

# The Philosophy of Secondary Christian Education

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What is our goal and objective in fostering Christian schools on the secondary level? What justifies the sacrifices in means, time, talents, and efforts that are made in establishing, maintaining, and staffing such special Christian schools, Lutheran high schools and academies? I take it that it was something in the way of a renewed answer to these questions that you had in mind in asking me to address you on the Philosophy of Secondary Christian Education.

While we readily grant that the years of schooling, also those spent in secondary education, are in themselves a part of life itself, it nevertheless remains true that education is training for life, training for proper living. Thus also when we speak of secondary education, we want to think of it as a phase of training for life, training for proper living. What is essential for such training is pointed out to us by the Book of Proverbs, Chapter 4, verse 23: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Here God through His inspired writer bids us to keep, to watch, to guard our heart. He bids us to do it with all diligence. A translation often fails to retain the full force of the original. That is also true here. A very literal rendering of the original would read something like this: "More than every object of guarding, guard your heart." When the Old Testament Scripture here and elsewhere speaks of the heart, it has a very wide concept in mind. The heart embraces not only the thoughts and the intellect of man, but also his feelings, affections, and desires, his principles, aims, motives, his will. In short the heart embraces our whole inner man, our soul life.

Yet why are we to keep our heart with all diligence? Why are we to guard it more than anything else that is to be guarded? "For out of it are the issues of life"; or as the RSV has it: "For from it flow the springs of life." Not merely what we know, nor merely what we are able to do, but also how we feel about these things, what we are prompted and incited to do with them, the attitude and motivation of the heart, will determine the kind of life that we are moved to lead. Amidst all that we have learned and all that we know and are able to do, we will always gravitate toward that which our heart loves, desires, values, treasures, and approves. In the heart are the fountains and wellsprings from which life issues forth, the fountains and wellsprings which give life its direction and its quality.

A person's life will be as his heart directs. Well may we therefore say: The heart of education is the education of the heart. Christian education, also on the secondary level, purposes to give earnest consideration to this divine admonition addressed to us in the Book of Proverbs: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." *Christian education purposes to help our adolescent Christians so to guard their hearts that a life as God would have it may issue forth from them.*

## I

Christian education, first of all, endeavors to bring home to our young Christians that a life as God would have it cannot issue forth from their heart as it is by nature. Here, then, is the first point at which Christian education, also on the secondary level, stands in bold contrast to present-day secular education. Also secular educators realize that the real objective of education cannot be achieved merely by imparting facts, developing skills, and improving natural gifts, but that the heart of education is the education of the heart. They, too, in a way sense that the heart must somehow be guarded and kept with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. Very emphatically, copiously, and loudly do we find them at present voicing just this conviction that imparted knowledge, perfected skills, and developed natural gifts by themselves alone will not lead to desirable living unless the heart is also properly touched and motivated, imbued with worthy values, interests, aims, and goals. In fact the secular stress on more comprehensive teacher training, with its emphasis on

philosophy of education and a richer cultural background, has just this in mind of equipping the teacher to do more in the way of supplying values, interests, and motivation.

Still, present-day secular educators, much as they may otherwise differ among themselves as to educational method and theory, are in almost complete agreement in an optimistic conception of human nature, in an optimistic conception of the natural heart of man. They are united in holding that the natural heart of a child is neither good nor bad but has infinite capacities for good and equally infinite capacities for evil, either of which may be developed. They agree in the assumption that the child has by nature a vast complex of stored-up readiness to do good and that this will lead to a good life, provided the correct environment allows this readiness to function. Thus for secular educators guarding the heart with all diligence so that a proper life may issue forth means guarding the *natural* heart, calling forth, fostering, and developing the supposed good inherent in it. They look to human reason to supply the heart with a worthy set of values, with adequate ideals, with proper motivation. It is principally with some form of reward, such as honor, praise, recognition, success, wealth, achievement, that an appeal is made.

