

knowledge, cultivate in them certain abilities, but let the students themselves freely decide what they will do with this knowledge and these abilities—that is the contention.

An odor of sterile academicism surrounds such discussions. As will become obvious in the course of our examination, it is virtually impossible for a teacher to avoid seeking to shape students' tendencies—to strengthen some and weaken others—and it is certainly impossible for a teacher to act in such a way that he or she will *in fact* not alter the students' tendencies. To reject one educational practice in favor of another is inevitably to choose a line of action which has one set of effects on a student's tendencies rather than another. And so the responsible and perceptive teacher will make choices in the light of these effects, thus aiming at one set of effects rather than another, rather than vainly seeking to have no effect. *Which* tendencies to seek to inculcate, and *how*, are the relevant questions—not *whether*.

2

Teaching Responsibility

Even if it were not inevitable that teachers aim at shaping the tendencies of their students, tendency goals would, it seems to me, be dominant among those who seek to impart a *Christian* education. Let me elaborate on this by way of a brief sketch of the rudiments of a philosophy of Christian education.

Every philosophy of education grows out of an image of man in the world. So we must begin by looking at some of the main features of the Christian vision of life and reality. At its foundation is the conviction that this world in which we live and to which we belong is a *creation*. It is not something sufficient unto itself. It points beyond itself to God who brought it into existence. And the world he brought into existence is ordered and structured, a *cosmos*, as the Greeks called it, a world of laws and things satisfying those laws.

Time was when it would have been necessary at this point in the discussion to emphasize humanity's embeddedness in the physical creation. We human beings are earthlings among earthlings, sisters to the birds of the air and brothers to the beasts of the field. That scarcely needs to be said in our secular age. What must be stressed today is that man is the crown of the physical creation. In human beings the bond between God and his creation finds its focus.

What is the essence of this crowning status? The core of our uniqueness among earthlings is that human beings and human beings alone are responsible. They and they alone have duties, obligations. They and they alone are capable of guilt, for to be guilty is to violate one's responsibilities. Christians do not see these responsibilities as free-floating. They see them all as given by God. Humanity alone God has *graced* with responsibilities. He does so by holding us responsible—answerable, accountable—to himself.

God requires of his human creatures that we obey certain laws which specify our responsibilities. In its depth all human responsibility is responsibility to God, and all defection from responsibility is at its root letting God down. The depth dimension of all human responsibility is that it is a relation of persons to Person which leaps out of the created order of things. Through human beings, God's creation is bound to its Maker by cords of responsibility.

Here we cannot discuss the full texture of what we are responsible to God for doing. But over against the all-too-common assumption that our responsibilities to God comprise nothing more than our responsibilities for acting in certain ways with respect to him—honoring and trusting and worshipping him—it is worth emphasizing some other factors.

We have responsibilities for acting in certain ways with respect to human beings. These, too, are responsibilities to God. We are responsible *to God for* loving our neighbor as ourselves. This presupposes of course that we are to love ourselves. To despise yourself, to long to be what you cannot be and so to neglect becoming what you can become, to squander your life instead of nourishing your potential—all these are ways to fail in your responsibility to God. All of us are to seek our own fulfilment but equally to exhibit solidarity with others, to stand in their stead, to love them as ourselves, to seek their fulfilment as we seek our own. Indeed, in seeking the other's fulfilment we will find our own.

(We also have responsibilities to God for acting in certain ways with respect to the physical creation around us.) We are to subdue it, to tame it, to order it, to humanize it, though in the manner of a gardener, not a bulldozer. With respect to the animals, more specifically, we are to rule over them, to be masters over them. We are to rule over "all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground" (Gen. 1:30).

An older Protestant tradition rightly heard in such Old Testament passages God's injunction not just to engage in agriculture and animal husbandry but to humanize the whole of creation by our labor, thus to develop culture. So this tradition spoke of a "cultural mandate." Labor which humanizes God's

creation and brings forth human culture is obedience to God the Creator.

It is especially in the authorization and injunction to have dominion that the songwriter of old Israel saw man's crowning status among fellow earthlings. You have crowned man with glory and honor, he says to God. And then at once he goes on, "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet" (Ps. 8:5-6). This ruling status is a key component in our being made in the image of God, as the biblical writers conceived it. With characteristic Hebrew parallelism the writer of Genesis says:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, . . . over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Gen. 1:26).

There is, in summary, a triplicate pattern to what we are responsible *to God for* doing. We are responsible to God for how we act with respect to God. We are responsible to God for how we act with respect to ourselves and our fellow human beings. We are responsible to God for how we act with respect to nature.

We cannot leave this brief discussion concerning our status as responsible creatures without sounding one more note. Human responsibility, I have been saying, consists in God's holding us responsible to himself for acting in certain ways—that is, for obeying certain rules, certain normative laws. The normative laws which specify our responsibilities have the status of being God's will for human action, his rule for human life. That is the Christian vision. But the Christian adds at once that they are the will, the command, of a *loving* God. And because they are the will of a loving God, our joy and fulfilment lie in carrying out our responsibilities. What God wants is that we should each live responsibly, and thus joyfully, before him, in the world, among our fellow humans, with ourselves.

