The Christian Philosophy of Education and Christian Religious Education

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Philosophy and education are concepts that enjoy an ancient association. In addition, it is maintained in this paper that the discipline of the philosophy of education can make an important contribution to the discipline of Christian religious education as both are concerned with the dimensions of an integral education. There is also an important relationship between the Christian philosophy of education and a Christian philosophy of life. All this leads one to reflect upon the connection between philosophy and theology in the context of Christian religious education. This is of particular interest in multicultural and pluralist Canada where Catholic education defends itself from the position of its theological distinctiveness. Five first principles are examined to show the unity between a Christian philosophy of education and a Christian religious education.

La philosophie et l'éducation sont deux domaines qui jouissent d'une association avec l'antiquité. De plus, cet article soutient que la discipline de la phiplosophie de l'éducation peut contribuer de façon importante à la discipline de l'éducation religieuse chrétienne puisque les deux se soucient des dimensions d'une éducation intégrale. Il existe également une relation importante entre la philosophie chrétienne de l'éducation et la philosophie chrétienne de la vie. Ceci mène à réfléchir sur le lien entre la philosophie et la théologie dans le contexte de l'éducation religieuse chrétienne. C'est d'un intérêt particulier dans un Canada multiculturel et pluraliste où l'éducation catholique se défend par sa position de distinction théologique. Cinq premiers principes sont étudiés pour démontrer le lien entre une philosophie chrétienne de l'éducation et une éducation religieuse chrétienne.

Introductory Issues

The history of ideas – particularly the history of philosophy and the history of education – reveals that philosophy and education, concepts whose meaning is apparently clear and straightforward, have been subjected to a variety of interpretations based on ideology, religious fervor, economic convictions, cultural settings, political manifestoes, analytical dissection, and, more recently, the wider experience of postmodernism and multiculturalism. The discipline of the Philosophy of Education, one that is as old as Socrates himself, has inherited, therefore, a collection of ideas and concepts that often defy integration. The analytical branch of this discipline has been involved with the definition of terms such as *education, philosophy*, and *knowing*. Such an analysis can be very useful in helping to clarify the meaning of words that are often accompanied by a heavy sociological, philosophical, and religious baggage. A seemingly endless analysis of these terms, however, leaves one with a sense of imbalance, the severity of which depends upon the number of pre-qualifications, qualifications, and post-qualifications that the words education and philosophy may receive. In the face of this, the addition and subsequent linguistic analysis of the discipline Christian Religious Education can lead to a decidedly dizzy analytical experience.

I do not propose to define these words in any strict analytical fashion. I propose, however, to go with our natural intellectual intuitions that philosophy is the quest for wisdom, that education is the process of leading the student into the arena of human formation–intellectual, moral, emotional, spiritual, psychological, political, cultural, historical, and religious, and that "Christian religious education" is that discipline which leads the student into the circle of Christian faith, belief, and discourse. It is a discipline that encourages the student to pursue an intentional manner of living out one's vocation in time and space, while at all times realizing that human beings depend more upon grace than nature, and that our ultimate happiness depends upon our appreciation of the relationship between grace and nature. Ultimately, an integral Christian religious education cannot proceed without an adequate reflection upon the student's natural and supernatural end.

The educational task is a decidedly philosophical one. It is only when this claim is understood and accepted that one can proceed

to a reflection upon what constitutes an integral education. From the Christian perspective, the philosophical nature of the educational task confirms that philosophical wisdom is, at one level, pre-theological. On another level, however, and from within the Christian perspective, one meets an intellectual tradition which claims that, as one progresses through the hierarchies of knowledge and wisdom, one is confronted by the realization that philosophical wisdom cannot exist apart from theological discourse, a discourse which, in ultimate terms, always remains close to the body of Christian revelation. (The discussion and debate about the possibility of a Christian philosophy is an ancient one; it is an issue that was eagerly debated with the revival of a neo-scholastic philosophy, particularly in North America.) Therefore, the relationship between the Christian philosophy of education and a Christian philosophy of life is an intricate one. The critic may well wonder why it is that we need to walk down this path, one that we have rendered confusing by our own doing. Would it not be far simpler, rather, to subscribe to a Christian theology of education instead of a Christian philosophy of education or, more generally, to a Christian spirituality of education? Would this approach not be far simpler and would it not be quicker in providing answers for the many practical questions that must be faced by a theory of Christian education?

