A Theology for Christian Education

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To

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Professor, Scholar,

Leader, Author, Colleague, and Friend

A Theology for Christian Education

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CHAPTER 11

Toward a Theologically Informed Approach to Education

James Riley Estep Jr.

If someone were to observe a Sunday school class at your church, or perhaps a midweek Bible study, or a classroom at a Christian school, would the observer see anything distinctively Christian about it? Would the Christian distinctive be so self-evident that even an unbeliever would detect a qualitative difference in the education? If education in the church is to be qualitatively different, it must be based on educational principles that reflect Christian theological beliefs. Our theology must be incarnated in our approach to education.

This chapter endeavors to provide a basic framework of theologically informed educational principles, so it is by no means a complete and systematic theory of education, which would have to involve the integration of social science theories such as learning or developmental theories. Rather, I utilize the seven common elements of every approach to education (identified in chapter 1) and address each element from the theological perspective presented in this book. It will cut horizontally across the text to provide a brief sketch of educational principles that are collectively informed by the individual doctrines discussed in the previous chapters. The seven essential elements of education are: (1) the purpose and objectives of education, (2) the role of the teacher, (3) the role of the

student, (4) the relationship between the teacher and the student, (5) the curriculum content, (6) the learning environment and methods, and (7) the means of evaluation. In discussing these elements, I hope to give the reader a basic but comprehensive expression of the Christian distinctive of education in the form of theologically informed principles for the Christian educator.

THE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

As with anything Christian, education's ultimate purpose is to bring glory to God. Education that glorifies God is God centered, viewing every subject and decision with him ultimately in mind. Because God is as he is described in the Scriptures, he is worthy and able to be the center of our approach to education. This is made possible because God has revealed himself to us through his creation but more specifically through his Word, the Bible. While some approaches to education marginalize or excuse God from them, Christian education's purpose is to glorify him in every element of its approach to education. How does it do this?

Education that glorifies God is one that transforms individuals into mature followers of Jesus Christ. The objectives of Christian education reflect this God-centeredness in terms of how it endeavors to transform. Christian education is not primarily about content, teaching methods, audiovisual technology, or facilities; it is about people! Hence, the objectives of Christian education are centered not on teaching but on the life characteristics it endeavors to promote in the Christian's life. Its prime objective is to see the members of the body in the church—both on the individual and cooperate levels—mature in their relationship with God. To this end three sets of objectives are essential to Christian education.

First, Christians must consistently approach all of life with a Christian worldview. Worldview is the ultimate expression of

Christian thought. It is built on the foundation of our study of Scripture, the formation of doctrine, the development of theology, and ultimately addresses the philosophical issues of reality, truth, ethics, and aesthetics that produce a Christian perspective on all of life. This is possible because of the nature of God's special revelation, Scripture. As such, worldview serves as a framework through which all of life is viewed. Without a Christian worldview, it is virtually impossible to expect Christians to live as Christians should. Since the formation of a Christian worldview begins with a thorough knowledge of Scripture as God's Word, it requires a content-centered approach to curriculum. If Christians are to think as Christians should, then Christian education must be designed so as to promote the formation of Christian worldview among all those in the church as a foundation for the Christian life in relationship to God. Education that glorifies God is one that transforms individuals into mature followers of Jesus Christ. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom 12:2). Educational goals that reflect this objective may be expressed as follows:

- Mature Christians have a thorough knowledge of Scripture.
- Mature Christians comprehend essential Christian doctrines.
- Mature Christians value Scripture and theology in their lives.
- Mature Christians are able to study Scripture for themselves.
- Mature Christians are able to think theologically about life decisions.

Goals such as these, and others that reflect the particulars of our congregations, further express the Christian worldview objective, making it more lucid and measurable.

Second, Christians must develop piety and character consistent with their faith. Spiritual maturity is more than just piety, as noted in chapter 9, but it must include piety and character while conforming our lives to the example of Jesus Christ. If our relationship with God is to be personal, an experienced relationship, then Christians must have piety and character. Without piety and character, Christianity becomes overly intellectual, a mental assent to Bible content, theology, and worldview. For Christian education to achieve this objective, it must move beyond the classroom and into the lives of the individual Christian. The curriculum would have to be more student centered, perhaps even designed with the individual Christian in mind. While education of this kind would require the use of Scripture, it would not be principally for content mastery, as in the first objective, but more for personal reflection, practicing the spiritual disciplines, meditation, and devotional application. Educational goals that reflect this objective may be expressed as follows:

- Mature Christians practice a regular pattern of devotion.
- Mature Christians exhibit a loving relationship toward God, fellow Christians, and the community.
- Mature Christians affirm their commitment to Christ.
- Mature Christians exhibit a high level of theologically informed moral reasoning.
- Mature Christians maintain a consistent Christian witness.

Measuring goals in the affective domain of learning is difficult to say the least, and they are less quantifiable than cognitive. But they are measurable through qualitative means, as explained later in this chapter. These goals require an approach to education that includes mentoring, discipling, and the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Third, Christians must serve as the church. Christians do not serve *in* the church but *as* the church. We *are* the church.

When this is instilled in the minds and on hearts of Christians, their participation in ministry becomes a natural expression of their relationship with God. However, knowing about serving and having the desire to serve are not enough; the congregation must provide opportunities and equip Christians to serve. If Christians are to serve as Christians should, a process-centered approach to instruction is required. Like learning to ride a bike, Christians need to be instructed on the process of doing evangelism, musical performance, teaching, and even leading as a Christian. Educational goals that reflect this objective may be expressed as follows:

- Mature Christians commit themselves to a ministry in the church.
- Mature Christians develop their talents for Christian service.
- Mature Christians value ministry participation as a means of spiritual formation.
- Mature Christians demonstrate a Christian motive and rationale for serving as the church.
- Mature Christians participate in training and equipping for service provided by the congregation.

