THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM¹

I. INTRODUCTION

AT THE outset it is imperative that we should be clear about our terminology. This is important to avoid misunderstanding at any time, but especially in this situation. A commonly understood terminology may sometimes be assumed. This is true when the persons employing it enjoy a common cultural milieu. However, in your case and mine this common ground may not be assumed, though we all confess one faith and belong to our faithful Saviour and Lord.

When we speak of the curriculum with reference to the schools, we are thinking of areas or fields of subject matter as learning areas, however they may be organized. Throughout the centuries we have taken the cultural product of the human race and organized and adapted it to learning areas appropriate for learners at various levels of maturity. We have thought, for example, that the coming generation must have some systematic knowledge of the past in order to have a conscious link with historical continuity and to enter understandingly into the issues of the present. Hence, we have included history in some form among the learning areas in the schoolroom. In order to graduate the learning materials of history according to the learning readiness of the learner we have tried to ascertain whether a biographical approach, or a logical approach, or a problem approach, etc., was psychologically and sociologically most sound. Thus the various areas of learning have taken shape more or less scientifically and now constitute the curricula of our schools. Among us in America, and from my reading I conclude that you are engaged in similar discussions; the school curriculum is very much under fire and in a state of flux. This is particularly true of us since education is to a large degree locally controlled and only in a very general sense centralized in state departments of education. In the U.S.A., we have no national control of education in any form.

The question for our discussion now is whether there is a distinctively Christian view of the curriculum. Can we say,

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amidst all the controversy in the field of education, that Christianity lays down certain basic principles with reference to the nature and meaning of the curriculum?

What determines the Christian view of anything? What determines the Christian view of government, of the economic life, of war and peace, etc.? One might reply the Bible, for it is our only infallible rule of faith and life. In a general sense this is true. But the question of what is the Christian view of this or that is not so easily or naïvely answered. Genuine honesty, for example, is required of every Christian. The Bible is crystal-clear on this requirement for Christian living. But in our complicated culture it is not always clear what is the honest thing to do. And sometimes the choice is between two evils rather than between the good and the evil.

I think with reference to education this may be said. The end which education is made to serve determines whether it is Christian, when we consider that this end is present at the very beginning and judges the process throughout.

Let me attempt to make my point clear.

Our cultural activity we have in common with all men. We build bridges, sell products of our farms and factories, engage in laboratory research, etc. All of this activity, however, needs an end or destiny for its justification. From the Græco-Roman classical world we have received two ends or destinies. One is the natural one, the end or destiny that finds the justification of all human activity in the fulfilment of man's natural propensities. It is a naturalism, to be distinguished from a materialism. The other is the ideal, the end or destiny that finds the justification of all human activity in the realization of an ideal life of reason. It is an idealism. The Hebrew-Christian tradition confronts us with the rule of God centred in the heart of man, the centre of his very personality as a created being. It finds the justification of all human activity in the glory of the Creator. There is a third end or destiny for all cultural activity of man which recognizes no final purpose anywhere. It finds the justification of human activity in meeting human needs as human only. It is the Renaissance-modern interpretation of life and its meaning and purpose.

Bringing this over into the field of education, we have this qualification of it as Christian. Education is distinctively Christian when the authority of Christ and the realization of His

authority in the lives of men is the justification of all educational activity. This is very definitely according to the Hebrew-Christian tradition.

It is our responsibility to indicate how this concept of Christian education can be implemented in the construction of curricula. To do this we should try to answer three questions.

- (1) What are the views of the nature of curricula?
- (2) How do we appraise these views in the light of the above concept of Christian education?
- (3) How can we make curricula distinctively Christian?

II. VIEWS OF THE NATURE OF CURRICULA

In the history of education we discern four major curriculum concepts. By this I mean that instructional materials or learning areas have been organized and adapted for learning purposes with one of four major purposes in mind. They are: the information or knowledge-getting concept, the disciplinary concept, the social concept, and the creative concept.

In the first or knowledge-getting concept the factual material subject matter is organized for mastery. The gradation of subject matter is based on a quantitative increase of amount and complexity from level to level. Finally one's education is measured in terms of the amount of information he has stored up during the years. The human mind is viewed as a sort of container into which one pours content at will, with this exception that it has the capacity to organize and recall, also at will, any combination of previously acquired information. The emphasis is on memorization or recall.

