

Education for Christian Living

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The individual Christian cannot achieve his optimal effectiveness until he integrates every facet of his personality. Resolution of spiritual conflict promotes health in all areas of life, yet it is also true that competent adjustment on the physical and psychological planes releases energy for greater Christian service.

A definite aim of the Christian psychologist is to further the Kingdom of God by increasing human comprehension of an effective Christ-like life. The individual and his processes of adjustment comprise the field of study for this biosocial scientist, although methods of study may differ. Thus, a fundamental hope is that each member of the human race may be educated to view himself as a creation of the Supreme Being, Who instilled within man miraculous organs and functionings of the body upon which the psychological world is built, supremely crowned by the cosmic consciousness—the bond between the Creator and the created—and maintained in varying degrees of sensitivity.

How may we come to grips with the challenge for encouraging development which will benefit not only the one individual but all society? Where do we start? What has made man what he is and how is he being molded *now*? On what can we base our judgments of adequacy or inadequacy? It is a cruel lesson of life that the individual's ability, his beliefs and respect for these beliefs, are judged by his performance in every-day situations. In any endeavor a good mind or a good character is handicapped unless coupled with the ability to display accrued benefits. The employer will not be apt to recognize his employee's value unless the employee can offer objective proof; the student will not be given credit for his earnest study unless he can evidence orally or on written tests that new knowledge has been acquired; the follower of Christ seems to do His cause the greatest good when he can display his Christian principles to advantage.

Let us agree that when we speak of the individual we are considering personality, the pattern of traits distinguishing one person from another. No one is born with a full-fledged personality, although the bases for formation are present. It remains to be seen in what manner the environment into which the child is born will

interact with the child's physical and psychological systems to produce his uniqueness.

For example: Esmerelda is so self-conscious she suffers agony if asked to recite at school or to perform in a church program. Frederick stutters so that he could not speak in public if he were asked to do so; but when by himself he is often heard singing sweetly and clearly without any speech difficulty. Adolescent Andy strives to ignore his physiological maturation because of deep fear of its meaning.

This Esmerelda, Frederick or Andy could be anyone's Mary or Johnny, for each is battling the consequences of a faulty education. Must so many of our "hopes for the future" be expended before fruition? The Christian psychologist protests emphatically to this needless waste, optimistic over the strides which appear to have been made in the appreciation of basic, inborn and therefore God-given needs. The capacities and the methods by which satisfaction is sought vary; yet intrinsically each need has its own depth.

A pattern of life grows out of living itself. It is the product of many experiences. So the *time* to face the challenge lies chiefly during the earliest formative years. As time progresses habits become fixed: habits of overt action, habits of thought, habits of emoting, habits of friendliness, habits of communing with God. We are, however, capable of change at any time if highly motivated. In lesser degree, change is the one thing we can be certain of, on the human level. Because the very world in which we move and have our being alters, we cannot be objects of inertia. Still, the fact remains that there are certain tender years of life in which the individual is doing a great deal of changing anyway. These years of childhood and adolescence are the best years to direct that change into habits and skills acquired by practice which will tend to promote health, happiness and holiness.

The key to answer all our questions, if we are clear-sighted, lies in the Book inspired by the Creator. There is one verse tersely written concerning the youth of Christ from which we wish to work. "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man" (St. Luke 2:52). In that one verse we see four aspects of development: "wisdom," the mental growth; "stature," the physical growth; "in favour with God," the spiritual growth; "in favour with man," the social growth. All these aspects of growth are forever interacting, each affecting the others. We are separating

them only for survey and cannot hope to exhaust the possibilities, for years of study and research have been devoted to each area. It is hoped that curiosity and desire for factual information may be aroused if there is need of further insight.