Christian education, however, lets God's infallible Word speak to our Christian youth. Concerning the natural heart of man it lets God's holy Law speak, God's holy Law which clearly testifies that a life as God would have it cannot issue forth from the heart as it is by nature. God's holy Law tells us: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." God's Word tells us: In the beginning God indeed created man perfect and holy, created him in His own image so that he was able to lead a life pleasing to God. Already in Paradise, however, man fell into sin; through Adam's fall all mankind is sinful and corrupt, utterly unable to do God's will. Through sin all men have brought God's holy wrath and His punishment for time and eternity upon themselves. Man's guilty conscience tells him that. That is why the natural heart of man is filled with fear toward God; and fear of God arouses enmity in his heart toward God. This fear-born enmity does not, of course, always manifest itself in the most obvious form of open defiance toward God and His will. This enmity may frequently take on forms that are inclined to lead us to think that it is not there at all. It may be the form of ignoring God, of giving as little thought and consideration as possible to Him in daily living. It may even be the form of zealous outward worship, yet worship in which the sinner has reconstructed God according to his own liking so that he no longer feels a need to fear Him.

Yet whatever form natural man's fear-born enmity toward God may take on, it paralyzes his power and willingness to do God's will, and it leaves him a prey of selfishness. Every attempt on the part of natural man to shake off this bondage to sin and selfishness with his own natural powers merely directs him into another form of this same service. Even when the hope of gain, honor, success, achievement, moves man to lead an outwardly righteous and upright life, he is still serving selfish interests and thus not leading a life as God would really have it. More often selfishness will lead natural man to disregard the needs and rights of others. Selfishness will move him to vindictive outbursts of anger, spur him on to disastrous pride, lead him into one sinful excess after another.

These humbling truths concerning the natural heart of man are brought home to our youth in Christian education. This is done in a formal way when they are unfolded and expounded in the direct study of God's Word. Yet this is not the only way. No less effective is the inculcation of these truths in Christian education by the very fact that they are constantly treated as truths and permitted to stand as truths throughout all instruction and training. We shall have occasion to say something further on this very point later on. Neither is it principally to the intellect that these humbling truths are addressed, but to the whole heart, also to the emotions and the will, so that our young Christians may come to despair ever more fully in their own spiritual powers, so that with the Apostle Paul they may come to say: "I know that in me, (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing."

If Christian education did nothing more, however, than lead our young Christians to despair in their own natural heart for leading a God-pleasing life, we could hardly say that it gave earnest consideration to the divine

admonition: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” It would be wholly negative; but Christian education is decisively positive.

Yet Christian education does earnestly purpose to help our youth in guarding their hearts that a life as God would have it may issue forth. It testifies, however, that such a life can issue forth only from a regenerated heart, from a heart that has been brought to faith in Christ Jesus. Christian education points our young Christians to the Gospel as the only thing that *was* able to give them a regenerated heart, filled with joyful faith in the Savior. It points them to the Gospel as the only thing that can keep and preserve their hearts in faith. For the Gospel is the joyful news that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. The Gospel is the glad tidings that God’s eternal Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, came down from heaven and being incarnate of the Holy Ghost by the Virgin Mary entered our humble human state to become our substitute. It is the message that in His tender compassion for us lost and condemned creatures Christ led a holy life in our stead and assumed for us all the dreadful curses of our sin, humbling Himself even to the bitter agony of Calvary’s cross. It is the message that in that death, to which love and love alone moved Him, all died. For when in this supreme sacrifice of His love Christ shed His holy, precious blood, it was in God’s sight as though we sinners all had paid the extreme penalty of our sins. Thus Christ’s love has redeemed and justified us in God’s sight. Through this Gospel message the Holy Spirit awakens faith in the hearts of sinners; through this message the Holy Spirit renews, strengthens, and preserves such faith. Such a believing heart is at peace with God; it has the blessed assurance that it has full forgiveness of all sins, that it enjoys God’s fatherly love and care, that all things must work together for good, that every prayer in Jesus’ name is acceptable to God and heard. For such a believing heart even the dreadful specter of death has changed into a blessed portal that leads to the full enjoyment of God’s bliss and glory in His heavenly fellowship. Thus a believing heart is freed from fear, and no longer has cause to hate God, to disregard His will and selfishly to seek out its own ways. Instead it is moved to thankful love toward God and the Savior and to child-like awe and reverence before Him. In such thankful love and reverence a believing heart thankfully realizes: I am bought with a price. I belong to Christ to live under Him in His kingdom, and to serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