We have spoken thus far of creation. The next chapter in the Christian story is the fall. In freedom man revolted against God and refused to live in trustful obedience, preferring instead to act as if he were self-normed. Thereupon he became confused

about his responsibilities and defected from them. He mutilated the earth. He victimized his fellows. He squandered his abilities. He set up surrogate gods. A dark cloud fell over creation, so that the whole of it groans for deliverance, as Paul says (Rom. 8:22).

Now comes the third chapter in the Christian story—so difficult for us to believe, yet so finely tuned to our deepest hopes. God resolved not to leave his creation in the grip of its misery but to act instead for its renewal. Out of love he acts so that human beings can once again live in joyful fulfilment with themselves, their neighbors, nature, and God. There is a drift, a direction, in history. In spite of all the manifestations of evil which we see around us, all the perversity and suffering, Christians are nonetheless persuaded that history as a whole, in all its ups and downs, is “arrowed” toward the ultimate renewal of creation.

No doubt, as the hymnwriter puts it, “God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.” Yet God’s motions are by no means entirely mysterious. For at the heart of God’s strategy for renewal is his calling out of human beings, to whom he says that he will be their God if they will be obedient agents in his cause. God has chosen to work in such a way that he needs his human creatures in order to accomplish his purposes.

God’s call came first to Israel—a particular nation from among the nations. Then it came in decisive fashion to his own Son Jesus Christ. And from Pentecost onward the call comes to all human beings everywhere. It is a call to repent, to believe, to follow in the footsteps of his Son Jesus Christ and to be his disciples. The band of those who accept this call to become agents in God’s cause of renewal constitutes the church. Thus at Pentecost a new people was given birth, a transnational people, which, while it transcends all nations, is now also to be found within each. “Elect from every nation, Yet one o’er all the earth.”

We may distinguish four tasks in what God asks of those who answer his call to repent, believe, follow his Son, and become agents in his cause of renewal. In the first place, the church is called to bear witness to what is to be seen with eyes and heard with ears—namely, God’s mighty deeds in the cause of renewal.

Peter made this clear in the first Christian sermon:

“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” (Acts 2:22–24).

② Second, the church is called to serve all human beings everywhere, working and praying for healing, liberation, and fulfilment in all of life—in politics, in science, in social structures, in technology, in art, in recreation—willingly undergoing sacrifice and suffering when necessary. The church does not have the option of remaining passive in the face of deprivation and oppression and distortion. As Christ the Lord of the church took on the form of a servant, so the church is called to be a serving, ministering presence in the world, aiding the victims of structures that deprive and oppress, laboring to abolish such structures, seeking to replace them with structures in which persons find fulfilment.

A third calling of the church is to give evidence in its own style of life of the new life to be found in Jesus Christ. The church is called to be a paradigm, an exemplary community in its work, in its worship, in its fellowship. Its own life is to demonstrate the firstfruits of the full harvest, the signposts of the kingdom. The church is not merely to wait with grim patience for the new age when the Spirit will fully renew all existence. It must already, here and now, manifest signs of that renewing Spirit.

Finally, the church is called to disciple all people, urging them to repent and believe and join the band of Christ’s followers, thus to share in the work of being witness, servant, and evidence.

As the band of Christ’s followers, the church is an alien presence within every nation. Called and committed to be God’s agent for the coming of his kingdom in a fallen and resistant world, to serve as the revolutionary vanguard of society ushering

in a new order, the church finds itself ever in tension with those who want to hang on to the present order. The new community of the church, in which the Christian finds fundamental identity, is an *alternative* society.

*One more point before we consider how this vision applies to education. Crucial to the character of the church is the fact that it has certain sacred writings, namely, the books of the Old and New Testaments. These Scriptures are the expression of the religion of ancient persons and peoples, but more importantly they are acknowledged by the church as authoritative guides for the thought and life of Christians in this present age. Becoming a member of the church involves submitting oneself to their authority.

* These Scriptures are taken as authoritative guides because Christians are persuaded that it is integral to God's mode of working for human renewal to *speak to* his human creatures. In the Bible we find an authoritative record of some of what God said to ancient persons and peoples; and by way of those ancient words we hear God speaking to us today. True, God's speech to us today is not confined to the Bible, but what he says there is the touchstone, the criterion, for what he says to us in other modes and manners. Convinced of this, the Christian community acknowledges the Bible as authoritative for life and thought.

* Of course the Bible does not offer specific counsel for every concrete situation that we face. It gives guidelines, paradigm situations, advice by way of example. Essential to maturing in the faith is learning how to get from that to one's own concrete situation. Often there are disagreements on such matters in the community; just as often there is consensus.

Thus the Bible occupies a central position in the Christian's answer to the question, How do we discover our responsibilities? For one thing, even though the Bible is not a political or economic or aesthetic or even moral handbook, it does contain a wealth of guidance, often quite specific, not only about what God asks of his redeemed people, but also about what he asks of his human creatures generally. But secondly, the Bible serves to open our eyes to creation and its normative structure—to what God asks of us by virtue of our status as created human beings—so that we can go on to inquire on our own. Where once we may

have thought of aesthetic values and artistic goals along Platonic or Romantic-humanist or Marxist lines, the Bible opens our eyes to how those are distorted visions of God's will for art in human life. From there on we act like grown-up human beings, thinking things through for ourselves, not demanding a biblical word on all the details of human responsibility.

