



Transcriptions

A Developmentalist Looks at Christian Education

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Annotation: *Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, January 30, 1981.* As a developmentalist Ward does not deny the important of knowledge as information; but in his view information facilitates development. Information acquisition is not an end in itself. The end of education is obedience—knowledgeable, critical conscience-based obedience, an obedience to truth. Ward concludes that education, then, cannot be something that occurs outside the life experiences of people, and that it is appropriate for all the people of God to take seriously their theological education.



We're here to talk about the whole field of Christian education today and specifically some of the problems associated with being effective in ministry in local parish situations and I trust that we will have a good time of discussion. I will attempt to launch that by giving you some sidelong glances at some of my concerns and preoccupations; and I suspect you might say, even less graciously, some of my biases.

As an educator, I've been very uneasy with some of the things that fly under the flag of Christian education and in many respects I'm aware of the Christian formation and discipleship nomenclature here as being an attempt to get an alternative focus so that one does not instantly buy into all the tradition and history that has come to roost on the field of Christian education. I published in one occasion with *The Scripture Press Ministries* (that's the foundation branch of *Scripture Press*) a little blue volume I was doing one section in it on "Developing Leadership for the Church" a

section on some of these sorts of things we'll talk about today. And the first line I put in it was, "I will confess to being the author of a piece of graffiti that has found its way to the halls of seminaries in various locations of the country. The graffiti 'Christian education is neither.'"

And I went on in that article to suggest that my point was not to be nasty about Christian education but to raise, rather soberly, the question of what constitutes being Christian in education and what constitutes being educational in one's Christian ministry? And there is such a thing as valid education and invalid education, as far as I'm concerned, especially if you take some kind of a clear-cut starting point about what it is that *people* are. I cannot understand how people within a field such as religious education, broadly, and Christian education, in particular, can begin anywhere else but with a creational focus on the nature of the human being. And when one starts there, rather than to start on the institutionalized modes of historical education, one comes up with a very different notion of what Christian education would be about.

Let me say that in other words. In most societies there is a phenomenon known as formal education. In the English-speaking world, formal education usually flies under the general label of, and you know the next word, school. And whether it is at the primary school level or the secondary school level or the college level which is still a kind of school and, heaven help us, when we get into graduate schools and into schools of nursing and medical schools and theological schools we are so imbued with that notion of the schooling model that it is only natural when we think about the development of Christian personhood and think of the role of the church in the development of people we tend to think of Christian education. And if it weren't for the fact that we even have another thing called Christian school we would call them in the church "Christian school." In fact, we do. We stick another word in there in order to be able to use that twice. And we have the interesting distinction in Christian education of using the word school, not only for the day school that the church occasionally sponsors and some churches sponsor, but also for the weekly experience in Christian fellowship and growth—the Sunday school. And then we compound it by, during summers when children are on vacations, we have Vacation Bible Schools and we *school* ourselves to death.

Now am I suggesting that schools are inherently evil or somehow sub-Christian? Some are; some aren't. That's not the issue. The issue is how we begin thinking about the mode of dealing with people. And if we presuppose the schooling modes, it brings a lot of things along in that bargain that we start with. If those same things were to emerge out of another focus, I'd say, well, alright, so be it. But there are a number of things that emerge, not because of a natural process of thinking through how we deal with people; but simply because we have a habituated, acculturated way of imposing a culture-based schooling model.

Now to make it even worse, what we in the Western world call school has its historical and philosophical origin in, not a broad cut of human thought, but in a very particular moment of human tradition. And interestingly that moment of human tradition from which our mental construct school emerges is pre-Christian. It is essentially Hellenistic Greek and it was well established at the time of Christ, and it was part of the Hellenizing that the Roman Empire was doing at the time of Christ. And one of the tactics used consistently by the Hellenizers was the philosophical brainwashing, re-orienting, or whatever, of leading religious thinkers in province after province of the Roman Empire; and the bringing into those provinces of the Empire a basically

Greek view, not only of the Arts, not only of how to build stadia, not only of how to lay out cities, but how to deal with children. And they called it school.