> Is theology, as it interprets the Bible, worship, heritage, and the Christian style of life, not a sufficient guide to the teaching and nurture of people? The plain fact is that theology makes use of the thought and methods of philosophical inquiry in order to carry on its work and to assist it in achieving meaningful communication. (Priester, 1966, pp. 60-61)

The relationship between philosophy and theology is an ancient one. What is important to keep in mind, however, is that the faculty of human reason is what distinguishes human beings from other terrestrial beings. Moreover, within the limited perspective of institutional learning, education is concerned directly with the intellect, and only through the illumination of the intellect is it concerned with the will, and hence with moral education. Furthermore, in order for the human mind to interact with the vast experience of reality, there needs to be a framework to assist in distinguishing between the different kinds of knowing and

knowledge. Such a framework would also assist in distinguishing between the kinds of knowing and knowledge that contribute to integral human growth and to the understanding of what hinders such a growth. For these answers, we cannot look directly to a theology (or spirituality) of education, not least because theology is the queen of the sciences, a monarch who expects that this kind of obvious and presumed discourse has already taken place in the antechamber of the palace. From the Christian perspective, education is ultimately a theological activity. The student, therefore, is not simply a natural being; he or she is also called to a supernatural destiny. Given this backdrop, knowing and knowledge cannot ignore this claim to a supernatural destiny, a claim that affects how one relates to all of reality.

The relationship between philosophy and theology within the context of Christian education is not a theme that has been eagerly explored in contemporary educational literature, particularly in the last 30 years. In Canada, for example, Catholic education has increasingly defended itself from an exclusively theological perspective. Such a position does not convince the non-Catholic, as theological distinctiveness is hardly particular to the Catholic creed. Second, theological distinctiveness is not necessarily the first place to begin a discussion about Catholic education in a pluralist and multicultural society. Not enough attention has been paid to such matters as ontological knowing and technical knowing and their importance in defining the scope and nature of Catholic education in general (see Oliver, 1989). For its part, for example, Canadian Catholic education needs to defend its distinctive mandate from a philosophical perspective. One presumes that it has a theological distinctiveness, and appealing to the constitutional protection of Catholic education in Canada will not necessarily move many hearts. A rigorous philosophical defense is essential in communicating the distinctiveness of a Catholic education.

The purpose of this reflection is to examine a few implications of some of the first-principles of a Christian philosophy of education for Christian religious education. The attempt will be to show that these first-principles must be understood collectively. Their intrinsic educational unity enables education to be the task of liberation that it is meant to be, a task of liberation which is

particularly crucial to all of knowing and knowledge that is governed by Christian religious education. The proposed first-principles are: (a) the nature of the student as a person, (b) the aims and end of education, (c) liberal and humanistic education, (d) moral education, and, (e) the unity of the curriculum. Of course, this is not an exhaustive but, rather, an initial working list. It is one that contains those essential pillars that support the unity and integrity of the task of Christian education. They are also pillars that secure the crucial and rightful place of Christian religious education within the curriculum. Moreover, these first-principles also secure the inner unity of the student's experiences. Without such a unity, education's central liberating task would be rendered meaningless.

The Nature of the Student as a Person

Christian education cannot proceed without the prior foundation of a basic philosophical anthropology of the student as a person. The Christian experience, however, teaches that one develops and grows into the realization of one's personhood by being faithful to the essence of the new law: love of God and love of neighbour. "The only adequate theological answer to the questions 'What is meant by personhood?' and 'Where is the authentic statement of what a human being can become?' is: Jesus Christ" (Thatcher, 1990, p. 74). Powerful as this mandate is, within the educational institution, however, the concept of personhood – particularly its development and its gradual realization – must be examined from the particularly distinctive human perspective of the education of the intellect.