Keeping our hearts with all diligence therefore means having the Gospel constantly renew and strengthen our hearts in faith and thereby in thankful love toward our God and Savior. To have the hearts of our adolescent youth thus guarded and kept by the Gospel is the foremost objective of secondary Christian education. This Gospel is daily brought to their hearts in opening devotions and in the direct study of God’s Word. It is commended to them through the Christian personality, example, and testimony of their instructors. It is constantly operative in that it is permitted to cast its illuminating light upon all instruction and training, upon all facts, happenings, activities, judgments, conclusions, principles, interests, and habits.

Everything is seen in its true light only when it is seen in the light of the Gospel truth that we sinners have a gracious God through Christ. A great many things remain a complete puzzle apart from this truth. The real value of a human soul, for example, man’s purpose in this life, man’s destiny hereafter—all of these things remain a dark mystery unless one knows that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Many other things are grossly overvalued and overemphasized without the truth of our salvation in Christ. It is thus with the matter of acquiring wealth, of obtaining honor, of rising to power, of wielding influence among men, of enjoying life to the utmost. In the light of the Gospel we are led to ask: “What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” In the light of the truth of salvation we are led to ask: What can I do to help my fellowmen to eternal life: Only when we have learned to ask those questions, are we in a position to evaluate the things just mentioned aright, only then are we in a position to assign to them their proper place in our lives.

Other things again are greatly undervalued and misunderstood without the truth of our salvation in Christ. Take sickness, for example, and sorrow, and all the troubles, disappointments, and hardships of life. Man will do nothing else but deplore them, murmur and complain over them, and vainly try to escape them until he sees them in the light of saving truth, which assures us that all things must work together for good to

God's children. Only in that light will we learn to know the troubles of life as the blessed, wholesome crosses that they are.

Apart from the Gospel truth many other things remain meaningless, un-interpreted facts. Science is giving us an ever expanding mass of data concerning the universe in which we live; but no one will understand these facts properly until out of the knowledge of God's grace in Christ he thankfully sees in them wonders which a heavenly Father has created for man's temporal well-being and happiness, yet wonders which because of man's sin have been put under the bondage of corruption. Human history has recorded the great happenings in the world and the notable endeavors of man during the course of centuries, but man will draw wrong conclusions from them, read a false human progress and evolution out of them, glorify himself by means of them, unless in the light of saving truth he becomes aware of the ruling hand of God who in grace and judgment makes all happenings in this world and all the deeds of men serve His one plan of gathering His Church of believers unto eternal life. Yes, there is nothing that is not influenced, affected, and illuminated by the Gospel truth of our salvation in Christ.

It is vital, however, that we have a clear and proper understanding of what it really means that in Christian education—and that means also in Christian secondary education—all instruction and training is carried out in the light of God's Word, in the light of the fundamental truths of sin and grace. It does not mean that every English lesson, every history lesson, every mathematics lesson, every science lesson is now to be interspersed with lengthy discourses on Law and Gospel, with elaborate applications of the various truths of God's Word. That would be utterly unnatural. Such extensive elaborations, evaluations, and applications will be made in these courses only when there is a very natural occasion and inducement to do so. Ordinarily it quite suffices that the student in a Christian school gains and keeps the conviction that all the divine truths as they are set forth in opening devotions and in the direct study of God's Word ever stand applied, that they are ever considered to be in full force in all that is said and done in every course of study that is pursued. To this end it is vital above all that every instructor in a Christian high school should himself live thoroughly in the truths of God's Word, in the truths of sin and grace, so that everything that he says and does in imparting instruction, the judgments that he makes, the conclusions that he draws, the interests that he awakens, the evaluations that he sets forth, the motivation to which he appeals, will ever stand in harmonious reference to the truths of God's Word, to the truth of the Gospel.

