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FOREWORD

Essays in the previous issue of the Faculty Bulletin focused on the Christian moral vision and the identity of the early church as a moral community. It was argued that faithful lives commended Christianity to many in the ancient world.

In T. R. Glover's phrase, however, the early Christians not only "out-lived and out-died" their pagan opponents; they also "out-thought" them. From the outset the church was involved in teaching and interpreting the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Thus the church was not only a moral community; it was also a teaching community--and its teaching anchored its morality.

In the emerging "therapeutic society" it is vital that the church resist the temptation to become "relevant" and "practical" to the neglect of the task of instructing believers in basic Christian beliefs. The following essays reflect upon various aspects of the church as a teaching community.

Once again, appreciation is owed to Mrs. Nancy Tindel, Faculty Secretary, for her work in preparing the manuscripts.

Michael R. Weed, Editor

PASSING ON THE TRADITION

By Paul L. Watson

The previous issue of the Faculty Bulletin examined the church as a moral community. My own contribution to that issue suggested that Israel's fundamental moral orientation came from Yahweh, who had called her to be his people, and from what it meant to be the "people of God." In this article I wish to raise and at least partially answer the question, how did Israel become and remain "the people of God" from generation to generation? Theologically, of course, the answer is they were called into being and sustained by Yahweh's grace. But on a more mundane level, how did the community maintain its identity from year to year, generation to generation, epoch to epoch?

Part, but certainly not all, of the answer to that question lies in the process of traditioning. By "traditioning" I mean the handing on of both the substance and the significance of the community's beliefs and practices from older to younger, from the more experienced to the less experienced. Most families have any number of customs and practices connected with the observance of holidays and birthdays, places to go on

vacations, and the like. When children ask why such things are done, the answer inevitably comes, “Our family has always done it that way” or “Your great-grandfather started this years ago.” In other words, the practices (and, for that matter, the beliefs and values) of a family have a history, i.e. a story, behind them. That story both explains and legitimizes the present.

That, this traditioning process took place in the early church is clear from Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I received, that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

Paul is saying, in effect, “as I have been ‘traditioned,’ so I ‘traditioned’ you.” Notice, too, that “tradition” here is not the antonym for God’s commands. It is not being used in the negative sense of “the tradition of men” (Mark 7:8) but in the positive sense of 2 Thessalonians 2:15. Thus Paul is saying in 1 Corinthians 15 that the tradition catches up and passes on the very heart of the Christian faith, viz., the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, this traditioning process did not originate with the early Christians. Its roots go back to the Old Testament, to which we now turn.

The Tradition Binds Up the Past

One cogent example of the traditioning process at work in Israel is found in Deuteronomy 5:28-33, in Moses’ exhortation to the people before his death and their

entrance into Canaan:

And the LORD heard your words; when you spoke to me; and the LORD said to me, ‘I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they have rightly said all that they have spoken. Oh that they had such a mind as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their children forever! Go and say to them, “Return to your tents.” But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments and the statutes and the ordinances which you shall teach them, that they may do them in the land which I give them to possess.’ You shall be careful to do therefore as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land which you shall possess.

The process is clear in verse 31: From Yahweh to Moses, from Moses to the people, from the people to their children. The goal of the traditioning is also clear: A “way” in which they and their children may “walk” safely and securely. The blessings for walking in this way (perpetuating the tradition) are three-fold: You will live well ; you will live long (verse 33). By contrast, to forget the tradition is to get off the path and fall into ruin:

Thus says the LORD:
 “Stand by the roads, and look,
 and ask for the ancient paths,
 where the good way is; and walk in it,
 and find rest for your souls.
 But they said, ‘We will not walk in it’” (Jer. 6:16).

Note, however, that this is not an appeal to some mindless recapitulation of the past but a knowing where to go by knowing where they have been.

It is also instructive to note that the tradition is not solely, not even primarily, the “laws.” Rather, the tradition is fundamentally the story of what God has done with and for Israel up to the present moment:

When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which the LORD our God has commanded you?’ then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out with a mighty hand; and the LORD showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes; and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land which he swore to give to our fathers’ (Deut. 6:20-23).

The story must, be told and appropriated first. Then come the statutes and the ordinances, which arise directly from the story itself and cannot be understood apart from it.

The Tradition Interprets the Present

The story is not something that happened only in the past to one specific generation. Instead, all generations participate in it: “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out.” In the words of Robert Lischer (A Theology of Preaching, p. 37), the story “deepens and enlarges the hearer’s sense of history . . . by personalizing it.” It is no longer a story, or their story, but my story. And the story is not just mine in the sense that it happened to my ancestors, but mine in that I am drawn into the story to live it out in my own life. I do not simply reproduce or clone the story, of course; but I live it in my own particular way, time, and circumstances.

Still another instructive passage from Deuteronomy in this regard concerns the

Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 26:1-11). When bringing their baskets of first fruits to the altar, the worshippers were to recite the story: “A wandering Aramean was my father . . . the Egyptians treated us harshly . . . the LORD brought us out of Egypt . . . he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now (not just because of this year’s crop, but on the basis of my whole story) I bring the first of the ground, which thou, O LORD, hast given me.” Note how the present moment is drawn up into and participates in the whole. The tradition thus keeps the present from being an isolated fragment of time and experience.

The Tradition Points to the Future

Even as the tradition binds past and present together, it also directs both to the future. The goal of the tradition is not to perpetuate the past, much less to idolize it. The goal is rather future-oriented. The tradition, properly rehearsed and appropriated, will enable each member of the community and therefore the community itself to step into the future with confidence and hope (cf. Hebrews 11).

It is instructive to note that both the Deuteronomistic History (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings) in the Old Testament and Luke-Acts in the New Testament are each in a real sense unfinished histories. The former ends with the people of Israel in Exile, with their very existence as a people hanging in the balance. Acts ends with the apostle Paul awaiting trial in Rome, with the outcome of that trial and its implications for Paul and his apostolic career totally unknown. Various historical explanations have been

advanced to account for the unfinished nature of these two works. Theologically, however, it seems clear that each has the future in view, as uncertain and precarious as that future might be, and that each is written not to encapsulate the past but to enable the communities of faith to face their respective futures. Again, in the words of Lischer, the story “enlarges the hearer’s history by opening it to the future.”

Conclusions

There are inevitable dangers in passing on the tradition. One is the tendency to idolize the past in the strictest sense of that word. When this happens both present and future are made to serve the past (contrary to the fundamental purpose of traditioning), and worship services become, as it were, a reading of the tombstones in the cemetery. A closely-related danger is the assumption that a mere knowledge of the facts of the story is sufficient. Such is most certainly the case. As Hosea reminded his generation, true knowledge of God is found only in a faithful, covenant-keeping relationship with him.

Again, one can magnify a part of the story to the exclusion of the rest of it. Perhaps an even greater danger lies in confusing our understanding of the story at any given moment with the story itself. But the greatest danger of all would be in not telling the story in all its historical, ethical, and liturgical richness, in assuming that all know the story and need not hear it again and again. To fail to tradition the next generation,

and the next and the next, would be to cut them off from what it truly means to be the people of God.

THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN IN THE EARLY CHURCH

By James W. Thompson

The observer of artistic works from ancient or medieval times is likely to be surprised at the way in which children are portrayed. The child is regularly represented as a little adult. In ancient Egyptian art, the children appear as miniature adults. In medieval portrayals of Jesus' request that children be allowed to come to him, the artist depicts a group gathered around Jesus who are little in stature, but who have none of the features associated with childhood. Children are regularly represented as having the same bodily structure and features as adults.¹

Philippe Aries, in Centuries of Childhood, has suggested that these artistic works reflect the place of the child in ancient and medieval society.² He suggests too that "in the realm of life, and not simply in that of aesthetic transposition, childhood was a period of transposition which passed quickly and which was just as quickly forgotten."³ It has been only in the modern era, according to Aries, that childhood has been "discovered." Indeed it might be argued that a future generation could look at our

memorabilia and conclude that we are a child-centered society. Moreover, such disciplines as child psychology and education indicate our interest in the development of the child. Unlike a previous society which largely ignored the child, our society has made the child the object of special attention in many different ways.

The special attention to the needs of the child has had an impact on the church. Christian educators have learned from specialists in child development in order to produce an educational environment suitable for the special needs of children. In the past two decades, churches have focused their energies on youth ministries because of a recognition that adolescents have needs that call for special attention. Few of these ministries existed a century ago. Indeed, many of them were extremely rare a generation ago. They reflect the church's own discovery of the child.

Modern sensitivities frequently provide questions which lead us back to the practice of the early church in search of answers. Thus our sensitivity to the needs of the child leads us to ask what guidance the New Testament offers about the place of children in the church. Does the New Testament offer guidance on the training of children and adolescents? Can we ascertain how the faith was communicated to the younger generation? In this article I shall examine the New Testament texts in an attempt to derive some in-sights from the early church on these questions.

A Problem for the Early Church

While the New Testament does not speak in detail about the place of children in the church, there are indications that the early church was faced with a problem in dealing with the place of the child in the community. This problem is suggested in a scene recorded in the Book of Acts when Paul returned to Jerusalem with the news from his missionary labors. Paul recognized, according to Romans, that the visit would be both dangerous to him and critical for his mission. The record of this visit which is preserved in Acts indicates that his fears were well grounded. While Paul finds many Jewish Christians who rejoice at the successful reports from his mission, he meets others who greet his report with suspicion and misgiving. In Acts 21 Paul is told about the concern which his labors have evoked. "And they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or observe their customs." Among the issues raised by the Pauline mission was the question of the status of children in the community.

While the reports about the place of children which were circulating among Jewish Christians in Jerusalem may not reflect Paul's teachings precisely,⁴ they do suggest that practical questions were being raised which challenged time-honored Jewish practices. The missionary practice, unlike that of an established religious community, was directed at the incorporation of adults into the people of God. The message, with its appeal to repentance and baptism, was presented to adults.⁵ One could

conclude that Paul's doctrine of justification by faith envisions only adults. The absence of any comments about the place of children in the community is particularly striking in light of the fact that the new situation in Christ called for Paul to make pronouncements on the social roles of others in the community. The missionary situation required Paul to comment on the place of women and slaves. These reflections on the status of women and slaves makes the absence of any comments about children especially striking. We can thus understand the reaction of Jewish opponents who could ask, "What is the place of children in these communities?"

