

# I — AN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY FOR THE MISSIONARY CHURCH

## THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Human beings were the zenith of God's creative activity. The first pair was charged with the superintendence of God's created order in a manner which would demonstrate responsibility to both the Creator and the creation (Gen 1:27-31). Clearly, since humans are to have dominion over the created order, they must seek to understand it. Therefore, the quest for knowledge is a necessary activity. In like manner, if humans are to be responsible to God, they must know something of God's character, who God is and what he requires.

Education is the discovery and implementation of truth, truth about God and truth about creation, in such manner that persons become all that they are meant to be, accountable stewards who are fully aware of responsibilities to God, others and the world.

## THE CONTENT OF EDUCATION

The content of education defines the proper subject matter of the educational process. The church has historically thought of education as the study of a two-fold revelation, designated as special revelation and general revelation.

### Special Revelation

Special revelation is the Bible, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as commonly received. The Bible reveals propositional truth about God, man, and the universe, truth which cannot be discovered from any other source. The Bible informs about origins and presents human activity within the circle of God's sovereignty. The Bible makes human existence meaningful and assures a destiny with purpose. Biblical absolutes are intended to provide the foundation stones for all structures of society. Therefore, the study of the Bible, both as an end in itself and a means to an end (the proper interpretation of the meaning of the universe) is a legitimate pursuit.

### General Revelation

General revelation comes from observance of the universe. By observing, categorizing and experimenting with the created order, knowledge is gathered about God, others and the world. Therefore, study of every facet of the universe, including mankind as relation to it and responsibility toward it, is a legitimate pursuit.

### The Integration of Faith and Learning

Special revelation and general revelation have a relationship that is both hierarchical and complementary. The relationship is hierarchical in that special revelation always takes precedence over general revelation and provides a framework for what is learned from the study of general revelation. Exploration of the universe will yield insight into its form and function, but only the Bible reveals the purpose of the existence of the universe. The relationship is complementary in that neither will yield information which contradicts the other when properly understood. The study of both is essential for a balanced understanding of the nature and meaning of things. An adequate worldview cannot be developed apart from such a holistic approach to education.

## THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION

Meaningful education enrolls the student at the cradle and graduates the student at the grave.

### The Home and Education

The first and foremost responsibility for education rests with parents. Both the Old and New Testaments elevate the home to the level of an educational institution. God said to Israel:

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:6-7).

The New Testament ideal is found in Ephesians 6:4:

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

While both of these passages seemingly refer to religious education, they also imply that a spiritual context is essential to all learning. It is in the home that the child first learns about others and the world around him. Interpersonal relationships, formative attitudes, habit patterns and value systems are directly related to home training. The church properly responds to this awareness when it makes available to parents the support and resources necessary to fulfill the task.

### **The School and Education**

Since it is logistically difficult for most homes to provide an adequate education, parents have chosen to band together in a community to provide a formal setting for their children’s education. In the Western world this has assumed the form of compulsory public education. Some parents, out of concern to teach a specific value system or religious heritage, have provided alternate education programs, the private school and homeschooling. It is the right of parents to choose public, private or home schooling without interference from the state.

All Christians have a biblical responsibility as citizens to seek to use existing structure to influence community schools to reflect their desired philosophy of life and value system. In a pluralistic society, Christians should request that traditional biblical values be fairly presented in the marketplace of ideas.

### **Higher Education**

Contemporary complex social structures and the sheer mass of knowledge about the universe require a longer period of formal schooling than was necessary in former generations. The same biblical concerns which bring the church into involvement with education in the home and school will properly carry that concern into higher education. The need for an integration of faith and learning never ceases. Higher education is only a difference of degree, not a difference of kind. The more intense and specialized curricula of higher education must be placed in the correct context, a balanced worldview which gives correct place to God, others and the universe. Hence, the church should encourage her people to pursue higher education.

From within the context of the church, the Holy Spirit calls certain individuals to specific roles (Eph 4:11-16). Both the Old and New Testaments, and the church through the centuries, have recognized that God calls and anoints some to special leadership roles. Appropriate programs in Christian liberal arts colleges, Bible colleges and theological seminaries are essential if those who are called by the Holy Spirit are to receive proper training. Such programs of study will be designed to allow those called of God to develop their fullest potential for leadership roles at all levels of the church.

### **The Local Church and Education**

In addition to providing support for the home and sponsoring institutions of formal education, the church should provide programs and opportunities for all of her adherents to learn more about God, the Bible, and Christian living. Every activity and organization of the church should have education as one of its goals. The discovery and implementation of truth is always a proper concern of the church. When seen in this light, everything the church does has an element of education.

## **EDUCATION AND THE GREAT COMMISSION**

The Great Commission as given by the Lord makes teaching an obligation of the church (Matt 28:19-20). It is essential for educational activity to accompany evangelism. The nurture which follows is, by definition, a process which begins at the new birth and continues throughout life. The discovery and implementation of truth to every arena of life, and especially the application of a Christian value system, are essential to discipleship.