Again, that doesn't make it inherently bad, evil, or out-of-bounds, but it should sober us a little bit to realize that the roots that we use to begin mentally conceptualizing what we should do in religious education has its roots, not in the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, but in the Greek philosophers prior to Christ. And if we look at the life of Christ, we discover that the most Hellenized sectors of the people that he dealt with were the Scribes and the Pharisees who happened to be something of a little bit of a burden from time-to-time, to whom he gave a good bit of attention in terms of some attempts to get them to think again a little bit more in terms of God's Word and Hebrew constructive thought.

Now I don't want to belabor this. I've written several articles that begin with phrases "like Jesus . . ." Or I wrote one article one time that had fairly wide circulation, was picked up in a number of places and it didn't even name the name of Christ. It just simply started out as telling a story. He had a very difficult training task ahead of him. He had only three years to prepare leadership people that would follow him and transform the world. So, of course, the first thing he had to do was to raise money and build a dormitory.

You see, sometimes we look at what Jesus did and said [and say] well, that was in another cultural era, another time, another place, another worldview. I say, well, now, wait a minute. He didn't ride a bicycle either did he? Now Jesus might or might not have ridden a bicycle. We know why he didn't, right? You know and I know why Jesus didn't ride a bicycle. They didn't have any. Now he may have decided for other reasons not to, I'm not suggesting that, but we know he didn't because they didn't have any. But they had schools; they had Greek-style academies. And they were using them for such things as the development of civil service workers and leadership people and so forth in various places in the Roman Empire, and it would not have been at all out of culture for our Lord to build a training academy—a theological school in the Greek style. And he didn't. He walked, he taught, he experienced people, and he took them on Christian camping trips. Yeah? Didn't he? Didn't he? He knew how to use a campfire and he knew how to sleep under the stars and he knew what boats were for and when he got tired enough he'd head for a different mountain. You say, well that was a different time, a different era. I submit that in this moment we live, the Christian education that is the most exciting in local parish ministry fits the description that I have just spun out; because it's in our time that we are rediscovering something of the broader frame of reference about human reality, human development, human spirit that is not best served by the schooling model but is best served by a more open approach to experiences in which human beings share life.

One of the things that distresses me an awful lot—and I don't mean to poke fun or to raise questions or to be nasty, Glen—but it strikes me that some of the things that we do, even in pastoral education, are far-fetched. And that if we're really serious about even saving money, we would take an approach a lot more like Christ used. And maybe that's what's beginning to happen as the money-crunch is beginning to cause the church in North America to take stock of itself and ask the question is all this necessary? Now, I'm not going to get into that one . . . or did I?

But let's just stick with the question of the local parish ministry. Didn't we talk about education that is Christian and Christian education that indeed is education? We ought to be able to think in terms of some sorts of do's and don'ts, some sorts of better and worse some sorts of

notions of what is valuable, more valuable, and less valuable; and we ought to be able to get our act together with reference to why we're doing it. There are a lot of things about the schooling model and the way we use the schooling approaches in even our club work with boys and girls that makes management rather easy. And I suspect that's one reason that we easily go that direction: it is an easy management route. We live in an era where some of our prime criteria of success are quantitative and some of our prime concerns are managerial. God help us; God help us. The Christian ministry to persons must be primarily a qualitative ministry, and our preoccupations should be person-centered not managerial.

Now this again is not to suggest that it's somehow wrong to be an efficient, effective manager. No. Please understand. I'm not that kind of a black-and-white person. I'm trying to simply say it's possible that there are some things that we do that could be re-balanced. I'm not suggesting throwing out of a lot of things that are desirable in order to substitute something else. I'm suggesting that in the great providence of God we're in a time when all over the church—North America and elsewhere—leadership itself is being re-thought. I am reformed enough in my traditions and in my theological training to believe that the Reformation is ongoing and that God is always reforming his church, and that at various eras of time certain foci come clearly to bear on the socio-cultural moment. And if there is anything that is characteristic of mid- and late-twentieth century it is a crisis of leadership in the secular society, and the reconceptualizing of authority, the challenging of authority, and the sorting out of where truth comes from. And even as that is true in the secular society, the response of the church is to get its own house in order and to tack at least one more of the unwritten theses on *The Wittenburg Door*: the big issue of leadership in the church.