The scene in the Synoptic Gospels where children are brought to Jesus (Matt. 19:13-15; Mk. 10:13-16; Lk. 18:15-17) may also reflect the fact that this community was faced with a problem over "receiving children." The fact that this single incident was remembered and handed on in the early church indicates that Christian communities were faced with a new kind of problem. The words of Jesus were recalled to provide guidelines for the place of children in the church.

Children in the Jewish Tradition

Those who raised the question about the place of children in the missionary churches had inherited a tradition in which the ways for incorporating the child into the community were firmly established. The circumcision of the male child initiated him into the covenant people.⁶ The ceremony dedicating a newborn child to the Lord

suggests the importance of the child to the community.⁷ God's mandate to Israel can be seen in Malachi's complaint about the frequency of divorce. "What does he desire?" asks the prophet. The answer is, "Godly offspring" (Mal. 2:15). The family was the fundamental unit in Israelite society where "godly offspring" were formed.

Our records leave no indication that children were the objects of special attention or that educational programs were designed particularly for the youth. "Godly offspring" were shaped in families and at the public festivals where children had been brought by their parents. Elementary and secondary schools for children apparently were developed no earlier than 100 B.C.⁸ Instruction was passed on by fathers in the family unit, and not in special schools. Joshua 4:2 anticipates the time when children will ask their fathers, "What do these stones mean?" The common refrain running through Deuteronomy is, "And you shall teach them to your children" (6:6; 11:18; cf. 4:10). The Israelites are told in Exodus 13:8, "You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.'" "The home was, therefore, Israel's educational institution where the faith was communicated.

As Israel's major educational institution, families recognized that the faith was communicated only in connection with the life of Israel. The child grew into the faith, not by receiving lectures, but by absorbing it through his presence at special festivals.⁹ As in the story of Jesus at the age of twelve (Lk. 2:41-51), parents brought their children

to the sacred festivals. According to Deuteronomy 31:12, “men, women and little ones” were to be assembled for the reading of the Torah.¹⁰ At the Passover celebration, the youngest child asked, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” Then the father recited the story of the exodus (Pes. 10:4). The child thus learned his place in the community by hearing the story retold in the various festivals. He thus “absorbed” the story in the context of the family and public worship. He was never taught the tradition in special lectures; he grew into it organically.¹¹

Israel’s concern with the child’s absorption of the faith is indicated by rabbinic discussions about the obligations of the child to keep the Torah. It was only at puberty that a young man became a “son of the covenant”—bar mitzvah.¹² Before the child reached the age of keeping the commandments, he was gradually prepared for that day.¹³ In Jerusalem, a boy who could take his father’s hand or ride on his shoulders was obligated to keep the festivals.¹⁴ According to one rabbinic statement, small children were not expected to fast on the day of Atonement. However, the child was to become accustomed to the traditional fast two years before he was obligated to keep it.¹⁵ Several rabbinic traditions rigidly prescribed the stages in the child’s learning. According to Aboth (“The Sayings of the Fathers”) 5:21, the child began with Scripture at age five; took up Mishnah at age ten; at age fifteen he learned Talmud.¹⁶ Another tradition suggested that a child’s education began as soon as he could speak.¹⁷

While children were educated to become full members of the community, they were not regarded as full members of the community until the age of puberty. Consequently, children are often listed among those who are religiously inferior. The minor was not included in the minyan, the required number necessary for a synagogue service.¹⁸ Women, slaves, and minors comprise a special category of those who were not full members of the community.¹⁹ They were exempt, therefore, from the responsibilities of adult, full members. According to one tradition, “Women, slaves, and minors were exempt from wearing phylacteries, but they were not exempt from saying the Tefillah, from the law of the Mezuzah or from saying the Benediction after meals.”²⁰ According to another tradition, women, slaves and minors could not serve as witnesses.²¹ While the child was being trained for the day when he was a full member of the community; the minor belonged to a special category. A firm line distinguished those who were sons of the covenant from those who were not.

The religiously inferior status of the child probably accounts for some of the negative comments among the rabbis. It was considered a waste of time, for example, to spend time in conversation with a child. According to one rabbi, “Morning sleep and midday wine and conversation with children and sitting in the houses of the ignorant people put a man out of the world.”²² Another rabbi said, “Since the day the temple was destroyed prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to fools and children.”²³

The Old Testament and rabbinic statements about the training of children in the Jewish tradition indicate that the education of the child was taken seriously. The faith was passed on from one generation to another by dedicated fathers who determined that “godly offspring” were shaped in families. The texts say nothing about secular education. The goal of the entire educational process was to prepare the children for the day when they would assume the obligation of keeping the Torah.

Children in the Early Church

When we turn to the Pauline letters, the modern reader is apt to be amazed at the paucity of references to children. In most instances where he refers to the nepios or the teknon, he uses these words for the child in a metaphorical sense.²⁴ His “beloved children” include the Corinthian and Galatian churches (1 Cor. 4:14; 2 Cor. 12:14; Gal. 4:19) and his co-worker, Timothy. The term nepios is used metaphorically for immaturity in the faith (1 Cor. 3:1; 13:11). The goal of the Christian life is to be “no longer children” (Eph. 4:14). Thus Paul’s references to childhood shed little light upon his view of children in the church, as Paul appears to be more concerned with the metaphorical child than with the actual child.

If we are to learn more about the place of children in the early church, we must observe the social characteristics of the early Christian mission. The household had a special importance in the life of the early church. The Christian mission often resulted

in the conversion of entire households (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15, 19). The house then became the meeting place of the early church (Philem. 2; Col. 4:15) and the “basic cell” of the Christian movement.²⁵ Thus the new community was superimposed upon an existing network of relationships.²⁶ The New Testament refers to the existing relationships of husband-wife, slave-freeman, and parent and child. While significantly more appears to be said about the relationships of husband-wife and slave-master, we may assume that children were present in these households. Indeed, there are scattered references to the place of children in these communities. On Paul’s final journey to Jerusalem, for example, the Book of Acts recalls a scene where Paul and his companions departed from Tyre.

And when our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey; and they all, with wives and children, brought us on our way till we were outside the city; and kneeling down on the beach we prayed and bade one another farewell (Acts 21:5).

The scene in the gospels where children are brought to Jesus is a further indication that the early church looked back to Jesus for guidance in determining the place of children. The children, according to all accounts (Matt. 19:13; Mk. 10:13; Lk. 15) are brought to Jesus. The word for “child” in Matthew and Mark (paidion) means “very young child.”²⁷ In Luke’s gospel they are described as infants (brephe). Thus the children envisioned are those who, in traditional Jewish custom, have not yet reached the age of the bar mitzvah. The fact that they are “brought” suggests their helplessness.

This passage is often recalled for its encouragement to the disciples to “become like children.” However, in Matthew’s version of the story, the emphasis is not on “becoming like children.” Jesus’ words, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven,” focuses on real children. As surely as the others were invited to come to Jesus (cf. Matt. 11:28), children were invited. They were among the many “little people” who, though despised by the world, were invited to come to Jesus.²⁸ Jesus’ words, “For to such belongs the kingdom,” refers not to childlike disciples, but to children. Whereas children were not officially counted in the synagogue until the bar mitzvah, Jesus gives them a place in his kingdom. In the same way that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor and the helpless (Lk. 6:20), it belongs to children.

Children in the Pauline Churches

We have few indications from Paul as to how the early church put Jesus’ words into practice. We catch a glimpse only when Paul mentions children in the context of other discussions. In 1 Corinthians 7:14, for example, children are mentioned in a context where the subject is mixed marriage. The Christian mission has separated families, leaving Christians bewildered about their relationship to their spouses and children. Apparently they ask how they could live in God’s new age and remain in the household with unbelievers. Would they become defiled by the spouse and the child,

who do not live in the new age? Paul answers, “For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is they are holy” (1 Cor. 7:14). Thus a Christian does not have to leave unbelieving spouses and children, for they are all “made holy” by the believer.

Paul introduces a concept of holiness which appears nowhere else in his writings. Both children and spouses are “made holy” when, in fact, they have not become Christians. In fact, Paul offers the hope that the unbelieving spouse will be saved by the partner (1 Cor. 7:16). Paul is apparently using the expression “made holy” to mean something like, “brought under the influence.” He anticipated that unbelieving spouses would be exposed to the Christian faith and later be saved. In the same way, children would be influenced by the wider circle of the Christian community. Christian teaching would have its impact on them.

Perhaps the religious training of Timothy indicates, at least partially, the way in which Christian teaching was passed on, even in a mixed marriage. Because Timothy’s father was Greek (Acts 16:1), he was not educated in the faith by his father. Nevertheless, he was not lacking in religious training. Timothy, according to 2 Timothy 3:15, had known the sacred writings “from childhood” (apo brephos). The expression rendered “from childhood in the RSV is literally, “from infancy.” The knowledge of the sacred writings is apparently equivalent to the faith which first dwelled in his mother

and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5). Instruction and faith were, therefore, communicated within the family. No mention is made of the role of outside institutions. Even where the father was not a believer, the home was the place where children learned the faith. Thus Timothy, like generations before him, simply absorbed the faith by constant exposure to it.

Fathers and the Faith

In the advice to households recorded in Ephesians (5:21--6:9) and Colossians (3:18--4:1), we discover the impact which Christianity made where families were not divided. In this advice to households, we see the results of the conversions of entire households, for all three groups of the ancient household are addressed: husband-wife, parent-child, and slave-master. The fact that each individual is addressed is a reminder that Christians were to remain “where they were called” (1 Cor. 7:17), and to use their status in God’s service. Significantly, even the individuals in the “inferior” roles are addressed.²⁹ Both they and the “superior” parties have duties “in the Lord,” for their roles have all been transformed “in the Lord.”