Let us clarify this with some illustrative comparisons. At our Seminary we approach our entire study of theology with the premise of faith that in the Holy Scriptures we have God's verbally inspired and inerrant Word and that through this Word God has revealed everything that we need to know for our salvation. Now in our Seminary work there will certainly be occasions when we will dwell upon that very premise, unfold it at length and firmly establish it from God's Word itself. There will also be repeated occasions when we will briefly take up this premise anew and reconfirm it. Yet this is certainly not done every day, in every period of dogmatics, exegesis, church history, homiletics, or liturgics. It fully suffices that both instructors and students at all times have and keep the conviction that every statement and judgment that is made is meant to be understood in the light of this premise of faith concerning God's Word.

To clarify the point in question we might also think of secular education, which is often imparted from an evolutionistic viewpoint. I think that you will readily grant that this evolutionistic philosophy is not merely inculcated on the occasions when the instructor at great length unfolds his evolutionistic viewpoint of life, of history, of man, and of the entire universe. You will rather agree that this inculcation goes on likewise, and with equal effectiveness, when in the daily course of instruction, whatever the subject matter may be, the instructor simply makes assertions, voices judgments, and draws conclusions in such a way that they constantly imply the hidden premise of an evolutionistic viewpoint and make sense only when placed in this frame of reference. In fact this is probably the most dangerous form in which our children can become exposed to the leaven of an evolutionistic philosophy; it is the form that is apt to leave its most telling effects on their thinking.

In this way we shall endeavor to offer our adolescent youth a unified Christian training which will let our young Christians see all things in the light of the Gospel, so that their hearts may be truly guarded and kept by it, i.e. be strengthened and renewed in faith and thereby also in love toward their God and Savior. It ought to

be a part of our philosophy of secondary Christian education that we shall want to offer such Christian training to all for whom secondary education comes into consideration at all. Hence our Lutheran or Christian high schools will of necessity differ somewhat from our synodical academies, which purpose to offer Christian training to students for service in the public ministry of the Church as pastors, teachers, professors, and missionaries. Such service in the public ministry of the Church calls for specific gifts and aptitudes—though also here with a measure of variation—nevertheless gifts and aptitudes which are not necessarily possessed by all of our adolescent Christians for whom secondary education is, however, meant and who are therefore all equally entitled to receive such schooling in the form of Christian education. Hence the courses in our Christian high schools need to be sufficiently flexible and varied to make Christian training possible for every type of our youth in keeping with the individual gifts and aptitudes that they possess.

Certainly Christian education will always include training in Christian stewardship and thus keep us from being content with an unduly soft curriculum for anyone. Nevertheless it also remains true that Christian stewardship can never look for more than faithfulness on the part of students in the exercise and development of those gifts and aptitudes that they possess. If in a program of Christian education we should compel students to pursue courses, to acquire skills, to engage in learning activities, and to reach certain scholastic attainments, for which they manifestly lack the necessary gifts and aptitudes, then this is bound to undermine the very goal and objective of such Christian training. Hearts are prone to become disturbed, instead of being guarded and kept.

## II

From hearts, however, that are truly kept and guarded through the Gospel in Christian education a life as God would have it can issue forth. God's supreme will, concerning our life, is that it be a time of grace ending in eternal salvation. Our Savior says: "This is the will of Him that sent me, that everyone that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." Unless this supreme will of God is realized in a person's life, it will be an utter failure, no matter how filled it may otherwise be with earthly honors, possessions, accomplishments, and joys. This supreme will of God will be realized in those whose hearts are kept and guarded in faith unto the end through the power of the Gospel. For those who believe in Christ are God's children; and if children, then heirs - heirs of God, and heirs of all that is His, also of His eternal glory and bliss in heaven. Eventually they will be summoned to the full enjoyment of their heavenly inheritance. Christian education purposes to train young Christians to feel constrained by Christ's love to keep their eternal goal ever firmly in mind, and hence to make diligent use of Word and Sacrament, by which alone they can be kept and preserved in faith unto eternal life.