The Physical. We consider the physical first, because psychological experiences are based upon the organism. A true appreciation of our Maker's provision for our well-being in this realm would prevent many anxieties, warped concepts or mental illnesses resulting from battling against a normal growth. We speak in subdued tones of the miracles of the New Testament and of those we recognize in the world about us. How often do we recognize the miracle of the body? No man has ever devised a pumping station as efficient as the heart; our mechanical devices for perception of sound are based upon the structure of the ear; the organ called the brain—why, scientists tell us all the radio signals, the television signals, the telegraphic signals in the world don't add up to the energy of the impulses carried around inside just one cranium! If man *could* build a machine to produce as many impulses as one brain does, even when it is resting, a structure higher than the Empire State Building would be required to house it, all the water of Niagara Falls to cool it, and then it wouldn't be able to make a simple decision as to whether it wanted orange or grape-fruit juice for breakfast. The way in which the power is used counts for dynamic or phlegmatic interaction.

A great deal of the way behavior is controlled depends upon the intricate glandular system. It is easy to explain personality differences between those whose thyroid gives out an over-abundance of thyroxine, making for hyperactivity, and those whose thyroid produces so slowly that movement and thought are sluggish. Hormone secretion is not easily controlled, but we *can* do something about maintaining the organism as a whole. Outlook on life definitely is influenced by physical health. When we are vigorous, we welcome the day with a shout; get a cold, and we mope around! See how personality within the individual may vary? We fail to stoke this elaborate machine of the body with the proper fuel—that is, skip breakfast, eat unwisely, rest too little (man dies more quickly from lack of rest than from lack of food), and our minds begin to play tricks on us, we lack vigor; in many ways we are penalized.

The bone structure, height, weight all are instrumental in en-

couraging or limiting interests and outlets which direct personality growth. There is a pattern of growth for each child which will not coincide precisely with that of any other child in every respect; yet within ranges there are available norms for guiding our expectations. We must be aware of the particular interests of the child as he passes through the stages toward adulthood in order that we may satisfy them wholesomely.

The process of physical maturation (growth from within) is decreed by heredity. Contours of the body change, especially during early adolescence. The years eleven to fourteen often find the girls taller and heavier than the boys. A lack of understanding that all this is the normal state of physical affairs can cause almost endless personality repercussion and anxiety in the young person. Both boys and girls at early adolescence (chronological age for this stage is not the same for both sexes) study their facial bones, hoping against hope for an attractive formation! (Adults have given it up for a lost cause and have settled down to make the most of what has happened.) This is the time when one can see a boy's wrists dangling below his coat sleeve or his ankles gawky below his trousers. He is growing so swiftly! It is thought that a portion of the awkwardness of the early adolescent is due to the fact that he grows so quickly he doesn't have time to get accustomed to the new size before he is even larger! We are so quick to censure his clumsiness when he most desperately needs to build his confidence. Nick-names which may be outgrown but which stick in popular usage and seem so inappropriate later spring up now: Leggy, Blubber, Shorty, Shrimp. One child growing swiftly may fear he is to be a giant; while another in the later-maturing group may fear he is to be a dwarf by comparison. A little reassurance based on the right interpretation may bring relaxation to that young mind.

There is no wisdom in attempting to ignore pubescence and the new awarenesses. When an inner state has its biological basis, such as food hunger, it cannot be denied and thus caused to vanish. So it is when the glands of childhood have done their job of holding sex development in check until the time for that individual to begin stretching for adulthood that the biologic change forces a change in attitude toward the opposite sex. Fully understood and put in place this drive is good and, let me remind you, God-given for the continuation of the race. Before puberty the child's questions along this line do not have the feeling tone the adult is apt to read into them,

for he does not have the physical equipment to produce that particular feeling; but when the second growth spurt comes, involving glandular maturation, the picture approaches the adult attitude. Thus Andy of the previous illustration is in deep conflict over a change which is normal and which would be cause for alarm if it did not occur. I vividly recall counseling one highly intelligent, attractive young man who had been told repeatedly to be wary of girls, that he should have nothing to do with them. Thus for several years he had been trying to follow the instructions of his parents while the wholesome growth of the innate interest had been a very real pressure. The result had been so drastic as to cause auditory and visual hallucinations, severe compulsions, deep resentment and a narrow escape from a psychosis. Had this lad not been so psychically strong he would have broken completely with reality.