It is especially significant that children are actually addressed in the household codes. Although teknon can refer to adult children, the context of the appeal in the household suggests that they are minors. The address to children suggests that they have a place in the assembly and in the life of the church. Their place is reminiscent of the

place of children at Jewish festivals. They have a place in the community, and they hear words which are addressed to them.

Both household codes remind fathers, in a way characteristic of Jewish literature, that they have responsibilities to their children. Although children have a place in the community, the task of instruction rests with fathers. In the early church, there is no record of educational institutions established by the church for the sake of children.³⁰ The church provided training programs for new converts, but not for children.³¹

The home was apparently the place where the faith was communicated from one generation to the next. Although it is uncertain whether “believing children” designates adult children or minors, the particular qualification stipulates that the Christian leader must already have demonstrated his leadership and faithfulness in his own home. The home, then, as a fundamental unit of the church, was an important place for communicating the faith.

In 1 Timothy 3:5, a specific parallel is made between the leader’s capacity to care for the home and his leadership of the church. Children were to be educated into the faith by Christian parents.

Lessons from the Early Church

The status of children in the early church may suggest at first that they were, as in ancient art works, little noticed and largely ignored. The early church neither made the

children the special objects of attention nor understood them as a special group. There is no “year of the child” and no special program for them. Instead, they were simply there in the life of the church. We do not know when and how they were judged to be suitable candidates for baptism. But we do know that they learned the faith through the interaction of home and church. Apparently little children were present in the assemblies, and they absorbed the faith. They were then taught the faith by devoted parents,

As a part of our general concern with the problems of passing on the faith to children, we share our culture’s discovery of the child. Thus we do not hesitate to initiate ministries designed to educate our children in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Our experiments with children’s worship, family life ministries, and youth ministries indicate our concern for the task. While many of these ministries will be helpful, none of them will substitute for one aspect of the early church’s education of children: the interaction of home and church. The faith was communicated in the intimate circle of the family. Children recognized that more than information was being passed on. It was a faith which was taught at home, a faith which the parents themselves had made their own. I am convinced that, with our emphasis on programs to teach children and adolescents, we have not often grasped the significance of parents who communicate their own faith. Because something is needed besides the communication of information, those who live in the intimate circle of the family are likely to be the

best teachers and evangelists.

We can also learn from the early church's inclusion of children in worship and in the life of the community. Children were present when the community recited its story of faith and when the word was preached. There is, as John Westerhoff has shown, opportunity for the congregation to communicate its faith at the regular worship.³² The story, as it is told in music, prayer, the Lord's Supper and preaching, will be absorbed by children who learn the faith as they hear it recited and participate in the church's life. The love for others in the community and the discipline of the Christian life will be experienced before they are understood.³³

Conclusion

While we have benefited greatly from our culture's increased understanding of child development, it would be inappropriate to derive our models for the Christian education of the child exclusively from secular education. While the New Testament only rarely addresses the subject of Christian education of children, it nevertheless offers insights which should be helpful for the contemporary church. The continuity between the family and the church provided children with a suitable environment for learning the faith. Any changes in training children which diminishes this continuity are likely to lose something vital in the training of the child. The new challenge of the church today is to equip parents to communicate the faith to their children.

Notes

- ¹ Philippe Aries, Centuries of Childhood (New York: Vintage, 1962) 33. Cf.
- ² Aries, chapter 2, passim.
- ³ Aries, 34.
- ⁴ There is no indication that Paul discouraged Jews from circumcising their children (cf. Acts 16:1).
- ⁵ G. Haufe, "Das Kind im Neuen Testament," TLZ 104 (1979) 625.
- ⁶ J. P. Hyatt, "Circumcision," IDB, I, 630. Cf. J. Jeremias, TDNT, V, 647.
- ⁷ Cf. Ex. 13:2.
- ⁸ See H. R. Weber, Jesus and the Children (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979) 41.
- ⁹ W. Jentsch, Urchristliches Erziehungsdenken (Gutersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1951) 11.
- ¹⁰ Jentsch, 96; Weber, 40.
- ¹¹ Jentsch, 110.
- ¹² Jeremias, 647.
- ¹³ Jeremias, 647.
- ¹⁴ See H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch (Munich: Beck, 1961) II, 145.
- ¹⁵ Strack-Billerbeck, II, 144.

- ¹⁶ Cf. Aboth 4:20.
- ¹⁷ Sif. Deut. 46; Suk. 42a. Cited in C. Roth, Encyclopedia Judaica, I, 428. Henceforth cited as EJ.
- ¹⁸ EJ, 428.
- ¹⁹ James Crouch, The Origin of the Colossian Haustafel, FRLANT (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Reprecht, 1972) 104. In enumerations, children appear together with women. Cf. Matthew 14:21.
- ²⁰ Ber. 3:3.
- ²¹ Baba Kamma 88a.
- ²² Aboth 3:11.
- ²³ BB 126.
- ²⁴ Cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-3; Gal. 3:23--4:6. Cited in Haufe, 631.
- ²⁵ Wayne Meeks, The First Urban Christians (New Haven: Yale, 1982) 75.
- ²⁶ Meeks, 76.
- ²⁷ W. Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957) 539.
- ²⁸ Weber, 18; J. Sauer, "Der ursprünglicher 'Sitz im Leben' von Mk 10:13-16," ZNW (1981) 41. The language, with its description of those who are "brought" to Jesus and "touched," closely resembles a healing story.
- ²⁹ J. H. Yoder, The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 171.
- ³⁰ W. Barclay, Educational Ideals in the Ancient World (London: Collins, 1959) 236.
- ³¹ Barclay, 236.

³² John Westerhoff, Will Our Children Have Faith? (New York: Seabury, 1976) 56.

³³ Westerhoff, 92.

MYSTERY, MARRIAGE, AND MORALITY

By Michael R. Weed

As the early Christian movement made its way into the Hellenistic world, it moved into an environment where an erosion of traditional values was long underway. It also moved into a climate where popular religion had little real interest in morality. Unlike the pagan gods, however, Yahweh of Israel and the Father of Jesus Christ was essentially personal and moral. Consequently, from the very onset, Christians were engaged in teaching the moral implications of Christian faith in an environment marked by moral uncertainty and confusion. Thus, for example, we find in the apostle Paul's earliest extant letter, First Thessalonians, Christians are exhorted to remember the moral instruction which they had earlier received from Paul and other Christian preachers (4:1 ff.). To the extent the early church was successful, much of its success was due to its ability to offer a clear and coherent vision of the meaning of human life--a vision with practical implications for everyday living.

Few would contest that we are presently living in a somewhat similar and perhaps even more dangerous situation, one marked by moral dissolution and personal

disillusionment. Certainly the past century has witnessed considerable erosion of traditional Western values--many of which are basically Christian. Unfortunately, many in the emerging "post-Christian" society consider Christianity as having been tried and found wanting. In this setting, it is not surprising to see in our "therapeutic age" a proliferation of therapies, each with its own vision of the human and of human flourishing. These, however, more nearly represent the problem than present any clear way to a cure.¹

It is both ironic and tragic that there is an all too evident tendency for Christians to abandon their own vision of the human and, in misguided attempts to "get practical," to annex uncritically the various techniques and therapies of the age.² In this fashion the Christian message too often becomes garbled and its vision of the human becomes blurred.³ This, in turn, results in a confusion in both the faith and the practice of an alarmingly large number of Christians.

A guiding thesis of these comments is the conviction that Christian moral exhortation must be accompanied by and grounded in basic instruction. For example, "play your position" would be meaningless advice to youngsters who do not know the basic rules, much less the goal, of the game. Similarly, taken out of their proper context within a biblical view of reality, particular Christian moral exhortations become distorted or even meaningless.

The following is an attempt to sketch how the Christian vision of the nature of

God as trinitarian underwrites the Christian view of human personhood (i.e., what it means to be human) and how that, in turn, grounds particular Christian moral exhortations, specifically those regarding marriage.

God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Early Christians maintained that Christ not only discloses God's purpose in the creation but he also reveals the very nature of God in a previously unparalleled way. It was inevitable that early attempts to explore and clarify the Christian understanding of God's nature were undertaken by those heavily influenced by Hellenistic philosophical categories. Unfortunately, Hellenistic thought tended to conceive of God largely in terms of Absolute Being--self-sufficient, unchangeable, impassible, and totally independent of all other existing reality.

Clearly such an approach ran counter to biblical views at a number of points. Absolute Being, for example, could only be involved with finite reality in a removed sense and only indirectly responsible for-the creation through a lesser being or demiurge.⁴ Further, it is difficult to reconcile basic categories of the personal to such a Being. Love, for instance, both as an emotion and as a need, appears to represent a deficiency for a self-sufficient Absolute Being and remains an embarrassment for Christian thinkers attempting to describe God on the basis of Hellenistic categories.

By contrast, implicit in the Hebrew understanding of Yahweh as Creator and explicit in the Christ event, the heart of the Christian revelation is the disclosure of God as personally involved with his creation. Unfortunately, Christian thinking about the trinitarian nature of God was pursued through the use of Hellenistic categories and remains to many Christians today an antiquated numerical puzzle. Still, however unsatisfactory they may have been, early attempts to grasp the meaning of the Trinity did endeavor to draw out nuances of the biblical picture of God.

Essentially, Christian reflection on the trinitarian nature of God attempts to grasp the innermost nature of God: the very character of God as disclosed in Jesus Christ. That is, the Trinity is not an aspect of God that is separable from or incidental to his “divinity”; it designates the essential and permanent aspect of God’s nature as he is within himself.⁵

As Father, God is the one who, out of his own richness, is giving life to the Son. He is not the self-contained Absolute one of Hellenistic thought but one who “goes outside of himself” and extends his own life to the Son. The Father holds nothing back; he gives all that he has to the Son.

The Son receives his life from the Father in an attitude of trust and dependence. He does not seek equality with the Father, much less independence. The Son does not seek his own will but totally aligns his own will with that of the Father. As the Father gives all to the Son, so also the Son holds nothing in reserve but offers all back to the

Father.