The disciplinary concept looks upon subject matter as a means of forming the learner in his mental powers. It is generally based on some form of faculty psychology. The mind is in possession of certain powers or faculties which are exercised and moulded in the process of mastering essentials of subject matter. What is learned is not as important as the sustained effort involved in its mastery. Then too, there is an external mould or pattern according to which the learner is to be formed. In the process of learning he begins to take on this form of things.

The two curriculum concepts referred to thus far have come down to us from ancient times. Early schools and those of the

Middle Ages were entirely dominated by them. Only occasionally were they called in question. It was not till the modern period that other concepts began to prevail.

The social concept is more of a utilitarian nature. From a survey of the needs of the individual with reference to his successful functioning in society it is determined what learning activities and materials must be included in the curriculum. Our modern industrial society, in which the worker rightly makes his just claims and which operates in the framework of the democratic ideal, provides the pattern for curriculum construction in our time. The paramount question is: What does the learner need to know and to do in order to participate in this kind of society for the welfare of all concerned? What kind of mathematics will he be called upon to know and use? How much history must he know and how is it to be organized and interpreted that he may be able to enter intelligently into the issues of the day? Knowledge-getting in itself is meaningless apart from the social structure in which it must function. As a discipline, education must take account of the relationship of the individual to the social whole.

The fourth concept we mentioned turns to the individual in his psychological make-up for its basis of the curriculum. It recognizes in man a creative capacity which, though varying in degree among individuals, is the primary goal in education. The development of man as a creator is the primary concern of a society that seeks not merely its self-preservation but that seeks social progress. Learning activities are organized to call forth the creative expression of learners. Learning is a co-operative activity in which the learners launch on an exploratory tour. Self-expression, self-appraisal, motivation, self-activity, and the like are the key words in learning as a great enterprise. The curriculum consists of activities which vary according to pupil needs. In some quarters it is known as the experience-curriculum.

Here we have the four common views of the curriculum. They should not be thought of as chronologically following each other. The first two, as we said, are of ancient date. They survive to-day, however, in several ways. Tests and examinations frequently give evidence of the knowledge-getting emphasis when they are almost exclusively factual in character. When the classroom recitation is but a "giving back" what the teacher said or what was read in the textbook, the knowledge-getting or

information concept is supreme. Arithmetic and higher mathematics textbooks still contain problems of mental gymnastics and lecture notes are still reminiscent of memory exercises for their own sake. The social concept is used by some as the basis of a curriculum for social and political regimentation, and by others more democratically as the social orientation of the individual. It is obvious that the creative concept of education is compatible only with a social order which commits itself to the potential integrity of the individual.

What shall we say about each of these concepts when viewed in the light of the Scriptural teaching of man and his place in this world?

III. APPRAISAL OF CURRICULUM CONCEPTS FROM THE

We must base our appraisal on certain essential teachings of the Scriptures with reference to man and his place in this world, for it is with these that education as a process is primarily concerned.

First, then, the nature of man and his needs.

Let us note first that education is concerned with man as a whole. He never functions mentally apart from his emotions. Never can we seek his mental development without affecting him spiritually. His social growth is involved in the mental and emotional. And his physical progress affects his emotional adjustment. It is comparatively recently that we learned that an infant needs emotional satisfaction as much as food. As a matter of fact the feeding problem of children is as much emotional as it is physical. Hospitals are adjusting maternity wards to this fact. Let it be remembered likewise that the whole child goes to school, and the whole child is involved in every learning activity.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the whole person in all his resources, physically, emotionally, socially, mentally, and spiritually was created to be patterned after the excellences of the Creator. This is what we understand by the Scriptural teaching that God created man in his image. In all his resources he is responsive to his world about him so that being activated by it he can be formed and form himself after the nature of it, above all after the nature of God himself. This is man's supreme

prerogative among God's creatures. This means that education is a process of man-making, not merely a training of the intellect, or stuffing the mind, or adjusting the human organism, etc.