Yet the will of God concerning our life is not only this that finally in heaven we should praise the riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Even now, in this earthly life we are to glorify our God and Savior by striving after that which is good and well pleasing in His sight. Christ died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto himself, but unto Him who died for them and rose again. Carrying out this will of God requires much circumspection, earnest scrutiny, continual sharpening of our moral judgment through God's Word. It involves avoiding much in which the world freely indulges and the honoring of duties and responsibilities that the world lightly sets aside.

It is the Lord's will also concerning our adolescent Christians that even now in the days of their youth they should glorify His grace by doing that which is pleasing in His sight.

Youth is imbued with an inquisitive spirit. Youth wants to know the why and wherefore of things, thirsts for information and understanding, wishes to probe ever-new thrills and excitements. Adolescent youth experiences the unfolding of its reason as a new power. The Lord has constituted youth that way. Otherwise we would not acquire the knowledge and experience that we need to meet the tasks and problems of this earthly life. Yet the devil seeks to put all things into his sinister employ and tries to exploit this inquisitive spirit of youth for his own wicked design of drawing it into sin and unbelief. He will try to get youth to take offense at many a deep mystery of God's Word, which it is not able to grasp or prove with its newly developing reason. He will try to have youthful Christians probe all kinds of pleasures and thrills which are sinful so that they

might sear their conscience and be disturbed in their faith. Christian education purposes to guard youthful hearts through the Gospel against these temptations. It seeks to direct their thirst for knowledge and understanding in a wholesome way and to center it above all upon the saving truths which God has revealed in His Word that they may come to appreciate them ever more fully in faith. In such faith Christian education would guide the young to bring their reason into subjection to the high and unsearchable wisdom of God. This calls for Christian teachers who have a sympathetic understanding for the doubts and questions with which youth is prone to wrestle, Christian teachers who will spare no effort to help our young Christians solve their vexing problems. We need Christian teachers who will patiently guide them to recognize the limits of their human reason, and this particularly also by their own example as Christians who in spite of thorough knowledge, and in spite of being abreast of all vital and current human thought, are nevertheless fettered to Christ in joyful faith and in humble service.

Another thing that marks adolescent youth is an unfolding spirit of independence. In itself that, too, is a God given development whereby the Lord leads every new generation to stand on its own feet. In childhood others necessarily had to take care of all of our needs, had to make all our decisions for us, had to guide us in all things. But in adolescence youth is growing up and maturing and must gradually think more and more for itself, must gradually make its own decisions, must begin to act for itself and in an increasing measure take care of its own needs. Again Satan tries to put this proper impulse for independence into his wicked service. Through their own flesh he will tempt adolescent Christians to misuse and abuse their impulse for independence, to turn it into an unbridled passion for being free from all guidance but that of their own immature whims. He will tempt them to resent and cast aside all further direction from parents, pastor, and teacher.

By guarding youthful hearts with the Gospel Christian education seeks to keep this youthful spirit of independence in proper bounds. This calls for Christian instructors who appreciate and recognize the increasing measure of independence in thought, judgment, and action that must be accorded to adolescent youth, but who at the same time with Holy Writ, underscored by their own tactful manner of dealing with youth, let the youthful realize that it is out of love that the Lord still keeps representatives in authority over them in home, school, church, and state so that through these representatives of His He might bestow His blessings upon them for body and soul. Thus our young Christians are trained to thank God that He has given them Christian pastors and teachers to guide them to strive with ever clearer Christian judgment after whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are of good report. Thus our young Christians are guided to keep on thanking God also in adolescence for parents who are conscientiously concerned about them, and they are led to appreciate and heed the counsel and guidance which such parents continue to offer from their wider experience in life, even when they are no longer minded simply to command and to dictate, or when they are not at hand to watch over them.