Theories of personhood – its development and realization – are readily available, and in this the social sciences have played an important role. What is crucial, however, is that a theory of personhood for Catholic education must connect the various elements of nature and grace, the intellect and the will, natural and supernatural destiny, the temporal good, and the eternal city; in short, all those features that are essential in the construction of human personhood as understood in the Christian tradition. One such theory of personhood that remains faithful to these various elements has been formulated by the French philosopher Jacques Maritain. Maritain's distinction between the person and

the individual pervades his philosophical corpus, and attempting to synthesize his thought is often difficult. Suffice it to say that, for Maritain, personality is rooted in matter, a distinction that should not be simplistically interpreted as either dualistic or gnostic. His distinction, rather, is based upon the conviction that human persons enjoy a supernatural calling and destiny, and that the more one attends to this calling the greater will be one's integration and growth towards human personhood. Furthermore, by attending to their supernatural destiny, human beings are situated in a wider and more meaningful context, and, paradoxically, are better equipped to work for the common good, for a truly liberating and lasting humanism. The four main characteristics of personality for Maritain have much to contribute to the discussion of personhood and education:

> Man is a person, who holds himself in hand by his intelligence and will. He does not merely exist as a physical being. There is in him a richer and nobler existence; he has spiritual superexistence through knowledge and love. He is thus, in some way, a whole and not a part; he is a universe unto himself, a microcosm in which the greater universe in its entirety can be encompassed through knowledge. And through love he can give himself freely to beings who are to him, as it were, other selves; and for this relationship no equivalent can be found in the physical universe. (Maritain, 1943, pp. 7-8)

The four characteristics are knowledge and intelligence, good will and love. These are heavily packed concepts, and Maritain spends much of his philosophical energy explaining the importance and the implications of these concepts. Suffice it to say, then, that for Maritain education is education for freedom, not simply the freedom that is realized by exercising one's free will, but a freedom that moves beyond the will into the heart of personhood and results in a freedom of independence.

> Freedom does not consist merely in following the inclination of nature but in being or making oneself actively the sufficient principle of one's own operation; in other words, in perfecting oneself as an indivisible whole in the act one brings about. (Maritain, 1962, p. 165)

The ultimate concern of the Christian educational institution should be the education of the student as a person. Educators,

therefore, will achieve a great balance in their work if they remember that the educational task is broad and rich, for it extends well beyond the boundaries of institutional education and, indeed, extends throughout the span of life. In this regard, it is also important to remember that the extra-educational agencies – the Parents and the Church – play a vital role in the development and growth of personhood. The Christian school cannot flourish and prosper apart from an educational philosophy whose central thrust is the recognition of the student as a person. Without such a recognition, Christian education could easily fall victim to one of the myriad "isms:" behaviorism, intellectualism, voluntarism, empiricism, rationalism, syncretism, and so on. Left to themselves, all of these are educational heresies.

Finally, in this all too brief reflection on personhood, the distinction and the relationship between the intellect and the will is crucial. In strict Thomistic language, the intellect and the will are faculties of the soul. The growth and the development of these faculties are significantly dependent upon the educational process, and I understand this process in the widest possible application. And so, while the educational institution is primarily concerned with the intellect, it is the enlightenment and the inspiration of the intellect that play a decisive and direct role in the education of the will. Moral education in the educational institution must always be conducted through the intellect. Only Parents and the Church can educate the will directly. The discussion of the relationship between knowing the good and choosing the good is an ancient one, one that the Christian school can ignore only at its peril.