For Christian education to achieve this objective, it must have a long-term commitment to the equipping of believers, which includes recruitment, orientation, training, and continual equipping of other Christians to serve in ministry as the church. How is all of this achievable? No single curriculum or approach to education is able to address all the objectives sufficiently. What is required is a multidimensional approach to education in the church, all the dimensions of which are theologically informed principles. Figure 11.1 on the next page is an adaptation of Figure 9.2. It illustrates the relationship between Christian education and the spiritual maturity of Christians.

The key to the holistic approach is to recognize that each form of education must be centered on the ultimate purpose of education, bringing glory to God. If the objectives are mistaken for the purpose, it would be disastrous for the Christian and the congregation. For example, if a church overemphasizes piety and character, education results in experiential fluff, warm feeling, devoid of substance. If the church overemphasizes service, we may see Christians experience spiritual burnout because they have been overextended in service projects. Even an overemphasis on worldview, which focuses exclusively on the intellectual study of Scripture and theology, produces a dry orthodoxy and could result in legalism. If the church keeps God in the center of education and his glory as its purpose, the other objectives are kept in balance. This leads to a holistic approach to spiritual formation in Christian education.[1] Christian education wants Christians to think like Christ, value like Christ, and serve as Christ has called us to serve. By the intentional alignment of the remaining educational elements toward the achievement of these objectives, Christian education glorifies God and matures the faithful, individually and corporately.

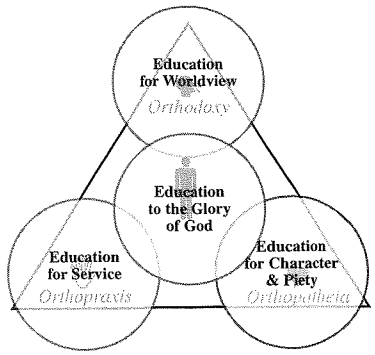

Figure 11.1: Holistic Response Model

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

What does it mean to be a Christian teacher? Obviously, a teacher is one who teaches since the title is defined by the action. However, what it means to be a teacher in the church is multidimensional. Some seek to define an effective teacher as a gifted scholar, a competent methodologist, a spiritual guide, or one who focuses on the role of a teacher in relation to the objectives

of Christian education. To all of these we would say yes. There is more to being a teacher than just teaching.

Essentially, the Christian teacher has five roles. *First, the teacher is an instrument of God.* Those who teach in the church must approach the task with humility since their authority, message, position, and call to serve all come from God. As an instrument of God, teachers realize that they are *not* God but are called by him to fulfill a ministry in the church. This should shape the teacher's disposition as one whose life exemplifies humble submission to God as well as to the ministry of instruction to which he or she has been called.

Serving as an instrument of God should likewise call the teacher to higher and ever increasing expectations of one's service. Teachers are to strive toward excellence in all they do, not to gain acclaim or accomplishment but to glorify God through their service. Paul admonished the Christian community at Colossi, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17), and again, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (vv. 23–24). Christian teachers are held to a higher standard because of a higher calling (Jas 3:1), so they seek opportunities for continued improvement and development and endeavor always to represent God in all that they do and say in the classroom and in the community.

Second, the teacher must be a diligent student of the Word. This is a practical necessity, but it is primarily because Scripture is the revealed and inspired Word of God. The Scriptures describe Ezra as one who "had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). Before he taught God's Word, he studied and lived it. Typically, effective teachers have

been good students and are recognized as those who know the Word, not only in a formal sense but in a personal sense as well. Regardless of the teachers' instructional context or which learning objective they endeavor to address, a thorough knowledge of Scripture is foundational to their effectiveness. Congregations must commit to a well-resourced program of equipping teachers to be students of Scripture that does not simply relying on weekend workshops or the occasional guest speaker to equip adequately a teacher to teach Scripture in any capacity. Teacher development requires not only basic orientation and training but mentoring by a more experienced teacher, assessment with feedback, Bible study resources (in the church's library or Web site), and opportunities for Bible instruction, not just training in teaching methods. Teachers who do not know Scripture or who serve in a congregation lacking in opportunities for teacher development may eventually become intimidated or disenchanted with the call to teach.

Third, the teacher must assume the role of a mentor. The role of a teacher extends beyond the classroom. Teachers assume the role of the one with greater maturity in the learning relationship. Teachers must be experienced Christians who experienced conversion many years earlier and also have a Christian lifestyle that demonstrates a maturing relationship with Christ. Teachers serve as examples to their students, teaching not only with their words but with their lives. Christian teachers assume the role of being faithful role models and mentors of their students faith. This requires them to know the students beyond the confines of a classroom or group setting, demonstrating a willingness to become personally engaged with students one-on-one in a discipling relationship. Praying for students, giving attention during times of spiritual or personal need, and spending time over coffee just sharing about life and faith are part of fulfilling this ministry role of a teacher.

Fourth, the teacher must be a servant leader in the church. Given the nature of the church, teachers automatically assume

the mantle of leadership. Most Christian education occurs in the context of the local congregation, and those who assume the role of teacher in the church likewise assume the role of servant leader. Teachers are perceived as leaders by those they teach, and in many respects their instruction is recognized as the official voice of the church since their ministry is part of the infrastructure of the church. In fact, 1 Tim 3:2 (see Titus 1:9–11) requires that congregational leaders be "able to teach" as part of fulfilling their leadership responsibilities. As servant leaders, teachers understand that their instruction is to be used in the service of the congregation, God's people. They understand their teaching is in the service of the class and congregations. Teachers must be faithful to the theology of their congregation, and as servant leaders they must use their position to uphold the beliefs, practices, and direction of the congregation. Teachers do this best when they understand their place in the ministry of the church. As servant leaders teachers must also realize that their influence goes beyond the walls of the classroom or group setting. Teachers are not only servants but leaders.

