It seems appropriate that having been raised in the Reformed tradition and still holding in my own faith, the tenets of that faith tradition, that what is true of the Church is also true of my theological understanding of Christian Education, "Reformed and always to be Reformed." Though my first attempt to write a statement like this came two years ago, at the end of the "Introduction to Christian Education," course I was in, and having reread my statement and still hold to the merits of what I first wrote, now entering my last year of Seminary, I am again reforming my approach.

Previously, I focused on how I saw the structure of Christian education, and the implications of that understanding on how the Church structures its educational processes. I identified the tension between the individual and the communal aspects of Christian education, the cultivation and discovery of the individual gifts we have each been given by God and shared communal goals, and the necessity for Churches to develop educational programs which cultivate and empower individuals and the gifts they bring for the common good. My concluding paragraph posited the following:

"Christian Education must be structured with the flexibility to operate within the tension of both individual development and communal development. This means utilizing many theories of education, including Multiple Intelligences to customize pedagogical tools to the individuals and church congregations that may use them."

It could certainly be said there may have been a little bit of recency bias, since I had just been through a course, which introduced me to a myriad of new theories and understandings of Christian education, each of which has its own merits and its own shortcomings. The instant impressionability of being a new learner, and the desire to want to make space for all possible approaches, led to a rather ambiguous conclusion to my statement on theology.

Having more time, and many other courses, to help inform my understanding, I am not putting this previous statement in the waste bin. I do, however, think a different approach to my theology of Christian Education is necessary. The reasons for this mindset change are my reformed and ever to be reformed understanding of scripture, my edification at the hands of my learning community at Columbia, and the experience of having lived two more years, in my particular context.

With all of this said, my new approach to a theology of Christian Education focuses primarily on the role of the teacher. Previously, my concentration had been on the role of the learner, and the promotion of the learner above all else. It was a very human focus. The focus on teacher gives my theology of Christian education a Christological focus that is representative of Scripture, and my faith.

The beginning of this theology of Christian education begins with the following: The emanant teacher of all of humanity is Jesus Christ. In the scriptures, 2 John proclaims, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God."[[1]](#footnote-1) Jesus Christ is the source and standard of all teaching of God. If Christian education is to been anything, it must be the teaching of Christ, as uniquely witnessed by the Holy Spirit through the scriptures. Though Jesus is no teacher, as any human would be. Jesus Christ, being the emanant teacher of all of humanity, is the only teacher who is not also a student. In Platonic epistemology, it was understood that knowledge exist within the reality of each person, and that a teacher helped students to discover what they already possessed within themselves.[[2]](#footnote-2) The search for God was a search within. While I do not believe this to be true of all people, I do believe this to be unique to Christ, insofar, as Christ containing within Christ self, all of the knowledge of God. Scripture acknowledges this in the Gospel of Luke, when Jesus is found, after his parents lost track of him for three days, in the temple, sitting among the teachers in the temple. It is said “Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”[[3]](#footnote-3) As a person of the Triune God, Christ is the emanant teacher, with all of the knowledge of God, and in no need, of further instruction. As we try to imitate Christ as teachers, we do not also imitate Christ as having no need for further instruction. Thus, Christ is the Emanant teacher, insofar, as Christ teaches from complete knowledge.

Since we are not Christ, but strive to imitate Christ, we are called to be teachers. However, as discussed above, we cannot claim that as we are teachers, we are not also, and at all times, students. As we teach, we point towards Christ who is the teacher of all humanity. In our teaching, we recognize the mutual space by which we learn from those whom we are teaching, how the Spirit moves in and through their perspective, and how our knowledge of the great teacher that is Christ, is a collective effort. Unlike the idea of looking inward for the divine, coming to know our Lord and Savior is a group project. S. Steve Kang speaks to the reality of this when he says, “the teacher is to model a deep respect for all people and an understanding that one, especially a Christian, can learn from every person, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, or age.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Though Kang was speaking specifically to the role of a teacher in a classroom, this also applies to all who Christ has called to be teachers, which is each and every believer. We are teachers teaching teachers, and every person, because of the distinctions of our particular contexts and humanity, is a capable teacher, when they are pointing toward Christ from their own position in the world.

This also means that when we are teaching, we cannot treat the material we are teaching as something we have already learned. Scripture never ceases to be open and the Holy Spirit never ceases to move in new ways. In Christian Education, the certainty of our beliefs is unique to the certainty we look for in secular learning. Our certainty is as God wills. Since we are all teachers as Christ has taught us, it is necessary that we approach all of the subjects we teach with a sense of newness every time we interact with the materials. It might be easier to teach the same lesson plan over and over, for the sake of consistency. But in doing so, we lose the possibility that Christ may be teaching us something new, that we are never really done learning.

The Presbyterian Church, USA, in the preface of its Book of Confessions, claims that “ministers must be teachers, and especially the teacher of teachers.”[[5]](#footnote-5) My theology of Christian Education is predicated on the idea that all of us are called to be teachers, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, under the tutelage of the great teacher, Jesus Christ. I believe that proclamation is incomplete without the imperative of teaching others to look to Christ, and to being taught by others what it means to look to Christ fully, from their perspective. The Reformed tradition believes in the “priesthood of all believers.” Contained within that sentiment, I believe we are all called to the “teacherhood of all believers.” To imitate Christ is to teach. To follow Christ is to learn and teach others that Christ is the great teacher, through whom, by the Holy Spirit, we come to know and be in relationship with God, by God’s grace. This means that the spaces, and times, and ways in which we educate one another must reflect and enable the possibility for any person in the room to teach about what Christ has taught and to point to Christ. This means being open and hospitable, flexible and caring, empowering and in awe of the mystery of God. All aspects of our education should be a reflection of Christ the teacher, pointing always at the one who casts the reflection. Paul calls for “mutual upbuilding,” which can only be achieved when we recognize the “teacherhood of all believers.”  
 For now, this is what I believe Christ has taught me, through scripture and through all in my life who have pointed to Christ from where they stood. In all things, we should strive to imitate Christ, and Christian Education should be no different. Only is recognizing Christ as the great, emanant Teacher, and in upholding the great “teacherhood of all believers,” can we truly claim any faith formation in our educational processes and structures.

1. Meeks, Wayne A., and Jouette M. Bassler. *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993. pg.2080 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Elias, John L. *A History of Christian Education: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Perspectives.* Kriefer, 2002. Pg. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Meeks, Wayne A., and Jouette M. Bassler. *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1993. pg.2080 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Conde-Frazier,Elizabeth, S. Steve. Kang, and Gary A Parrett. *A Many Colored Kingdom: Multicultural Dynamics for Spiritual Formation.* Grand Rapinds: Baker Academic, 2004. Pg.156 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).* Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). 2014. Pg.xxiv [↑](#footnote-ref-5)