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CONTENTS

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FOREWORD

The church, founded upon and guided by the biblical story, is the place where that story becomes concrete reality.

In order to maintain its identity and to remain faithful to its calling, the church must continue to draw its wisdom and insight from the Bible. Above all, the church must be a place where the Christian message is proclaimed, the Bible is taught, and believers are enabled and encouraged to live faithful lives.

The church is also the place where biblical faith is passed on to future generations. Today, this task is complicated by challenges at every hand. Powerful forces pull upon the church from the outside world. Countless distractions divide our efforts and weaken our resolve. Quick and easy solutions expend our energies and waste our resources. This issue of *Christian Studies* poses a serious question: If the church can not, or will not, who will make us wise and keep us safe for our journey?

Special acknowledgment is due Mrs. Denise James for her expertise and unfailing cheerfulness in assisting in the preparation of *Christian Studies.*

Michael R. Weed, *Editor*

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

Why Johnny Can't Pray

Michael R. Weed

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."
Hosea 4:6

Hosea 4:1-10 announces Israel's failure and Yahweh's consequent judgment. Today, this text offers both a timely reminder and a sobering warning for the church's leaders--elders, preachers, teachers. It is a reminder of the crucial importance of passing on basic biblical faith and knowledge. It is also a warning of the devastating effects wrought by the betrayal of the task of passing on the faith.

Hosea (4:1) indicts Israel for lack of faithfulness, lack of loyalty, and lack of knowledge. Israel is also indicted for widespread moral blight. Verses 2 and 3 list a number of crimes that are widely practiced among the people.

The heart of the prophetic indictment, however, does not fall on the nation or the people in general. The faithlessness of the people is recognized as a direct result of a deeper problem. The main object of God's displeasure is those primarily responsible for Israel's welfare--the religious leaders. These are indicted for having failed the people by failing to perform their duties. For Hosea, the corruption of the people is rooted in and reflective of the failure of the priesthood.

The priests are condemned because they have not taught those in their care; they have failed to inculcate knowledge of God's works and his will in his people. They have betrayed the trust

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

Yahweh has placed in them:

> My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me (6a).

We are not given the complete background of what led to this situation. Scholars tell us Hosea is addressing a time of prosperity in the reign of Jereboam II. The text suggests that Israel's ever-present struggle with Baalism played a role in the crisis. The text may also suggest that the priesthood is no longer seen primarily as a way of serving Yahweh but merely as a way of making a living, a career. The priests, perhaps for turning the sacrifices into a mechanical mockery of their true nature and meaning, are accused of "feeding on the sin of the people" (vs. 8).

Whatever the full explanation--prosperity, careerism, idolatry--the failure of Israel's religious leaders promoted a national disaster. Those responsible for maintaining and passing on the faith had betrayed God's trust. With eloquent brevity, the prophet announces that the people are destroyed "for lack of knowledge."

Again, these words stand as a timely reminder and sobering warning to all bearing responsibility for passing on the faith. While circumstances change over the centuries, the task of passing on the knowledge and practice of the faith remains constant for the people of God.

A Cry of the Heart

A recent article by Nancy Yos vividly reminds us that the risk of failing or betraying this task is as great today as it was Hosea's time.[1] Describing herself as having "almost twelve years of formal Catholic education at my back and seven-and-a-half years of Confraternity of Christian Doctrine classes, four years of religion classes at a Catholic high school," Yos remembers coloring,

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[1]Nancy W. Yos, "Teach Me: A Catholic *Cri de Coeur*," *First Things*, Number 22 (April, 1992) 23-28.

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Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

filmstrips, and a textbook called *Deciding and Relating.* Nowhere in this process was she taught the fundamentals of her religion. Yos states:

> If the fundamentals had ever been given to us, I think we could have absorbed them. But they were not given. . . . How frantically my teachers worked to fill the time with anything except plain information! . . . On behalf of their church, my teachers cultivated such innocence as would have made any harassed pagan emperor smile, and sleep soundly in his bed. . . . In my own parish's weekly bulletin a priest writes of the need to pass on the Catholic faith to young people, and yet he persists in organizing pizza parties, ski trips, and weekend excursions to amusement parks. To my knowledge this man has never gathered ten adolescents into a classroom to speak to them about their religion.[2]

And then the poignant "cry of the heart":

> No teacher ever stood up in any classroom of mine and made any positive statement beginning with the words "This is so." I would have liked to learn something, anything.[3]

Yos expresses concern for modern youth who, ill-served by their teachers and ignorant of their faith, must survive in a confusing and secular world. Had she known her Bible better, she could have concluded with Hosea's words: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of religious leaders and officials failing to teach the knowledge and practice of their faith is confined neither to the time of Jereboam II nor to the modern American Catholic church. Yos's story, with minor changes, accurately describes the experience of many non-Catholics.

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[2]Yos, 25.

[3]Yos, 25.

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There are obviously many reasons, ranging from character flaws to adverse circumstances, why religious leaders fail in their responsibility to nurture and pass on the faith. Perhaps most tragic and far-reaching, however, are those unintentional ways in which the teaching capacity of the church is weakened and undermined. In the remaining comments I want to examine one major source the modern church's failure to pass on knowledge and practice of the faith, viz., modern education theory. Modern education theory not only has seriously damaged secular education; it has also been annexed by many well-meaning Christians entrusted with the task of religious education.

Three Assumptions of Modern Education Theory

Hannah Arendt, writing nearly forty years ago, brought her considerable intellectual powers to focus on the then emerging crisis in American education. Arendt especially criticized American educators for an "uncritical fascination" with and "slavish acceptance" of a complex of modern education theories originating middle Europe.[4] The adoption of these theories, enthusiastically promoted as "progressive education," "completely overthrew . . . all tradition and all established methods of teaching and learning."[5]

Behind the ruinous measures widely implemented, Arendt identified three closely interrelated assumptions which have become part of the taken-for-granted world of modern American education theory. First is the assumption that there exists a child's world which must be protected from the world of adults. Indeed, the

[4]Hannah Arendt, "The Crisis in Education" in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking, 1961, originally 1954). "What in Europe has remained an experiment, . . . in America about twenty-five years ago completely overthrew . . . all traditions and all the established methods of teaching and learning" (178).

[5]Arendt, 178.

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child must be emancipated from the adult world of tradition, authority, control, and discipline.[6]

Ironically, Arendt argues, this approach has placed children in a disastrous state. When put into practice, it has meant that children are not "emancipated." Rather, they are

> . . . handed over to the tyranny of their group, against which, because of its numerical superiority, they cannot rebel, with which, because they are children, they cannot reason, and out of which they cannot flee to any other world . . . .[7]

The child, "free" from authority, tradition, and discipline, is defenseless before an even more terrifying and truly tyrannical force than the individual "authoritarian" teacher ever posed, viz., the tyranny of child-majority.[8] The result has been conformism or juvenile delinquency, and bizarre combinations of the two.[9]

The second underlying assumption, influenced by modern psychology and pragmatism, is that teacher training needs to focus on learning theory rather than on the material taught. The effects of this have been far-reaching. Among other things, it has resulted in "a most serious neglect of the training of teachers in their own subjects."[10] In effect, students are increasingly left to their own resources. It has also undermined the most legitimate source of the teacher's authority, which is his or her mastery of a body of knowledge. The teacher now seeks a classroom identity in roles such as "facilitator," "convener," or "co-discoverer."

The third basic assumption is that a learner can know and understand only what he or she has done or experienced directly.

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[6]Arendt, 181.

[7]Arendt, 181.

[8]Arendt, 181.

[9]Arendt, 182.

[10]Arendt, 182.

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This has meant the substitution of "doing" for "learning." Teachers were led to fear "passing on dead knowledge," seeking instead to demonstrate skills through which knowledge is produced. The result has been the

> transformation of institutes for learning into vocational institutions which have been as successful in teaching how to drive a car or how to use a typewriter or, even more important for the "art" of living, how to get along with other people and to be popular, as they have been unable to make the children acquire the normal prerequisites of a standard curriculum.[11]

For Arendt, the substitution of doing for learning also led to discarding the distinction between "play" and "work"--in favor of the former.[12] Play was romanticized as the natural state of the child and the truest form of learning:

> . . . learning in the old sense, by forcing a child into an attitude of passivity, compelled him to give up his own playful initiative.[13]

Consequently, the natural maturation process of development from childhood to adulthood, and the crucial relationships between children and grown-ups, have been seriously damaged. The tragic result is that this procedure consciously attempts to keep the older child, as far as possible, at the infant level. The very thing that should prepare the child for the world of adults, the gradually acquired habit of work and of not-playing, is done away with in favor of the autonomy of the world of childhood.[14]

For Arendt, these three assumptions have thrust aside common sense and human reason. They have given rise to a

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[11]Arendt, 183.

[12]Arendt, 183.

[13]Arendt, 183.