Finally, the teacher must be a learning specialist, knowing the students and the curriculum. A Christian teacher, as one called by God and authorized by the congregation to be a biblical instructor and mentor, also assumes the responsibility of teaching well. To this end teachers must have an intimate knowledge of their students' faith and lives as well as the curriculum they use to instruct them. Teachers who do not assume this role inevitably approach teaching as a stale and routine method of generic information dissemination without taking into account the specific needs of their students or the nature of the instructional materials. As learning specialists they endeavor to know their students (as would a mentor) and make the appropriate use of Scripture (students of God's Word) to address their lives and spiritual needs. Teachers who assume this role intentionally spend time with other teachers, sharing ideas and seeking new materials and methodologies for classroom use, rather than

settling for whatever the congregation may provide as a basic curriculum.

THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT

Christian educators first and foremost understand that their students are more than what developmental theories can determine. Developmental*ism*, as an approach to comprehending human nature or speculating about spirituality, is insufficient for Christian educators. We understand the essential nature and identity of students to be as those who are God's image bearers. Students are made in God's image. They are valuable to God regardless of their spiritual status (lost, immature, or mature). With this core understanding of the student's human nature, what can teachers reasonably expect from students? What role should students understand themselves to assume as part of the learning environment? The students' role is directly tied to the learning objective being addressed by the teacher since with each of the three basic learning objectives the students assume a new role in the learning process. If we reflect on Figure 11.1, each objective places on the student an assumed role in the learning environment.

- *Education for Worldview:* The Student as Learner—the Teacher as Knowledgeable Instructor
- *Education for Character and Piety:* The Student as Disciple—the Teacher as Pastoral Mentor
- *Education for Service:* The Student as Apprentice—the Teacher as Trainer-Coach

Of course, the principle aim of a Christian's life is to glorify God, and hence that becomes the central expectation and role of a student. How is this done by a student in an educational setting? A student moves toward having an increasingly God-centered life in three main ways: (1) diligently studying God's Word; (2) being a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ; and

(3) becoming an equipped servant of the kingdom. All three of these are explained more fully below.

First, the student is a learner, shaping the Christian mind. Students must assume the role of learners, those who are responsible for committing their minds to knowing God's Word so as to develop a Christian mind-set. In this instance the teacher is an instructor to the students. In order to fulfill this role, students must develop four learning qualities. (1) Students must be *attentive* learners, hearing the instructions of their teachers and demonstrating a willingness to listen and learn. It is difficult to learn if one is unwilling to listen. (2) Students must be *respondent* learners, who not only listen but engage with the instructor in posing questions and in desiring to comprehend what is being taught. It is difficult for students to learn if they do not raise critical questions and seek clarification. (3) Students must eventually become *participatory* learners. As learners increase in their knowledge and comprehension, it is possible for them to engage in an informed dialogue with one another. While the teacher is still involved with the instructional process, students should mature to the point that they are capable of teaching one another through intelligent dialogue. Students cannot learn if they do not eventually become active participants in a learning community. (4) Students must ultimately become *self-directed* learners, possibly becoming teachers themselves. As students mature intellectually, they develop the traits of self-directed, lifelong learners who are no longer directly dependent on the guidance of an instructor. They cannot be learners if they don't develop the disposition and skills to search for answers independently. In short, the role of students as learners is in itself a fluid one since it changes as students intellectually develop from dependence on the instructor to an interdependence with each other. Ultimately, independent learners become teachers themselves.

Second, the student is a disciple, shaping the Christian heart. As students endeavor to pattern their lives to what God has

revealed in Scripture, they transform their lives into the image of Jesus Christ. This is a lifelong, cumulative effect of assuming the role of a disciple, one who orients his heart toward God. In this case the teacher assumes the role of a mentor, one who provides guidance in matters related to the integration of faith into life. Rather than the sage on the stage, the teacher becomes the guide at the side. As a disciple studies Scripture, every stage of his life is addressed. For example, as one reads Eph 5:21–6:10 throughout his life, different messages surface and find new applications to life. As a child, "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (6:1) becomes a highlighted theme. As one grows older and marries, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands" (5:22) or "Husbands, love your wives" (5:25) is quite applicable. Still later, when one becomes a parent, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger" (6:4) becomes a resounding admonition. On each occasion Scripture's content does not change, but its applicability addresses our faith needs at every stage of life. This devotional use of Scripture, or engaging in personal theological reflection, is associated with being a disciple. Students must assume the role of a disciple to make use of the Scriptures to transform their lives.

Third, the student is an apprentice, shaping the Christian servant. To be a wholly devoted follower of Christ, the student must assume responsibility for participating in the ministry of the congregation. Without this role students will lack the spiritual satisfaction of serving others as the church. In this case teachers assume the role of trainer-coach, and the student becomes their apprentice. Learning to serve in the church requires more than a classroom orientation and instruction effectively to engage in ministry. Learning to evangelize requires that one be taken on an evangelistic call by someone who is proficient at evangelism. Learning to be a teacher requires that one observe and be observed by an experienced, competent teacher. Serving as a leader in the congregation should be preceded by a period as an apprentice with a mature and capable congregational leader.

If a student is unwilling to assume the role of apprentice, it may indicate an unteachable spirit, one that does not see the necessity or value of being trained by an experienced person. Students assume the role of apprentice when they recognize the need for instruction beyond the classroom in order to participate in congregational ministry.

