals about which we have heard so much, is not a relativity of morals as such, but a relativity in our oft-mistaken judgments about right and wrong.

At this point, and for this purpose, we emphasize the serious, scholarly study of the Bible. It is scarcely conceivable that anyone in our Western culture should consider himself liberally educated who remains in ignorance of the greatest volume on spiritual and moral values the world has ever had. The classic words of Thomas Woodrow Wilson, one-time head of Princeton University, and 28th president of the United States, should be heard in every classroom across this country where the development and establishment of moral character is a serious objective: "The Bible is the word of life. I beg that you will read it and find this out for yourself—read, not little snatches here and there, but long passages that will readily be the road to the heart of it. You will find it full of the things you have wondered about and been troubled about all your life . . . When you have read the Bible you will know that it is the word of God, because you will have found it the key to your own heart, your own happiness, and your own duty."

Fifth, such information as is required for, and a lasting appreciation of the importance of, physical health. A sound mind requires a sound body. In the context of Christian education, this means the awareness that each young person has a life-long task as caretaker of the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The last, but not the least, of the specific goals of higher education is the necessary information, skills, attitudes and abilities essential for the successful prosecution of some honorable vocation—a breadwinning skill. It is particularly important that Christian young people come to view the field of a life work as an opportunity for service to the kingdom of God, regardless of the so-called secular character of the employment.

In addition to these major goals, there are certain underlying attitudes which Christian higher education would strive to inculcate. The first of these is true tolerance—not the imitation tolerance which is really nothing but indifference, but tolerance grounded in a strong conviction that truth will triumph in the end. It is easy

to call ourselves tolerant about those things for which we have no concern. But the tolerance which we need is that born in the quiet confidence of a reasonable faith.

Closely allied is the demand for devotion to objective truth. The educated mind must be open but not empty, thoughtful but not gullible. The habit of constructive thinking, so essential for creative leadership, is one of the greatest safeguards we may have against persuasive propagandas and the shifting winds of doctrine which constantly blow over us.

Finally, there is need for a realistic attitude toward the fundamental problems of our age. The easy optimism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has perished in the first birthpangs of a new age. No longer are men convinced that progress is inevitable, that the millenium brought about by humanitarian reform is just around the corner. Two devastating wars, and the dreadful possibility of a third, have taught us better. As Douglas MacArthur, General of the Army, said on the deck of the battleship Missouri, anchored in Tokyo harbor not four years ago, "We have had our last chance. If we do not now devise some greater and more equitable system (than war), Armageddon will be at our door. The problem basically is theological and involves a spiritual recrudescence and improvement of human character that will synchronize with our almost matchless advance in science, art, literature and all material and cultural developments of the past 2,000 years. It must be of the spirit if we are to save the flesh." (As quoted in Evening Herald-Express, Los Angeles, Monday, September 3, 1945).

That optimism has largely vanished does not mean that the opposite mood of pessimism is justified. Optimism asserts, "Evil is but an illusion. Good will triumph without fail, and there is nothing we *need* to do about it." Pessimism claims that good is a phantasm, evil is inevitable, and there is nothing we *can* do about it. But as William James long ago pointed out, in either case the outcome is the same—nothing is done.

But there is another attitude possible. It would recognize that evil is real, and everywhere deeply entrenched. But there is something we can do about it. It is the mood of the early circuit rider who announced as his text, "They that have turned the world upside down have come hither also." "This text shows three things," he said. "First, the world is upside down. Second, it should be turned right side up. And third, we are the ones to do it."

History has always been fashioned, whether for good or for evil, by creative minorities. The task of Christian higher education is to help fashion a creative minority, which shall be for good and not for evil. The young leaders who are part of this creative group must be inspired by a realistic attitude which will neither be incapacitated by over confidence in an easy victory, nor paralyzed by fear of an unavoidable defeat. We cannot do everything, but must not on that account yield to the subtle temptation therefore to do nothing.

To our graduating class of 1949, may I say first, "My congratulations to you." We have made it just as hard for you as we could, knowing that soft nests are made for *little* birds—and we have not wanted you to be little. In keeping with our philosophy of educational democracy, we have made it easy for you to get

into Pasadena College, but have endeavored to make it hard for you to get out—that is, with a degree.

And you have achieved tonight what only one person in thirty ever attains, even in our highly educated society. When you started out at the foot of the educational ladder sixteen years ago, there were three thousand others with you. Almost half of that number had dropped out by the time you entered high school, and another seven hundred before you started to college.

But this is your commencement. It is not the end, it is the beginning. It is not the goal, it is the point of departure. Education is not an intrinsic, but an instrumental, value. We trust that we have been able to challenge you with an ideal of Christian greatness you shall never lose. But as Bishop Thoburn has said, "Ideals are to run races with. The moment we stop chasing them, they sit down and become opinions." Robert Browning immortalized the lines, "A man's reach must exceed his grasp. The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life."

And now our reputation is in your hands. We shall be known to the world, not by our literature, by our buildings, or by the stature of our faculty, but by the measure of your lives. Whether we have succeeded or not will be shown, not by the grades recorded on your transcripts, but by the impact of your lives upon your generation.

"Dare not to dream of better things,  
And brighter days to be;  
Dare not to hear the rush of wings,  
Inspiring prophecy.  
Dare not to climb the lofty hill  
Where vision greets the view,  
Unless you have the strength of will  
To help to make it true.

"Dare not to think in quiet hours  
Of Earth come to her own,  
Each desert overgrown with flowers,  
And Love upon the throne;  
Dare not to speak of better years,  
Set free from hate, and sin,  
When never one shall shed vain tears—  
Then fail to bring them in."

(C. E. FLYNN)

"A charge to keep you have,  
A God to glorify;  
A never-dying soul to save  
And fit it for the sky.  
To serve the present age,  
Your calling to fulfill;  
O, may it all thy powers engage  
To do thy Master's will."