The Impact of the Transition to Modern Education upon Religious Education

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It was not in the character of the medieval religious, political, and social structures to yield easily to the forces of change which were at work at the dawning of the so-called Modern period. The outward forms and dominant principles of medievalism persisted after its philosophical structure became decrepit. When some branches of culture, education for example, attempted to move forward upon new premises, they found resistance from the forces of entrenched custom in religion.

The significance of the transition which affected all phases of life appears in its true light when we remember that the education of the Middle Ages was essentially religious education. Before 1400, the Church could rely upon the learning of the time to serve her interests. The fifteenth and sixteenth century, however, brought movements toward a new form of education—an education which almost inevitably moved in directions independent of Church control.

This paper will seek to analyze several factors which contributed to the secularization of education, and to evaluate the impact of these factors upon the educational aims and program of the Christian Church.

I
The Religious and Social Scene in the Time Of the Reformation

Several factors served to perpetuate the firm hold which Romanism had upon Central Europe at the time just following the Reformation. The fragmentation of Protestantism which followed the death of Luther based upon an attitude of mind which refused to yield minor points in the interest of a larger unity, prevented any large consolidation of the Zwinglian and Calvinistic Protestantism. As a consequence, ward religious individualism was greatly weakened by disunity. Again, the Counter-reformation served to make Romanism more tolerable, by a correction of the most glaring abuses of Catholicism. The rise of the Jesuit Order served to consolidate Romanish gains, and to perpetuate a close relationship between the Church and the civil rulers.

This had its counterpart in the decline of morals which marked the higher strata of society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is not surprising, therefore, that there arose men like Boyle and Voltaire, who, lacking the ability to discriminate between Christianity as such and Christianity as it was degraded by abuses, attacked the Christian system as a whole.

Again, the social and economic conditions which marked this era resulted from the attempt of the privileged classes to maintain an obsolete economic structure. Feudalism in principle was maintained long after many of its outward forms perished. Several factors were operating to crumple feudalism: the increase in travel, the increase of commerce, the rise of the bourgeoisie—these all served to mediate between the First and the Third Estates, and to invade the precincts of the upper class by a new type of aristocracy, that of wealth. The Second Estate served both to make the peasantry dissatisfied, and to afford an opportunity for the younger sons of peasants to do a bit of “social climbing”.

The autocracy of the government of France represented the last stand of the privileged classes. But there were disintegrating forces operating within France (and elsewhere as well). The work of Montesquieu popularized the study of Political influences were crossing the English Channel; and the evident success of liberalized govern-
ment in England could not but attract attention elsewhere.

In the midst of such conditions of political oppression and abject poverty upon the part of the masses, there arose movements which championed the cause of the Third Estate. Influenced by Locke, many Rationalists gave attention to the question of the equality of all men, which attitude replaced the haughty attitude which earlier adherents of the rationalistic School had assumed toward the masses. Pietism concerned itself with the poor and the underprivileged; the Anabaptists gathered together in a common interest many of the humbler classes; the Brethren of the Common Schools served also to minister to the poor in France.

Thus, in the midst of conditions which lagged much behind the theoretically possible, there were movements which presaged a transition. Humanism and Scholasticism were alike the subjects of attack. The religion basing its claims upon Divine Revelation had allied itself with the oppressive classes; and a reaction was due. Education had been the exclusive property of the Church far too long. And in the reforms soon to come, education could not but be profoundly affected. Reform came, in significant part, in the realm of ideas.

II.
A New Theory of Knowledge: The Philosophy of Empiricism

Characteristic of the education of medievalism was the theory of innate ideas. This served to perpetuate the traditional patterns of thought, and to discount any attempt to advance knowledge by the empirical method. This view of the nature of the human intellectual faculties proved exceedingly persistent.

It was John Locke who challenged this theory. His method was that of investigating the thought of persons of cultures other than his own, and the processes of infants. The diversity of moral principles among social patterns convinced him that there were no universal ideas - not even the idea of God.

Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding developed his theory of the "two sources". Only by the two-fold method of observation and reflection, he contended could there be knowledge. It is possible that he went too far in his tabula rosa theory, inasmuch as it denies the active faculty of the mind as it participates in the reception of impressions from without. But it afforded a corrective against a view which had too long dominated the field.

