

CHRISTIANITY AND EDUCATION

By

Dr. Gordon H. Clark
Dept. of Philosophy, University of Pennsylvania

and

Erling C. Olsen
Director of the Mid-Week Forum

Delivered Over Stations
WMCA, New York, N.Y.
WIP, Philadelphia, PA.
WOL, Washington, D.C.
WPRO, Providence, R.I.
WMEX, Boston, MASS.
WLNH, Laconia, N.H.
WCBM, Baltimore, MD.

Wednesday December 18, 1935
at 9:30 P.M.
“Mid-Week Forum Hour”

FORTY-FOURTH MID-WEEK FORUM

MR. OLSEN: On your previous visits, Dr. Clark, we have not had an opportunity to discuss one particular topic on which I should be glad to have your opinion.

DR. CLARK: What may it be?

MR. OLSEN: We both believe, do we not, that the Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, and we are both interested in the progress of that Gospel. Now, since you, Dr. Clark, occupy the interesting position of coming into contact with hundreds of students - tell me, does a college education ruin a student's Christian faith?

DR. CLARK: When a student has no Christian faith, Mr. Olsen, it cannot be ruined; but you undoubtedly refer to students, far too few in number, who have received Christian training in the home.

MR. OLSEN: Yes, certainly.

DR. CLARK: Well, at the opening exercises of Westminster Theological Seminary, last October, the Rev. John H. McComb, of New York City, asserted that he had never known a case of Christian faith ruined by college contacts. In apparent cases, it is equally discovered that the student in question had no real faith in the first place. He might have had some vague religiosity which wore off, but no

personal trust in Jesus Christ for salvation and strength. Where there is real faith, and where, further, boys and girls are properly; instructed by their parents and forewarned of the existence of enemies, the enemies do no irreparable damage.

MR. OLSEN: Yes. I know the hymn

“The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose, I will not, I will not desert to his foes; that soul though all hell should endeavor to shake, I'll never, no never, no never forsake.” But is your experience the same as Dr. McComb's?

DR. CLARK: Yes, it is. I have never known personally of a case of ruined faith. Yet, no doubt colleges do a great deal of general damage. There has been published recently a book entitled, “Crucifying Christ in Our Colleges,” by Dan Gilbert. Mr. Gilbert states and then gives his evidence that “for many, a college education has meant an applied course in immorality.” His quotations from contemporary authors and statistics make sad reading. He also quotes textbooks which advocate promiscuity in sex, revolution in politics, thievery and even murder in private affairs.

MR. OLSEN: Can all this be true?

DR. CLARK: Yes, Mr. Olsen, it can all be true. Assume, if you will, that the author has collected the most outrageous instances; and that he has selected the worst textbooks; nevertheless, this is what some students get, in some textbooks, in some colleges.

MR. OLSEN: While not a college man, Dr. Clark, I cannot say that I am surprised at Dan Gilbert's damaging evidence against our American universities. Yet, one does not have to be prudish to be disquieted about it.

DR. CLARK: A rehearsal of this situation to many Christians would prove exceedingly painful; but others need to be roused from their lethargy to a realization of actual conditions. It would do good to rehearse some of the most revolting and nauseating instances Mr. Gilbert had discovered; but I would rather turn the discussion to the underlying causes, which, while they are not as spectacular as the surface phenomena, are more basic.

MR. OLSEN: No doubt, the basic cause of all this evil, promoted by some professors and engaged in by some students, is the inherent depravity of human nature, on which you spoke here last September. But human depravity is not restricted to the educational field. Anyone who has worked in the business world knows that “one common taint of nature makes the whole world kin.” I suppose, therefore, you will confine yourself to purely educational causes and not discuss again the subject of depravity.

DR. CLARK: It might be proper to omit a topic which seems purely theological and has no special bearing on education. On the other hand, although it is not peculiar to education, an educator's belief or disbelief in hereditary depravity determines his attitude toward school problems. The non-Christian educator who believes that the child's nature is inherently and positively good, aims to develop that nature as it is. Restrictions are considered evil; and inhibitions are said to lead to the modern equivalent of hell; viz., an inferiority complex. That the result of such an attitude is often a decidedly immoral life is not surprising; even in the sphere of purely intellectual achievement the results are disastrous. Instead of real study and intellectual discipline, the child is permitted to choose as a project some passing fancy, and the basic drill of languages and mathematics is neglected. The Christian educator, on the other hand, believing in human depravity, praises self-control rather than self-expression; he aims to give the child some solid content, rather than a superficial project; and the further these divergent views of education are worked out, the more it is evident that the educator's theology is a determining factor.