I'd like to go through with you more systematically now for a few moments a few things that I believe rather important in considering what it means to be *education* and what it means to be *Christian*. I suggested to the folk putting the program together that we might use some kind of an overall title for this day, "A Developmentalist looks at Christian Education." On the one hand, that's a title that my wife refers to as a dummy title. She says it sounds like it was written by a dummy. It is also a dummy title in the sense that under that you can almost do anything and I'm sure some of you have used dummy titles like that. But it has a little substance in it. You have a right to know where I'm coming from. I'm coming from a set of filters that I believe to be consistently Christian, on the one hand, but I'm willing to argue are shaped by a particular view of the person—a developmental view, particularly a developmental view in contrast with a behavioristic view or in a more extreme form, a deterministic view.

This is perhaps oversimplified and I don't intend to get off into a theology and philosophy lecture here today, but suffice to say if you wonder where I'm coming from and why some of these things sound a little different it's because, within the field of Christian education, there has not been really careful theological philosophizing about our view of man. For some strange reason the field of theology almost abandoned anthropology as a theological construct back a hundred years ago. I can't quite understand it. It has revived, but mostly under missiology as if somehow the study of people is important if you're talking about them. So we find in missiology a lot of focus on anthropology because you have to understand *them*. I submit, as an educator, that the key problem is understanding *us* and theologically the big issue is how do we see the nature of man? And this whole question of the nature of man is not simply a matter of, oh, how do you see man. Man is sinful. Now if someone were to give such a simplistic response to, how do you see God, we would know them to be a phony. But somehow theologians get away with that in the anthropological category

and then we'll spend the next 15 hours writing on the nature of God. I submit that God created man and created as a distinct separate last creative process focus. Take that Genesis account as you will. And a creational commitment by a Christian calls attention and focuses the uniqueness of man as a creature in the image of God; an image that God created into man that is a continually fulfilling sort of image of God, not a once-only and then blighted by sin.

Now I see all human beings are under the curse of sin but the stars are, too. I'm always impressed that the Moody Institute films, as they began, they looked in the natural universe as if somehow that's the way to see the part of the Creation that's not under sin. If I understand the Psalms and the Proverbs, the whole thing's under sin. And there's nothing bad about looking at the nature of man if you're willing to look at anything else that God has done. And, in fact, we can learn something of the grandeur of God by really studying deeply into the nature of man and that gives you an education that is Christian because it carries a great shortage of switches.

To be Christian, Christian education needs first and foremost, I believe because of a creational developmental point of view, a sense of respect for persons that is equivalent to and modeled on that sort of respect that was characteristic of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ was remarkable in his capacity to listen to people and let them identify their need. It's a very interesting exercise to run through the gospels and notice the number of times when Jesus said, Yes, I know fellow. You think that's your problem, but let me tell you what your problem really is. A blind man came to him, says, Jesus, I'm blind. I would like to see. He says, That's fine, fellow, we'll work on that later. First of all I got a spiritual law to lay on you. Remember that? Hezekiah 13: 9. It's right there. You say, that's absurd. That's lampooning the Scripture, and I know it is. Forgive me for it to make the point. There is no case in Jesus' ministry where he did anything other than to let people spell their problems out and deal with them in their terms. Now in his broad public ministries, he focused attention on various issues. Jesus was a multi-mode worker. He did not always persist in the same mode. He did not always say to people, first we got to pull our chairs in a circle, nor did he always say shut up I want to talk. Any mode that we take that says this is the way to do it, is a schooling habit not a Christian education habit.

A Christian education habit begins with a Christ-like respect of persons and it is demonstrated first and foremost in an attentiveness to the way people are viewing themselves. You say we don't do that with little children. My wife does it with 4-year-olds. She is the superintendent of a huge 4-year-old department and I watch her from time-to-time and she does it. And I know from my own work in other levels (I've not worked with 4-year-olds) that it is a way to go, to be attentive, to be responsive, to be aware, to be alert, to be in tune, and to be flexible to move in the directions that people's needs begin to manifest.