[14]Arendt, 184.

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preoccupation with method over content. In short, they have had a devastating impact on modern mass education. They directly underlie the failing performance standards and confusion seen in American schools. They have abandoned teachers, armed with little more than slogans and cliches, to an environment denuded of conditions necessary for education to occur, viz., self-discipline and respect for authority and tradition.

Symptomatic of the bankruptcy of the whole approach are the teaching profession's infatuation with therapeutic jargon, and incessant quest for "meaningful experiences" or "learning experiences." Henry Fairlie vividly characterizes the tragedy of many modern classrooms:

> School teachers . . . let their little victims play at what they will, and . . . applaud (it) as their self-actualization. From cradle to grave, life is to be avoided by therapies . . . .[15]

Fairlie continues,

> We should think hard why the phrase "learning experience" has been found necessary. . . . When we say "I learned this today," we mean something is learned. When we say "I learned this today," there is a measure by which to test its accuracy and value. . . . But when we say "that was a great learning experience I had today," we mean only a rather vague and superficial response in ourselves, in which what happened to us is more important than anything else.[16]

Such "education" has in effect disinherited students and created a class of sophisticated barbarians, free from the restraint, guidance,

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[15]Henry Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* (Washington, D.C.: New Republic, 1978) 115.

[16]Fairlie, 115.

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and wisdom of authoritative pasts and thus trapped in an ever-expanding and egocentric "radical contemporaneity."[17]

Why Johnny Can't Pray

For several decades, seminaries and divinity schools have been developing programs for preparing ministers in various "fields" such as religious education, counseling, youth ministry, and missions. Countless specialists have been given some level of expertise in matters such as education theory, adolescent psychology, and cross-cultural communication. While this appears progressive, a high price is being paid by the church. Programs for specialized ministries have watered down the curriculum to make room for specialty courses.[18]

Consequently, knowledge of the Bible and of the Christian faith provide little or no integrative framework for ordering and guiding most specializations in "ministry." Thus we regularly see methods, techniques, and insights uncritically annexed from various social sciences and other disciplines and enthusiastically introduced into the life of the church. Unfortunately, few recognize that many of these resources have underlying assumptions that are antithetical to the Christian faith and promote long-term consequences that are simply disastrous. In spite of good intentions (however naive),

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[17]Philip Rieff, *Fellow Teachers: Of Culture and Its Second Death* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1985) 39.

[18]See James D. Smart, *The Rebirth of Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960). "Even in our best seminaries it is assumed that a person who is to direct an educational program does not need the same thorough training in Bible, church history, and systematic theology that is considered necessary for preachers and pastors. . . . There are seminaries where the disparity of standards between the two departments is so great that Biblical and theological textbooks used for religious education students would not be recognized as adequate in the theological department. . . . The distinction between the two was greatly sharpened by the tendency in the first half of this century for religious education, in its zeal for educational thoroughness, to follow a line of development that was separating it ever more widely not only from other theological disciplines but also from the historical continuity of the church's life" (87-88).

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Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

these ministries and their various programs have become major arteries through which the toxins of modernity are invading the church.

Particularly tragic has been the impact of this development upon the church's ability to provide basic instruction in the Bible and the fundamentals of the Christian faith. While Sunday schools and Bible classes provide an unending array of discussion groups, sharing sessions, and "meaningful experiences," biblical illiteracy and ignorance of basic Christian beliefs are reaching epidemic proportion among youth and adults. Not surprisingly, Christians who don't know the Ten Commandments, the 23rd Psalm, the Shema, the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, or the Fruit of the Spirit have difficulty living faithful lives.

Johnny can't pray (and knows little Bible and less about the Christian faith) for the same reasons he can't read (and knows little about history and geography). Like the priests and leaders of Hosea's time, many of us entrusted with passing on the faith are betraying that task. Prosperity, careerism, and idolatry apparently played prominent roles in Israel's betrayal; in our time, an additional factor is at work. We are betraying our task for many of the same reasons modern education has betrayed its task, namely, preoccupation with methods and techniques which are firmly rooted in the prevailing myths of the post-Christian age.

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"What Do These Stones Mean?" Passing on the Faith in Biblical Perspective

Douglas L. Gragg

Gary Holloway notes elsewhere in this issue of *Christian Studies* that a shift of emphasis in Christian education has occurred during the last two or three decades in Churches of Christ. He describes this as a shift from an emphasis on acquiring "Bible knowledge" to an emphasis on addressing various topics of contemporary concern. The older emphasis on Bible knowledge, he admits, had its problems. In practice, it often came across as dry rehearsal of biblical "facts." Holloway expresses concern, however, that the newer emphasis on addressing topics of contemporary interest may pose an even more serious problem. In practice, this approach often amounts to little more than "baptism" of conventional cultural wisdom or current fads of popular psychology.

I agree with Holloway that this latter problem is potentially more serious. Dry rehearsal of biblical facts is a poor approach to Christian nurture, but it represents only a problem of pedagogical deficiency. The solution is more thoughtful and creative teaching. When Scripture is replaced, however, by an alternative subject matter (whether deliberately or unwittingly), the enterprise ceases to be *Christian* nurture at all, regardless of how "meaningful" or "relevant" the curriculum might be.

What is to be done? How do we revitalize Christian education, avoiding the pitfalls of past and present? What follows are some brief reflections on these questions from the perspective of biblical theology.

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What Do These Stones Mean?

A passage from the Book of Joshua provides a perspective that can clarify our situation. The context of the passage is Israel's crossing of the Jordan river to enter the land of promise.

> When the entire nation had finished crossing over the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua: [2]"Select twelve men from the people, one from each tribe, [3]and command them, 'Take twelve stones from here out of the middle of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood, carry them over with you, and lay them down in the place where you camp tonight. . . .'" [19]the people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they camped in Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. [20]Those twelve stones, which they had taken out of the Jordan, Joshua set up in Gilgal, [21]saying to the Israelites, "When your children ask their parents in time to come, 'What do these stones mean?' [22]then you shall let your children know, 'Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground.' [23]For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we crossed over, [24]so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, and so that you may fear the LORD your God forever" (Josh. 4:1-3, 19-24 NRSV).

Four points about Christian education grow out of the perspective provided by this text.

Christian Education Must Be Christian!

The first point is that Christian education must, in fact, be Christian. This means that the fundamental concern of Christian education is not to help people cultivate the "religious dimension" of their lives in some general sense but to nurture distinctively Christian faith. Teaching children the value of "sharing" or of "kindness," teaching adolescents the importance of personal "quiet time" for meditation, or teaching adults how to enrich family life

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

or to cope with the stress associated with professional responsibility are all noble aims, but none is distinctively Christian.

Joshua 4 illustrates that biblical faith is rooted not in human spirituality or morality as such but in the story of the concrete acts of the living God. According to verses 20-23, it was through recollection of such concrete acts of deliverance as the crossing of the Jordan and of the Red Sea that Israel's faith was nurtured. In the same way, Christian faith is created and sustained through proclamation of the story of what God has done in Christ (see Rom. 10:17 and 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

This concern that Christian education be distinctively Christian may seem obvious, but, in fact, it runs counter to the prevailing trend in contemporary Christian education theory. In much contemporary theory, the fundamental concern is not with finding more effective ways to encourage engagement with the biblical story but with analyzing human "faith development" as such. James Fowler, for example, whose book, *Stages of Faith*,[1] has been a religious bestseller, is very candid about his interest in the analysis of faith as a universal human phenomenon.[2]

This interest in faith development and the dynamics of religious experience finds expression not only at a theoretical level but also in the churches. It is reflected, for example, in the growing preoccupation with sharing our personal "stories," or "spiritual autobiographies," and in the demand for sermons and classes that speak to us "where we are" in our personal spiritual pilgrimages. Perhaps there is nothing particularly wrong with this in itself, but it is remarkable how little interest the biblical writers themselves show in such matters. A recent remark of Stanley

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[1]James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

[2]Fowler, xiii. For a concise overview of Fowler's theory of faith development as a universal human phenomenon, see the chapter, "Faith Development Theory and the Human Vocation," in his *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984) 48-76.

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

Hauerwas and William Willimon on this very point is worth quoting:

> Lately it has become fashionable to speak of "faith development" and "stages of faith," as if faith were a natural human ability, an instinctual urge. There may be some truth to the suspicion that we humans are incurably religious animals, that we are determined to bow down before something. Yet the Bible seems to have little interest in encouraging such behavior or in analyzing its dynamics, except perhaps as our "faith development," left to its own devices, is often an exercise of various forms of idolatry.[3]

The implication of this first point should be obvious. If faith in the living God is nurtured not through spiritual introspection but through encounter with the story of God's saving deeds, we must become concerned above all else to recapture the commitment we once had in Churches of Christ to serious Bible study.

The other three points to be made in conversation with Joshua 4 can be stated as three priorities. These are (a) the priority of content, (b) the priority of meaning, and (c) the priority of adult education.