Further, the relationship of the Father and Son describes an ongoing and dynamic movement at the very center of God. The mutual self-giving of the Father and Son does not diminish or compromise the “divinity” of either. Rather, it is precisely self-expending love, not undifferentiated self-contained Being, that comprises the nature of God. Father and Son embody mutual and total self-giving. Moreover, this love constitutes a unity in which the identities of the Father and Son are not swallowed up and annihilated but are established and maintained. The Father cannot be who he is apart from the Son, nor can the Son exist apart from the Father.⁶

The mutual self-giving of the Father and Son, constitutive of the essence of God, is generative. The Holy Spirit is the means whereby the dynamic relationship of self-expending love between the Father and Son proceeds from the Father and Son and creates a world occupied by a vast and richly diverse array of finite and dependent beings. That is, creation itself is an expression of the love of God who, out of his own nature, wills a cosmos to exist separate and apart from himself. Through the creation the Creator risks himself in creating beings who are uniquely endowed with the ability of entering covenant relationships with him--relationships of trust and loyalty. But these beings are also permitted to stand over and against the Creator--to ignore, forget, and even to reject him. Such is the shape of the nonreciprocal, self-expending love of God.

It is this understanding of the nature of God as self-expending love that grounds the Christian view of human personhood. Quite simply, the Christian view is that human personhood is derivative of the Creator and images the divine nature and purpose. In the following comments I shall outline three basic ways in which the Christian view of God provides a framework for viewing human personhood and, in particular, the meaning of marriage. This theological framework, in turn, underlies and renders meaningful particular Christian moral exhortations.

The Human as Image of God

As the Creator is not a remote, self-contained Absolute Being, but one who from within himself wills to exist in relation, so he pronounces that it is not good for the human person to be alone. The image of God, borne by his creature, is, in the first instance, a reference to neither “spirituality” nor “rationality.” Rather, the imago designates the unique capability of humans to communicate with and to enter into covenant relationships both with the Creator and with fellow humans. To be a person is to form and live in relationships of trust, loyalty, and self-expending love.

“Male and female he created them”

Genesis indicates that the fundamental and prototypical form of human existence as co-existence is the relationship between man and woman. The primal unit of the

human is man and woman. Consequently, there is no neutral or androgynous “humanity” behind male and female. Neither is there any ground for denying or attempting to transcend human sexuality in the name of a “higher way.” It is essentially in the relationship between man and woman--not as man or woman--that human persons image the self-expending love of God. It is in this relationship that the two become “one flesh,” indissolubly bound in a new psychological and spiritual reality.

As hereto, the spouse remains fundamentally and irreducibly other. She speaks to me from beyond my own world and questions my mastery of the world.⁷ She also discloses the richness of her own person from beyond the range of my own grasp or gaze. She exists over and against me and in her presence offers countless occasions for painful but necessary disclosures of my own expansive ego, exposing my faults and self-deceptions. Yet it is also this other who accepts and cares for me who opens me to the richness of the world outside myself and my narrow self-serving intentions.

As one whose existence is fundamentally co-existence, the other stands before me as one who both offers and needs a word. It is through both her words of commitment and care and her own need for such words that I am enabled to offer similar words of loyalty and care. It is only together as man-for-woman and as woman-for-man that we complement one another, truly complete and fulfill one another’s potential as human.

Finally, it should be noted that it is only in this overall view of the personal that human sexuality must be viewed. Truly human sexuality cannot be grasped simply on

the biological level. To be human, sexuality must serve broader spiritual and personal goals than mere satisfaction of instinct. In the biblical view, human sexuality is the means of intimate communication--knowledge of the other and of the self. In Karl Barth's phrase, "coitus without co-existence is demonic."⁸

"Be fruitful and multiply"

As the Creator's love is generative and brings into existence others with whom he wills to co-exist, so also human love between the primal pair is generative and issues in the existence of the child. Unfortunately, many Christians fail to recognize the full theological and moral significance of parenting.⁹ Within the biblical perspective, however, to bear and to raise children is not merely an external, fortuitous and non-essential aspect of being human.¹⁰ Nor is it merely an act of compliance with the divine command. Rather, parenting is a fundamental expression and realization of that self-expending love in and through which man and woman image, however obliquely and imperfectly, the Creator.

Becoming parents marks an irrevocable turning point in the history of the couple, a point from which their characters are indelibly altered in a number of substantial ways. No longer are they merely husband and wife; now they are also and forevermore mother and father. Herein is the relationship of the two both intensified and transcended. The child's very existence forever points to the union of the two parents. It also, however,

intrudes upon and alters their world. The child limits their time and challenges their self-mastery and independence. He requires considerable self-discipline and demands self-sacrifice on the part of the parents.

Further, the child evokes care and responsibility from the parents. As one who has distinct uniqueness, the child resists and challenges the parents. Eventually, the child is not only one for whom the parent is responsible; the child is also one to whom the parent must give account. This questioning serves as a constant reminder that parental authority is neither absolute nor arbitrary; it is derived from--and ideally is reflective of--a higher authority.

The child also unsettles and disturbs isolationist tendencies of the parents by drawing them even further beyond the family, opening their world to broader dimensions of human co-existence both spatially and temporally. To be a parent inescapably involves one in a broader network of social relationships. To be a parent also, however, heightens sensitivity to and awareness of human frailty and transience. The child occasions in the parents a deeper awareness of both the past and the future. He opens the parents to the reality of the child's future--a future which the parents cannot finally guarantee and into which they cannot fully accompany the child. Herein the parents awaken to their own limitations and dependence upon others. They also become aware of those beliefs, values, and traditions which were received from their own parents and forebears. These, in turn, are bequeathed to the child for the child's own

journey into the unknown future.

In summary, the bearing and raising of children are primal dimensions of experience which indelibly mark human personhood. It is the Christian view that the experiences of marriage and parenting both anticipate and find their ultimate meaning and significance within the context of Christian faith.

‘This is a great mystery’

In the foregoing we have said that human existence is co-existence; the basic form of the personal is the interpersonal. It has also been argued that two primal dimensions of human existence wherein growth into the fully human occurs are those of marriage and parenting. The point now must be made that these primal experiences also provide circumstances in which one may be open to the transcendent. That is, there is a “sacramental quality” to these experiences; given within the ebb and flow of the common are glimpses of the uncommon, fleeting encounters with the depth, richness and the mystery of reality.¹¹

Christian faith relates to such moments in the course of ordinary affairs, however fleeting, wherein are experienced hints of extraordinary meaning. For there are, however much moderns, “bombarded with banality,” have become dulled to them, those incredibly rich moments--times with a husband or wife, with a parent or with a child--

moments which evoke awe and wonder. Such moments are “rumors of angels” (Berger), or signals of transcendence, which point beyond the lived world and reveal it to be but an enclave in a larger and yet eminently personal world. More precisely, these occasions point beyond themselves to the presence of a deeper dimension of the personal, the presence of the Creator and Sustainer. Such hints of transcendence not only point beyond my immediate world, however; they also reinvest or even hallow the everyday with a sacramental quality. They contain impulses for trust and hope and evoke an “inductive faith.” It is this faith that is completed, clarified, and corroborated by the full disclosure of God in Christ.

In summary, it has been argued that, according to the Christian view, marriage and parenting are requisite for the fullest realization of human personhood and the personal nature of the universe. It is necessary, however, to offer two brief words of clarification to this thesis. First, it has not been argued that one cannot become fully human without the primal experience of marriage and parenting. To do so, however, entails some analogous relationship with rigorous demands for sacrificial care, long-term commitment, and self-discipline.¹² Second, it has not been argued that marriage and parenting are easy; more nearly, the opposite is the case. Rather, I am maintaining that we receive our identities in struggling with these difficult roles--heroic roles--and that in them it is offered to us to become fully human, i.e., imago dei.¹³

Conclusion

It is one of the present tasks of the church not merely to give moral exhortations but to anchor those firmly within the Christian vision of the God who manifests his character in the self-expending love of the cross. Thus the church cannot neglect the teaching of scripture and basic beliefs and must promote serious reflection on the meaning of Christian faith precisely in order that its attempts to be practical will also be faithful--and fruitful. For it is only within the framework of biblical faith and the Christian vision of reality that we can understand why anyone would forgive an unfaithful partner, keep a costly promise, bear and protect a retarded child, or even stay with an unpleasant spouse.

Contrary to much contemporary ideology, the Christian vision reveals that self-expending compassion, and not independence or self-sufficiency, relates the human to the divine. We are defined as persons more by our roles as husbands and wives, parents, brothers and sisters and friends than by our individual achievements.

Notes

- ¹ Christopher Lasch writes: “The trouble with the consciousness movement is not that it addresses trivial or unreal issues but that it provides self-defeating solutions. Arising out of a pervasive dissatisfaction with the quality of personal relations, it advises people not to make too large an investment in love and friendship, to avoid excessive dependence on others, and to live for the moment--the very conditions that created the crisis of personal relations in the first place.” The Culture of Narcissism (New York: W. H. Norton, 1978) 27.
- ² Certainly the intent to be “practical” is commendable. It is misguided, however, if it entails neglect or abandonment of serious attention to scripture or basic Christian beliefs. For example, much recent attention to human sexuality among Christians reflects a mechanistic and theologically naive view of human sexuality.
- ³ Again, Christopher Lasch points out that much therapeutic language is deceiving: “Even when therapists speak of the need for ‘meaning’ and ‘love,’ they define love and meaning simply as the fulfillment of the patient’s emotional requirements. It hardly occurs to them . . . to encourage the subject to subordinate his needs and interests to those of others, to someone or some cause or tradition outside himself. ‘Love’ as self-sacrifice or self-abasement, ‘meaning’ as submission to a higher loyalty--these sublimations strike the therapeutic sensibility as intolerably oppressive, offensive to common sense and injurious to personal health and well-being.” The Culture of Narcissism, 13.
- ⁴ In Plato’s Symposium, for example, the divine has nothing to do with the human (203a).
- ⁵ The following comments are indebted to Arthur C. McGill’s rich reflections in his provocative little book, Suffering: A Test of Theological Method (Philadelphia: Geneva 1968).
- ⁶ John Macquarrie, Principles of Christian Theology (New York: Scribner’s, 1966) 178.