We must follow this observation immediately with the fact, however, that the perfection of which man was capable in all his resources by creation has been lost by the disastrous consequences of sin. By a voluntary act of disobedience man deprived himself of the one source according to which he was to pattern himself that in his response to the world about him he might cultivate the perfections of which he was capable. This source is God himself. Having thus deprived himself, he did not cease to be a responsive being, but continued to function thus and according to the natural inclinations of a heart inclined toward self and its indulgence rather than the fulfilment of his original nature according to creation. The natural man of sin is involved in the tragedy of history, unable to extricate himself. In all his resources he is perverted and unable to respond according to his created nature. It is particularly in his mental and spiritual resources that distortions have been so damaging. Because he is mental and spiritual he is a creative being, rational and moral. He has created a culture made to serve himself according to his perverted heart. The final culmination will be the full realization of his own perversion, unrestrained by influences in this world reminiscent of his origin. What a tragedy! Education which fails to recognize this awful reality is not true education, but mal-education.

Thanks be to God that we can follow this tragedy of tragedies by the glorious truth that God is in Christ reconciling men and the world unto himself. There is hope! There is salvation! There is redemption! Man can again be made responsive to God and thereby responsive to the truth of his world in all his resources. He can again be formed, patterned after the excellences of his Creator. This is the gospel of the risen Christ. Education to be true must now be redemptive. It must cultivate the individual in all his resources in keeping with the awful reality of sin and all its tragic consequences and the saving grace of God in Christ Jesus that delivers him from the human tragedy to be made responsive to the truth and to be formed or patterned after it.

Now, what are man's primary needs in view of these teachings of the Scriptures? First, that before he is conscious of the truth about himself and about his world he be surrounded by influences which take into full account this truth. Though the

child is unresponsive to the truth by natural inclination of the heart, Christian parents have the promise of God Himself: "Bring up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." The Holy Spirit only can transform hearts, but He promises to accompany the word of truth and make hearts responsive. Second, we must continue this influence according to the needs of our time by soliciting the growing consciousness of the learner in the understanding and mastery of the truth and the commitment to the truth to be disciplined by it. The latter is the special task of the school on its various levels. True, the home, the church, and the community play a large part in this task, but in our modern society it is the formal schooling of the youth which officially assumes this responsibility. Education which fails to meet this basic need is mal-education and will fail of its most cherished goals.

There is another criterion by which we must judge the curriculum concepts which we listed. We must ask the question, What is man's place in this world? In the language of Christ Himself this is described as being in this world but not of it. The meaning of this should become clear in our later discussion. But we should ask of each of these concepts whether it will give us a curriculum which will help us function in this world as not of it or whether it will cause us to function as of it. For Christianity this is of the utmost importance. To live in this world "as of it" is to be worldly. To live in this world "as not in it" is world-flight. To live in this world "as not of it" is to fulfil one's Christian task or God-given calling. This is education's task in our world.

Now we must return to each of the curriculum concepts briefly to appraise each in the light of the criteria presented.

The information or knowledge-getting concept is right when it asserts that there is objective, pre-existent truth to be apprehended. There can be no true education without understanding it and mastering it for recognition and recall, at least to a degree. There is need for logical organization of the materials of knowledge that it may tend to form the learner's thinking.

But a curriculum organized on the basis of knowledge-getting fails to take account of the whole man. It leaves all resources other than the mental resources of man, and even some aspects of the mental, a sort of accidental in education. Little thought is given to them and no phase of the curriculum aims specifically at their activation and forming. Benefits may accrue to the cultivation of other resources, such as the emotional, but they will be quite incidental. On the other hand there is great danger that erudition may be achieved at the expense of the emotional or the social. And on the religious side we know that informational knowledge about God is not synonymous with knowing God unto salvation.

The discipline concept is right when it calls attention to the fact that the mental resources of the individual are strengthened by their exercise and that they must undergo a forming according to the pattern of real being. There are basic laws of logic which must mould our intellect. There are basic principles underlying effective memorization for retention and recall.

A curriculum organized essentially in terms of this concept, however, fills textbooks and learning activities with exercises in mental gymnastics with little regard for the value of subject matter in itself. Mental acuity may be achieved at the expense of desirable emotional and social growth. It can produce debaters and arguers, but will make lovers of the truth only incidentally, if at all. To make lovers of wisdom requires more than either a storehouse of information or a well-disciplined mind.