The Priority of Content

The second point is that, if Christian education is, in fact, going to be Christian, we must emphasize content over technique. Holloway has noted the problem presented by Christian teachers and education ministers who are better trained in how to teach than in what to teach. If the goal of Christian education were simply to inculcate a particular set of attitudes or values or to encourage spirituality as such, mere technique might very well be sufficient. If the goal, however, is to bring Christians into more intimate contact with the living God, the emphasis must be on

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[3]Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989) 22-23.

engagement with the story through which he has made himself known.

Of course, this does not mean that technique is unimportant. The stone memorial described in Joshua 4 was certainly intended to serve a pedagogical function as a "sign," provoking the curiosity of subsequent generations. The point that must be stressed, though, is that the "sign" only provided an occasion for telling the story. Its sole purpose was to point to the reality of what God did at the Jordan when Israel entered the land. Technique is important only to the extent that it enhances engagement with the content of the biblical story.

The Priority of Meaning

This emphasis on the priority of content over technique does not suggest a return to the "just-the-facts" approach of many sterile curricula used in the past. The third point, in fact, is that our goal must be to promote understanding of the *meaning* of the biblical story and not mere mastery of biblical "facts." This is illustrated in Joshua 4 in verse 24. The story of what God did for Israel bore a *message* not only for Israel ("that you may fear the LORD your God forever") but also for the world ("that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty").

The contemporary concern for greater "relevance" in Christian preaching and teaching is perfectly legitimate. Much of the instruction we dispensed and received in the past was, in fact, dry and lifeless. The answer, however, is not to turn our backs on Bible study or to "read into" the Bible insights derived from popular psychology or some other fount of cultural wisdom (as if one had to *make* the Bible relevant). The answer is, rather, to learn better how to *discover* the inherent relevance of the life-giving message of Scripture and to convey it to others. If we lose contact with the faith-generating story of God's saving deeds, we will have nothing of value to pass on to the next generation.

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The Priority of Adult Education

This brings us to the last point. Passages like Joshua 4 and Deuteronomy 6 are often cited in support of the idea that the central concern of Christian education must be the training of our children. The question, "Will our children have faith?" is one that weighs heavily on the heart of every Christian. Is not the greater need, however, the Christian education of *adults*? Joshua says, "When your children ask their parents in time to come, 'What do these stones mean?' then you shall let your children know . . ." (Josh. 4:21-22a). This assumes that the parents *know the story.* That is an assumption that we can no longer make. There is an appalling rate of "biblical illiteracy" among adults in our churches. Since parents will teach the children the first priority of the church must be to see that adults are equipped for that task through a diet of serious Bible study.

Conclusion

These are four points, then, that can revitalize our efforts in the area of Christian education: (1) Christian education must, in fact, be distinctively Christian, (2) content must take precedence over technique, (3) we must move beyond mere mastery of biblical "facts" to engagement with the life-giving message of Scripture, and (4) our first priority should be the equipping of adults for the task of passing on the faith to the next generation.

The first two points serve as warnings to those tempted to abandon our historic emphasis on serious biblical instruction as the essential core of Christian nurture. The third point calls for us to demonstrate our seriousness about Bible study by cultivating more effective means of discerning and communicating the central message of Scripture than we employed in the past. The final point reminds us of the extent to which we have failed to maintain vital contact with "the faith once delivered to the saints" and the urgent need to rediscover for ourselves--and transmit to our children--the heritage of faith, hope, and love in which we stand.

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

Skills, Credentials, or Faithfulness? Reflecting on Theological Education

Allan J. McNicol

We sat in the congregation on a Spring Sunday morning waiting for the annual presentation of the high school graduates. As always it was an inspiring and hopeful time. These seniors represented tremendous promise for their families and the church.

But as each graduate walked by, and I noted from the bulletin where each one would go to college, as well as their intended majors, a disturbing thought began to cross my mind. No one had indicated an interest in ministry. I recalled a similar situation last year. When was the last time someone I knew had elected to go to college for a theological education?

Of course there have always been reasons parents discouraged their children from vocations in church work. I suggest however, that there is a new and disturbing factor that accounts for the paucity of talented young people in churches of Christ entering vocations in ministry. Specifically, it is increasingly difficult to understand the rationale for Christian ministry. We know what nurses, bankers, and engineers are supposed to do. But what do we mean by the term "ministry"? Is it a service? Is it a profession? Who would wish to have an indefineable job where fundamental questions are raised about the necessity of its very existence?

This was not always so. As recent as this century a person discouraged with life would visit the priest or minister convinced that he would get the final word about the meaning of it all.[1] He may have been told nothing more than that he should live for the

[1]As noted by Terry C. Muck, "Religious Education and Theological Education: Background Potential, and Problems," *Insights* 107/1 (Fall, 1991) 6.

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

praise and glory of God.[2] But, at least, he left that visit convinced that he had received the final word on the matter from the appropriate person.[3] Today, things have changed drastically. Many are convinced that there are no definitive answers to the ultimate questions. Ministers know no more about these things than anyone else.

The minister no longer serves as the steward and teacher of a body of ultimate truths. He now has a functional task of facilitating and enabling voluntary religious communities to survive. As Dean Acheson said of the British after World War 2, "they have lost an empire but have not found a role." Little wonder that few young people are challenged by this vision of ministry.

All of this puts tremendous strains on theological colleges. How does a faculty, given these new realities, design a curriculum that will prepare one to be a minister? Should the emphasis be on spiritual development, cognitive knowledge, or the development of practical skills? All of these emphases have their advocates.

This essay will assess the current philosophy and practice that informs theological education in the churches of Christ. I will argue that present programs imitate a model of ministerial training popular among mainline denominations--a model that has been shown to be seriously flawed. Specifically, this pattern is known as the theory-practice model of ministry. In my view, we are in danger of turning our ministers into the worst products of the theory-practice model. We are creating leaders who attain positions in the life of the church, either on the basis of credentialed knowledge, or by mastering professional skills.

In place of this model we ought to encourage the development of leaders who have both a vision of what it means to live an integrated life in the church informed by the Christian story and have the capacity to help us make the choices necessary to live worthy and faithful lives.

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[2]*Muck,* 6.

[3]*Muck,* 6.

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

Procedurally, I will first show why the theory-practice model of theological education became so dominant in the West and why it is flawed. Second, I will note that evidence indicates that theological education among churches of Christ is becoming dominated by the theory-practice model just as others are giving it up. Finally, I will offer suggestions regarding the direction theological education in churches of Christ should take.

The Failure of the Theory-Practice Model

Programs of theological education operative in the theological colleges of mainline denominations have come under sustained criticism in the past decade.[4] At the center of this critique is the claim that seminaries no longer produce spiritually mature ministers who are informed in their knowledge of the Christian faith and who can interpret that faith clearly for contemporary believers. Either the minister emerges from the seminary with a few practical skills in some specialized area of ministry, while blissfully ignorant of the historic tradition; or, he has mastered a body of knowledge about the faith (on the basis of accepted canons in the modern research university). With the former, the *practice* of ministry is more likely to be informed by models of professionalism gleaned from social sciences or business professions. With the latter, the minister attains *theoretical* competence in handling a body of truth arrived at through critical, historical inquiry; but seldom has he

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[4]On a popular level see Robin W. Lovin, "The Real Task of Practical Theology," *Christian Century*, 109/5 (February 5-12, 1992) 125-128. At the substantive academic level of sustained historical critique the book by Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) is a good place to start. The book sparked a major debate about the nature and effectiveness of theological education in the liberal mainline churches in the past decade. The debate can be traced in the journal *Theological Education* starting in Vol. 20 (1984) and continuing to the present. Recently, the debate has been brought up to date in *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education* eds., Edward Farley and Barbara Wheeler (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991).

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

been given a capacity, skill, or even a rationale for communicating and applying this knowledge to the person in the pew.

As a rule, seminary teachers, dominated by this theory-practice model, and having a need to keep abreast in their academic specialties, are not even interested in bridging these gaps. And if they cannot (or will not) cross this divide between the theoretical and practical it is little wonder that students fail to do so. Ultimately students are turned loose to do ministry either with a few skills disconnected from the story; or, credentialed in knowing the latest research, are left to wonder about its relevance for Christian life. After painful experiences the student either accommodates to life in the local church or, out of frustration, gives up. This is why many believe that theological education in the West, by making itself answerable primarily to the secular professions or the academy (the theory-practice model), has become detached from the faith communities it was designed to serve.[5]

A brief description of how this situation arose may be helpful. Throughout the Middle Ages the education of clergy took place in a number of different settings such as the bishop's household, the cathedral schools, monasteries, or the universities. The latter first rose to prominence in the twelfth century.[6] By the Reformation, certain tensions had developed between the church and the university that were harbingers of things to come.[7] Medieval universities placed heavy emphasis on philosophy and the intellectual skills necessary to understand revelation and promote it through argumentation. This spawned a scholasticism in the church which was detached from ordinary life.