- ⁷ The homosexual relationship, I would argue, is as psychologically barren as it is biologically infertile. It is true that many--perhaps most--heterosexual relationships are less than ideal. Nonetheless, as hetero, the other can shatter my world of illusions and open me to that which is truly other.
- ⁸ Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics III/4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961) 133.
- ⁹ Stanley Hauerwas has even maintained that “the most morally substantive thing that any of us ever has the opportunity to do is have children.” See his A Community of Character (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981) 165.
- ¹⁰ Walter Kasper, Theology of Christian Marriage (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 18.
- ¹¹ I leave it to biblical scholars to decide the full meaning of Ephesians 5:32. It is my understanding, however, that it is the “miraculous and mysterious” nature of the one flesh relationship between man and woman which allows it to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church. See Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. I (New York: Harpers, 1962) 150.
- ¹² I would argue that just as it is a perversion of language when two promise to lie to one another, it is a perversion of the human when a person or persons deliberately avoid marriage and parenting for reasons of cowardice or selfishness.
- ¹³ Two excellent articles which explore this theme are Michael Novak’s “The Family Out of Favor,” Harpers Magazine (April, 1976) 37-46, and Rosemary Haughton’s “Marriage: An Old, New Fairy Tale,” Marriage Among Christians (Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 1977) 129-150.

THE CRISIS IN SECULAR EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH TODAY

By Allan McNicol

America is rediscovering the teacher and the importance of the classroom. In previous generations the work of the school teacher in her classroom attempting to teach the basics of literacy, computation, and social skills, was perceived as a foundational pillar of our society. As an example, we only need to recall how Norman Rockwell represented on canvas our childhood memories of the daily classroom routine as a celebration of the common virtues of our civilization. But somewhere along the way the classroom became a tarnished image in our society. During the past generation major changes began to unfold in classrooms throughout the country--especially in our public schools. By now we are very familiar with them. The students seemed "different." We heard more about drugs, the growth of social diseases, and the decline of discipline and test scores than the triumph of learning.¹ As one writer put it, "the influence of the family is down and the influence of the peer group is up."² Thus respect for the teacher and her classroom eroded.³

A growing number of Christian thinkers have for some time now asserted that what we see taking place currently in our public educational system constitutes the harvest of a crop of mechanistic social-scientific models of education. These models have both consciously and unconsciously commended themselves to our educators during the last generation.⁴ They had their origin in the Enlightenment when concerned people like Kant, Hume, and many others who were tired of the assertions of Christian dogma and religious divisions attempted to give an account of how human ethical and moral thinking would operate on a rational basis apart from a religious foundation.⁵ The mechanistic social-scientific models for evaluating moral growth often used in modern educational systems, are simply later developments of this post-Enlightenment enterprise. Recently this whole effort has been pronounced a failure by one of the world's leading moral philosophers.⁶ Today in America this failure is readily apparent. There is no publically recognized rational set of objective referents for ethical behavior in our society. Education of the self as moral agent and a motivation to learn cognitive skills, essential ingredients of being educated, cannot flourish in an amoral climate. The end product of education today in the public mind is confusion. This leads many in our society to claim there is no "ought" only "I prefer."⁷

If this is the case then it would seem that what is needed for our schools is not just more money, more time spent in homework, or a longer school day, but a fundamental reappraisal of the value of the philosophies which inform our current educational

system. Without the replacement of these philosophies which have failed, we seem destined to repeat the same mistakes of the past.

We have noted the crisis of current secular education for a reason. Historically, in America, there has been a very close interaction and cozy relationship between the various philosophies of learning with their implementation of correlate educational techniques of teaching in our public schools, and models for education pursued in teaching in the classrooms of the local church? This is readily understandable. In the church in many areas the same teachers who teach in the public schools during the week teach in church schools on Sunday. Most of their education for teaching has come from their formal secular professional training. Consequently, it stands to reason that if secular education is in trouble, because it is informed by questionable educational philosophies, similar problems may also arise in education in the church. Not surprisingly, Christian educators repeatedly affirm that it is increasingly difficult to impart the norms and values of historic Christianity from one generation to the next.⁹ Could it be that our educational philosophies and models in the church schools (as our physical plant, equipment, and grading divisions in the church school) have been informed by sources that have demonstrated themselves as being bankrupt elsewhere? Could this be a major ingredient in the widely perceived demise of the traditional church school classes both in terms of their numbers and importance in the life of the church and the community?

Thesis and Procedure

This brings us to a statement of the thesis for this essay, viz., the current models which inform instruction in moral education in secular society are incompatible with Christianity. Instruction in development in Christian faith and moral growth in the churches built on these models must be abandoned. In its place must come a renewed emphasis on grounding the church in the Christian story, understanding of the doctrines that develop out of that story, and a perception of the shape of the peculiar moral lifestyle that is congruent with Christian faith.

Procedurally, we will briefly give attention to the current crisis with respect to education in the faith in the church. Second, we will evaluate the adequacy of one secular model (i.e. Kohlberg) often used as a basis for a model for teaching moral and faith development in the church. Next, we will examine two strategies (the procedure in Jesus' time for teaching sacred materials and catechetical teaching)⁸ to see how the early Christians carried out the task of teaching the faith and encouraging development in holiness.

Finally, based on this analysis, we will make several concrete proposals about how strategies and programs may be developed in a local church in order to facilitate growth in our knowledge of the Christian story and how peoples' lives living under that claim should be shaped.

The Current Crisis in Instruction of the Christian Faith

Despite the excellent work of Mac Lynn of Harding Graduate School, who has presented invaluable statistical data on churches of Christ in the Missions Bulletin, it is still virtually impossible to get a comprehensive picture of the numbers who attend Bible classes at a local church of Christ in this country as compared to past decades. Therefore, I will base my remarks about current trends on personal observations made through regular participation in Bible classes in several medium to large congregations over the past decade. One dominant impression comes to mind. We are spending an ever decreasing amount of time both giving and receiving instruction in the Christian faith. Let us look at the evidence. In the churches with which I am familiar it is not unusual for Sunday Bible class attendance to be about 50% of the attendance at the morning assembly. A similar situation prevails on Wednesday night. I believe that it is safe to say that at least 50% of the membership of congregations with which I am familiar seldom attend a Bible class. As there seems to be little evidence that those who do not attend Bible classes are engaged in private study, and since there is no tradition of catechetical instruction, the conclusion seems to be that the only formal instruction in the Christian faith which the majority in the church receive today is in the (Sunday morning) sermon. On Sunday the minister at the regular assembly in about twenty

minutes must address audiences which range intellectually from children to nuclear physicists and emotionally from being zealots in the faith to those who are passively hostile. Thus, even when done well, the sermon usually is not the appropriate vehicle for systematic instruction in the biblical story and Christian doctrine. We have produced in the church a generation which is biblically illiterate in the Christian story and has only the vaguest notions about the origin and importance of such foundational Christian doctrines as the trinitarian view of God, Creation and Election, Sin and Atonement, and Eschatology.

It is no wonder that, ignorant of the faith in its essential features, many Christians fall prey to various heretical teachings which are offered like varieties of food at a cafeteria, in our great urban centers. Frequently our members are blissfully ignorant of either what they are rejecting or accepting. The fact that large numbers of Christians do not know who they are or what they stand for constitutes the crisis in instruction of the Christian faith among churches today.

One Secular Model Used for Spiritual and Moral Growth in the Faith

Granted the perception that instruction in the Christian faith in church school classes has fallen on hard times, in recent years a number of educators in the church have advocated that our real problem may be found in over reliance in instructional models of imparting the Christian faith. So much instruction in church school classes

appears to follow a purposeless “hit or miss” method. If only some method could be found whereby we could be more scientific in our approach to education, in the faith? If only we could identify scientifically the stages of thinking and moral development in the human, then both resources and teaching techniques could be marshalled to meet real spiritual needs.¹⁰ Teaching would then be goal directed. It would not be “wasted” on those who are at a stage of development wherein the particular line of reasoning being pursued has no effect. Indeed, most of the time students in church school classes hear words but do not perceive the music.¹¹

In recent years many have felt the answer to their prayers have been found in the works of the educational psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg traces the immediate antecedents of his work back to the Swiss child psychologist Jean Piaget. Building on his observations that the process of maturation in children has definite structural patterns (the cognitive movement from simple concrete to the telos of abstract reasoning) Piaget observed that a similar process of discernable stages takes place in the moral development of the child.¹² Piaget believed that this process could, in principle, be traced, measured, and scientifically evaluated.

Kohlberg built on Piaget’s work. He developed a mechanistic model of six (later he seems to have expanded this to perhaps eight) distinct progressive stages or levels of moral thinking in a human after he or she had gone beyond the pre-rational stage of childhood.¹³ This is known as the Cognitive Developmental Theory.¹⁴ It is important to

note that Kohlberg stands in the tradition of Kant and Hume in his belief that moral education can be separated from religion.¹⁵

Indeed, from the perspective of civil liberties in America, it ought to be.¹⁶ Kohlberg even argues strongly for the implementation in the public school of the traditional Platonic view that no one is educated unless he is educated in moral virtue--although his notion of what constitutes moral virtue is tightly constricted. The public school, like government, must transmit certain consensual moral values of society.¹⁷ Usually these consensual moral values are universals (i.e. justice, etc.).¹⁸ Since a declining number of people receive training in moral development in traditional settings (i.e. the family and the church) such training must take place in the public schools, leaving churches to promote religion. Such an approach commends itself to many in our society. We may well expect many public schools will implement curricula based on Kohlberg's views and his educational techniques.