There is not space to consider here the implications of the Lockian view for theology or social study; nor were the conclusions which others drew from his theory in any sense unanimous. Diverse schools of thought located their origins in his Essay. His view attacked the idea that words expressed necessarily any given ideas: that is, he contended that a word was but a symbol, adopted arbitrarily. This had its practical result in the abandonment of the exclusively linguistic system of education. Rhetoric was discounted as a study, and the tendency away from the Classical languages became inevitable. Thus, the trend was toward the vernacularization of academic study, a tendency which had begun in the Realistic movement.

Eby and Arrowood are of the opinion that Locke was influenced little, if any, by the Humanists and Realists of the Continent. His view of education, on the other hand, reflected the educational theory of the British gentry, which was essentially aristocratic. He would educate a few "at the top", trusting that there would filter down to the society below the benefits of education.

To Locke, the objectives of the educative process was as follows: Virtue, Wisdom, Breeding, and Learning. He cared little for the bookish scholar as such. For him, education meant preparation for life. Usefulness was the determining factor in the arrangement of the curriculum. This left little place for dialectic and rhetoric, while the study of Latin was shorn of its traditional halo.

Locke was most largely at variance with traditional education pattern in his denial of the theory of "transference. He had little hope that the stu-
dent could transfer facility in Latin to facility in logic. Nor did he agree with
Spinoza, that the universe could be reduced to a huge geometric problem, and that a
knowledge of mathematics would yield the clue to its comprehension.

There has been much controversy concerning the relation of Locke to the prob-
lem of formal discipline. Some have sought to argue from the writings of this man that
he favored the disciplinary theory; others have been equally positive that he did not
favor it. Eby and Arrowood submit the follow-
ing arguments to establish that he did not favor it: (1) he insisted that education
be made a matter pleasurable to the child, recognizing his interests and his play in-
stincts; (2) he insisted in making the cur-
riculum practical; (3) he insisted upon a
wide curriculum, that it should be extensive, rather than intensive; (4) he favored those
studies which developed reason and judg-
ment, at the expense of memorization; (5)
he insisted that habits and skills are “made,
not born”; (6) he insisted that “mathema-
tics sets up a model method of reasoning,
and that this method may well be copied in
all other forms of reasoning.”

The views of Locke had their repercus-
sions, not only in education, but in philosophy as well. They underlay that
period in the history of Europe and Ameri-
can known as:

III.
The Enlightenment

It is interesting to note that while the
Realistic movement centered in Germany,
and that while the demolition of the medi-
 eval pattern of education occurred largely in
England, that the ENLIGHTENMENT
was centered in France. This movement
stood at the confluence of two streams: Rationalism and Empiricism. The Philoso-
phes were the heirs of Descartes and Locke.
They, in general, abandoned revelation in
favor of reason and observation. Their
theory cut off from the spiritual world
and portrayed him

As frequently occurs, the Enlighten-
ment was carried too far in France, where
it resulted in both

\[9^\text{Op. cit., p. 423.} \]

Against Christianity, not in its pure form,
but as it was represented by a moribund
church, attacks not entirely fair were level-
ed. The social sence was likewise such as
to make a reaction of excess to be expected.

Intellectually, the motto of the Enlighten-
ment was that of Bacon “knowledge is power”;
the ultimate datum was thought to be located in the reason. Politically there
came, slowly but surely, a growing symp-
athy with the masses. Locke’s insistence
upon the equality of man had its effect. The
impact of this democratization of society
could not but have its reflex in education.

Parallel to the work of the Enlighten-
ment in France, there was a liberalizing
work going on in Germany. In France,
Rousseau in his *Emile* applied the prin-
ciples of the Enlightenment to education, stress-
ing the essential “physical” outlook of the
child prior to his fifteenth year, and the
phenomenal unfolding of the power of ab-
straction during the period of adolescence.
This led to inevitable readjustments in the
curriculum, including a stress upon a liber-
al arts education, as against an early spe-
cialization. His effort in curriculum build-
ing was conditioned by what Eby and Ar-
rowood call the “Antinomies” in education:
freedom of nature vs. conventions of
society; spontaneity vs. formal discipline;
naturalism vs. idealism; natural goodness
vs. social depravity, etc. His attempt to
solve these problems by the adjustment of
curricula to suit the several age levels was
not completely successful, but it pointed to-
ward significant developments which should
come to full flower in the modern period of
education.