What keeps these roles in balance? Just as the objectives they reflect are held in balance by a God-centered life, the desire of the student to be a Christian who lives a God-centered life keeps these roles in balance. These three roles—learner, disciple, and apprentice—are all centered on becoming a more complete and fulfilled Christian. If this purpose can be kept in focus, the roles will be kept in balance with each other.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TEACHER AND THE STUDENT

How do students and teachers interact? From a Christian perspective, relationships are a reflection of the trinitarian God in whose image we were created. Hence, the teacher-student relationship is not simply a means of enhancing educational effectiveness but a necessity of participating in a God-centered education. As previously mentioned, the teacher may assume a different role with a student, such as being a knowledgeable instructor, pastoral mentor, or trainer-coach, each with a different relational dynamic. However, our theological foundations provide four basic principles that shape the relationship shared by teachers and students in any circumstance.

First, the teacher-student relationship is one of respect. Regardless of the student's spiritual or social status, or the student's race, gender, or ethnicity, he is made in God's image; and since this is true, he must be treated with respect. R. Habermas identified three "practical dimensions" of the *imago Dei* in the teacher-student relationship: (1) It facilitates a "transformed attitude" toward others. (2) It requires "transformed behaviors" as to how a student treats others. (3) It engenders a "greater

appreciation for diversity" among all of humanity.[2] Because of these dimensions, students must be treated fairly and indiscriminately and given equal opportunities to succeed. They must never be shunned or intentionally embarrassed but should always be shown respect from the Christian teacher.

Second, the teacher-student relationship is primarily spiritual. If the Holy Spirit has any role in Christian education, particularly in the area of teaching and learning, then the relationship shared by the teacher and student must be a spiritual one. The spiritual facet of the teacher-student relationship is the primary dimension of any Christian relationship. Regardless of how many other ways we may relate to another Christian, the primary relationship is one of spiritual siblings in Christ. Before believers become students of a certain teacher, they are that teacher's brothers and sisters in Christ. The primacy of being spiritual siblings with students causes the teacher not only to respect students further as Christians—members of Christ's body—but also to recognize their mutual dependence on Christ for their salvation and continued transformation. It reminds the Christian teacher that intellectual achievement as a learner, moral excellence as a disciple, and practical competence as an apprentice are secondary to the student's relationship with God. We are brothers and sisters in Christ regardless of anything else that may enter into the relationship.

Third, the teacher-student relationship is a formative one. Teachers understand that, while they and their students are colearners and spiritual siblings in Christ, teachers are more advanced than the students. In the teacher-student relationship the teacher is the leader, and the student is the follower. It is the teacher's task to lead the student into a more mature relationship with God, one which teachers presumably already possess, which means that the relationship is a formative one. Teachers must on occasion assess the degree of spiritual maturity in the student and seek to aid in the spiritual formation process. In many instances the teacher must believe in the student more

than the student believes in himself or herself. Teachers assume the responsibility of building a relationship with students as a means of advancing the students intellect, disposition, and competencies in the service of God, and of conforming their lives to God's Word.

Fourth, the teacher-student relationship is ecclesiastical. Since most of Christian education is done in the context of a congregation or a church-related institution, the relationship between the teacher and the student is one that exists in an ecclesiastical context. This refers to the context of the Christian community wherever it may be assembled, not to a building. The relationship shared by the student is also one of comembers of Christ's body, the Church. Teachers and their students are among the people of God, so both are called to be servants—not *in* the church but *as* the church. Both students and teachers are endeavoring to mature in all dimensions of their spiritual lives to become able-bodied servants *as* the Church. As the Church their relationships have a common identity and context in which they learn, live, and labor. Hence, teachers and students are to be churchmen and churchwomen. They do not simply seek to serve one another, nor to advance an institutional agenda, but to advance God's mission—something beyond all of them that requires the joint commitment of both teachers and students.

THE CURRICULUM CONTENT

When one sees the word *curriculum,* it often conjures up the image of a packet of materials purchased from a publishing company, such as a 13-week week curriculum for a Sunday school class or a book with a leader's guide for a small group. While these images are partially accurate, they do not do the term justice. *Curriculum* comes from the Latin *currere*, which literally means "to run" and indicates the course of one's studies or the direction of one's race in life, such as in preparing a *curriculum vita*. Curriculum is the manifestation of education, as Figure 11.2 on the next page depicts.[3]

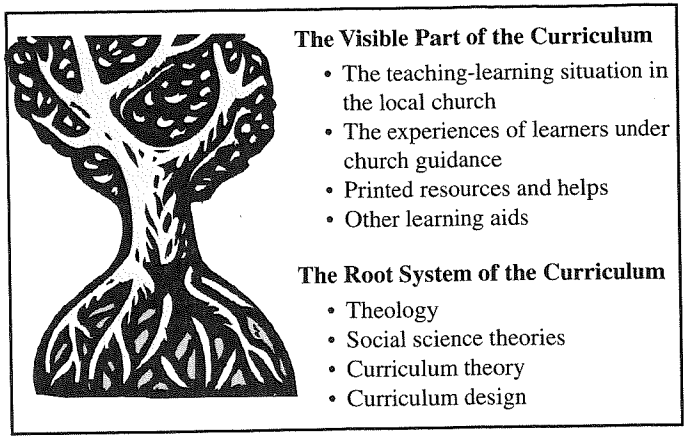

Figure 11.2: Curriculum and Education

D. C. Wyckoff explained curriculum as "the plan and program by which the church seeks to fulfill its educational imperative," including programs, theory, design, content, and materials.[4] It is the capstone of education in the church, the ideal expression of everything educational. In fact, the journal *Educational Leadership* is almost exclusively about curriculum development. So what is Christian curriculum?