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[5]See the disturbing account of the situation in a representative number of seminaries given by Paul Wilkes, "The Hands That Would Shape Our Souls," *Atlantic Monthly* (December, 1990) 59-88.

[6]Carl A. Volz, "Seminaries: The Love of Learning or the Desire of God," *Dialog* 28/2 (Spring, 1989) 103.

[7]Farley, 34.

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

The Reformation was as much a reaction against this scholasticizing ministry as it was against the moral and religious abuses of the medieval church. Indeed, in an attempt to correct the earlier abuses, the Council of Trent, in 1563, set up schools (seminaries) separate from the universities charged to develop both moral character and spiritual exercises among the clergy in addition to teaching them the tradition.[8]

Nevertheless, the role of the university in the education of ministers remained dominant. Even though the Enlightenment questioned much of the traditional heritage of the West, it fueled a strong interest in the study of Christianity in the universities. Now, however, Christianity was not defended as the true legacy of the ancients. Instead, it was rigorously examined as to its truthfulness before the bar of autonomous reason.[9] In this, developing character and the spiritual life took a back seat to the impartial scientific study of religion.

Downgrading of the importance of the university in assisting the life of faith gradually developed into the contemporary chasm between being a churchman and being a professor. Today, a large number in the university community, given their canons for assessing evidence, consider the academic study of Christianity unworthy to be included in the curriculum.[10]

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[8]Volz, 103.

[9]Farley, 40.

[10]Already by the nineteenth century it had become evident that the university had made its own classifications of human knowledge which were worthy of study. Where did this leave the traditional curriculum for the preparation of ministers? The study of the Bible could be housed as a branch of Near Eastern Studies or Classics. Theology could be viewed as one stream in Western history and philosophy. But what about the formation of Christian character and spirituality? And where did the minister learn the practical skills of preaching and pastoral care?

In the early nineteenth century Friedrich Schleiermacher, living in the context of a strong connection between church and state, made the most celebrated attempt to justify ministerial training in the curriculum of a modern university. He argued that just as the German people needed experts trained in medicine and law they need specialists (ministers) to teach and encourage the development of piety. As the study

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

To many sensitive observers, the practice of training ministers on the basis of models acceptable to the research university is anachronistic.[11] New paradigms are needed for training Christian leaders that can sustain them in their identity and give them integrity to travel the journey of faith.

Troubling Signs in Theological Education in Churches of Christ

Since its inception in the nineteenth century, the Campbell-Stone Movement has been susceptible to adopting the now highly suspect theory-practice model of ministerial training. Campbell understood Scripture as a "book of facts not of opinions."[12] He stood squarely within the American early post-Enlightenment where, it was thought, through the ordinary use of reason the common man could discover the necessary facts about Christianity and its ordinances in order to live a faithful life. This philosophical position provided a perfect matrix for using the school (both in the church and college) as a model for Christian training. With

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of the natural sciences (*Wissenschaft*) and learning skills of how to practice medicine contributed to the physical health of the nation, the study of Bible and Theology (*Wissenschaft*) supplemented by the practical ministries (preaching and pastoral skills) would contribute to spiritual health. Needless to say, this argument which provided a foundation for the theory-practice model made some sense in a fairly coherent society like nineteenth-century Germany. It became totally implausible in twentieth-century pluralistic America. Current difficulties encountered by those who follow such models can be noted in the article by Merl D. Strege, "Chasing Schleiermacher's Ghost: The Reform of Theological Education in the 1980's," *This World* 26 (Summer, 1989) 102-115. Strege's article also appears in a helpful collection on the general subject, *Theological Education and Moral Formation* ed., R. J. Neuhaus, *Encounter Series* 15 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

[11]David H. Kelsey, "A Theological Curriculum About and Against the Church," *Beyond Clericalism: The Congregation as a Focus for Theological Education* eds., Joseph C. Hough Jr., and Barbara Wheeler (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 37-48.

[12]Cf. S.C. Pearson, "Faith and Reason in Disciples Theology," *Classic Themes of Disciples Theology*, ed., K.W. Lawrence (Fort Worth: T.C.U., 1986) 114-116.

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

this approach Restorationists were well on their way toward embracing the dominant theory-practice model.

Campbell himself started Bethany College in 1840 with the Bible offered as an area of study along with other academic courses in the liberal arts. Across the frontier, other similar schools were established by Restorationists. To this day the liberal arts college, with the academic study of the Bible as the cornerstone of the curriculum, serves as the basic vehicle for the training of ministers in churches of Christ.

In due time, the rigorous critical methodologies used in the academy also became acceptable in the liberal arts colleges of the churches of Christ.[13] Since the philosophical underpinnings and basic methodologies for the disciplines were set in the major universities, and since they taught the Bible as a rigorous historical science, it was predictable that our colleges, wishing to be academically credible, would follow suit.[14]

At the same time, while the Christian colleges have looked to the great universities for their theoretical models in the teaching of Bible, these same colleges have been quick to appropriate the philosophies and methodologies of many other secular disciplines as the basis for their teaching about the work and practice of the minister. Preaching, for example, has generally been taught in the department of speech or communications. One would not deny there is much that the preacher can learn from specialists in communication. But one can also question the value such classes place on the theology that should inform the sermon.[15]

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[13]Gary D. Collier, "Bringing the Word to Life: Biblical Hermeneutics in Churches of Christ," *Christian Studies* 11:1 (Fall, 1990) 18-40.

[14]If one would dispute this claim, he is invited to consult the reading lists and bibliographies in the course descriptions for upper-division and graduate Bible courses offered in the colleges of the churches of Christ. There, increasingly, one will find little difference in both the form and the material content of the course offerings to that which is operative in the major universities which still offer courses in Bible.

[15]An additional factor contributing to the dominance of the theory-practice model in theological education among churches of Christ is the peculiar relationship

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

On the other hand, various programs in the practice of ministry are being set up in our theological schools, in missions, counseling, marriage and family therapy, and special ministries to various age groups. These programs exist independently as areas of expertise with their own peculiar methodologies. It is difficult to see where the theory (the traditional fields of theological study) and the practice (the professional programs) intersect and interrelate.

Suggestions for Future Directions

Without question it is time for a fundamental analysis of theological education and ministerial preparation in churches of Christ. In these concluding observations it is only possible to highlight general directions which such an analysis should pursue.

First, with respect to the guiding philosophy, it would appear advisable that schools (whether preaching schools, liberal arts colleges, or university graduate schools) re-evaluate their adoption of the theory-practice model and begin to search for other models to undergird theological education. As an example of another model I would commend a mode of theological education that is congruent with the important movement of Narrative Theology. Taking for granted that we live in a post-modern world, and bracketing questions of proving before the bar of reason certain foundational theological claims, we would proceed with theological education on the basic presupposition that the Christian faith *is* true. Consequently, the task of theological education is to teach students the basic rudiments of the biblical story and how they may

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of the churches to the schools. Because of the emphasis on congregational autonomy most congregations elect not to contribute financially towards theological education. From the point of view of the schools (often dependent on foundation and business support) the churches have not shown a great deal of responsibility in this regard. On the other hand, the schools, not being directly accountable to the churches, often tend to gravitate toward academic rather than ecclesiastical models as the basic reason for their existence. Tragically, students suffer most in this system. Lacking direct oversight from either their home church or the faculty of the Christian school, many spend years in a spiritual wilderness wondering whether there will be a place for them in the ministries of the church.

live and serve with integrity in light of it. In short, theological education would become much more catechetical.

The focus of this model would be on developing the character and spiritual maturity of students rather than their being merely credentialed in a certain body of information or given particular professional skills. This model has the advantage of integrating learning about the Christian story with practice congruent with the faith. Such a philosophy would come closer in preparing the ideal leaders as described in passages such as I Timothy 3:1-13 than those who are educated under the theory-practice model. (Scripture emphasizes the character of the person filling the office, not the credentials or skills of the office holder.)

Second, with respect to the actual training of ministers, it may be necessary for the schools to undergo major changes in the present curriculum. A new center of the curriculum may emerge based on the need for growth in faith, the capacity for leading worship, and the ability to carry out the regular routines of the local church which is God's vehicle for remembering and perpetuating his story in the world. Although nourishment of the life of faith lived in the church is central, the student still goes to school and is instructed in the story (Bible, Church History, and Theology) and in ways that are appropriate to live in light of it (Ethics and Ministry).

Schools with this agenda may have to curtail certain specialized studies (e.g., the history of the Synoptic Problem, or the philosophy of Kant) in favor of the more integrated approach traced above.[16] Ultimately, what the church needs is not ministers who can read Ugaritic, but moral and faithful leaders who know the Christian story and can communicate it to others.