Now this does not follow that we always sit down and say well, what do you want to learn today. That caricature should have been thrown out a long time ago and anybody that's ever tried it knows that it doesn't work in those terms. And I don't know of many people who actually do that, that people who are alert and listening may have, in fact, a starting point agenda; but they also have a capacity to bend, to shift, to reorganize, to get better in tune with the people they're dealing with.

Secondly, to be Christian, Christian education needs a creational respect of the handiwork of God. This is somewhat recapitulative with my introduction but let me point out that if an educator, a parent, a teacher, a worker within a Christian education program does not have a respect for the

marvel that exists in every human being; you're dealing with a person who probably is going to create sub-Christian education. We cannot treat people as passive receivers. We cannot treat people as empty to be filled. We cannot treat people as if they were of variable worth, some worth more than others. This is not an appropriate respect for the handiwork of God. God has created all in his image. God has created all with the capacity to develop, to grow, to become something significant. This requires a very different approach than that kind of classifying approach that says we put these here, we put these here, we put these here according to their abilities, according to this, according to this, and according to this. That is a managerial characteristic of much of education and historically education has devolved to a catering to the elite. Face it. In virtually every society, formal education devolved to a catering to the elite—elite in terms of wealth, and elite in terms of certain categories of mental competency, not really a respect for the handiwork of God. To be Christian, Christian education needs a whole life scope. A whole life scope in these words is preoccupied here and referring to the wholeness of development across life.

Stop and ask yourself what does *school* connote. School is something for children with the possible exception of theological school and dental school and some of these others, but the general imagery of school in virtually every society that uses formal education is first and foremost centered in what children need. And I ask you to consider Christian education and reflect on the fact that Christian education in our Western, particularly the Anglo tradition had its great impetus, not from a Reformational view of human development, but from a pragmatic view of hungry, neglected children on the one day a week that they didn't have a place to go in the factory.

Now God bless the Sunday school movement, but I would argue that the Sunday school movement is a seriously inadequate historical route for Christian education and yet it persists. Why does it persist? Not because of the American people's entrancement with the history of the British Empire. There isn't one American in fifty that knows what a British Empire was but, because of the American fascination with children, *that* we do know about. We're one of the many cultures that likes to set apart our children. We even set apart our children into categories. And, by the way, that's a very strange one when you get in many parts of the world. Some parts of the world that have developed as the West don't make a category called "adolescence." They called it "childhood" and "adulthood" and they talk about what we think of as adolescence as young adults. And they expect more from them, they tolerate more among them, and they get development more rapidly. There's a lesson there, but that's beside the point.

Let's go on with the whole life scope that says, if you're serious about formation within the church, you don't limit yourself to a program for children, nor do you model the whole of your Christian education ministry on what you do for children. And I ask you to consider how often you have taken the child schooling model and used it as your thinking point to organize adult ministry. Do you see it? There are mental habits here that are deep, they're in our culture, and they're unchallenged largely within the field of Christian education. Now I speak very pompously as if I'm making discoveries that no one else ever thought of. There are a number of people who have pointed these sorts of issues out over the last 30, 40 years. There are people who will point them out better than I, but that doesn't give me any reason not to be enthusiastic about pointing them out and taking my steps, too, and urging you likewise to consider the whole of this. If anyone suggested that I was either an original fount of knowledge or the greatest thing since fried apples that was their problem not mine. I didn't make such a claim. I share with you concerns that are not altogether original. However, as an educational philosopher in the field of educational research in the secular

arena, I marvel at some of the things that I see people in the Christian education arena putting up with.

A whole life scope takes seriously the developmental stages of the fulfilling life. I find it rather fascinating and in some respects rather sad that it has been in the Sheehy literature and others of the secular source literature that we really have, in our time, a clear focus on these great transformation of points of life and a real clear glimpsing in a new fresh way up-to-date about what really is going on in our society with people as they confront various of the transforming moments in life. Why should it not be leadership within the Christian community perceiving that, sharing that with the whole public? The Christian education public has presumed that its primary publishing target is the Christian audience. I submit that that's a small view of a redemptive work of God in the church. Our target audience is the world and our insights into human nature are for the world. And if we will put a little bit less emphasis on those things that cause us first to look peculiar and to offend people, we have something to offer and we should be about it.