IV.
Educational Reform in Germany in the
Eighteenth Century

The situation east of the Rhine was
somewhat unspectacular when compared
with that prevailing in France. Educational
this period represented
ents of which were:
Rationalism, Physi-
occracy, Romanticism;
strong background of
appeared in the most
expected places. Space
permits little more than a mention of names
in this connection. Hecker, Basedow and von Rochow were the chief figures of the period. Hecker’s development of the Realschule and the academy for the training of teachers, constituted his chief contribution. Basedow’s work was chiefly among the upper classes. His reforms centered in the centralization of education under state control, and the separation of education from the ecclesiastical authorities. His contributions in the fields of realistic studies and of physical education were also significant. Von Rochow was the champion of education for the masses. With a profound faith in the lower classes, he insisted that the State was obliged to educate all children; and the objective conditioning his work was that of elevating the lower classes through knowledge. His work was underlain by democratic ideas, of the worth of the individual, and the equality of men.

More significant still for education as a whole was the work of the German, Herbart, whose work merits a section by itself.

V.

The Contribution of Herbart To Modern Education

Johann F. Herbart combined in himself several careers: as educator, as philosopher, and as psychologist, he represents a prolific and versatile complex. His training, especially that of tutoring the three young children of the governor of Interlaken, Switzerland, gave him a unique opportunity to study the growing mind at first hand, and to develop his own educational theory at the time of his greatest creativity.

To Herbart, education could properly serve one major objective, to inculcate morality. To him, the moral man was the man who was intelligently moral, and thus free by choice and not by chance. In planning such an education, he recognized the need for a many-sided approach, which gave the individual a wide range of interests. Thus the two great objectives are: educated goodness, and versatility.

Herbart avoided one danger which beset the educational reformers of his time, especially those of France. He recognized that while education must have its pleasant side, yet the element of discipline must be dealt with and given proper place. Hence his insistence upon instruction, as well as upon spontaneous study. Hence, the educator must perform a ministry of many facets: he must discipline, he must build the thought processes, he must impart information, he must indoctrinate toward morality. The ultimate objective was, of course, the provoking of growth and development of ideas in the mind of the child.

Part of his rigid theory of education was found in his insistence that account must be taken of the laws of the mind. His psychology was centered in the educative process. There is not space to consider his psychological theory at this point. The keys to his system is that of the unity of the inner life. Meaning and process were to him one; experience and significance were likewise one.

His stress upon empiricism was reinforced by his theory of the “stream of consciousness”. According to this, the mental life consists of a series of primary recognitions by the mind, which are in constant flux, and which pass from below to above the threshold of consciousness and back again, according to the interest factor.

Herbart’s view of the problem of interest is one of his outstanding contributions to the field of psychology. To him, interest was a force governing the retention of a conscious impression, or causing it to rise or fall below the threshold. Thus, education consists in part in the utilization of the principle of interest: and the function of the teacher is to manipulate the interest so as to elicit from the subconscious the proper thought-material, and to hold above the level of consciousness those ideas which have educative value.

Emphasis was laid by this educator also upon the association and relation of ideas. This emphasis called attention to that tendency of the mind to think in terms of likeness (or antitheses), and of the capacity to interpret a new experience in terms of a similar one of time past.

The three stages of mental development, as set forth by Herbart, are as follows: (1) the stage of sensations and perceptions; (2) the stage of imagination and memory; and (3) the stage of conceptual thinking and
judgment. From this, it is not difficult to see his conception of the purpose of education. In medieval education, the second of these held primary emphasis. Herbart would take the unfolding child from the first to the third.

Herbart reinterpreted the phase "from the known to the unknown" in terms of apprehension. This he employed to denote that mental set by which we interpret present experiences in terms of our general thought-pattern.

It is evident from the foregoing that the chief interest of Herbart was in the more advanced stages of the educative process. His thought concerned the theory of the mind advancing to the stage of conceptual thinking and judgment. His aim was to shape properly the maturing person for a practical, harmonious, creative, and useful life in a society. Hence his theory of education was primarily social and ethical.