Christian curriculum must advance the transformative objective of Christian education since it is tied to the God-centered purpose and transformative learning objectives previously mentioned. There are six principles for curriculum content.

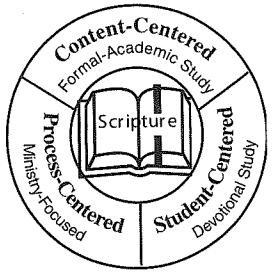

Figure 11.3: Scripture-Centered Content

The first principle is that Scripture is the essential focus of the content. As the Word of God, it contributes to the various functions of fulfilling the objectives of Christian education. Christian curriculum provides its users significant engagement in Scripture on every level of instruction (see Figure 11.3).

While each objective may make a different use of it, Scripture is nonetheless the central content of a Christian curriculum. The content-centered approach is aimed at making students master the actual content of Scripture and theology and further develop their theological reasoning abilities. A student-centered approach would aim students toward making use of Scripture devotionally or as a source for theological reflection. Even the process-centered approach toward education, designed primarily to equip students with ministry skills, would make use of Scripture to explain the rationale, motive, and "oughtness" of Christian ministry. It would be difficult to assess any curriculum as being "Christian" if it in fact omitted Scripture.

The second principle is that curriculum content must engage Scripture in an ever-increasing depth of study. The continuous study of Scripture on the same level or depth is insufficient to advance Christian maturity. This is not simply a pragmatic necessity but one reflected in the biblical foundations of education and in our concept of human salvation and sanctification. Educational theorists have developed taxonomies for knowing (cognitive learning domain),[5] valuing (affective learning domain),[6] and doing (psychomotor or behavioral learning domain)[7] that demonstrate an ever-increasing depth of learning, requiring a curriculum to facilitate the development of such depth (see Figure 11.4). Peter wrote, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good" (1 Pet 2:2–3). Scripture frequently uses the metaphor of milk versus solid food or meat, often condemning the lack of growth in a congregation (1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12–13). But what if a congregation is guilty of not providing anything but milk? Would this not stifle Christian growth? Education programs that offer the same level of instruction in a variety of formats are not providing an ecology for growth since people could involve themselves in every avenue of instruction offered by the congregation yet never be fed in such a way as to grow spiritually.

Cognitive Taxonomy (Bloom)	Affective Taxonomy (Krathwohl, Bloom, Masia)	Psychomotor Taxonomy (Simpson)
I. Knowledge • Of specifics • Ways and means of dealing with specifics • Universals and abstractions in a field **II. Comprehension** • Translation • Interpretation • Extrapolation **III. Application** **IV. Analysis** • Elements • Relationships • Organizational Principles **V. Synthesis** • Production of a unique communication • Production of a plan, or proposed set of operations • derivation of a set of abstract relationships **VI. Evaluation** • Judgments in terms of internal criteria • Judgments in terms of external criteria	**I. Receiving (Attending)** • Awareness • Willing to receive • controlled or selected attention **II. Responding** • Acquiescence in responding • Willingness to respond • Satisfaction in response **III. Valuing** • Acceptance of a value • Preference for a value • Commitment **IV. Organization** • Conceptualization of a value • Organization of a value system **V. Characterization by a Value or Value Complex** • General set • Characterization	**I. Perception** • Sensory stimulation • Cue selection • Translation **II. Set** • Mental • Physical • Emotional **III. Guided Response** • Imitation • Trial and error **IV. Mechanism** (habitual) **V. Complex Overt Response** • Resolution of uncertainty • Automatic performance

Figure 11.4: Learning Taxonomies

The third principle is that curriculum content must be owned by the congregation and/or institution. Curriculum is not something that can simply be purchased. When taken seriously, curriculum is the expression of the congregation's educational ministry and even culture. M. Harris described the church as God's curriculum for transforming lives into God's people.[8] When one grasps the truth that the church is the people of God, the development of a curriculum uniquely and specifically designed for a congregation becomes even more pressing. While congregations may share a common theological understanding of the nature of the church (see chapter 10), each one is inimitable in its individual character or path in adhering to the pattern described in Scripture; hence, no canned curriculum can suffice for the congregations. Within each congregation, a team (whether it be a committee, board, or task force) must be responsible for identifying learning objectives and assessing how well the congregation's curriculum content adheres to those objectives so as to give ownership of the teaching ministry to the congregation.

The fourth principle is that curriculum content must aid the student in building a relationship with Jesus Christ. Curriculum also possesses an often neglected personal dimension. While it is easy to regard curriculum content as nothing more than the selected topics of study being taught in sequence at an increasing depth, Christian curriculum ultimately aids at building a relationship with Jesus Christ. Relationships are between people, not things. The curriculum in many respects is aimed at introducing Jesus to the students and building a relationship with him throughout their lives. Thus, regardless of the subject matter, the curriculum must point individuals to Jesus Christ and help them establish a more lasting and meaningful relationship with him. While this principle is perhaps most readily applicable to the affective learning domain—personal piety and character—it is likewise necessary for the other domains. This can be done in several ways, such as referring to Jesus as a "who" and not a "what," drawing examples from the life of

Christ as it relates to the session's content, closing the class with a brief discussion on how the day's lesson aided their relationship with Jesus, and most obviously by studying the life of Jesus and Christology.