MR. OLSEN: Indeed, you have made it very evident that an educator's policy is governed by his theology. That should dispose of some educators' claims to neutrality in religious matters. But cannot

you come still nearer to the actual theories of education?

DR. CLARK: We can try; and that is the best way to find out if we can succeed. But what is educational theory, and what is education? Disagreement on this initial question produces divergence all along the line. It should be obvious that a school system, founded on the idea that education is a moral and spiritual preparation for all life, will train children in a manner totally different from a school system which conceives education as a preparation for getting the most money in the shortest time. Aside from any religious implications, this latter type of education tends to turn men into machines. As long as the victims of this type of education are busily engaged in following their own little rut, the machine works smoothly. But get the man out of his rut, and give him leisure and solitude, and his essential poverty of spirit is revealed. Having no internal resources, he must, to avoid boring himself, find someone to amuse him.

MR. OLSEN: But not all educators hold to such a narrow vocational type of education. Surely there are many, Dr. Clark, who believe in the liberal arts.

DR. CLARK: Quite so, Mr. Olsen, and this type of theory, directly the opposite of the previous view, seems definitely more promising. If the aim of vocational education is to turn man into a machine and regiment him in a rut, the aim in this case is to prevent regimentation, and to make the student a mature man, a complete man, instead of a dependent child. Public school systems would do well if they should banish all vocational material, and banish it on the ground that it is not education. Technical schools are to be encouraged - the finer they are the better; but let not the common confusion remain that technical training and education are the same thing. Education, properly understood, is not for the purpose of producing chemists, engineers, or brokers; it is for the purpose of producing men. It does not prepare for anyone type of life in particular, but for all kinds in general. This general education can be and should be as thorough as technical training. The theory does not imply that hard intellectual labor can be dispensed with, or that college is a four-year holiday. Education should be as thorough as technical training, but not so narrow and restricted; for its purpose is to produce a complete man with a well-balanced life.

MR. OLSEN: Well, this is more to my liking. I am glad to know that the educational situation is not altogether bad. Some educators seem to have very good ideas on the matter. And yet, I see a serious difficulty lurking in this statement concerning a well-balanced life. Education may aim at a well-balanced life and a complete man; but what is a well-balanced life and what constitutes a complete man?

DR. CLARK: No strictly educational theory can answer these questions, Mr. Olsen, and for this reason it is impossible, intelligently, to discuss education without considering theology and other matters apparently far afield. Each educator really bases his educational theory on his personal philosophy and theology. Some educators hold, that man and the world he lives in should be humanistically conceived. They do not believe in God; religion, in their estimation, is superstition; and the well-balanced life becomes the gratification of as many senses as possible. Some of the worst results of this view give Mr. Gilbert the material for his book we mentioned. Other educators, too few in number, hold to the theistic world view. They assert that God is; and is sovereign; that disregard of God issues in inevitable calamity, and that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. On the one side, we have John Dewey and most of the professional educators; on the other side, the Christian. The anti-Christian educator wants to produce one kind of man; the Christian has chosen a far different ideal. They may both talk about the complete man, but they mean different things; and this may be clearly seen by quoting perhaps the best verse of Scripture, on the goal of education: "All Scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable for teaching ... for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."

MR. OLSEN: You speak with such assurance, Dr. Clark; that you can hardly escape the challenge to turn from negative considerations and present a more positive theory. Of course, your insistence on human depravity is sufficiently positive; but what about education in the strict sense?

DR. CLARK: I have no desire, Mr. Olsen, to dodge any difficult problems. Only bear in mind that an educational theory, based on Christian principles, can hardly be stated, not to say explained and defended, in twenty minutes. But to mention the most important principle, I should say, that first of all education is and should be regarded as the responsibility of the family.

MR. OLSEN: I am 100% in agreement with you there. Parents have a tremendous responsibility, as well as a glorious opportunity, to mold their children's lives. I think of the Apostle Paul's remark on the training given to Timothy, when he said: "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Believe me, the older I get, the more thankful I am for the mother I had, who taught me of Christ, from my early childhood.