The social concept is right when it emphasizes the social resources of the individual. Man is a social being. Co-operative activity in the interest of a great cause is difficult for one who has not matured socially. Maturation socially is no more an automatic process than is intellectual maturation. Education must be directed at certain essential social qualities as well as at necessary basic knowledges and intellectual skills.

When the social concept of education makes social adjustment the end and criterion for all educative activity, we respond by saying that the fulfilment of man's deepest needs transcends the social milieu. Society needs an end or destiny beyond itself for justification. A curriculum organized on the basis of the social concept will fall short of developing basic knowledges and understandings, and will neglect the forming of the intellect according to patterns of truth. It will either regiment the individual forcefully or condition him by propaganda to the end that he conform to the social context of his time.

The creative concept is right when it calls attention to one of the greatest capacities of the human personality, namely,

through insight to reorganize past experience that relatively new patterns of thought and action are produced. This originality is not limited to the few geniuses who write poetry, sculpture human forms, invent machines, etc. It is an integral part of the whole learning process. From the kindergarten through the university we encourage originality. To repress it is to arrest essential motivating drives towards growth.

A curriculum organized on this concept, however, will neglect the forming of the individual according to pre-existent patterns of thought and action. Emphasis will fall on expression with little to express. Norms for judging the quality of expression will be lacking. The individual becomes a law unto himself. All systematic learning ceases. Education as a process is aimless, lawless, and capricious. The individual learner determines the curriculum.

Let us summarize our appraisal. All the curriculum concepts we discussed have elements or aspects of truth, according to the criteria we secure from the Scriptures. There is pre-existent truth to be understood and mastered. Our mental resources gain power through their exercise in knowledge-getting. Our social resources are responsive and must be cultivated. And finally, we are creative beings, and our capacity for originality must be given opportunity for expression.

We should add immediately that all four concepts are found wanting on essential counts in the light of the same criteria. Every one fails to take account of the individual in all his resources. Especially the social and creative concepts fail to recognize a pre-existent order of truth to be understood and take no account of the great tragedy of human history and its dire consequences. Likewise they find no need for a process of redemption outside and independent of man's own efforts.

A combination of these concepts in eclectic fashion will not do for a Christian view of the school curriculum. They are all essentially rooted in a view of man and his world contrary to the teachings of the Scriptures. And, let it be said, any view of anything to be Christian must take its departure from the basic tenets of the Scriptures. By this I mean that the Scriptures as the revelation of God, in which God has spoken, are for us the corrective, our one true orientation to ourselves and to our world because it reorients us to God.

IV. THE CHRISTIAN VIEW

The basic criteria for appraisal discussed before send us in another direction for educational concepts. In keeping with these criteria we must ask three questions:

- (1) What materials are available to us for educational purposes?
- (2) What end or destiny must they serve?
- (3) How shall we select curriculum materials?

First, then, what materials have we available?

Here we generally think of areas of subject matter such as history, geography, language, etc. And this is correct. But to appraise them as educational media, we must look a little deeper than to view them as organized bodies of knowledge.

What is subject matter? It embodies in organized form the cultural and spiritual products of man. These products are the fruit of cultural and spiritual activity through the ages.

Let me try to make these statements clear by illustration. There is a given element in the world of nature outside of man which constitutes his environment. There is the sunshine and the rain. According to the alternation of these in a given geographic area man develops an agricultural practice and technique which produces the necessary victuals for his consumption. A system of exchange is developed to profit from each other's enterprise. In a similar way communication, transportation, manufacture, construction, etc., are the products of man's use of what is naturally given to create for himself the means for life and its enrichment. This activity we call man's cultural activity, using the word culture in its broadest sense.

It is this cultural activity and the cultural product which have constituted the media for the education of the growing generation throughout the ages. In the course of history the cultural product was organized into systematic bodies of knowledge or information. These bodies of knowledge variously organized became the curricula of the schools. They constitute our subject matter to-day.

But we cannot stop at this point to find the ground for subject matter. There is another given element that is presented to man. It does not come to us in the form of nature, as nature is generally understood, that is the world of creation. This "given" is God Himself as He comes to us in His Word, in Jesus Christ the

Word made flesh, and in the inscripturated Word, and in the Holy Spirit as He accompanies that Word in our consciousness. Man's response to this "given" is man's spiritual activity, in distinction from his cultural activity.