The fifth principle is that curriculum content is in part reliant on the work of the Holy Spirit. No matter how gifted the teacher, no matter how elaborate the facilities, no matter how sophisticated the instructional methodologies—none of these can replace the work of the Holy Spirit in the learning process. The Holy Spirit is at work in the life of the teacher as well as the student, so he has an integral part in the teaching-learning process. The selection, preparation, lesson planning, and presentation of the curriculum materials are thus in part reliant on the ever-present leading of the Holy Spirit in the life and ministry of the teacher—not to mention the work of the Holy Spirit in enlightening students about application (1 Cor 2:10–16). For this reason teachers should not only stay in tune with the lives of their students but also with their own spiritual lives. Furthermore, they should pray for the Holy Spirit's leading in their lesson preparation and be open to his influence in their teaching ministry.

Finally, the sixth principle is that curriculum content must be future focused. As Christians, we not only have a heritage and a history but a future as well—an eschatological perspective. Christian curriculum, and particularly its content, should not only strive to root the Christian individual and congregation in the historical heritage of our faith, including the biblical pattern for the Christian life, but it should also recognize the need to prepare Christians for the future. Christians must be prepared to address new questions and challenges to their faith, so the curriculum content must prepare them to know the essentials of the faith and to think theologically about life, culture, and spiritual issues. Curriculum would require Christians to study eschatology and to become familiar with the implications of adhering to a particular eschatological viewpoint. Such implications may

include content on evangelism and world missions, seeking social justice and reform, personal piety in terms of relationships between Christians in their communities, and the impact of the congregation on its culture. Such a curriculum calls the Christian to view world history as *his*-story, asking where God is involved in contemporary world events and practicing theological reflection on history. Curriculum content should be formulated in anticipation of the future and what believers need to thrive in their spiritual lives.

The Place of the Scriptures in Scope and Sequence

In terms of curriculum, scope refers to the parameters of the curriculum, its limitations, while sequence refers to the specific order in which content will be addressed. A question unique to Christian educators is the relationship of the Bible to other subjects within the scope and sequence of the curriculum. This applies to every educational situation but most specifically to formal educational settings, such as a Christian school or institution of higher education (college, university, or seminary).[9] What is the Scripture's "place" in the scope and sequence?

The first possible response is that the Bible is part of the curriculum; it is one topic of study among others with all topics being treated equally (Figure 11.5a). This may be similar to some public schools or higher education institutions that offer "Bible as literature" or "religion" courses. In this instance the Bible is an interesting topic of study, but it is not given any special or unique attention more than any other topic.

The second option is that the Bible could be considered the whole curriculum, using the Bible to the omission and intentional exclusion of other topics (Figure 11.5b). This may be typical of Sunday schools, small groups, or a Bible institute curriculum. In this instance the Bible is regarded so highly that it leaves no room for the study of other subjects, even to the point of excluding them from the curriculum.

A third option is to integrate the Bible into every subject of study so that it is not an independent field of study. For example, biblical or theological insights may be included as one studies history, geography, literature, biology, and so forth; but the Bible would not receive separate attention (Figure 11.5c). At one time a noted Christian school curriculum publisher did not produce a Bible study module but included the Bible and other Christian materials in all their other curriculum materials, such as studying creation in science, biblical literary forms in English, and Christian missionary work in world history.

While all these potential places of the Bible in the scope and sequence of the curriculum have merit, for many evangelicals they are simply insufficient, particularly for institutions of Christian higher education. A preferred place of the Bible is as the interpreter of subjects *and* as the subject for interpretation (Figure 11.5d). In this curriculum Scripture is given due attention as an independent field of study, as in the first two options mentioned previously, and Scripture (along with theology) provides the proper perspective for the interpretation of the other fields of study, as would be the case in the third option.

This fourth option has all the strengths of the former three

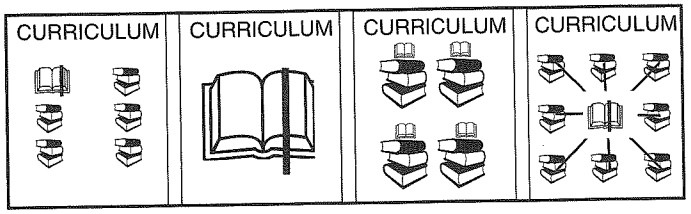

Figure 11.5a-d: Bible in the Curriculum

while minimizing their innate weaknesses. It provides for the scriptural focus of Christian education's curriculum while providing due attention to other fields of study but from a biblical perspective.

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND METHODS

Oftentimes, when one thinks of Christian education, classroom settings and instructional methods immediately come to mind. However, these items directly flow from the learning objectives and the curriculum design (see Figure 11.6). On a purely practical level, the "best" learning environment and instructional methodology is the one that most effectively and readily achieves the desired learning objective.

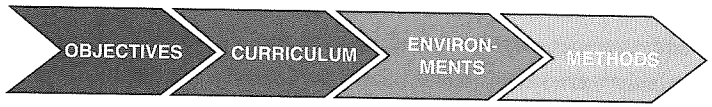

Figure 11.6: Objectives, Environments, and Methods

For example, is classroom lecture a poor teaching method? If the objective is the transfer of Bible content, lecture in a classroom setting is the preferred method. If the objective is building relationships with other Christians, lecture in a classroom setting is among the least preferred methods of instruction since building relationships favors a less formal environment and a method that facilitates dialogue between participants. The learning environment and the instructional methods are interrelated since one can detract from or contribute to the other's effectiveness. Excellent settings do not ensure learning without excellent instruction, nor do excellent settings make up for poor instruction. The best learning occurs when the learning environment and the instructional methodology coalesce into an optimal setting for learning. G. C. Newton commented when writing about the Holy Spirit and learning:

> Learning experiences such as Moses by the burning bush, Jews in the tabernacle or the temple, Jesus and his disciples at the Sea of Galilee, the early disciples in the upper room, Paul and Silas in the jail at Philippi, or Paul and the philosophers in the midst of the Areopagus illustrate the importance of environment related to the learning of truth. Both the teacher and the learner cooperate with the Holy Spirit by strategically designing the physical and aesthetic aspects of a learning environment to allow the Holy Spirit freedom to accomplish his purposes.[10]

If the learning environment and instructional methods are to facilitate spiritual formation so as to mature the individual Christian (and the congregation) into Christlikeness, several basic principles need to be considered regarding both. The overarching principle is that the educational priorities are the learning objectives and the students, not the learning settings and methods. Once again, since the appropriateness of learning settings and methods are contingent on the learning objectives and the learner, Christian educators *first* have to ask, "What learning objectives are we trying to achieve with what set of students?" and *then* ask, "What setting and methods are most conducive to accomplishing these objectives?" With this in mind, three general principles can be made regarding learning environments and instructional methodologies. While these principles may seem to be purely practical, they are in fact derived from our understanding of the church as the people of God, the context of Christian education, and our understanding of human beings as students.

The first principle is that a congregation must have multidimensional programs to achieve balance in spiritual maturity. Christian education is more than Sunday school. It is also more than small groups, or just training, or just a church library, or just discipleship, or just mentoring. Christian education that is one-dimensional in its approach to programming on many occasions undermines the effectiveness of the ministry. The only way in which a single educational program could appropriately address all three objectives is in two instances. (1) The

objectives are minimized so as to allow one education program to address all three. For example, a congregation may only use small groups, but in order to use them exclusively as its education program, it minimizes its goals under the worldview objective, in effect lowering its expectations of cognitive learning. In this situation the small-group ministry may seemingly address all three objectives. (2) The single educational program in effect has three different kinds of curriculum functioning in it, so that it really has three educational programs under one label. For example, a congregation may have only the Sunday school as an education program, but if it had some elective classes that are content based, others that are more experientially based, and still other Sunday school classes focused on equipping individuals to serve, then the one education program would be addressing the three general learning objectives of the Christian education ministry. In effect, three different programs exist. The point is simply that congregations should not limit their educational programming to any single, exclusive ministry; rather, they should develop alternative educational programs to address more fully the learning objectives.

The second principle is that a congregation must have multilevel educational programs to ensure continued growth toward spiritual maturity. How does this differ from the above mentioned point? Just as a congregation should have more than one educational program, each program must progressively delve deeper into the learning objectives if continual maturation in Christ is to occur. As previously mentioned in reference to curriculum, the congregation's education program should progressively build toward more advanced levels of learning, moving through the learning taxonomies. This requires congregations intentionally to develop programs designed for some and not for others. D. Willard once commented, "I'm waiting to find a Sunday school that actually has prerequisites," calling for the need of multilevel educational programs in the congregation.[11] How deep would your congregation promote spiritual growth?

What ceilings are present in your educational programming? These questions are not just about how many opportunities for education you provide but about how they differ in terms of expectations of the teacher, the curriculum, and the students' role and participation.

The third principle is that a congregation must have multiple learning environments to support the learning objectives and students. Because of the multidimensional and multilevel education program, a variety of learning environments and instructional methodologies will naturally be employed to address the needs of these programs. For example, in terms of learning settings, classrooms may be regarded as more suitable for cognitive outcomes, whereas a small-group setting, such as a home, may be more suited for developing relationships in the affective domain, and "in the field" may be more advantageous for ministry training. Any learning environment, whether it is a classroom, home, or school, is a microcosm of the church. It is not an appendage or a separate entity; it must reflect the character of the church as the people of God.

Similarly, instructional methodologies vary depending on the learning objective. Without listing teaching methods, which is all too common in Christian education texts, D. Lambert provided one cautionary note:

> What is the absolute worst teaching strategy in the world? Lecture? Osmosis? Memorization? Exams with 100 multiple-choice questions? Long essay questions? Anarchy? The answer is . . . none of the above. The world's worst teaching method is the one you always use, no matter what it is or how well you do it. . . . If you don't know what your favorite teaching method is, ask your students—they'll know.[12]

Any instructional method, whether lecture, discussion, or self-study, must be used to promote the spiritual formation of the student. The key issue of method selection is one of "fit." Does

the method fit the learning objective, the students (in terms of life need, developmental level, commitment), and the teacher's capability to use it. If these three basic criteria are met, then instruction should be effective and beneficial to all involved.

THE MEANS OF EVALUATION

Evaluation is in fact a simple matter if you have something to evaluate! If the Christian educator has: (1) a concrete understanding of the purpose and objectives of Christian education, (2) an expectation of the roles and relationships between the teacher and the learner, (3) the specific learning goals of the curriculum, and (4) a solid grasp of how each program in the congregation is designed to facilitate the accomplishment of all this, then evaluation becomes a simple matter of asking: "Are we doing it?" "How well are we doing it?" "Where are the occasions for commendations and the necessity of change?" Once again, evaluation is predicated on what you already have in place; and if it is there, evaluation is a simple matter. Christian educators must evaluate everything previously mentioned in this chapter if they are going to gain a comprehensive portrait of the ministry's achievement.

Many times the idea of evaluating Christian education in the church is met with resistance on two fronts. A theological reaction is, Is evaluation Christian? A practical reaction is, How can one evaluate a church ministry? Evaluation is not only a practical necessity for advancement of Christian education in the church (what some may call a necessary evil), but it is also a theological necessity for the people of God.[13]

Is Evaluation Christian?