To be Christian, Christian education needs a holistic awareness of the spiritual core of personhood. The human being is a marvelously complex multifaceted being and you know as well as I do that it's possible to segment the human being into body, soul, and spirit as the Bible does in some places, and in spirit and body in other places. And the Bible, by the way, is not consistent on whether the human being is two parts, three parts, four parts, or many parts. And the Bible's own uncertainty about this, I believe, is to signal us to be alert to the fact that there are many ways to slice the concept, human being, and that any one of these will be efficient for some purposes and useless for other purposes. We should not become somehow wedded to some mystical trinitarian notion that says body, soul, and spirit reflects the three persons of the Trinity, and so forth and so on. Look, we need to be very concrete and practical but human beings have, if nothing else, a visible physical reality. I can see it. You got it. You brought it with you today. And like anybody who ever came to a Sunday school class, you can't leave it at the door, even if it wiggles. And any educator, any parent, any helping person who doesn't let the whole physical being get into that learning situation is just plain unfair. We know that. We know that human beings have an emotional aspect and we differ in our emotional aspects.

We have an intellectual aspect and we differ in our intellectual aspect. But the intellectual aspect is not transcendentally important over the physical, and the emotional is not transcendentally important over the whatever, and whatever. This is not the issue. The human being comes with all of it and that's the elegant thing. You don't have to decide what's important and more important and what else. It's all there. It's all real. We need a view of human personhood that accepts that the core of the person is none of those aspects and that to deal with the core you must relate through those aspects. Aspects are like the facets on a diamond: the Physical, the Moral, the Emotional, the Social, the Intellectual. These are the facets. They are not the diamond. The diamond, the substantial diamond that goes on the scale—no matter how many facets—is the spiritual reality. You say, oh boy. That's getting mystical. How in the world can a behavioral scientist live in that kind of realm? No problem at all. Every behavioral scientist puts his faith somewhere because beyond what I can see there is the organizing principle that I use to make meaning out of what I see. And this behavioral scientist is here to tell you that I put my faith in the spiritual core and it clears my mind as to what it is I'm about when I'm in the business of spiritual development. I'm very sympathetic to people that say well, ours is not really a ministry to the physical being. Ours is not really an intellectual ministry, ours is a spiritual ministry. I say great, God bless you. Now tell me how you do

it. And what they generally do as the very next paragraph of stuff is tell you all the intellectual stuff that they use to reach the spiritual, all the logic, all the information, all the knowledge, and all the things, you know. Well, great. I'm awfully glad that the human being has that facet. It is a key facet into the spiritual, but it is but one facet into the spiritual. And if you presuppose that it's the only facet into the spiritual you're going to have a lot of neglect going on as you deal with people. We have to deal with people in their moral thought. We have to deal with them in their social relations, in their emotional composure. But you can't do that in school, for heaven's sake. You get them in there and you give them the information. Exactly. And that's what's wrong. School is primarily a tactic to deal with the intellectual facet and it is seriously inadequate to deal with the whole of human existence.

You say well, what does that mean in practical terms? Go camping. What? Is that all you can say? Listen to kids. Is that all you can say? Have parties. Is that all you can say? Well, how long do you want me to keep reciting this stuff? Those kinds of things you thought of them, too. Recognize them to be valid. Recognize them to be part and parcel of the whole ministry to the whole person and be happy about them.

I see people doing things for Jesus like somehow you have to sneak up on people and you sprinkle a little salt on their tail and then you grab them, which is the old technique for catching dogs, by the way. I tried it; it doesn't work, but it sounds great. We do these things, you know, we have these nice experiences with kids because you have to do that to get their attention. What you really want to do is grab them. That is not a very Christ-like respect of persons. So you see, if I don't have a holistic awareness of the spiritual core of human personhood I probably also won't have this Christ-like respect for persons. And if you take this list home and think about it you'll see that it's a cyclic list. It goes round and round and round on itself and you got to break out somewhere. And what you do is you really get concerned about one of these areas and you begin to say I'm going to work on that. For example, I've seen a lot of Christian education ministries just come alive when they suddenly began to acknowledge that they had young adult singles. And ministry wasn't whole life for those people. I've seen other programs in churches come alive when you recognize the validity of being old and to look particularly at the particular needs of retired people and old folks, especially if you can figure ways to get people from other categories to minister cross-category.