Now it is peculiar to the Christian that he engages in both. He is in this world and as such is involved in the activities related to this world. But he is not of this world. And it is precisely his spiritual activity that gives direction to his cultural activity. His citizenship is in heaven.

Here we could enter at length into the discussion of the tension this creates in the Christian's life. How can the Christian cultivate his spiritual activity in a mixed culture? How can his heart be set aglow with the love for Christ in a world so full of enmity to Christ? This tension is reflected in the Christian view of the curriculum as we shall see.

It should be said that man's spiritual and cultural activities find their justification in a common end, that the authority of Christ may be realized and manifest. This is our citizenship. Hence, the Christian says with Paul, "to be with Christ is far better". He cannot rest until the Christ within him has come to full expression. He longs to be delivered. But with Paul, too, he finds himself in a dilemma. He would fill his place in this world in keeping with God's will for him and abide God's time for his deliverance. In his cultural activity he will struggle to make the claim of Christ upon his life effective. In his spiritual activity he will cultivate a personal fellowship with God in Christ which gives direction to his cultural activity. The Christian's end or destiny is his heavenly citizenship. All his spiritual and cultural activity finds its justification in this end. And it is from the spiritual and cultural products that we have our curriculum or media for education.

What concept do we need to select curriculum materials from our spiritual and cultural products to the end that "the man of God may be perfect and thoroughly equipped to every good work", which is the same as saying that he may exercise his heavenly citizenship? We have found the four concepts that have prevailed in the history of education inadequate. I trust this is even clearer now after the discussion of the Christian's spiritual and cultural activities and their destiny. But can we find a comparable concept that will serve our purpose?

We are concerned with men as creatures of God who have

fallen from their God-given state and who, in the face of the tragedy of a perverted heart and world, are called to turn to Christ in whom God is reconciling man and the world unto Himself. We are concerned with the whole man, the individual in all his resources. We recognize man's primary need to be his personal restoration of fellowship with God. He must be saved. We recognize too that the media at our disposal must be employed to realize the meaning of a saved life for this world and the world to come. The best concept I know is that of the Scriptures, citizenship of heaven. We may also call it citizenship of the kingdom of God when this kingdom is placed over against the kingdom of darkness or the devil. To be subjects of Christ in this world, this is our citizenship. Our curriculum materials must be selected to cultivate this citizenship.

What we want, then, are curriculum materials taken from the spiritual product and cultural product that will energize, direct, and form the learner on his level unto citizenship of heaven. This is Christian education's task. Without the destiny of citizenship, education cannot be Christian. Without the cultural product it cannot be education. Without consideration of level it cannot take into account the whole man. Such is our curriculum problem.

Now on to the curriculum itself.

We can divide the areas of subject matter into these major groups: religion, language and literature, philosophy, historical sciences, social sciences, natural sciences, and creative arts. What can each of these areas contribute to the energizing, the directing, and the forming of the individual in all his resources as a citizen of heaven?

The primary task of Christian education in each of these areas is to cause the learner to face God. In every area he should encounter the demands of God upon his life in an attitude of submissiveness to that demand. A heart attitude is our primary objective. The very centre of the human personality must be inclined to the divine order and the patterning of the individual in keeping with that order. This is the essence of a heavenly citizenship.

Our first criterion, therefore, in the selection of areas and of subject matter within these areas is: Can the learner on his level be directed to face God and God's demands upon his life that he may come consciously to submit to this demand?

Let me illustrate this criterion on two levels. First on the

primary level, first level of formal schooling, and then on the level of what we call secondary education, especially the senior level.

On the primary level the child, of seven or eight say, hears and reads Bible stories, first largely centred in great Bible characters and later in the form of narration of events. He joins the teacher and the class in prayer, in the singing of sacred songs, and in devotional reading of the word of God. He comes face to face with God in his direct dealings with men in the history of the people of God. He faces God as he joins in group devotions in which he takes an active part. Throughout these activities the demands of God upon his life enter his consciousness.

In the language arts he learns to interpret the printed page and to express himself orally and in writing. His reading material deals with real life as he lives it in a Christian community, including its hazards, its joys, and its responsibilities. Speaking and writing is gauged by the standard of our companionship in which Christ is the unseen guest on every occasion.