The Aims of Education

If an integral education is primarily directed towards the growth of one's personhood and ultimately towards a freedom of independence, then the aims of education must all reflect this reality. And thus we see why it is crucial to ground the educational task in an adequate and integral philosophical anthropology of the human person. There are, of course, other educational aims: to transmit the richness of a culture and of a civilization, to assist students to take their place in society and grow towards responsible citizenship, responsibility towards one's

family, earning a living, and so on. All of these, while being essential are, however, the secondary aims of education. The primary aim of education is to assist students in their journey and growth towards personhood and gradually to become aware of the duties and responsibilities entailed in such a growth

> Education is an effort to exert influence through which one attempts to improve, perfect or increase the value of an educand's personality .... Before education can occur, educational aims must be present. Thus it is essential that those intending to educate know *to what end* (they wish) or ought to educate. Only once this is established will they be in a position to search for methods through which their chosen aims could possibly be realized. (Brezinka, 1994, p. 1)

The characteristics of the aims and end (goal) of education – both the specific ends and the ultimate end – are understandably intertwined. In the zeal for the educational task and in the zeal to achieve the aims and to contribute towards the end of education, however, one can become trapped in the means, without any regard for their relationship to the aims and end of the educational process as a whole. One can, for example, concentrate upon students in a manner which imprisons them in their own experiences; or one may reduce education to the demands of sociological or political convictions; or the teacher's own views and preferences may become confused with the personal commitment to teach the truth, thus preventing the student from hearing the whole truth; or a school may become the victim of a school board or of government policy which may attempt to revise constantly the aims and end of education; or the shifts in the Christian theological perspective may come to exert an undue influence upon the teacher, the student, and the school; or the school and the teacher may be expected to assume the burden thrust upon them as a result of the failure of the extra-educational agencies – the family and the Church – to assume their rightful responsibility. In all these examples, the education of the student towards personhood, and thus freedom, becomes subservient to a host of other and sometimes well-intentioned means, but usually in a manner which distracts and takes away from the integral aims and end of education. If the ultimate end of education is to guide students towards the increasing realization of their personhood,

then the means of education cannot assume any more authority than that which is bestowed upon them by the ultimate end of education. They are the means of education, and they are so in order to assist the aims and end of education.

The rightful place of the means and end of education can only be established through a fundamental appreciation of the breadth of the educational task. One author makes reference to precisely such a breadth: "To call something education implies that it is an *intentional activity* and that the result is not entirely accidental." "To call something education implies it is of value." "To call something education implies that it *involves knowing and understanding in depth and breadth*." "Calling something education implies reference to a rather long period of time." "To speak of education implies the necessity of *interpersonal interactions*." "Speaking of education implies the presence of something we can only call *wholeness*" (Melchert, 1994, pp. 48-49).

The critic may well object that such a system is far too static and stationary, that such a system is chiseled out in a hierarchic universe, one that uses outmoded categories and distinctions. What is required, the critic may continue, is a revision of the aims and of the end of education within the confines of a particular historical time and place. Surely postmodernism makes precisely such a claim. Admittedly, it would be foolishness to pretend that historic and contemporary concerns do not influence the means and the end of education. Given that reason is our highest faculty, however, and a spiritual faculty at that, it is difficult to imagine how the primacy of reason could be compromised, even by what overwhelms us in the concrete present. Reason tells us that human beings are called to become human persons; and reason tells us that this process is a gradual one and that one step builds upon another; and reason tells us that growth in one's personhood depends upon one's interaction with the wealth and diversity of reality; and reason tells us that the interaction with this reality through knowing and willing leads to a deeper human growth. Could we say, then, that these are in fact the first-principles of education? They are in fact those foundational issues that actually secure the educational activity. They are, therefore, given the nature of reason, non-negotiables. Reason constantly attempts to liberate itself from the confines of matter and to situate itself

within the realm of the spirit, and it does so through the dynamic and spiritual agency of the intellect and the will.

Liberal and Humanistic Education

Liberal education and the humanities have received a great deal of attention in the last 15 years, particularly since the time of Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*. Close to this discussion is a legitimate concern with an early and sharply focused specialization that has become part of school curricula. Philosophers have long recognized that human beings are by nature specialists; they aim at particular knowledge and particular kinds of knowing. This makes it all the more urgent to stress the importance of a general, liberal, and humanistic education, precisely because specialization does not presuppose a broad humanistic foundation, one which is imperative for personal and communal responsibility, as well as for personal and communal knowledge and learning. What binds society and communities together is not specialized knowledge but a broad and general basis of knowledge and learning.