DR. CLARK: It is primarily to parents, not primarily to the state, nor even to the church, that God has entrusted the children and their up-bringing. This principle needs emphasis in these days, because so many educators neglect or deny it. There are powerful forces at work in the world, and in these United States, to destroy the family and to make children, yes, and adults too, the creatures of the State. Loose morals go hand in hand with dictatorship, to destroy the family and to exalt the State. If these tendencies toward loose morality, exemplified both in easy divorce and in the repudiation of national debts; and toward dictatorship, exemplified again in the repudiation of debts and laws concerning potatoes; if these tendencies are not combatted and overcome, the family stands to lose. Dictators never have, and never can, annihilate the family as an institution; simply because it has been established by God and is ingrained in the human institution, but dictators can ruin many individual families, cause widespread misery, and even civil war.

MR. OLSEN: Just how does this policy express itself in education?

DR. CLARK: In education, the dictatorial policy is pursued with every centralization of authority. A Federal Board of Education, which could control local systems, would turn the schools into instruments of party politics, and in short, would be the most effective method possible for preventing any true education. All this, too, is in line with the so-called child-labor amendment. This proposed amendment to the U. S. Constitution would take all control of children away from the parents, and give it to Congress. Furthermore, the legal definition of labor is "any physical or mental exertion." Thus, this amendment would immediately put all school systems under the direct control of Congress. Private schools would be abolished, and local public schools would become departments of a job-hungry political machine, run from Washington. A score of attempts to limit the scope of the amendment to gainful employment, or to employment outside the home, or to labor in mines and factories, all failed; because the purpose was to give Congress control of all the mental and physical activities of persons under eighteen. In these troubled times the Christian must make himself vocal; he must attack these pagan proposals, and reassert the responsibility of the parents for the education of the children.

MR. OLSEN: These matters are more serious than I thought. Perhaps you have some suggestions to make, Dr. Clark, both along political lines and along educational lines. Would you favor the methods of some communities in the Middle West, where parents run their own schools, independent of state control?

DR. CLARK: Yes, Mr. Olsen, I favor such schools, and the type of government which allows them to operate. But this evening, we shall have to confine ourselves to emphasizing parental responsibility, and the importance of the family. The Bible, apart from which we are threatened with skepticism, contains some definite principles on this subject.

In Genesis, we read, that God established a gracious covenant between Himself and Abraham; but it was not with Abraham alone, that God established the covenant. The words are: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee..." The covenant, therefore, definitely included the children. Hence, the children of Abraham stood in a relation to God different from the relation of heathen children to God. In Paul's Letter to the Galatians, God teaches us that the New Testament dispensation is but the revival and fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham. This does not mean that actual salvation is a natural inheritance from father to son. Much less, does it deny the need of regeneration. But it does mean that God ordinarily works through families. For these reasons, Christian parents promise to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

MR. OLSEN: Dr. Clark, I believe both of us could relate many cases where faithfulness to children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord has yielded great dividends in later stages of life.

DR. CLARK: Not everybody recognizes the importance of the family, and I am afraid, Mr. Olsen, that not even all Christians recognize it. Christian knowledge, civilization, and culture, are unfortunately decaying. Large numbers of earnest, orthodox Christians are totally unaware of the rich heritage that is theirs; they are as babes, drinking Milk, and they need strong Meat for maturity. To be sure, they believe the fundamentals; they have been washed from their sins in the blood of the Lamb; they preach salvation through the propitiation which the Lord Jesus offered to His Father on the Cross; they have been instrumental in bringing many to repent of sin and accept free pardon of God through Jesus Christ; for all this we give glory to God, and we aim to imitate their excellent example. It is impossible to estimate the value of this. But, though they have made such an excellent beginning, they are not completely furnished unto every good work. This is partially because of pagan education. The milk of the Word sustains them; but they are fed poison in the schools, colleges and current literature. If Christian families should take hold of this situation, we may hope for a truly Christian culture, embracing not merely a part, but the whole of life; a culture through which the Christian will be a complete man, living a well-balanced life.

MR. OLSEN: Dr. Clark, your observations are keenly interesting, and your suggestion that "if Christian families should take hold of this situation, we may hope for a truly Christian culture," I heartily endorse. If Christian parents would study the Scripture, maintain a family altar, and make sure to familiarize themselves with what their children are being taught, a great stride will have been made toward this end.