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[16]This does not mean that the church does not have a stake in other important areas of knowledge. Realistically, however, such issues are the province of the humanities in the Christian liberal arts college or specialized graduate programs.

Conclusion

An undercurrent flowing throughout this essay is the claim that the programs of theological education offered by institutions affiliated with the churches of Christ often begin implementing the methodologies of others about the same time these constituencies have realized they were a failure.

The Disciples of Christ in their programs of theological education followed the theory-practice model to the letter. Now with the release of a series of essays tracing the fortune of the Disciples in America during the past century, a major milestone in the evaluation of the ministry in one segment of the Campbell-Stone Movement has been reached.[17] These essays were compiled against the background of a precipitous decline of Disciples membership and influence in the last generation. A major argument of the editor is that the legacy of the Disciples' well-organized higher education system spawned a liberal clergy who served a basically conservative constituency.[18] The situation has produced the disastrous mix of a frustrated clergy and demoralized laity. Given present trends among the churches of Christ, who can say that we will not end up in the same boat?

In this essay we have advocated a change in direction in our philosophy of theological education. We call this the model of informed faithfulness. Implementation of this model requires co-operation between school and church. The focus of this model is no longer on attaining academic credentials or merely developing skills, but on the nurture and formation of *character* congruent with the story we hold. The church must demand evidence of mature Christian character as the *essential* pre-requisite for ministry.

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[17] *A Case Study of American Protestantism: The Disciples' Relation to American Culture, 1880-1989*, ed., D. Newell Williams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

[18] Williams, "Disciples' Relation to American Culture," 3-25; 561-574.

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

Reading the Bible Through Life

Wendell Willis

As one who has worked in Christian education, I believe that I have noticed a trend in the last two decades within churches about Bible study. Let me admit at the outset, that this is a personal observation. I have done no polling to check it out. If your experience is otherwise, I would be interested in hearing from you.

What I have witnessed is a trend away from Bible study in Sunday school classes, almost wholly to topical interests. I acknowledge that this may be a "straw man" in some ways, for topical studies can use the Bible a lot, just as ostensibly textual studies may use the Bible as a launching stage to get to the personal interests of the teacher. Still, even with this admission, I am curious about how we study the Bible, and why we seem to be shifting away from this--even in the specific time that churches set aside for this task.

One answer, of course, is that in a video culture, such as our own, all reading is problematic. In the university where I teach New Testament, I increasingly realize that it is not just that the students don't read *my* assignments, they simply do not read much at all. They are "post-literate."

Another explanation for the increasing disinterest in Bible study is that while familiarity may not breed contempt, it does sometimes breed disinterest. Adults who have spent a lifetime in Bible study, may feel that they have mastered the subject and its contents. That is one of the greatest challenges of teaching and of preaching--reaching the already converted. How often do we anticipate or expect, that anything at all will "happen" in our study? Are the ideas and approaches like comfortable old shoes?

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

I want to examine present Bible study in relationship to three questions as we begin. The first is the question of "*how*" we read the Bible, the mechanics if you will. The second is "*why*" we read the Bible. After all there are a large number of folks around us who regard Jesus as important for life, but who do not do Bible study. Third, what is the "*goal*" of reading the Bible? This is more than why we do it, since we can do a number of things which seem to have no real goal. I mean, if we decide to study the Bible, what goals must be fulfilled in order for us to deem our study successful?

How We Study the Bible

I see two major difficulties in Bible study in our churches: first, our tendency to dis-integrate the text and, second, to study the text against its grain--demand of it answers to questions that it does not ask. Let me elaborate on these.

By "dis-integrate" the text I mean the common practice of picking it to bits and pieces. We take what was written as a whole and so atomize and divide it as to make it impossible to appreciate it as a whole. How many Christians know that Paul and Mark did not write chapters and verses, but complete letters and a gospel? The practice of versification in most translations cannot but unconsciously give the impression that these writings are meant to be read in snatches, or at least in chapters. The result is that we may become experts on trees, but ignorant of forests. This is a procedure which is all the more problematic when we stretch out our studies over a long period of time (e.g. a two year class on Romans).

The best rebuke of this approach of "vivisecting" the writings of the Bible that I know is found in Juan Carlos Ortiz' little book *Disciple*.[1] This is put somewhat in caricature (but only slightly, I fear), and is thus humorous to a degree. But I suspect it may betray a gallows humor view of Bible study. What is lost in the

[1]Juan Carlos Ortiz, *Disciple* (Creation House, 1975) 107-109.

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

atomistic Bible study is the pulse that ties all the pieces together. It is as if we dissect the cadaver and are unable to appreciate what made it originally a "person"--its life center.

The second methodological problem is reading the Bible against the grain, contrary to its intent. Often it is not that the Bible doesn't give the answer we want, so much as it doesn't ask the questions we ask. One can ask questions that don't have answers precisely because of how you ask them. (How many free throws after a touchdown?)

To take a recent question of popular debate among Christians in some areas, to ask of the Bible an answer to the question of whether we are permitted to take part in a state lottery is to ask a question that it does not consider. We may find in the Bible principles to consider for guidance in this issue--but it is unfair to press the story of soldiers gambling for Jesus' seamless robe into a critique of gambling! Other examples are legion.

Let me make perfectly clear my concern here. *I am not denying that the Bible may teach us a lot about how we should be Christians today; I am stating that we do wrong seeking to wrest an answer from a letter that it never asked.*

Why Read the Bible?

I suspect that the initial reaction of many readers to this question is "How obvious! We study the Bible because God gave it to us, to reveal himself." That would certainly appear to be an adequate motivation for Bible study, but I am really asking when we do the studying that God expects of us--what do we expect this study to accomplish.

Perhaps you have seen pictures of Buddhist "prayer wheels" found around temples in the East. A passing worshipper gives it a spin and thus another prayer is offered. No one asks the passerby for his attitudes, or interests; he may not even be conscious of what he does. The prayer is effective by virtue of being done. I have often thought that much Bible study that I have been around is like this. The doing of it is effective and acceptable to

God. This is what I would regard as "thought-less" Bible study, in which those who study do not really concern themselves with reasons for doing what they do.

The motive of Bible study which I grew up with was really focused upon *the recovery of right doctrine.* We studied the Bible to learn right beliefs that God expected of us. In most every case, of course, we knew the belief before we opened the Bible, and only wanted to remind ourselves of our previous discoveries. That is why the biblical books we studied were so very predictable. Mostly it was the Acts of Apostles, or the letters of Paul. On rare occasions we might take up Revelation, either to answer mistaken views being peddled door to door, or because some teacher was foolish enough to ask what the class would prefer to study next.

It is perfectly obvious to all that the Bible contains and teaches doctrines--beliefs. However, to read the Bible just for beliefs is to pay attention only to the intellectual side of its teaching. One of the major difficulties with our reading the Bible just for its doctrines is that it is too intellectualizing and too rationalizing of the broader concerns of the Bible itself. Paul did not write his letters to be published as tracts, or even collected essays. Even less did he research his letters with index cards in the library of Antioch or Corinth. Just as it truncates a human being to reduce him/her to thoughts, so also it truncates the Bible to reduce it to doctrine.

Moreover, most often the doctrines we studied were usually selectively chosen as those where we came out right, and were studied for our interests. Let me illustrate this from my recent experience.

When we moved from central Texas to Springfield, Missouri, I made an interesting discovery about churches. In Springfield is located the national headquarters for the Assemblies of God. They are among the most prominent groups in the city, their members belonging to the influential citizenry of the town. This is a far-cry from the Assemblies of God that I grew up knowing about, a small minority living on the wrong side of the tracks.

Having moved to a stronghold for the "AG," I have learned something about their doctrinal interests. To my surprise I have found that their favorite portion of the Bible is also the book of Acts. However, while I grew up reading the book of Acts for instruction on baptism, Lord's supper, and church organization, the AG's read it for its emphasis upon the Holy Spirit. My point is that both we and they only read the book for those doctrines that we want to know about.

Twenty years ago I was introduced to yet another way of reading the Bible. *That is the reading of the Bible for historical content.* In fact, the first teacher who showed me that the study of the Bible could not only be fulfilling but intellectually stimulating, was a Bible teacher at Abilene Christian University. He introduced me to the wonders of the Greek language and to the historical backgrounds of the individual writings of the New Testament. I first read in the arcane works of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and tried to follow Philo in his meanderings. From this teacher I received not only great knowledge, but also that the desire to know more.

Again, I do not wish to be misunderstood--I do not regret that experience in any way. I may have even found a personal reason to be a Bible student in my admiration for that teacher and the wisdom he shared with me. But it is possible wrongly to regard this historical understanding as the basic motivation for Bible study.