Despite these strong secular emphases of Kohlberg, many Christian educators still believe Kohlberg can serve as the basic model for education in the church. This is because his theory sets as its basic goal the moral and religious maturity of persons' developing self-awareness, thereby becoming more intentional in making choices and in relating to others.¹⁹ As such, it dovetails neatly with Horace Bushnell's influential nineteenth-century view that in American society children should never know themselves not to have been Christian.²⁰ Bushnell's theories on Christian nurture led to

Bible classes in American Christianity. Kohlberg's views offer the opportunity to give greater scientific precision to its curricula. With surgical efficiency Bible passages may be "adapted" to facilitate growth in self-awareness through the various structural stages of the moral development of children and youth. Needless irrelevant information which does not pertain to development in moral or spiritual maturity (i.e. learning the books of the Old Testament or the missionary journeys of Paul) may be dropped from the curricula.²¹ The Bible class as a faith and moral development-creating-institution will (finally) be professional and will earn the respect of professionals.

Thus the Kohlberg model for moral education has received widespread favorable attention and implementation as a basic model by Christian educators for the curricula of church school classes throughout the country.

Christian education, then, becomes the task of moving one upward through the stages toward more meaningful solutions to ethical dilemmas. Curriculum molded around moral development, causing ethical disequilibrium to be resolved at higher levels would be the order. The discoveries Kohlberg has made about human growth opens up Christian educators to a brand new arena. Now we have a ruler with which to measure Christian growth among our people.²²

There is no doubt that this model has certain appeals. This generation of parents in the church know very well that their children have not well internalized the traditional faith and moral norms. What could be better than a "professional" "systematic" program of guidance like Kohlberg's in order to promote faith and moral development in the church. Certainly some frame of reference is needed.

Yet, before the church begins to build its whole educational curricula on the Cognitive Developmental Model, or something similar, certain questions may be raised concerning the appropriateness of its use in our structures of Christian education. We will now give attention to several of these.

First, it should be observed that there is implicit in the language of Christian faith imperatives for faith and moral development. I refer to talk in the Bible about the necessity for spiritual growth, growth in holiness (“the fruits of the spirit”), and the pilgrimage of the self in the world following the example of Jesus (the search for perfection).²³ Furthermore, this language constitutes a call to Christian faithfulness based on remembering the revelation of God’s faithfulness to his creation in the history of Israel and the life of Jesus Christ. This is incompatible with any secular model of moral development that makes human autonomy (“becoming aware of ourselves”) the necessary condition and/or goal of moral behavior.²⁴ Kohlberg’s model stressing the virtues of Justice, and its corollaries of tolerance and respect for human rights, essentially is informed by a vision that the purpose of life is self-discovery and development of one’s potential free from indoctrination of heteronomous values. But Christianity has a totally different vision of the purpose of life. For Christians, all life is received as a gift from a sacred other and it involves constant conscious emphasis on the need of the believer to imitate the divine character as shown in the Christian story.²⁵ Thus the Christian constantly perceives life in heteronomous terms. The emphasis is on

knowledge and imitation of the divine not on human autonomy. The Christian is a disciple, and slave to Christ. He must take his cross daily and follow the master. A Christian's purpose in life is not to form his identity through the exercise of innate inner mental structures but to reflect the "mind of Christ" (Phil. 2:4). Thus, the Christian finds his identity by learning how to appropriate the values and norms of the community of God in his life, and by developing in connection with others strategies which will ultimately lead to the triumph of the Kingdom of God.

Moral philosophers label Kohlberg as essentially a utilitarian.²⁶ That is to say, through following his ahistorical mechanistic schema of moral development intuitively he arrives at justice as the ultimate universal principle to be commended. This creates in humankind a set of obligations (cf. Kant's categorical imperative). Being just contributes to the greatest amount of human welfare which may be defined as maximization of human autonomy.²⁷ One may then well ask, "does Kohlberg ultimately escape the fate of the various moral schemes that came out of the Enlightenment and which ultimately could not furnish sufficient motivation in our society for creating a sense of obligation?" I do not believe he does.

In contrast to Kohlberg, the Christian finds motivation to be obedient to the heteronomous claim over him through his orientation within the Christian story. Through the appropriation of the values and norms which flow out of biblical accounts and guided doctrinal formulations of it, the Christian is motivated to be obedient not for

any utilitarian purpose but because he has a vision to be a participant in God's triumphant work in reclaiming the creation for himself.

This leads to a fundamental conclusion from this discussion. Since Kohlberg's theory of moral development and Christianity are based on totally different visions of reality and moral goals, it would be extremely inappropriate to use the educational techniques developed by Kohlberg as a basis for the curricula of Christian Bible teaching in our church classes.

As we have seen, Kohlberg is primarily concerned with providing the class with exercises (through examples of human dilemmas) to develop the appropriate mental capacity to make distinctions between justice and injustice, right and wrong, etc. For Kohlberg the appropriate educational paradigm is a class wherein Socratic discussion methods are used to develop an individual's moral capacity through wrestling with a dilemma in conjunction with others. Through mental exercise over concrete issues moral capacity innately emerges. But the educational paradigm for Christian nurture has always been different. In order for Christian spiritual and moral development to take place one must first know the story and how the doctrines are connected with the story. From the earliest ages children are taught the Christian story. Examples of those who lived out of these stories are given. And the heritage of what it means to live faithfully--in a practical sense--is passed on in sermon. Thus the educational paradigm for Christians is not the Socratic questioner but the teller of stories. The Christian claims

one acts in proper conformity to God's character which is learned not by "self discovery" but by instruction in our heritage.

Thus we conclude that what is needed in Christian education today is not more classes where people sit around "sharing" their feelings or hunches in the hope that some new insight may providentially emerge. What is needed is exciting and refreshing instruction in the Christian story in both class and sermon given by those who know the story and are personally claimed by it. This follows with the New Testament description of Jesus' call for disciples and Paul's call for his converts "to be imitators of him" (2 Thess. 3:7, 9).

Education in the Faith in Early Christianity

Our analysis indicated that the current crisis in the knowledge and perception of the Christian faith in the church cannot be overcome by simply following advances in modern educational theories. In fact, it is precisely the application of these post-Enlightenment moral educational theories which have precipitated the current crisis. As long as these various philosophies hold sway over the goals and techniques of our educators in the church the crisis will remain. In order to gain some sense of perspective on what to do about this situation today it may be helpful if we look at how the church in the pre-Constantinian era carried on the task of teaching the story to potential followers of Jesus of Nazareth. The limitations of the essay form will allow only a

cursory glance at some highlights of recent developments brought to light by scholars in the study of this subject. Nevertheless, we will say enough to allow us to formulate some modern strategies to address the present situation.

It has been noted often, that from its inception, Christianity presupposed a high level of intellectual and literary competence. In early Christianity this was simply taken for granted. The conversion of the classical world (after Constantine) basically left its educational system intact.²⁸ Christianity presupposes educational competence such as reading, writing, etc. This is true even in missionary work today. One of the first tasks of a missionary in a primitive area always is to start a school.

The relationship of Christianity to the classical educational system (primarily informed by paganism), just as today, was a source of controversy. One only has to remember Tertullian's plaintive cry, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem," or read such works as Clement of Alexandria's (circa 200 A.D.; perhaps the founder of the first school of higher learning in Christianity) Exhortation to the Heathen, or The Instructor (Paedagogus) with its great debt to Stoic and eclectic philosophies in order to appreciate these tensions.

But it is not to these encounters we wish to draw attention. Rather, it is important to note in its early centuries, that as a distinct minority, the church developed educational procedures which facilitated the maintenance, development, and propagation of their faith above and beyond the educational systems of the Greco-

Roman world. It is with respect to these, often unnoticed developments in early Christianity, that we wish to draw attention; because in this post-Constantinian era some structures similar to these would seem to present a needed alternative educational model for the church in our time. Recent developments in biblical studies have highlighted (1) ancient techniques of handing over sacred material used by Jesus (2) and the development of the catechumenate as especially appropriate vehicles for the transmission of early Christian teaching. We note both of these vehicles briefly.

Palestinian Jews in Jesus' time were benefactors of a heritage which had placed a premium on learning. For the average Jew of that society Torah (instruction-in-the-total-heritage-of-Judaism) centered in Scripture was the ultimate reality. In order for a Jew to function in that society he had to learn and obey Torah.

Education was to learn Torah. There was no distinction between religious and secular education. For example, the initial learning of the letters of the alphabet was understood as a religious act because it was a contribution toward the ability of the child ultimately to study Torah for himself.²⁹ This is a background of the latter Rabbinic statement, "The world endures only for the sake of the breath of school children."³⁰ This was the foundational factor for education in Judaism.

Such elements as instruction in Torah by parents in the home, readings from the Scripture and teaching in the synagogue on Sabbaths, Mondays, Thursdays, and during festivals, and further instruction in the elementary schools for children aged five through

twelve run by the synagogue, provided the total milieu for pre-occupation with Torah. Even the worship in the synagogue was different from the cultic systems of the ancient world. There were no mystery initiations or propitiary sacrifices in the synagogues.³¹ The centerpiece of synagogue activity was teaching. The synagogue represented a marriage between worship and education.³² Philo called the synagogues didaskaleia (centers of learning).³³

It should be noted that the basic educational technique which was used to impart the Torah was primarily memorization.³⁴ Oral presentation was frequently given in didactic forms by the teacher with the expectation that it would be committed to memory. Even today in the middle-east such a practice is well known.³⁵ Thus the teacher through such various devices as repetition, recitation, use of rhythmic and parallel phrases, parables, etc., instructed students in Torah.

Such was the case with Jesus of Nazareth. We may presuppose Jesus was taught Torah at home, in the synagogue of Nazareth (Matt. 13:54) and in the synagogue school. This is confirmed by the tradition of Jesus being the childhood prodigy in Luke 2:46-52. Jesus was frequently addressed as teacher in the synoptic Gospels. In his hometown he was extended the privilege of reading the Scripture which, according to Jewish custom, was only permissible for those who had committed key passages to memory.³⁶

As the messianic teacher Jesus demanded that his disciples recollect his words because of their importance for the coming kingship of God.³⁷ This is the simplest reason to explain why we have the large amount of sayings and parables of Jesus collected in atomistic form in later productions of the Gospels. These approximated the forms in which the disciples memorized the sayings of Jesus.³⁸ The collections of oral discourse were designed to be memorized and they were.