It is characteristic of adolescence to have high hopes and ideals. In youth we all imagine that we will some day do and accomplish great things, that great happiness is in store for us. It is this spirit of optimism and hopefulness that we appreciate in youth and which makes it a pleasure to associate with young people. We say of older people who preserve a good measure of this spirit that they have stayed young. But here again the devil plays his game, tempting youth to set its hopes and aspirations, its goals for happiness and greatness upon treasures and joys that will ultimately fade away, or to obtain them in some way that would mean involvement in sin and denial of faith. By guarding hearts with the Gospel Christian education purposes to turn the hopefulness and idealism of youth into God-pleasing channels by showing the young that no matter how wealthy, learned, renowned, or mighty they might otherwise become, true happiness can come to them only by clinging to their Savior in faith, by walking His ways, by serving others in love for His sake. Christian education testifies that we become great in the eyes of the Lord only in the measure in which we serve others, prompted and constrained by the great love with which our Savior has served and saved us.

It is the heritage of youth to be happy. Our young Christians will have many decisions to make in the field of amusements, which make their appeal particularly to youth. Christian education will make it clear that being a Christian does not imply that we are to be somber stoics and sour-faced killjoys. Our God and Lord wants us to be happy. He has given us all the wonders of nature that we as His children should enjoy them. He

has given us our senses, our appetites, our tastes, our emotions, our capacity and our love for joy. He has given us human friendship, the intimate bond of marriage, the love of parents, given all these things that we might rejoice in them. He has filled this earth with good things, and He bestows them upon us individually by blessing the labors of our hands in different measure.

Yet God's gifts are often used in a manner that scorns every sense of stewardship. All about us we see lavish expenditures for luxuries and amusements that are frequently made without consideration for actual means or for higher duties, obligations, and responsibilities. Also many of the pleasures that the world pursues and the manner in which it pursues them with wantonness and insobriety brazenly scorn God's holy will that we should lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed.

To our sorrow and alarm we find also that the youth of the church becomes implicated and enmeshed in all these things. It is due to the sinful flesh clinging to Christians. What can be done to stem this tide? Certainly the church and its public ministers should bear clear testimony against all that involves sin and spiritual danger. Yet knowing that something is wrong and dangerous does in itself not lead to hating and shunning it. Only the constraining love of Christ, deeply experienced in a believing heart, can effect that. Hence the church looks hopefully to those whose hearts have in Christian education been guarded with all diligence through the Gospel.

Christian education is also to train our youth for proper Christian living in the future. Leading a life according to God's holy will requires decisions in every sphere of human activity. We live in an age in which life and human relations are not only becoming more and more intricate, but in an age which is at the same time becoming more and more pagan, an age in which God's holy will concerning the home, concerning marriage, concerning property, concerning life itself is often lightly set aside. Only a heart that is diligently guarded through the Gospel, only a heart which treasures Christ's saving love in joyful, thankful faith will lead our youthful Christians to ascertain with conscientious concern from God's Word what His holy will really is in all these relationships. Only such hearts will move them to strive to live in conformity with that will of God regardless of what the world around them is thinking, doing, and saying.

There is still one more thing to be said about a life, as God would have it. God has entrusted a special work to His believing children. It is really for the sake of this work that He has us sojourn here on earth, each for his appointed time. It is the task of furthering the testimony of His Gospel so that His Church of believers may be extended, perfected, and preserved among sinful men. This task God wants us to carry out individually and collectively. To this task God would have us willingly devote of our time, of our strength, of our gifts, of our abilities, and of our earthly means.

We find that many Christians do not give this God-entrusted task the supreme attention in their lives that it ought to receive. That is why our churches, our Christian schools, and our mission endeavors often lack sufficient volunteers who are ready to make the necessary sacrifices and to shoulder the various tasks which might further the cause of the Gospel. What is the remedy? Shall we put our hope upon schemes of human persuasion and coercion? No, we need hearts that are guarded with all diligence through the Gospel, hearts which treasure the saving love of Christ in joyful, thankful faith and which are therefore filled with thankful love. Such hearts will lead Christians to be blessedly active in the cause of Christ's kingdom everywhere. Such hearts will move them to offer willingly of their time, of their means, of their particular gifts and abilities wherever the cause of the Gospel has need of them.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." Let the Gospel keep the hearts of our youth and guard them in faith so that in every way a life as God would have it may issue forth. In this task, Christian education, on both the primary and secondary level, purposes to offer helpful aid. That is the very essence of the philosophy of secondary education.