But, beyond my own confessionals, I think that a number of Sunday School teachers have switched from the "doctrinal" to the "historical" approach for Bible classes. They share with their classes information about the meanings of Greek terms, the impact of Stoic philosophy, and other scarcely known historical footnotes. And the students are very often willing participants in such a venture, going forth at the end of each hour bemused and amused. They are grateful for being initiates into the ways of arcane biblical wisdoms, and tell the teacher in lauding terms, "I never knew that before." It would take a rare person not to regard his Bible teaching as successful in the face of such praise. (I suspect this is

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

why Barclay's commentaries have come to have such an honored place alongside the copy of Josephus in most church libraries.)

Yet another trend in Bible study that I take to be a motive for reading the Bible is more recent--in my experience. It is reading the Bible as illustrating contemporary wisdom. It used to be the case that teachers would occasionally refer to some famous author, or "Dear Abby" to illustrate a biblical truth. In recent years, this procedure seems to me to have reversed. Now more often the real "text" read for the Bible class is derived from counselors, psychologists, cultural analysis, and especially that new breed, "forecasters." I have seen some times when I thought this was done well, but most often it strikes me as something of an embarrassing admission for the biblical guild--that finding our own pantry bare for useful teachings, we are ready to raid our counselor neighbors for the main course and use the biblical texts for condiments.

Reading the Bible Through Life

How did the writings of the Bible, or let me restrict myself to the New Testament for this essay, come to be written? What motivated the various authors to write? Clearly in the case of Paul it is because of problems in life that he saw in the churches he addressed. But we are not accustomed to thinking of the life-situation dimension and it is often overlooked when we read the letters sifting them only for their "doctrine." This is a dimension, however, which I not only find necessary for accurate understanding of the original writings, but especially useful for our concern to see how life today intersects with the original intent of the Bible's writings. Think how much Paul's letters are concerned with how Christians should (or should not!) live. Philemon is the easiest example to see, for it really contains no "doctrines" (in the restricted sense of the word) at all. It is solely concerned about the relationship between two Christians, one a slave and the other his owner. But Philemon bristles with "theo-logy" in the ways in which Paul addresses this life problem.

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

Or take the example of I Corinthians. In it Paul addresses a collage of life-style catastrophes: lawsuits, marriage and re-marriage (and celibacy), incest, eating customs, how the Lord's Supper is observed, and the general way in which worship occurs in Corinth. Again, although Paul presumes and argues from doctrine (in the restricted sense) the letter is aimed at lifestyle issues. The Corinthians were not behaving as Christians. I could continue with Galatians (the question of what to do about keeping the Law for non-Jews), Philippians (minor internal squabbles among Christians), and so on.

Let me say a little about the theoretical base of the model for Bible reading which I am proposing. It is nothing really revolutionary and requires no unusual skills. It is more a matter of what questions we bring to the New Testament than anything else. It simply assumes that *life-style and doctrine (in the restricted sense) are integrally and reciprocally related.* We live how we believe and we believe how we live (Romans 6, for example, says that those who give their lives in service to Satan are Satan's slaves, regardless of what they profess). This relationship I take to be a circle, a loop. Like the chicken and egg question, there is no unambiguous answer to which comes first. We all encounter doctrine and life-styles together as a pair.

If we focus our reading of the Bible on life and seek to learn what life-style is described and/or proscribed in these writings, I think there is one immediate gain for Bible study. Reading the Bible in this manner enables us to "make contact" with he original intent of the writer. We may, or may not, share certain ideas found in his culture, but we are all engaged in trying to live as Christians.

One of the difficulties with the strict historical approach that I mentioned earlier (and which, I remind you, I still value), is that it often lacks the ability to bridge the time gap between the writing of the New Testament and our own day. This is especially the case when we use the historical approach to deal with ideas (doctrine) alone. This happens even if we are very clear about the

ideas themselves (often problematic for the historical reconstructions).

For example, if we are able to prove that the letters of John are addressed to the rise of the docetic doctrine that the Christ was not really a "flesh and blood" person, but only wore a "human suit" and in his essence remained fully divine--how do we bring that into our times? I've never met a single theoretical docetic Christian, who would argue that Jesus was not really fully human. (On the other hand, I have met a number of practicing docetics who regard Jesus as so fully divine that his human activities are unimportant for their understanding of his life's mission.)

I hope that I am being clear on this point, but fear that I may not be. The letters of John certainly address the historical and ideological problem of Docetism. However, this ideological problem arises because of a problem of life, not just theory. It is the gap between accurate historical information and its present-day importance that I wish to face with the approach of reading the Bible through life.

A Model for Reading Through Life

I keep returning to the original question: What do we hope or expect to gain from reading the Bible? (I have in mind especially in Bible classes.) In previous days our purpose was *to understand correct doctrines*; in recent years *to receive new information.* Both these purposes regard the goal of Bible study as gaining information. Certainly this is a valid goal for education of all sorts, Bible included. However, it does not seem to me that this is a fully sufficient goal. I am not most concerned that my children have accurate information, but that they have proper attitudes and live faithful lives.

A second-level purpose in Bible study is more life-related when it asks us to *examine our attitudes* as well as our knowledge. Jesus, you will recall rebuked the Pharisees most often for their attitudes of self-righteousness and haughty disapproval of others.

How can we read the Bible with concern for whether our attitudes are changed?

A third level is that of *conduct, or behavior change.* It is not enough just to have correct definitions about *agape* in comparison to other Greek words for love. It is not enough even to feel sympathy for the battered stranger in the ditch. The key issue, it seems to me, is whether our lives are remodeled by the gospel. Paul admonishes us in Romans 12:1 not to have our minds shaped by the world, but by faith--then he proceeds to tell us what we are to do as believers (12:3-8).

If we try to read the Bible through life we must ask ourselves some questions as well as what we ask of the Bible. The first question, a decisive one, I think, is whether we tend to regard the Bible only as a *warrant* for what we are, or also see it as a *critique* of who we are. This is a skill very difficult to develop and practice. In their interesting book *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*[2] Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart tell of a Sunday school teacher who concluded the study of the parable of the Publican and the Pharisee with this prayer: "We thank you, Lord, that we are not like the Pharisee in this story"! (And in a very refreshing bit of candor, they add, "And we had to remind each other not to laugh too hard, lest our laughter be saying, "Thank you, Lord, that we are not like that Sunday school teacher.") As Paul teaches us most clearly in Romans 2, there is nothing in grace that humanity is not able to pervert.

One of the best teachers I ever had, formulated for his students this interpretive principle: "Whenever you find the Bible teaching something that you already held to be right, suspect that you are misinterpreting it." He tried to instill in each of us appreciation for what may be called the "anti-church" character of the Bible. The Bible calls us into question more than it congratulates us on what we have achieved. This seems to me to be reading "with the grain." The prophetic books, and the letters of the New

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[2]Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (Zondervan, 1982) 134.

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

Testament all were originally written not as letters of recommendation for Israel or the church, but indictments by the Lord of the church.

In conclusion, let me list the basic questions which help us read the Bible with a focus upon issues of living.

1. What is the situation of the readers regarding the world outside the church?

2. What is the situation of the first readers regarding each other? What is happening within the church?

3. What are they admonished to do/not do? (i.e.,not just think).

4. What arguments/reasons are set forth to encourage their actions in this regard?

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

From Scripture to Sharing: Sunday Schools in Churches of Christ

Gary Holloway

How can Christians pass on the faith to their children? Home instruction is of primary importance. Christian day schools can help. However, for two centuries Christians have also relied on the Sunday School to help train their children in spiritual matters. This brief survey of the development and practices of the Sunday School in churches of Christ will provide insights into how it can become a more effective tool for passing on the faith.

The Origin of Protestant Sunday Schools

Although Sunday Schools originated in Scotland in the 1780's, they soon crossed the Atlantic and became a peculiarly American institution. The first Sunday Schools in America were organized in Philadelphia in 1791 to teach literacy to poor urban children by having them read and copy portions of the Bible. These schools were Protestant and evangelical but were not affiliated with a particular church. In 1824 the American Sunday School Union, a nondenominational organization, was founded to promote Sunday Schools and provide textbooks and curricular materials.[1]

The Sunday School's work in supporting literacy actually laid the groundwork for the development of public schools in America. The rise of these "common schools" set Sunday Schools free to concentrate on the teaching of religion. By the 1850's there were two distinct types of Sunday Schools: mission schools for the

[1] Anne M. Boyland, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale, 1988) 6, 61.

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

unchurched and Sunday Schools for the children of church members. It was about this time also that Sunday Schools began to be programs of local churches instead of nondenominational enterprises.[2] Eventually mission schools passed from the picture and the Sunday School took on the basic shape it has today: a ministry of a local church where children of the church are given religious training.