In spite of the centrality of the Bible in the Christian's apprehension of our human responsibility, we must nonetheless resist the delusion that Christians alone discern what human beings are responsible for doing. People in many cultures have enunciated it as a fundamental principle of morality that we are to treat others as we would like them to treat us. Though not identical with the biblical principle to love one's neighbor as oneself, that is at least an approximation to it.

Now we can move on to education. Like any other community with a cause and lifestyle of its own, the church finds it necessary to educate, not only its new recruits, but also its longtime members. Thus education by and for the community comes into existence, conducted informally by parents, conducted formally by teachers and pastors. And that, at its most basic, is Christian education: education by the Christian community for the Christian community.

To put it that way sounds inward-looking—and so, in a certain sense, it is. But we have seen that the church exists not for its own sake but for the sake of God's cause in the world. That cause is the overcoming of alienation from God and liberation from the oppression, deprivation, and suffering in which sin works itself out, so that human beings may dwell in God's shalom, where there is harmony and delight in all dimensions of existence. The Christian is one who follows Jesus Christ, who was, in Bonhoeffer's phrase, the "Man for others." And so, in being education for the Christian community, Christian education is education for the sake of all.

It used to be said, particularly in the Calvinist tradition, that the goal of Christian education is to impart to the student the Christian "world and life view." The intent behind putting it this way was to affirm that the gospel pertains to all of life and not just to some "religious" part. But this formulation is inadequate, for it puts too much emphasis on a "view," that is, on what we have

called cognition. To be identified with the people of God and to share in its work does indeed require that one have a system of belief—call it “the Christian world and life view.” But it requires more than that. It requires the Christian *way of life*. Christian education is education aimed at training for the Christian way of life, not just education aimed at inculcating the Christian world and life view.

This implies, straightforwardly, that what we have called tendency learning is an essential component in a program of Christian education. Christian education points to a certain way of living and acting—one in which a person lives and acts responsibly, in obedience to God’s will, as an agent of God’s cause in the world.¹ To act responsibly in the world obviously requires *knowledge* of the world and of God’s normative laws for one’s actions. Likewise it requires *abilities* of various sorts. So a program of Christian education will include among its goals both cognitive learning and ability learning. But if it were to stop there, its fundamental goal would not yet have been achieved. One can have the knowledge and the abilities required for acting responsibly and yet have no tendency to engage in such action. A program of Christian education will take that further step of cultivating the appropriate *tendencies* in the child. It will have tendency learning as one of its fundamental goals.

Let me put these points in a slightly different way. The ultimate goal of *all* education, as Christians see it, is that those who are taught shall live in such a way as to carry out their responsibilities to God and find joy and delight in so doing. The Christian parent and teacher seeks to do what he or she thinks all parents and teachers should seek to do. A philosophy of education which has this as the proper ultimate goal of education may be called a *responsibility theory of education*. Notice that a person need not be a Christian to hold a responsibility theory of education. A Jew or Muslim might also believe that the proper goal of education is that the student shall so live as to carry out his or her responsibilities to God, but disagree with the Christian about the

¹When I speak of “action,” I do not mean to exclude contemplation and meditation. These are themselves actions—actions far too seldom practiced in the contemporary West.

location and nature of God’s redemptive action in history, and consequently about the details of our responsibilities. But if there may be responsibility theories of education which are not *Christian*, I have tried to show that a Christian philosophy of education—and, more specifically, a philosophy of Christian education—will be a responsibility theory.

Anyone who holds a responsibility theory of education will include cognitive goals among the aims of the educator. If we are to act responsibly we must be in tune with reality. We must have knowledge of how things are. We must know the relevant facts along with the relevant norms. So one of the goals of education will be to impart to the student knowledge of how things are. Teaching will aim at cognitive learning, at producing an increase in the students’ knowledge.

If we are to act responsibly we must, in the second place, have abilities (capabilities, competences, skills) in a large number of different areas. We must have the ability ourselves to acquire knowledge, and we must have the ability to discern what we ought to do in a variety of situations. We must have the ability to read, the ability to perform arithmetical computations. Education, accordingly, will have goals concerning abilities. It will aim to produce an increase in the students’ abilities. It will aim at ability learning.

But if responsible action is to ensue, more is necessary than for the students to have knowledge of the relevant matters and the ability to perform the relevant actions. Knowledge and ability are not yet performance. It is also necessary that the students’ tendencies, ranging all the way from their unreflective habits to highly self-conscious commitments, be those of acting in accord with the normative laws for right action. Education, accordingly, must have among its goals to secure—always in morally defensible ways—the formation of right tendencies. It must seek to develop in students the habit of speaking their native language correctly. It must seek to develop in students a commitment to the principle of doing what is honest. Education must aim at producing alterations in what students tend (are disposed, are inclined) to do. It must aim at tendency learning.