These sayings were remembered in the churches founded by Paul (1 Cor. 7:10; 9:14) and in various forms in the communities that nurtured the canonical and apocryphal Gospels. It is difficult to perceive what Christianity would be like (or even if it would have lasted) without this meticulous work of remembering the text of Scripture (i.e. Old Testament) and the sayings of the Lord in the early churches. It was impossible to be a Jew without a knowledge of Torah. It would have been an extremely anemic Christian believer who would not carry around in his memory an essential record of the sayings, deeds, and an account of the passion and resurrection of Jesus. This being so, why are followers of Jesus so reluctant even to read these accounts today?

Of course, the early Christians were not just concerned to maintain mere remembrance of the words and works of Jesus. The need for appropriate standards of faith and practice for the Christian community in ever-changing historical situations, correlated with these teachings, was very apparent even in the first century. In analogy with the Jew and study of Torah, innumerable questions arose in the churches. Thus

systematic instruction came to be given to all those who contemplated following the Christian way. Perhaps the early remnants of systematic catechetical (Greek: katechesis, “instruction”) teaching rest behind the discourse narratives in Matthew 5-7; 10; 13; 19:2-23; and 24, 25, or material in the epistles. But there is no question that catechetical teaching was widespread in the churches by the end of the first century. In the little document The Didache (i.e. “The Teaching”; circa 100 A.D.) R. A. Kraft has deduced the following catechetical instruction:

1. Ethical instruction given on the Christian duties prior to baptism (7:1; 11:1) and on the two ways (1:1--6:2).
2. Instruction on fasting (7:4) before baptism.
3. The formula to be used at a baptism (7:1-3).
4. The meal after baptism (9:1--10:6).
5. Anointing with oil (10:8).
6. Fasting on Wednesday and Friday (1:3; 8:1).
7. Observance of the Lord’s Day (14:1-3; 16:2).
8. Recitation of the Lord’s Prayer (8:2, 3).
9. Daily Meetings (4:2; cf. 16:2).
10. Discipline in the community and prayer, almsgiving, and contributions (15:3f; cf. 1:3b; 2:7; 4:3; 13:3-7).
11. Attention to hospitality (11:3--12:5).³⁹

As the second century progressed Irenaeus in Lyons produced a summary of the biblical story with a history of salvation approach called The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching.⁴⁰ Other catechetical works were known as far east as Jerusalem.⁴¹ By the fourth century such instruction as that given by Cyril of Jerusalem had expanded to eighteen lectures and involved the major doctrines of the Christian faith. Thus in a concrete sense Christianity had become a faith to be believed (Jude 3). In a day when

most responsible ministers will not conduct a Christian wedding without an Understanding that the prospective bride and groom have soberly considered the meaning and implications of their action, does it make sense to baptize potential converts without some form of systematic prior instruction of the duties of a Christian believer?

Conclusion

Having engaged in this analysis of the philosophies, attitudes and techniques of education operative in the early church and in Bible classes today we will conclude this paper with several summary statements. These are designed to be both summaries of points made in the essay and suggestions about future trends for the teaching enterprise in the church. They are designed to be suggestive for further reflection on this matter.

- 1: The average church member spends less than an hour a week studying the Christian story and consequently is deficient in knowledge of scripture and Christian doctrine.
- 2: New secular techniques of education for development in morality and faith which stress growth in human maturity cannot substitute effectively for learned knowledge of Scripture and doctrine. The latter presumes a different foundation for morality (presumed knowledge of the Christian story) than the former.
- 3: Since the life of Jesus indicates a total seriousness on his part toward Torah so that he memorized much of his received heritage and demanded that his understanding of it be transmitted in a similar way; consequently, such activities as the repetitive teaching of Bible stories to children, emphasis on learning verses of scripture, books of the Bible, should be encouraged.

- 4: It would be a worthwhile proposal that churches establish systematic courses of instruction in the Christian faith for the young, new convert's classes, and other forms of catechetical training for the membership.
- 5: The pulpit minister may periodically evaluate both how well his sermon hearers are able to appropriate to their lives the fundamental images and symbols of the Christian faith and if remedial teaching is necessary, in what form it should be done.

Clearly the time has come when Christians should be told that we can ill afford a generation as gullible and naive in the faith as the one in the past. As society expects our educational systems to improve, it would not be too much to expect that the average believer knows the Christian story, its fundamental doctrines, and the appropriate lifestyle of Christian faith.

Notes

- ¹ Kevin Ryan, "Moral Formation: The American Scene," Moral Formation and Christianity: Concilium, December, 1977 (eds. F. Bockle and Jacques-Marie Pohier; New York: Seabury Press, 1978) 95. The references to schools in this section refer to the process of formal education from the elementary through the high school levels unless otherwise stated.
- ² Ryan, 95.
- ³ Ryan, 95.
- ⁴ For an analysis of the cultural phenomenon of pluralism as the seedbed for the changed climate in our society which produced these models see Michael R. Weed, "Pluralism, Morality, and the Church," Institute for Christian Studies Faculty Bulletin, 3 (1982), 5-16.
- ⁵ R. S. Peters, Reason and Compassion (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973) 22.
- ⁶ Alasdair McIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981) 84-102.
- ⁷ Cf. Richard Neuhaus, "The Hauerwas Enterprise," Commonweal, 109, May 7 (1982) 269, 270.
- ⁸ John J. Westerhoff III, Will Our Children Have Faith? (New York: Seabury Press, 1976) 3-4; D. Campbell Wyckoff, "Historical Perspectives on Religious Education," Does The Church Know How to Teach? (ed. K. B. Cully; New York: MacMillan, 1970) 29.
- ⁹ Westerhoff, Will Our Children Have Faith? (23) grants this very point. However he believes that it is the paradigm of "schooling instruction" that is the basic cause of the demise of the contemporary Sunday School and its perceived irrelevance for the

development of Christian faith. This seems to be a case, however, of blaming the messenger for the bad news. It is a fact that some form of cognitive instruction (preaching, teaching) for twenty centuries has been a primary vehicle for imparting a knowledge of the Christian faith. It seems to have served fairly well. It overstates the contemporary situation to say that “the schooling-instruction” model per se is the problem. Many Sunday School classes are banal. But this is only the outward manifestation of a deeper cultural malaise with reference to the process of the transmission of the faith.

¹⁰ Westerhoff, 20.

¹¹ Ryan, 102.

¹² Ryan, 100.

¹³ Lawrence Kohlberg, Essays on Moral Development: The Philosophy of Moral Development (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981) 409-412 states in detail these stages. They move from the pre-conventional level (complete obedience to rules and acting to meet your own interest by allowing others to do the same) through the conventional level (living up to the expectations of cherished ones and doing your duty) to the post-conventional or principled level. At this level one gradually matures to the stage that his actions are governed by universal principles rather than the values of a particular social class or group. For Kohlberg the most important universal principle is justice; and its correlates of respect for the dignity of individual human beings and human rights. These virtues are usually perceived by him in a democratic way as an ideal of equity or equal respect for all people.

¹⁴ Of course Kohlberg does not believe all individuals progress from stage one to the post-conventional or principled level of moral development. Only a minority of even adults reach this level. However, he does believe that moral development may take place through techniques of moral education, especially sustained classroom teaching about appropriate responses to human dilemmas.

¹⁵ Kohlberg, 294.

¹⁶ Thus, Kohlberg takes issue with those who claim that the Schempp decision of the Supreme Court mandates that any articulated ethical credos or value systems are ruled out of being taught in the public schools on the same grounds as religious instruction.

- ¹⁷ Kohlberg, 295.
- ¹⁸ Kohlberg, 296. Needless to say there are no universal religious values that appear here.
- ¹⁹ Donald E. Miller, "The Developmental Approach to Christian Education," Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education (eds. J. L. Seymour and D. E. Miller; Nashville: Abingdon, 1982) 93.
- ²⁰ Miller, 73.
- ²¹ Such a book as that of James Fowler, Stages of Faith (New York: Harper & Row, 1981) has studied various developmental models of psychologists (e.g. Erickson) and has produced his own model of the development of faith in humankind. This is very influential in Christian educational circles today.
- ²² Reid Lancaster, "Morals, Faith, and Christian Growth," Mission, 11, June (1978) 281-282; cf. Ronald Duska and Mariellan Whelan, A Guide to Piaget and Kohlberg (New York: Paulist Press, 1975). Emphasis mine.
- ²³ Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, (1981) 130.
- ²⁴ Hauerwas, 130.
- ²⁵ Hauerwas, 130.
- ²⁶ B. Crittenden, "The Limitations of Morality as Justice in Kohlberg's Theory," The Domain of Moral Education (eds. D. B. Cochrane; C. M. Hamm; A. C. Kazepides; New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 255. This is combined with a definite formal model of the moral agent that is remarkably close to Kant. The goal of moral development is the free individual autonomously acting on universal principles and manifesting the strength of will to keep them. Cf. Peters, Reason and Compassion, 25.
- ²⁷ A further deficiency in this model is that it intuitively places justice as the fundamental moral value. But on what grounds is justice raised as the "apex" of the virtues over such virtues as compassion and agape? Cf. Crittenden, "The Limitations," 261-264.
- ²⁸ E. A. Judge, "Antike and Christentum," Augstieg und Niedergang der Romischen Welt II, 23: (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1982) 41.