Sunday Schools in the Stone-Campbell Movement (1820-1906)

Alexander Campbell was at first against the Sunday School. In 1823 he said the early church knew nothing of Sunday Schools because "in their church capacity alone they moved."[3] He believed the Sunday School to be a interdenominational organization that usurped the role of the church. He was also afraid the teachers in the Sunday Schools, who were drawn from several Protestant denominations, would bring their young pupils "under the domination of some creed or sect."[4]

By 1837 Campbell had changed his mind. Responding to a reader's question whether "little ones" should be sent to Sunday School or taught at home, he replied, "Schools for this purpose should be carefully encouraged by all Christians."[5] He goes on to warn again against sectarian teaching in Sunday Schools.

The shift from the interdenominational Sunday School led by the Sunday School Union to each church having a Sunday School for its own children is reflected in Campbell's writings. In 1848 he published in the *Millennial Harbinger* "An Appeal to the Churches in Behalf of Sunday Schools," by A.S. Hayden and Isaac

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[2] Marianne Sawicki, *The Gospel in History, Portrait of a Teaching Church: The Origins of Christian Education* (New York: Paulist, 1988) 259, 275.

[3] *Christian Baptist* 1 (July 1823) 14.

[4] *Christian Baptist* 2 (August 1824) 5.

[5] *Millennial Harbinger* (1837) 93.

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

Errett. These men appealed to each church to have its own Sunday School and announced the formation of a committee that included Alexander Campbell who would produce curricular materials "for the young."[6]

What was the shape of these early Sunday Schools? One church in 1855 reported 48 students between the ages of seven and fourteen and described a typical class: "The Superintendent opens the school by reading a chapter before the class, and prayer. Then instructions are given from the chapter read in the form of a short lecture. Then recitations and reading, and then rewards dispensed according to merit."[7] These 48 pupils had collectively memorized 13,319 verses of the New Testament in the previous five months. This glimpse of a typical Sunday School illustrates how lecture and Scripture memorization were the most widely used teaching methods throughout the nineteenth century.

One problem the Sunday School faced from the beginning was poorly trained teachers.[8] Thus while Sunday Schools were originally exclusively for children, eventually adult classes were begun to educate Sunday School teachers. Some of these classes were quite demanding covering two years of instruction in Bible, archaeology, Christology, and educational methods.[9]

Bible Schools in Churches of Christ (1906-1960)

By 1906 when churches of Christ were listed separately from Disciples in the United States census, the vast majority of congregations had Sunday Schools. There was, however, a vocal minority who felt, like the early Campbell, that Sunday Schools were an

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[6] *Millennial Harbinger* (1848) 470.

[7] *Millennial Harbinger* (1855) 477.

[8] See the scathing comments on unskilled teachers in *Lard's Quarterly* (July 1865) 378.

[9] *Millennial Harbinger* (1864) 547.

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

unauthorized innovation. By the 1920's this group had developed a separate identity. These "Non-Sunday School" churches of Christ today number around 25,000 members in 600 churches and are found primarily in Texas.

In the majority of churches of Christ, Sunday School programs were well-accepted as a part of each church's ministry. The greatest controversy was over what to call them. Many felt the term "Sunday School" sounded too denominational and preferred the name "Bible School."[10]

In the 1920's Bible Schools began to take the shape they have today in churches of Christ with graded classes, volunteer teachers (usually women for children's classes), and the use of printed lesson quarterlies. The growing importance of Bible Schools is reflected in repeated calls at Christian college lectureships for improving instruction through the use of trained teachers, well-equipped classrooms, printed materials, and established educational principles.[11] At the forefront of this call were two men who left their mark on education among churches of Christ: J.P. Sewell and Henry Speck. These men had been trained in education theory, and throughout the twenties and thirties they published a series of volumes on the work of educating various age groups within the church.

Judging from the Bible School materials used by most churches (the quarterlies published by the Gospel Advocate and Firm Foundation companies), the shape of the typical class was fairly constant from the 1920's to the 1960's. For children, there was an emphasis on Bible stories from both the Old and New Testaments. After the story, certain questions would be asked to impress upon the children's minds the main feature of the story. Memory verses

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[10] Even as late as 1947, J.P. Sewell and Henry Speck argued that "churches of Christ have no Sunday Schools," reserving the name "Bible School" for the church's educational program. See *The Church and Her Ideal Educational Situation* (Austin: Firm Foundation, 1947) 39.

[11] See for example the survey of discussion on Sunday Schools at the Abilene Christian Lectures in William S. Banowsky, *The Mirror of a Movement* (Dallas: Christian Publishing, 1965) 234-243.

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

were to be learned, although there was less memory work than was typical in the nineteenth-century Sunday School. For older children and adults, the lesson consisted of a reading from Scripture (usually from the New Testament), an outline of the passage, several fill-in-the-blank questions from the Bible text, and then a few questions on the religious teaching of the text. Studies were structured around a verse-by-verse study of books of the Bible. The few topical studies were also quite biblically based.

Christian Education During the Last Three Decades (1960-1990)

A new pattern of leadership for the Bible School has developed in the last three decades. Until the 1960's, Sunday Schools were headed by volunteer leaders--at first called superintendents, later directors, coordinators or similar terms. In the 1960's this role began to be filled by paid ministers, first assistant ministers who had additional duties and later by full-time Educational Ministers.[12]

Today, medium-sized and even some small churches have paid educational directors. In many ways this has been a positive change, placing needed emphasis on the church's educational program. However one negative consequence has been the professionalization of the Bible School program. Elders may be led to think that all it takes to have a strong Bible School is to hire an education minister. Participation and planning by a variety of church members, which was historically one of the greatest strengths of the Sunday School, is often lost. Educational ministers and churches find themselves in a no-win situation. If educational ministers take an overactive role in running the educational program, they stifle the participation and leadership of members. On the other hand, if they turn the program over to others and assume the role of facilitator or resource person, their elders may

[12] The first full-time educational director in churches of Christ was Alan M. Bryan who worked with the Broadway Church in Lubbock, see Banowsky, *Mirror*, 239.

Institute for Christian Studies
CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

question their work-habits or the value of even having a paid educational director.

A more detrimental consequence of relying on an educational minister to produce a quality Bible School program is the lack of biblical and theological knowledge expected of them. Many educational ministers are experts in educational theory, child development, and family studies, but have limited training in the text and meaning of Scripture, church history, and theology. Our Christian colleges perpetuate this lack of knowledge by offering degrees in Religious Education that require minimal hours in Bible and Theology.[13] When Elders interview someone for a position as educational minister, they assume the candidate has personal faith and extensive Bible knowledge. Such an assumption should not be made.

The expertise of educational ministers in technique, not content, reflects another significant change in the Sunday School: a change in curriculum. In the beginning, the sole purpose of Sunday Schools in churches of Christ was to teach the Bible. The Bible itself was the text, and teaching methods included lecture, reading and memory work. Early on, Sunday School libraries consisting of books for Bible study were established.[14]

By the late 1850's, quarterlies published by other denominations were being used by some congregations. By 1910, the Firm Foundation and Gospel Advocate companies were publishing their own graded quarterlies for ages 7-adult. The format of these quarterlies changed little until the 1960's, when a noticeable shift in the curriculum of the typical church of Christ Bible School began to take place. In children's classes, knowledge of the Bible, particularly memory work, has been at least partially replaced by an

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[13] This "double standard" between the training of pulpit ministers and educational directors is not unique to churches of Christ, but has for decades been the practice in seminaries throughout the country. The devastating effects of this practice are outlined by James D. Smart in *The Rebirth of Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 87.

[14] Moses Lard suggested each church have a 200 to 500 volume library for children, *Lard's Quarterly* (1865) 378.

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

emphasis on learning concepts (kindness, obedience, etc.) illustrated by biblical and secular stories. In classes for teenagers and adults, Bible study has generally been replaced by a study of "relevant" topics from a "biblical perspective."

To grasp the extent of this change, one has only to peruse the catalog of the Gospel Advocate Company. In 1970, almost every quarterly offered for purchase was on a particular book or section of the Bible. In 1990, along with studies of particular Bible books, adult quarterlies are available with the following titles: "From Worry to Happiness," "A Giving Heart," "Power to Become," "Practical Christianity," and "Spiritual Aerobics." While these studies may impart some spiritual truths, they are a long way from our traditional emphasis on Sunday school as Bible school.[15]

The driving force behind this shift in curriculum is a quest for relevance. In an attempt to "meet people where they are," more emphasis has been placed in our classes on the felt needs of individuals than on hearing the voice of Scripture. "Thus says the Lord," has been crowded out by "What will this do for me?"

What's wrong with this approach? In a society (and a church) that is increasingly unfamiliar with traditional Christian terms, should we not first identify what questions modern people are asking and then translate the gospel answers into terms they will understand?

This approach has its attractions. It makes us feel relevant, intelligible, and powerful. At base, however, it is unfaithful--to the power of God and to the biblical message. A theology of accommodation is always a theology of distortion. We stretch, bend, or cut the biblical message to accommodate what people want to hear. By doing so, we rob God's word of its power.