If we evaluate Christian education, are we not ultimately judging those who volunteer to serve in programs and those who wrote curriculum? Evaluation is by no means contradictory to the injunction of Jesus, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matt 7:1). In fact, Jesus clarified his own statement in

the following verse, voicing concern about an *unfair* and *unilateral* critical attitude: "For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (v. 2). In another instance Scripture calls Christians to evaluate and assess individuals' character and worthiness to serve as leaders.[14]

Christian educators can evaluate without being judgmental. This can be done by grounding our evaluation in our theology. Four theologically informed criteria can readily guide us in assessing Christian education in the church, whether it is a program, learning, or personnel: (1) Does it bring glory to God? (2) does it edify the body? (3) Is it compatible biblically and theologically with distinctively expressed Christian beliefs? Finally, (4) does it encourage and aid in the personal development of the individual? With such an approach, evaluation can be a very Christian activity, one beneficial to the individual participant.

In short, when evaluation is approached in a Christian manner, it is not a judgmental sentencing of individuals, curricula, programs, or ministries. Rather, if it is approached in a spirit of collaboration, and follows carefully determined, theologically informed criteria, it contributes to the spiritual maturing of the individual, the ministry, and the congregation.

How Can One Evaluate a Church Ministry?

As previously mentioned, with each of the items in this list of essential educational components is an implicit criterion. Such criteria may be stated in terms of the following questions: How well does the Christian education ministry

- fulfill its purpose of glorifying God?
- transform individuals into the likeness of Christ?
- fulfill its learning objectives (cognitive, affective, and behavioral)? What are the students learning?
- staff its programs with effective teachers? Are our teachers capable?

- promote positive relationships between teachers and students?
- focus its curriculum on Scripture?
- develop a multidimensional or multilevel program?
- utilize diverse instructional methodologies?

With such questions Christian educators can assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of their ministry, curriculum, programs, and personnel.[15] How can such an evaluation occur? From where does the information come? Should we rely on personal experience, anecdotal insights, and subjective feelings? While these are not to be excluded from assessment, a more systematic and formal method of evaluation would be beneficial to consider. Three general principles of evaluation help guide Christian educators in conducting reasonable and insightful evaluations.

First, listen to multiple voices in evaluation. Evaluation occurs on many levels: self-evaluation, subordinate evaluation, peer evaluation, and superior evaluation. No single voice provides the complete picture, but each voice is important. For example, if a teacher thinks he is incapable of doing his job well—even if his students love him, peers admire him, and superiors appreciate him—his self-evaluation must be taken seriously. In this instance sharing with the teacher the comments and evaluations of others may provide invaluable encouragement to the teacher. Hence, it is important to have more than one voice in evaluation and to listen to each voice with care.

Second, use both quantitative and qualitative means of evaluation. Quantitative assumes the evaluation is somehow numerical since quantities are given in terms of numbers. Qualitative assumes evaluation is to some extent verbal since it is given in terms of words. Using one or the other may provide good feedback, but using both provides a more comprehensive picture of what is occurring. For example, what if you give a survey (numerical data) that asks, "On a scale of 1 to 5, how

intellectually challenging is this Sunday school class?" What does it means when the class responds with a 1.7? While the number should give a signal for follow-up, that is virtually all it does. By itself it cannot explain why this class gave such a low response. Christian educators may want to follow up the quantitative survey with a qualitative instrument, such as a focus group or interview that asks, "In what ways is the class intellectually challenging? How is it not? What would you change to improve its intellectual challenge?" This kind of information would enable Christian educators to gain a more thorough, accurate, and helpful picture of the classroom than just relying on one or the other set of insights.

Third, evaluation is not beneficial without follow-up as a pastor. Evaluation is worthless without rendering a decision based on it. Evaluation calls for either commendation, change, or at least affirmation. Without follow-up, evaluation is a meaningless exercise. However, as a minister, the Christian educator must follow up with a pastoral approach, especially when addressing individuals with less than desirable evaluations. For example, R. Wicks commented about evaluating an individual's performance in the congregation as an opportunity for spiritual growth:

> To grow spiritually, feedback from others is essential. We often back away from this process because we are frightened of what we might hear. Our anxiety is an indication once again that we have centered ourselves on something or someone less than God. It is a sign that we have set ourselves up to filter out the positive and emphasize the negative—to hear praise as a whisper and negative comments as thunder.[16]

Approaching evaluation from a Christian perspective that is conducted in a pastoral manner makes evaluation of Christian education an avenue for improving both the program and the people involved in it.

CONCLUSION

Christian education is an applied theological discipline. It is not systematic theology, but as a practical ministry of the church it is indeed theological at its core. As Christian educators, it may appear that we live in two worlds, one theological and one practical. However, through this book, and this chapter in particular, we have endeavored to demonstrate that these two worlds are not as distant and distinct as once thought. We are not called to be Christians and educators but Christian educators. Our field is not Christian and education; it is Christian education. By engaging the theological beliefs of the church as we develop our education ministry, we ensure that it will be a *Christian* education.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How well documented is your church's ministry of education? Where does it spell out its approach to the teaching ministry?
2. What implications does this theory have for teacher/sponsor training? How would you communicate this to them?
3. What implications does this theory have for how you administrate Christian education? How does your administration ensure that education is indeed Christian in your congregation?
4. Who is responsible for developing your congregation's approach to education? What routines or procedures should be developed to review continually your congregation's philosophy of education?

ENDNOTES

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11 D. Willard, Plenary Address, North American Professors of Christian Education annual meeting (Orlando, FL), October 2004.

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14 Luke 7:43; 1 Cor 5:12; 1 Tim 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Pet 5:1–4.

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16 R. J. Wicks, "Spirituality and Ministry," *The Princeton Theological Bulletin* 12 (1991): 24.