- ²⁹ S. Safrai, "Education and the Study of the Torah," The Jewish People in the First Century. CRINT 1, 2 (eds. S. Safrai, M. Stern; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 945.
- ³⁰ T. B. Shabbath, 119b as quoted by Safrai, 945.
- ³¹ L. J. Sherrill, The Rise of Christian Education (New York: MacMillan, 1944) 45.
- ³² Sherrill, 45.
- ³³ The Life of Moses, 2, 39.
- ³⁴ Rainer, Riesner, "Judische Elementarbildung und Evangelienuberlieferung," Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels, 1 (eds. R. T. France and David Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980) 211-218.
- ³⁵ Birger Gerhardsson, The Origins of the Gospel Traditions (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) tells of a Swedish professor of Medicine who gave a series of lectures in Egypt. After the first lecture the students suggested it would be helpful if he could present his major points in such a way that memorization of the material may be facilitated. Each day on the way to work I pass a synagogue school where Hebrew children are taught to memorize Hebrew words from the Bible.
- ³⁶ Riesner, 218.
- ³⁷ Riesner, 233, has noted the following striking sayings in this connection: Matt. 24:35/Mk. 13:31/Lk. 21:33; Matt. 7:24-27/Lk. 6:47-49; Lk. 9:26/Mk. 8:38.
- ³⁸ Gerhardsson, Origins, 23, notes that the followers of the earthly Jesus probably also maintained along with their memorization of Jesus' sayings some private memoranda or notations on Jesus' words and deeds. These memoranda would soon become organized into standard literary classifications known throughout all schools in the Greco-Roman world and would also function as major source material for the Gospel accounts.
- ³⁹ R. A. Kraft, The Apostolic Fathers: A New Translation and Commentary, 3: Barnabas and the Didache (ed. R. Grant; New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965) 66.

⁴⁰ Cf. R. M. Grant, "Development of the Christian Catechumenate," in Made Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976) 41.

⁴¹ Grant, 41.

TELEVISION AND THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH

By Melinda Worley

Once in a while, a book appears on the secular educational scene which can be related to the church in its teaching. Neil Postman in his book Teaching As A Conserving Activity (New York: Delacorte Press, 1979) offers a significant perspective on how responsible teaching should be carried on in our rapidly changing society. Though much of what he says about our society is not new, his descriptions are illuminating. Certainly the content of the “teaching” with which he is concerned is different from the church’s “teaching”; his carefully outlined argument for making “teaching” a “conserving” activity differs as well from that of the church’s. What is helpful to the church is a particular body of subject matter Postman draws in and the way he defines it as the essential element of “conserving” teaching. We shall begin with reasons for defining teaching as a conserving activity.

The American culture, writes Postman, has overdosed on change. Deeply absorbed in too much change too fast, our culture has experienced the erosion of continuity and tradition. The art of preservation and even the will to preserve has been lost. Postman describes the present situation in ecological terms: there exists an

imbalance in the system. Continuity with the past has been neglected. Balance must be restored if the culture is to remain healthy. He proposes that equilibrium can be restored by conserving tradition through the institution typically in charge of a culture's memory bank, viz., our schools. What he believes should be conserved is not always clear but his reasons for proposing that conservation is clear. At issue is not the value of traditions of the past but the continuity with the present those traditions provide. Postman is concerned that our culture be maintained in its most balanced form.

The church has not been immune to the pressures of rapid change in society. It has struggled, sometimes poorly, to proclaim its ancient message with fresh approaches to new situations. But its teaching is by nature "conserving," its gospel firmly rooted in the past. The believing community confesses that God's revelation, written and collected so long ago, remains true, and therefore must be conserved. What, then, does Postman have to offer us in the nurturing of our young? It is precisely at the point the ancient message intersects with a society in rapid change that Postman's categories and proposals have value. We shall begin with his assertion which has the most significance for the church.

The "Information Environment"

" . . . it is the business of the educator to assess the biases of the information environment with a view toward making them visible and keeping them under control" (p. 31).

Here Postman redefines our task of teaching as having much to do with the “information environment.” Every society has its modes and patterns of communication which are as real to the society as is the terrain. These elements of communication, the “information environment,” define the parameters of thought and learning and determine social attitudes, ideas, and intellectual capacities which will emerge. A society in which the speech of one individual to another is the major element of its “information environment” will maintain a strong bias toward oral literature which, in the absence of the written word, will be its chief medium for passing on its history to its children. When written symbols are introduced, not only will other literary styles develop but gradual changes will take place in the society’s perception of history. If rapid change takes place in the “information environment,” as has happened in American culture in the last few decades, violent changes will also take place in the categories of attitudes, thinking, and learning. The electronic media represent the most obvious and pervasive changes which have taken place in the “information environment” of our culture.

The church has recognized the changes and has understood to some degree the role of the electronic media in these changes. Discussions among teachers, parents, and sometimes church leaders, concerning the influences of media on young people are not uncommon. Such influences are occasionally addressed from pulpits. But the church may not have clearly understood the biases of the “information environment” in which

our children live nor taken its impact seriously enough to subject it and its tools, the media, to more concentrated scrutiny in our various teaching situations. Postman has provided a great service in defining this activity of scrutiny as the major business of conserving teaching. While the community of faith must ensure that its young people begin first with a solid foundation in the message of the Gospel, Postman clarifies for us the necessity of turning our attention next to the “information environment” for its biases exert pressure on the way we and our children think. We shall begin to suggest how the church might thus respond by considering two of Postman’s categories in the “information environment.”

The Image-Centered Medium

The first category Postman describes as “. . . the major educational enterprise now being undertaken in the United States” is television. His two-chapter discussion of this medium is complex, and somewhat grandiose. It is helpful, however, that he focuses attention more on the nature of television and its impact than on the content of its programs and commercials, which is the area to which the church has most attended. We shall confine our remarks to only one aspect of television’s nature and suggest how the church can more directly respond to the impact its biases have on our young people.

Television is image-centered, i.e., its material is presented in a series of pictures in narrative form. It is, thus, non-propositional and instead of inviting abstract critical

analysis, as say a written essay might, television engages the viewer primarily through his/her emotions. There is no dialogue with the material. The viewer has no power to alter what is rapidly appearing on the screen and is therefore poorly motivated to criticize the material according to categories of moral value and judgment. Postman argues convincingly that given this nature of television which discourages calling into question any of its content, children are inclined to absorb the material uncritically whether it conflicts with what they know or believe about the real world. This is an essential bias of television to which he wishes educators to attend.

Of course, an argument might here be raised that whether the medium itself invites criticism is beside the point. The nature of television does not determine how the viewer will respond to its content. If one has the skills of critical thinking and some moral convictions, one will quite naturally subject the medium to whatever analysis and moral evaluation is appropriate. That is precisely what we are here suggesting. If our children are left without these critical skills of analysis and have no clearly defined moral convictions, or if it has never occurred to them to apply these skills and values to what they watch on television, they are more likely to absorb the material without regard to its implications for their behavior and beliefs. The bias of television has remained for them unrecognized and out of their control and we, their teachers, have failed in our task of conserving teaching.

How can the church best respond? If one is to design refined curriculum for studying a medium, one must be accomplished in understanding what the nature of that medium is and how its content affects its viewers. No accomplished understanding can be claimed here. However, there are some points of focus that present themselves as worthy of consideration when a refined curriculum is developed by the church.

Teaching Contexts. Since children do much of their television viewing at home, guidelines for family television viewing might be helpful, not confined only to what kind of programming is appropriate to particular age-groups, but suggesting ways in which parents can discuss the content of programs they watch with their children. Modeling appropriate critical skills is an exceptionally effective teaching method.

The church classroom or young people's group can be an excellent context for teaching critical television viewing, provided each session includes watching selected programming together and that assignments are made which encourage use of the developing skills at home. The goal is to teach critical skills that are eventually applied by the children to their own television viewing.

Suggestions for Discussion. Children should be led to ask how the medium engages them, to discover for themselves which characters in a program they most identify with and why, and how that identification affects their "feelings" concerning

the character's behavior. Discussion is also appropriate concerning how particular behavior or convictions in a program conflict with those of the church and what the consequences of each perspective are.

Young children are not generally ready to participate in very abstract discussions but they are not too young to learn to address critical questions to the television they watch. The context of Saturday morning cartoons might be a fruitful starting point. They can be led to ask how logical consequences of behavior differ in reality from those in a cartoon in which a character throws another off a cliff. Most of them know the difference but teaching them to discuss it clearly is a good beginning.

“Technology as Salvation”

A second category of the “information environment” is the ‘Technical Thesis.’ We shall confine our discussion to an offspring of this thesis which Postman calls “technology as salvation” (p. 98) as seen in the content of television commercials. The subject matter of television commercials is rarely trivial. They typically address basic human needs. The need to share the values of a group, for instance, is often very effectively dealt with in beer commercials, or consider how well the need for status is manipulated by car commercials. The fear of pain, of being sexually unattractive, of being thought to function poorly in the eyes of one's peers are some of the apprehensions dealt with in commercials. What is most significant, however, is that

almost always the solutions offered to these deep psychological needs are products of technology. In a twenty-second parable, one is told, usually with impeccable technique, that whatever one's problems, the solutions to them are immediate and cheap, and it's brought to you by the power and might of technology. This is what Christine Nystrom calls the "metaphysics" of television, the "principle assumptions about what is at the core of human failings and about how we may overcome them" (p. 98). Of course, "technology as salvation" did not originate with television commercials but it is very definitely a bias of television advertising as well as programming. The church must draw the attention of our children to this bias, teach them to recognize it when they see it, and further, to see the essential conflict this bias has with the values of the church.

Suggestions for Discussion. In refining curriculum for these purposes, the church must come to terms with some of the merchandising techniques on which advertising depends. The children should learn to observe, for instance, how the actors/actresses in commercials are dressed, how they act, and what their age, financial status and profession seems to be. Thus, they can perhaps begin to discern at which groups of people the commercial is aimed and what connections the commercial attempts to make between these "types" of people and the product being sold.

Further, children should be encouraged to notice for themselves what is said about the product, what is implied, and what is left unsaid. They need to identify what

problem is presented in the commercial, that the problem often manipulates a deep human need, and that the solution offered by the product may or may not be a realistic one.

Summary. The believing community strives to teach its children what it believes and how these beliefs define what is real and valuable. It struggles to address the human condition in ways that are informed by scripture. But the church must also teach its children to recognize the biases of the secular society in which it finds itself and train them to discern when those biases conflict with that which they have come to believe. We must prepare them to live lives of faith in an age of confusion and change. Neil Postman's book Teaching As A Conserving Activity can help us in that task.

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