From the perspective of Christian religious education, liberal and humanistic education secures the foundation upon which one may secure the crucial relationship between faith and culture. Such an edifice refuses any simple division between intellectual and academic culture on the one hand, and between religious and a faith culture on the other. A sound liberal and humanistic education also prevents the bifurcation of the human person. Faith and culture – intellectual, moral, religious, social, political – stress the unity of the human person at all levels of knowing. Such a unity is integral to the life of a liberal and humanistic education. The power of a liberal education is that it confirms the unity of the human person, both personally and communally. A sound liberal and humanistic education must always aim at unifying the experience of the student, and it does so by recognizing the stages of mental and moral growth and the gradual ascendancy of the educational process. It does well to ask, however, and within the context of a Christian religious education, about the importance of that particular kind of knowing and knowledge that is imparted through a liberal and humanistic education:

> Liberal studies are devoted to the maintenance and cultivation of responsible personal knowledge. This does not mean narcissistic self-absorption in the human reality as opposed to other subjects of knowing, but deliberating about the human contribution to acts of knowing in every discipline, and criticism of that contribution. (Churchill, 1983, p. 37)

I believe that the principal contribution of the liberal arts and the humanities is precisely to liberate the student from the confines of the self. A liberal education is concerned with the student coming to know and possess the self without ever losing contact with the rest of the world and the orders of reality. A liberal education should rightly attempt to unify the student's experiences – intellectual, moral, religious, social, political, aesthetic – and thus to lead the student to a deeper awareness of self, of others, and, ultimately, of God.

A liberal education also enables the student to appreciate the depth and breadth of a moral and spiritual response to all of reality. That is to say, the student's response to reality is not to be limited within the confines of institutional religious expression. Rather, religious expression is the total response of the human person to all of reality. To ignore this fact is to encourage a bifurcation between faith and culture, and, therefore, to fail to unite the student's experiences in interacting with all of reality. Furthermore, a bifurcation between faith and culture results in spreading the student's experiences over a wide surface, rather than attempting to unite the experiences within the single whole that is realized in what it means to be a human person.

A liberal and humanistic education is also an essential unifying force in a pluralist and multicultural society. The questions that arise in this context are: How do humanistic and liberal studies unify a diverse cultural and religious populace? And, given such a diverse populace, can a liberal education be limited to the Western classics? The unity of a diverse cultural and religious populace must be grounded in the power of reason, a power manifested in the ability to make choices and judgments. It is precisely these abilities that are celebrated in the Western classics. Second, liberal and humanistic studies should not be limited to the Western classics. How choices are made and which classics are chosen are another matter. What is important from

the perspective of a Christian religious education, however, is the universal quest for holiness, for reverence, for the love of truth and beauty, for moral order and sanctity, and for social and communal responsibilities. The classics ponder such universal themes, themes that are common to humanity, and thus they rightly occupy a place of prominence in a liberal education, and, by implication, in the universe of Christian religious education.

Moral Education

Essentially, the educational institution imparts moral education through instruction and through example. The school is primarily concerned with the enlightenment of the intellect, and through this enlightenment it is, by implication, concerned with the education of the will. It would be a grave mistake, however, to suggest that the education of the will is a secondary matter. Everything that teachers and schools do and say has a moral bearing on the education of their students.

Institutional moral education cannot afford to be either dogmatic or moralistic. Rather, it must appeal primarily to intelligence and to the power of reason, and through these powers reach the will and thus the heart of the student. Moral responsibilities and duties appear to become deeply rooted when they are integrated with the dynamic spiritual capacity to love and to respect the other as a person, a person who as Christianity proclaims, is created in the image and likeness of God.