Now I'm not much for homogenized groups and that's not my point. I've seen some good homogenized work but I've also seen some things that were held together by screaming and band-aid. You know, the Christian education leader who has to scream and keep them all herded together because they tend to fly apart and fragment. I feel the same way that I do in my cross-cultural work. When you're dealing with people from several different cultural sets, people quite often are uneasy because they're out of their set unless they're able to affiliate in a primary way with people that are in the same set. We need in the church to recognize that a ministry to whole person requires different sorts of security-building devices appropriate to the individual.

Well, I'm getting off into the whole strategy thing and I want to deal more with the overall principle. So let me run on to four more. That list to be *Christian*: Christian Education Needs. This list to be *Education*: Christian Education Needs. First of all, a focus on the reorganization of experience. How else do you define learning? Oh, lots of other ways. Learning is acquiring information; well, lots of folks, in fact most lay folks who use that mental process to think about education. What is education? Well, that's where you learn lots of things. You acquire information.

An acquisitive view is generally not a developmental view. Just, you know, keep that in mind. You get emphasizing, acquiring of knowledge and you're probably drifting away from a developmental view.

Now this does not mean that a developmentalist is disinterested in knowledge in the informational sense. Sure, we're interested in it, but information becomes facilitative to development. It is not an end in itself. In 1965, when I began working overseas in theological education, I began doing curriculum analyses of pastoral training programs. And much to my surprise and, at that point with tongue in cheek, I reported a kind of a phenomenon that to me didn't really mean much except that I could show you that it was so and I thought it was funny. Approximately 90% of the curricular emphasis in theological education was the memorizations of lists. In other words, if you if you were analyzing (as I was) the curriculum of pastoral preparation, approximately 90% of the learning tasks were list-memorizing tasks. So I was saying to people, okay, I'm not in your bag. I'm not in theological education and apparently you know what you're doing so let's assume that's what you're doing and it makes sense. Let me show you how to do effective teaching of lists. And that was one of my first great contributions to the world—was teaching theological educators how to more effectively teach people to memorize lists. And that began to keep me awake at night. You know, that doesn't seem to have an awful lot to do with what I think a church pastor ought to be. But there were lists: do these things, know these things, here are some kings, here are some words, here are some verbs, here are some . . . oh, wow, marvelous lists, marvelous lists. But I say who in the world ever puts those together in a living way? That's not reorganization of experience; that's the acquisition of information.

Now I can't be honest messing around with that kind of stuff. I got to walk away from it. Because as I look at education or learning or the process of being assisted in learning (which is what I mean education to be) is inevitably the being helped to reorganize one's experience; reorganize it into more and more meaningful wholes. Being able to analyze it; being able to reflect upon it; being able to put it together in more meaningful ways. That's what education is about. And how can Christian education be anything less than that? I don't believe it can.

Christian education needs emphasis on the consciousness of intellectual learning within the context of critical conscience. That's an awful lot of big words. It's the reason I put the transparency up here because I felt guilty about all those big words and I told Roberta before the meeting, I got to have a transparency pen because I'm going to put some big words up there and in the air they're going to sound like so much froth. But every one of those words says something. Emphasis on the consciousness of intellectual awareness helping people come to a conscious awareness of the world that they're in and who they are, and all of that within a context of consciousness.

What's wrong with humanistic education today? It is that the emphasis on intellectual awareness does not carry with it a component of critical consciousness. You draw your critical consciousness out of some kind of theological construct: your view of God. And the person who has no view of God has little ground. He can rush to Plato. He can rush here and there to the philosopher, but quite often he or she really comes up with nothing very adequate to serve as an arbiter. So what do we have? Values clarification, which presupposes along with some of the early Greeks, that the purpose of education is clarification—intellectual clarification. The categories of mind re-organized, labeled effectively; the dichotomizing skills built so that people can classify effectively—and to clarify is the end of education.