The historical, social, and natural sciences at this level come in the form of readings, stories, and individual and group projects aiming at an initial understanding of our world through the world closest to our present interests. This may be our immediate community or it may be the children and their way of life in other lands. Let it be, for example, the Eskimo children. How are they living without the Christ? What is being done to bring the Christ? What is our obligation who know the Christ to them who know Him not?

The creative arts take the form of construction, colouring, cutting, etc. Some pupils may begin to show talent in composing prose or poetry or in colour, or in mechanical arts, etc. What are we doing with the special talents God has given us? How well do we co-operate with others in the use of tools, etc.? Can we make or do something to make others happy?

Now an illustration of how this criterion applies to the secondary level. Through a study of the Bible and its doctrines, and the study of the history of the Christian church through the ages since the New Testament days the learner enters more rationally and intelligently into the religious life. He is confronted with the claim of God upon his intellectual life as well as his moral and devotional life. Class devotions in which all participate take on a more mature character of intercessory prayer and personal consecration. Exchange of religious experiences can

be productive of energizing and directing one another if wisely guided by a spiritually mature and tactful teacher.

In the language arts young people are stimulated to read and express themselves. A more mature study of language in its structure and function becomes necessary. Here too we remember that language is our means of communication. The fellowship we keep will determine largely the kind of language we use. When Jesus is our constant companion in all the company we keep our language will be qualified accordingly. What language is appropriate to this company? What language is in keeping with the citizenship we cultivate?

Of the sciences I shall refer to the historical only. We meet with God in His inscrutable wisdom and purpose when we note that He permitted the devout Huguenots to perish when the Pilgrims were saved in their journey over Holland to America. We meet God when we see the Christian church going down in times of cultural productivity but standing firm when shorn of this opportunity and bitterly persecuted. The learner faces the claim of God upon his life when he begins to ascertain his position in this kind of world.

Thus without sermonizing, moralizing, or preaching, the claim of God upon each individual life enters the consciousness of the learner. It is the primary criterion for the selection of curriculum materials. Curriculum materials are selected and organized with this primary end in view.

I shall have to confine myself to the brief mention of two other criteria.

A citizen of heaven in this world faces the tension, as we saw, of keeping himself unspotted from the evils of the world while trying to make his citizenship of heaven effective in the mixed cultural activity of our time. Curriculum materials must be selected to make victory over the evil in our cultural activity the freely chosen pursuit of the learner. The areas of subject matter are to be explored that the learner on his level is cultivated in all his resources according to their respective functions in the life of the individual to discern among cultural products and in his cultural activity. As a member of a productive unit in industry he must understand his position as a citizen of heaven. As participant in governmental affairs he must discern in what he is involved.

I think a third criterion with reference to the selection of curriculum materials should be mentioned.

As citizens of heaven in this world we are called upon to be workers. Curriculum materials are to be selected and organized in view of the various callings of life. In this rapidly changing and uncertain socio-economic order the call upon one's life for service presents a most perplexing problem to the Christian. The curriculum materials of the various areas of subject matter present opportunities for guidance with reference to this problem. Curriculum makers are to take this problem into account.

In selecting and organizing curriculum materials, therefore, for any level of Christian education, we ask three important questions. First, what is needed on this level to have the learner face God and God's claim upon his life? Second, what is needed to have the learner discern the cultural product and cultural activity of man with reference to his heavenly citizenship? Third, what is needed to have the learner face the call of service as a worker?

V. CONCLUSION

The scope of my subject has not permitted me within time limits to place before you more than the basic principles involved. I believe these principles are universally applicable in whatever community Christian education is taken seriously.

Permit me to recapitulate.

The curriculum for Christian education is selected and organized from the areas of subject matter embodying the spiritual and cultural products available to us. These areas of subject matter constitute the media for energizing, directing, and forming the individual in all his resources unto his heavenly citizenship. Curriculum materials are selected and organized for the various levels according to the basic criteria as stated before.

It is obvious that only a Christian school wholly committed to the concept of Christian education included in this discussion can prepare the curriculum according to the principles set forth here. No half-way measure is possible. In no sense can a school be called Christian which fails to make the citizenship of heaven its destiny. In no way can a school be a school which fails to employ the cultural product meaningfully towards a destiny or purpose. The Christian school is the answer to the confusion of the educational scene.

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