The issue of duties and responsibilities has become a matter of grave concern in an age of relativism, one that seems to have been given form and content through postmodernity. The elusiveness of this world-view and its refusal to be tied down with a fixed definition seem to be only half the excitement; the other half appears to be the fluid sense of personhood, one which develops in relation to context – race, gender, class, history, cultural experience, to name but a few. "From a postmodern perspective, the 'centered' subject does not exist naturally and pre-formed but is rather a cultural *construct*, inscribed by the meaning system that is language and by discourses, particular and systematic language (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 16). If we adhere to the theories of postmodernity, then we are no longer in a universe where we may either choose or reject postmodernity as one theory

among many. Postmodernity is, rather, or so we are told, a condition of being; nothing can be chosen, discussed, or approached outside of this condition. If this is correct, then what are its implications for institutional moral education? Furthermore, can the young who seem to have experienced postmodernity at several levels, like advertising, television, the internet, the critique of institutional religion, can these young people be educated in the traditional way of stressing the primacy of the intellect and its vital relationship with the will? What happens when the moral teachings and insights of the classics are simply dismissed as theories and positions bound by a particular culture, religion, and race, and further limited by particular geographical, political, economic, and ethnic perspectives? These are no longer the theoretical and armchair questions of the philosophy of education. Rather, they are questions that are crucial to the vitality and efficacy of a Christian philosophy of education.

Christian religious education has become increasingly aware of the dangers and the repercussions of a dogmatic morality. It must, moreover, become equally concerned with a morality that becomes so relativistic and contextual that any reference to universal issues like the unity of the human person and the primacy of reason is looked upon with incredulity. The Christian faith is closely bound up with the moral life, one that recognizes that we depend more upon grace than upon nature, and for no other reason than the wounded condition of human nature which is depicted so clearly in the individual and communal capacity for sin. This awareness cannot be lost amidst the electrifying discussion about postmodernity, especially through its cultural wing of postmodernism.

The Unity of the Curriculum

It is far from coincidental that this section follows on the heels of the mention of postmodernity, postmodernism, and relativism. "As well as its challenge to the conception of the subject who learns, the postmodern moment also constitutes a challenge to existing concepts, structures and hierarchies of knowledge" (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 16). On the other hand, the curriculum of a Christian educational institution must be committed to the

sanctity of the intellect by exposing the mind to the truth in all of its dimensions and spheres. The unity of the curriculum is important for at least two reasons: knowledge is constructed from degrees and hierarchies, and the inherent unity of truth.

Both the degrees of knowledge – physical, mathematical, and metaphysical" and the unity of truth are vital in enabling students to grow in and towards their personhood. The degrees of knowledge recognize various truths, but they also recognize the ascendancy of truth where spiritual and theological truths occupy a place on the highest rungs of the pedagogical ladder. The unity of the curriculum depends upon the ascending and descending nature of knowledge. In such a context, therefore, one can fully appreciate the errors of a curriculum that is dominated by a premature specialization.

Theology, and by association Christian religious education, occupies the highest place on this pedagogical ladder. Much of the discussion about the place and the role of a Christian religious education occurs within a model where it is isolated from the rest of the curriculum, thereby rendering the relationship and interaction between Christian religious education and the rest of the subjects in the curriculum ambiguous at best. An integral Christian religious education must presuppose a certain hierarchy of values in the curriculum, values that are related to the natural and the supernatural end of the student as a human person. And so, in a Christian school, while it is important to know the chemical formula for water, it is more important to know and appreciate one's moral duty and responsibility; and while it is important to know historical dates and facts, it is more important to know about the revelation of God through Jesus Christ. "Certainly there is much to criticize [in a Catholic school] in the way diverse subjects tend to roam about like planets with no sun, occasionally bumping into one another by accident" (Nordberg, 1987, p. 133).

The bifurcation between faith and culture can quickly show its ugly head in a curriculum that lacks internal unity. This unity is not simply dependent upon some prior philosophy of education, though this field has much to contribute to this discussion. What is important, however, is the particular vision of the teacher. What is important is whether this vision is dominated primarily by facts

and data or whether it is influenced by a genuine desire to know and to see and to make connections, and to see the implications of how and what one teaches. The unity of the curriculum is largely dependent upon the teacher, and in this capacity the moral and religious convictions of the teacher will play a decisive role. It is through the unity of the curriculum that teachers must engage in the ever vital task of unifying the experience of students, rather than allowing these experiences to be spread out because they are devoid of a unifying principle. How the teacher envisions the unity of truth is another crucial matter. From the Christian perspective, all truth is united because it comes from God. And so, while each discipline enjoys an independence in its own quest for the truth, it is not an absolute independence. From the perspective of the human person and the growth towards personhood, there are, on the pedagogical ladder, lower and higher truths, and it is the recognition of this primordial fact that plays a decisive role in unifying the curriculum. Postmodernity's challenge to this claim, however, needs to be answered.