But there is a better approach, one with a long history in Christian practice. The theological term for it is "catechesis" or instruction in fundamentals of biblical faith. In the early church pagans who were interested in Christianity were given lengthy

[15] As another example of this trend, a recent edition of a Bible school training publication popular among churches of Christ has articles on word games, puzzles, and giving children self-esteem, but not one quotation from the Bible.

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

instruction in the Old Testament stories and their fulfillment in Christ, in Christian terminology, and in Christian forms of moral behavior. Only after this learning did they confess their faith and put Christ on in baptism.[16]

This must be the purpose of our Bible schools today: to train both children and adults in the faith. To accomplish this aim, our emphasis must always be on scripture that provides "training in righteousness" (II Timothy 4:16), not on our own selfish needs.

The Future of Bible Schools in Our Churches

Judging from the type of teaching being done, our Bible Schools are in trouble. Apparently we have overreacted to the limitations of earlier Sunday school teaching. No doubt some teachers grasped the powerful message of the Bible and moved their students to embrace it. But many times our teaching was shallow, relying solely on facts, not meaning. People who had been Christians for over forty years were still "filling in the blanks." Our children could recite the books of the Bible, but did not know the love of God.

Thus we fled sterile presentations of Bible facts to take refuge in relevance. What we have found is that all too often "relevant" answers to life's problems are not based on biblical theology. Rather, they are based on various models taken from the world: the business models of success, psychological models of self-fulfillment, sociological models of interpersonal relationships, and countless others.

But the problem with our Sunday Schools is our teaching, not the Scriptures. The correction to our "just the facts" approach is not the current insipid, topical, discussion classes where unprepared students share their ignorance. The solution is to go back to the Bible and rediscover its great themes of sin, salvation, calling,

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[16] For an interesting discussion of these contrasting approaches--translation and catechesis--see George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) 132.

covenant, responsibility, and God's love, themes relevant to any age.

We have a strong heritage as a people devoted to Bible study, a heritage reflected in our devotion to Bible School. Today our heritage is at risk. Through neglect and distracting preoccupations with technique and relevance, we have forgotten what gave our Sunday Schools their power: they were Bible schools. We must make them so again so we can answer the call voiced years ago by Alexander Campbell:

> We may do this thing; we may cause our children to know the Holy Scriptures from their earliest years; and thus the unfeigned faith of the parents may by prayers and the favor of God, be transmitted to their children's children.[17]

[17] *Millennial Harbinger* (1840) 62.

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BOOK REVIEWS

William Kilpatrick: ***Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong.*** New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.

Reviewed by Dean F. Smith

In recent years many sincere and loving parents have naively assumed that their children would naturally acquire the proper values for life simply by getting a good education. William Kilpatrick's recent book, *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong,* gives parents some strong reasons to question that assumption. Kilpatrick, a professor of Education at Boston College, reveals the dangerous premise that is the basis for moral education in most public schools. That premise is that well-educated children will naturally choose proper values if given sufficient information about their moral options and the freedom to experiment and choose. The result of this conclusion is that both parents and teachers have relinquished their role as moral guide in favor of a more popular and less demanding role as moral facilitator. In a very clear and sensible way, Kilpatrick points out the danger of this shift and the folly of its underlying premise.

> None of us want to go to untrained doctors, or fly with untrained pilots, or have untrained soldiers protect our country, but for some reason we have come to believe that one can be a good person without any training in goodness. We have succumbed to a myth that claims that morality comes naturally,

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Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

> or at most, with the help of a little reasoning. But it seems increasingly clear that these metaphors and the models that flow from them aren't working. The "natural" thing to do in most situations is to take the easy way out. The most perfectly rational plan of action is to always put yourself first.

The result of this "myth" is that, although students are given a smorgasbord of moral options, none of these options is "weighted"--one is as right or good as another. Students are encouraged simply to choose those values that "work" in their individual lives. This is the model variously described by the author as the "decision making" or "moral reasoning" approach, or by its more familiar designations as "the dilemma method" or "Values Clarification." Along the way, his description of this approach is seasoned with several provocative examples of specific activities designed to shock, or at least raise an eyebrow, of any thoughtful parent. Activities such as an elementary school workbook that encourages children to "draw mother and father making love" or the showing of "a steamy film of a couple making love" followed by boys and girls learning contraceptive and AIDS prevention techniques.

Kilpatrick not only criticizes this approach, he reveals the roots of it in modern psychology and various philosophies, such as pluralism that promotes tolerance as the ultimate virtue. Whether he is discussing the influence of Plato and Rousseau or more contemporary figures such as Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, Joseph Campbell and Judy Blume, Kilpatrick's insights are understandable and helpful. In fact, his analysis of Lawrence Kohlberg's approach to moral education and Joseph Campbell's exposition of story and myth, as well as other contemporary influences, will serve as a needed corrective for those enamored of their theories and conclusions.

As an alternative to the "Values Clarification" model, Kilpatrick offers "Character Education," an approach that is attracting a great deal of attention among educators recently. This approach assumes that certain values "work" better that others because they are right and good. These values, which Kilpatrick assumes are fundamental and historically approved, must be

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

instilled by intentional instruction and example. The primary vehicle for such instruction is the telling of stories that encourage certain virtues and inspire courageous deeds. To this end, Kilpatrick even offers his own selected bibliography of literature for various ages which was most helpful.

He also offers very practical advice in two chapters addressed specifically to schools and parents. His suggestions for parents are very sensible and realistic, focusing primarily on discipline and the urgent need for parents to reclaim their rightful authority within the family. These same suggestions, while reasonable expectations for parents, seem lofty and unrealistic for most schools, given the present devotion to a "value-free" environment in public education today. This then serves to elevate the importance of his admonitions to parents. Even Kilpatrick recognizes this urgency.

> Parents cannot, as they once did, rely on the culture to reinforce home values. In fact, they can expect that many of the cultural forces influencing their children will be actively undermining those values. Sometimes, unfortunately, this even applies to the schools.

Some may find this unduly provocative, but Kikpatrick means to provoke the reader and, hopefully, to disabuse some parents of their naive, uncritical dependence upon society for the proper moral education of their children. His book is a "call to arms" for parents, an attempt to help restore parents to their rightful place as the primary moral guides for their children. Given the present state of morality, such provocation seems reasonable.

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
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Richard Robert Osmer: ***A Teachable Spirit: Recovering the Teaching Office in the Church.*** Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990. Pp XI + 298 (Paper).

Reviewed by Allan J. McNicol

On reading this book, I found myself recalling Jaroslav Pelikan's observation that Protestantism would ultimately lose in any confrontation with Catholicism. Pelikan observed that it takes a far greater degree of literacy and theological acumen to understand the intricacies of the doctrine of justification by faith than it takes for the average Catholic to be observant and in good standing with the Catholic church. Remembrance of this somewhat elitist comment came to me upon reading this book by Osmer.

Protestantism cannot work unless a considerable number of its adherents understand and live by its foundational confessions. But Osmer is understandably bothered by the inability of old-line Protestant constituencies (Reformed and Lutheran) to maintain an effective grasp on traditional doctrines and pass them on to the next generation. He sees churches either pandering to modern tendencies toward excessive individualism and uncritically commending and trying every new idea which comes along, or, embracing forms of counter-modern authoritarianism (fundamentalism).

Osmer is not happy with these alternatives. In good Protestant form he suggests a third model: restoration of the teaching office in the church. This model rejects the Catholic idea of all teaching authority being placed in certain individuals who constitute a *Magisterium.* Osmer favors a more collegial approach where authority is exercised through a tri-partite interaction between

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

responsible leaders in theological colleges, denominations, and the local church. The recent resurgence of interest in practical theology at the local church level is commended. For Osmer, if Protestantism is to survive, all of the leaders, especially the ministers in the pulpit, must teach the Faith with utmost seriousness.

Procedurally, Osmer opens by showing why the present abysmal ignorance of the fundamentals of the faith constitutes a crisis for the contemporary church. He then details the history of the teaching office in the church. He concludes with a proposal for the recovery of that office.

One early reviewer of this project whimsically commented, "Great idea, but it is like closing the barn door after everything has escaped." Perhaps so! It is a fair question to ask in this do-your-own-thing generation, where will we find enough people interested in living under the discipline of sustained theological instruction?

Osmer leaves us with the haunting thought that unless we take recovery of the teaching office with absolute seriousness, very difficult times are ahead. More than ever before the church is called to articulate its faith over and against a modern culture that imperialistically claims absolute allegiance. How can we keep an adequate distance from cultural captivity unless we have been taught what constitutes true discipleship today in light of the message of Jesus and his gospel? (p. 176)

Readers inclined to embrace contemporary culture may well reflect on the message of this book. Christian survival depends on knowing who we are and what we believe. That can only come through a recovery of substantive and faithful preaching and teaching.

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CHRISTIAN STUDIES
Number 12 Spring, 1992 ©

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