The Mental. "As he thinketh in his heart"—his innermost self—"so is he." A child cannot think as an adult for two reasons: (1) a lack of mature physical equipment, (2) a lack of experiences through which he has learned to pattern his thinking. Will he be optimistic or pessimistic? confident or insecure? What is the attitude of his parents? Do they have faith in themselves and in God that problem situations can be met and solved?

There are intellectual attitudes and emotional attitudes, all in the realm of the mental. Emotional attitudes may be prejudicial, unreasoning products of all degrees of past pleasantness or unpleasantness. We like one person at first sight. Why? Without our intellectually reasoning it all out, we "remember" a pleasant friendship with someone else who resembles the new acquaintance in some way: he acts like the old friend, he looks like the old friend, she has the same color eyes, she has a trick of tilting her head in the same way, he has a husky voice. On and on may go the samples of behavior. Our emotional attitudes expect the same friendship from this newly met individual.

There is too often a gap between what we say and what we do because one is thought-out behavior (an intellectual attitude) and the other is based on feeling, the pleasantness or unpleasantness of unconscious memory. A student's intellectual attitude may be splendid: he sets up a study schedule for himself, he prepares his study center with the best of lighting, paper and other equipment. Now comes the crucial moment; will his emotional attitude agree with his intellectual one? Does he *feel* like studying? And if he does not,

will he have enough intestinal fortitude, determination, to do it anyway? If he will begin with only the intellectual attitude, soon the emotional attitude may be favorable, as well. Many conflicts between intellect and emotion arise in like manner.

Emotions must be educated constructively as well as the intellect. It is more a matter of directing emotional expression than of control by ironclad methods. The emotionally mature person is emotionally developed; his actions are distinguished by helpfulness, cooperativeness, human service. The maladjusted person's emotions and thoughts are negative, concerned with his own troubles and problems. It is well to know how to avoid emotional stumbling-blocks; if unavoided or unavoidable, how to get rid of them. Emotions are meant to bless us, not to blast us; to help us, not to hurt us; to make us, not to break us. The first portion of Romans 10:10 says it for us: "for with the heart man believeth . . .," the heart being the innermost, deepest facet of our beings, involving our emotions. We are more prone to do what we *feel* like doing than what we should do.

Obviously, consistency in intellectual and emotional attitudes is a prerequisite for an integrated personality, free of unnecessary turmoil and diversity of motivation. Freedom from control of the intellectual by dangerous fear *is* possible. No one would advise laying aside the fear which makes one wisely protect himself from danger. Anxious fear brings denial of reality; whereas intelligent recognition faces the situation to find the solution.

The child learns by example, long before there is conscious realization, how to express love, fear or dislike. Love is necessary for self-respect, for a feeling of being worth while, for very physical life itself. There is an illness called "marasmus" which afflicts a youngster and may bring death when he does not feel loved or wanted. A child to whom love is not demonstrated does not know how to demonstrate it to others, and may never fully appreciate the meaning of the words, "I love you." For peace within and peace without, the ability to care about other people based on love is so necessary.

"Emotions are more caught than taught" is a frequent and true expression. Therefore, each succeeding generation should endeavor to become more wise in the handling of its own emotion in order that its offspring will "catch" initially a healthier emotional attitude.

The Social. Social contacts constitute an important part of

our lives and have their beginning in the home. Fortunate is the child who receives respect and affection properly displayed in his pre-school years, who learns to get along with the members of his family, for that child goes out into his school world expecting to be accepted and liked. His first social adventure has been successful; why not others to follow? Gradually he will realize not everyone will treat him as tolerantly nor as kindly as his family did; however the early security will see him through with confidence.