The discipline of the philosophy of education should have a great deal to say about the theoretical and practical implications of the unity of the curriculum. Both sets of implications, however, will be molded by a prior philosophy of the student as a person. Without an integrated anthropological, metaphysical, and epistemological basis, the philosophy of the person could easily disintegrate and bend to the demands of the work place, a situation most clearly manifested by the call for premature specialization. And so, while the academy has continued to grapple with the place and role of liberal education, the march of technology is set to the beat of a different drum, one that is not particularly sympathetic to the concerns of an integral philosophy of education. The unity of the curriculum, therefore, is in some ways at the heart of the issue, and one that should be reflected in the convictions and commitments of the educational institution, particularly in a Christian school. The unity of the curriculum is a philosophical matter. A curriculum devoid of this philosophical unity fails to provide the student with an integral education. In the Christian context, a curriculum devoid of philosophical unity also fails to provide a Christian education.

Conclusion

A Christian philosophy of education has, therefore, much to say about the place and influence of Christian religious education, both as an individual subject which enjoys its autonomy within the curriculum, as well as its relationship to the rest of the curriculum. The rigor of such a philosophy of education must ensure that the educational task does not lean towards individual ideologies and theories without examining the implications for the education of the student as a person. It is this concern with the person that must remain the guiding light in the educational task.

Critics have been concerted in their attack on Christian religious education and accuse it of being a 'soft' and a non-rigorous discipline. This criticism needs to be taken seriously. The over-emphasis on the experiential in Christian religious education must carry much of the weight of this criticism. Often, classes in Christian religious education offer little more than a forum in which to react against the doctrinal, moral, and dogmatic teachings of the institutional Church. Dismissing the academic criticism of Christian religious education as the reaction of crusty and stodgy academics will be of little benefit, particularly if one is striving for the inclusion of Christian religious education within the academy as a whole. Furthermore, it is a criticism that must be faced and answered. To claim that the discipline of Christian religious education swings from one extreme to another – for example, from a strong manual or catechetical style to an overly experiential and emotional style – does little to pacify the critics. Indeed, one part of this swing seems to be devoid of serious academic and intellectual content. Critics of Canadian Catholic schools, for example, argue, and rightly so, that an alarming number of young Catholic students who hail from Catholic schools are dangerously unaware of the basic elements, teachings, and practices of the Catholic faith. Another concern raised pertains to the place and treatment of religious education in the Catholic school in general and within the curriculum in particular. It is often pushed to the margins of the school day; it is isolated from the curriculum, thereby raising further questions about the integral nature of Catholic education, which should be the aim of the Catholic school; it is seen as highly experiential and not academically demanding; and it is regarded as a subject that

anybody from the teaching staff may teach, often with little or no theological education. Much of this criticism is correct.

These criticisms should be of special concern to the advocates of a Christian philosophy of education, particularly in an age when relativism is backed by elusive cultural theories which are quick to dismiss organized religion and a disciplined moral theory. In such a climate, the advocates of a Christian philosophy of education should be seen on the front lines with the intent to challenge the Christian educational institution to assume the depth and gravity of its educational responsibility. On the other hand, such a philosophy of education must also engage in the intellectual debate with the critics of Christian religious education concerning the kind of knowing and knowledge – particularly its spiritual character – that should be imparted by a Christian religious education. Too often, Christian educators begin their teaching and reflection from the perspective of faith and belief without adequately grounding their theories and convictions in an integral Christian philosophy of education. A Christian theology of education must look to and depend upon a Christian philosophy of education for such a grounding.

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