I submit that in the Hebrew and in the Christian, in its indebtedness to the Hebrew, the end of education is not clarification but obedience. Now not inherently the obedience of blind obedience but the obedience of knowledgeable, critical, conscience-based obedience—an obedience to proof. And we need, in Christian education, not just clarification, but confrontation on the base of truth and that can be done within a respect of human person. To be Christian or to be education, Christian education needs integration with the socio-cultural context of the person's life walk. And again big words, but they mean something.

Education cannot be something apart. Education cannot be something that occurs outside and in lack of reference to the life experiences of people. Integration with the socio-cultural context refers to education as experience reorganization that tells a person something about what's going on in their lifestyle. It's an extension of my last point: that obedience, then, leads to a transformation of walk. This, I believe, is what the epistle of James was about. I think it was this sense in James that there was already that kind of intellectualization within Christianity that was deeply into the ideas, the language of the Word of God. But James was able to discern, as certainly we can discern today, that there are some who are yes, indeed, hearers of the Word—avid hearers of the Word who are not doers of the Word, and what's the problem? James said the hearers of the Word are like people who get some feedback on themselves and have an opportunity to get a clearer picture of who they are and get a clearer integration of what they're encountering with their lifestyle, but they don't want to look and they walk away promptly forgetting what they saw—the last part of the first chapter of James, the metaphor of the looking in the mirror to see self. The Christian who is the doing Christian by inference is the person who hangs into feedback; the person who wants to see an integration of what he's encountering in his learning experiences in terms of the context of life walk. What difference does it make in the way I behave?

Now we can moralize this one. We can platitudinize this one. We can preach this one. We can tell people what they ought to do, but pretty soon we begin again to demean person: I tell you what you ought to do. That is not respect of person. God himself does not tell you what you ought to do. God gives you choice freedom. God sets principles. God sets instruction before you, but God does not make decisions for you. It is in the educating, the formation of Christian personhood that people encounter that information and make a difference in their lives. And last, to be education, Christian education needs to be a utilization and promotion of praxis as the primary mode of Christian learning. And again some big words, but they mean something.

Just to demonstrate that I'm not altogether against the Greeks, I'll go back and pick up one of their words. And in today's educational context, the word "praxis" is being dusted off, re-polished, and set in its right place. The nature of an educational experience that is education for a Christian is a constant interactive process back and forth between doing and reflecting and doing and reflecting. Jesus himself used this with his disciples. We have a few little microscopic glimpses of what he did in various circumstances. Would that we had more data. But somehow the gospel writers into the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gave us just that much, but I think we're entitled to use it. He sent his disciples into the countryside, into the communities, into the villages for experience. He sent them two-by-two. And I believe he sent them two-by-two, among other reasons and perhaps educationally first and foremost, so that there would be someone else having the same experience; so there'd be someone else to talk with. All animals have the capability of experiencing. The human being experiences and communicates about the experience. That's what it is to be human. We need, in our Christian education, to give people lots of small two-by-two kinds of

experiences—doing things, going places, having encounters with this and that and the other and coming back and, even as Jesus’ disciples did, to process it and talk about it and share it and make meaning of it. They came in and he says: What are you hearing in the countryside? What are people saying about me? And they talked about it. Then he takes another level and says: But what do you think? What are you hearing? What are you encountering? What are you experiencing and what do you mean? These are praxis. What are you encountering? What does it mean? What are you encountering? What does it mean?

One of the most charming questions that you can use as a parent or as an educator is why? Why? In moral development terms we call that the structure process; not, what do you believe is right but, whatever it is that you believe is right, why do you believe that? The probing, not as if attacking, but teasing out so that people learn to verbalize where they’re coming from; what the structure is that underlies their moral premises. Experiences of life everybody is having. What we can do within even meager blocks of time within the religious education experience—even if you are futile-y, fatalistically, deterministically presupposing that you can’t touch kids more than an hour a week—in that hour a week recognize that they’re already having life experiences. Deal with the why first. Help them build the rest of that praxis: the doing and the reflecting, and particularly be concerned with the reflecting that respects their verbalizing and conceiving of the meaning of their experiences. It gives you something substantial to get a hold of, and then it gives something substantial to feed the confrontational truth of the Word of God in truth.