Have you ever felt "alone in a crowd"? If so, then you can begin to know how a child feels when set apart from the other children by oddity of dress or manners. Social shyness is an insidious cruelty; the child does not protest his isolation because of the very cause for it, his shyness; in turn his withdrawal becomes even greater. If carried to extreme a mental illness of living completely in a dream-world eventuates. All the cures put together are not worth the ounce of prevention. Allow, or teach, the child to enjoy life and he will not wish to escape from it.

Not all children react to social non-acceptance by retirement. Some will fight to secure a place in their age group; when this is done to extreme the behavior is termed "bullying" or "delinquent."

Whatever the effects are, the attempt is to adjust to this need. Parents should not hesitate to help the child make friends by encouraging group fellowship at all ages. Never does the child wish for *interference* from the parent nor for the parent to conduct himself on the child's level. The assistance should be unobtrusive, bringing about natural opportunities.

Friendliness is one thing we cannot lose by giving away. In fact, the more of it we give, the more of it we have to give. It grows by exercise, this ability to like people. The child may have all the traits which make for a pleasing personality and exercise them only in regard to his own sex; this means he is living in half a world, for the other half is populated by the opposite sex. There is such a thing as platonic friendship, a meeting on an intellectual level, without the stirring of the deeper emotions.

Emotional and social maturity does not make fun of the boy and girl relationship. These friendships serve a definite purpose whether they are based on mutual give-and-take or are adventures into infatuation. Wise guidance assists in assessing these experiences for what they are: experiences in discovering traits in others which

are pleasing and those which are not in order that a permanent choice for a life companion will be made later.

The Spiritual. Spiritual development tops off all the others. It has been woven in occasionally in what has been said and in the Scriptures used. When man is referred to as trichotomous—body, soul, and spirit—the soul refers to that which reaches out to his fellowman and the spirit refers to that which reaches out to God. A dichotomous referral speaks of body and soul, the latter including the mental and social aspects as well as the spiritual. At any rate, the soul is sacred and eternal. Longfellow put it this way: “Life is real and life is earnest, and the grave is not its goal, ‘Dust thou art to dust returneth,’ was not spoken of the soul.”

There is a deep responsibility upon the Christian to make the very most of his own capacities and to do all possible to permit full growth in others. The Christian is not sarcastic in his comments concerning others, for he is tampering with divine possibility. He sees the purpose in the plan of the universe and in human existence. He feels in tune with the Supreme Being and so is worth while. His confidence is increased, for we can be self-confident only as we are confident in a Divine Guidance. Paradoxical? No; confidence comes from knowing One greater than ourselves is guiding and checking us, as the need may be. Instead of wavering unsteadily in indecision, we launch forth into the deeper, more challenging tasks confidently. I have little sympathy for the sentiment of “living in a house by the side of the road,” that is, not if that means a lack of initiative, a laissez-faire attitude. The beautiful hymn, “I Come to the Garden Alone,” expresses my thought in the third verse: “I’d stay in the garden with Him, though the night around me be falling; but He bids me go. . . .” We gather strength in His presence, and use that strength as He especially bids.

Among the advantages for the Christian in the process of integrating personality is the resolution of conflicts which continue to face the so-called “moral” man. The moral man sits on the fence, constantly trying in his own power to live according to high standards. The Christian has wholeheartedly crossed over the fence to find a redirection of formerly perverted drives and an ever-present help in time of need.

Conclusion. Each aspect must receive its rightful attention, for each will supplement and enhance the others. Actual separation

is impossible. If any area is neglected, others will be minimized and take away even that which is a possibility.

The hope of the future has a frog—or a frilly handkerchief—in its pocket. The youth to whom the adult will entrust the causes dear to his heart are being formed day by day, for what our children will be casts its shadow backward to the molding of the here and now. We have high hope that these young people will be able to perform more ably than has humanity heretofore; we package many dreams for their tomorrows. This is right and good only if we, as parents, educators, ministers, counselors (and no one can be merely an on-looker to the young life about him) assist in bringing forth the personality potential which will allow for greater effectiveness and equilibrium in a world we know can be chaotic without a true concept of the Way of Life.