His view of the proper type of curriculum was conditioned by his psychology of education. He would carry the child as quickly as possible from the stage of perception and sensation, to the level of conceptual thought. He laid special stress upon the study of history, as revealing knowledge most relevant to the social adjustment of the individual, and as developing the moral judgment.

His followers elaborated and applied his educational theory, notably Karl Volkmar Stoy and Otto Frick. Their aim was to produce a well-knit curriculum, which would lead to a correlated thought-pattern, including all of the major factors in the systematic body of knowledge. With this in view, Herbart and his followers anticipated the system by which a pupil "majors" in a given field, and elects subjects to integrate and correlate his thinking in this given field. The major subject was not only given special emphasis in itself, but likewise, its bearing upon related fields was exposed, and other subjects were impressed into the service of supporting and reinforcing it. This has been a significant and permanent contribution of the disciples of Herbart.

Concerning the method of instruction advocated by the Herbartians, it is essential first to say that they had little use for mere memorization of things that would be of no practical use, and that would be soon forgotten. The emphasis is rather upon the correlation of knowledge into a pattern which would remain indelible upon the mind, and which would, by virtue of its strong inner relations, form the basis for a workable philosophy of life, and serve as an adequate reservoir of knowledge. Thus, the stress was primarily upon assimilation and digestion of ideas.

The five steps in the process of instruction, namely preparation, presentation, association, generalization, and application are essentially utilitarian. The goal was always that of making all knowledge of practical value and of eliminating dead learning.

Conclusion

From the foregoing considerations, it is evident that the transitional era, which bridged the gap between the Middle Ages and the modern period, was one in which educational theory in general underwent transformations which both undermined the medieval system of religious education, and also presented a great challenge to all Christian education, and particularly to that of modern Protestantism.

The movement toward popular, as against aristocratic, education challenged the Catholic monopoly upon education. The Roman Church possessed facilities to educate the privileged few; but to educate the masses constituted a task too great for the Church. Hence, she could no longer be certain that the training which her people should receive was definitively religious in character. The influence of John Locke was many fold; one significant element in it was its tendency away from Latin and Classical education. So long as education could be narrowed, the Church might exert control over it. With the extension of the curriculum, however, secular learning became inevitable. This drove the Christian movement, whether Catholic or Protestant, to focus her attention upon specifically Christian education, that is, education which must project the Christian message into an educational system whose climate was largely secular.
The Enlightenment brought great pressure to bear upon Christian education, chiefly through its negative effect upon belief in the supernatural. Natural studies expanded in scope until there threatened a situation in which the area in which religion might be a factor was shrunk to near-zero. The broadening of the scope of secular education moved on apace, creating in the public mind the impression that organized Christianity was a poor representative of the religion which might still be allowable in an enlightened age.

The movement toward state control of education in Germany weakened still further the grip of the Church, both the Roman and the Protestant, upon the education of youth. As a result, the Church was more and more driven to the defensive. Prussia education, ostensibly designed to elevate the masses through education, actually served to make education an arm of an absolutist State, which had no appetite for ecclesiastical participation.

Herbart's influence was many sided. His emphasis upon conceptual thinking and judgment, and away from imagination and memory, not only made the break between the scholastic conception of education and modern education theory complete; it opened the way to a utilitarian type of education, which had for its object the elaboration of a philosophy of life based on learning alone. This challenged Christianity at its center. Secular education now threatened to erect its own world-view, independent of theology, and to implement its conclusions with the vast resources of an expanding educational system.

This faced Christian education with an entirely new task. The other movements which had preceded the work of Herbart were preparatory. Not only had the foundations of Catholic education been undermined; that might possibly have left Protestant education in a large measure untouched. But the educational pattern which emerged at the end of the transitional period left the Christian Church with a shrunk educational field to cultivate, and at the same time, left her with a constituency which, as a result of the compulsory pattern of education, was disposed to find the answer to most of life's problems in secular learning.

The Church could expect little aid and comfort from public education. In some cases, she was actually confronted with a competitor for the loyalty of her people at the point of basic world-view. She thus found herself with a colossal task on her hands, and with much competition as she was compelled to perform it with limited resources. It is this which constitutes much of the contemporary crisis in Protestant Christian education.