



Facing Educational Issues¹

Ted Ward

Introduction²

For many years, Ted Ward was Professor of Education at Michigan State University [MSU.] His work there in values development in education, Theological Education by Extension (TEE,) and nonformal education became widely known. Over a period of more than two decades, he supervised the doctoral education of dozens of evangelical Christians who have become leaders in various areas of ministry in North America and overseas. Many of these men and women are involved in a variety of Christian education endeavors.

Dr. Ward, especially through his speaking and teaching, has probably been the most influential constructive critic of Christian education from the evangelical perspective during the past 30 years. Now a Professor of Christian Education and World Missions at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, he continues to direct doctoral students and to express his interest in world-wide ministry.

At the time *Church Leadership Development* was produced, Ward was at MSU and was fully engaged as the friendly critic of Christian education. He spoke to groups of church teachers, college leaders, and camp directors. Often his message revolved around the quip that much of “Christian education is neither.” As the reader will see from the excerpt that follows, this was not idle banter.

Professor Ward sees much of Christian education as fragmented rather than holistic, too propositional and not developmental enough, too abstract rather than experiential, and generally undisciplined or lacking in structure. While the issue of leadership is addressed directly in this excerpt, it is an overall perspective on Christian education that Ward is presenting.

The call is for a return to Biblical and theological scholarship on the one hand, and the approach of social science on the other, so that Christian education can be as Christian and as educational as possible. Understanding human development and using its insights in leadership, or any other aspect of ministry, is often an emphasis for Ward. Bringing the Bible and developmentalism together, as in the section dealing with Matthew 23:1-7, is a challenge that has been met by many Christian educators as they respond to the thinking of Ward.

One word of caution: this paper contains strong medicine. It is compounded of a mixture of love and indignation that unfortunately includes traces of foreign particles. These particles, which may be seen as anger or nastiness, have floated through even the smallest pores of one man’s filter of compassion.

This paper is not intended for widespread publication; it is a discussion piece intended for serious professional dialog. The motive is to heal; the procedure is to cauterize, to expose and burn

¹ Ted Ward. Facing Educational Issues. In Eugene S. Gibbs (ed.). *A Reader In Christian Education: Foundations and Basic Perspectives*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), pp. 331-348. Used with Permission.

² This chapter was originally prepared as a paper presented to the National Christian Education Study Seminar, *Church Leadership Development*, (Glen Ellyn, IL: Scripture Press), 1977, pp. 31-46. Mimeographed.

away, so that the process of healing will not be interrupted by the bursting forth of the running sores of secularism that infect the church in North America.

But that is too grand. The paper is not that ambitious, certainly not that adequate. Instead, it is the sharing of a conviction based upon a thesis with which not everyone will agree. May it at least, be given attention and prayerful consideration. The conviction is that the church of Jesus Christ is being inadequately served by its educational components; the thesis is that much or most of the blame lies in the failure of us all to challenge the educational validity and the theological relevancy of the patchwork of programs called “Christian education.”

The author has been heard before on this subject, and since he tends to deal with the theoretical issues first and treat practical matters as being secondary, the activists are often disappointed. With reference to this current paper, a happy condition prevails: it is the middle paper of three; at last, the author is located where he feels most confident: bridging between theological perspectives and practical planning. So the challenge to be completely candid and as thorough as possible, given the space and time restrictions, is warmly accepted. The author may never have a better chance to be blunt.

Let the reader beware!

Problem I: Christian Education

I regretfully confess to being the originator of a little dab of graffiti that has, by now, found its way to the walls of some of the leading theological education establishments of the land: “Christian education is neither.” I do not regret having started this little prank, but I do regret the need for having to raise the challenge. Though there are notable exceptions (some of my best friends are in Christian education), in far too many cases Christian education is neither thoroughly Christian nor soundly educational.

Too many of its programs lack foundation and substance in matters of human development and instructional facilitation; the social science research upon which the formal study of education must be grounded is often neglected. Christian *education*? “Christian programs” might come closer—and one watered-down course in child development plus one confusing excerpt from behaviorism called “educational psychology” doesn’t begin to solve the problem.

As for being “Christian,” the claim is even more farfetched—a handful of proof-texts about the Pentateuchal origins of Christian education (God knows they didn’t have Sunday schools) and, ironically, the mandatory recitals about the central role of home and family. Then the courses push wildly into the mass of programmed activities that tend to divide and isolate families and that reduce the whole marvelous matter of redemption and growing in grace to a series of informational chunks which are to be dumped on people at just the right moments of life. Christian education? At its best, maybe it is; but as I’ve seen it and experienced it in dozens of shapes and forms in various institutions and local churches, “Christian education is neither.”

The educational aspects of the church need to be re-examined and revised. The following complaints cry out for healing; until they are dealt with, nothing much is going to change for the better.

1. Christian education has become a conglomeration of events and programs dealing with bits and pieces of supposedly needed learning. It is *fragmented* when what it needs is to be more comprehensive, thorough, and related to body, soul, and spirit; in short, *holistic*.
2. Christian education is too often *propositional*, concerned with getting the right information into people and conditioning them to make the right responses, when what we really need is an educational environment that is nourishing and *developmental*.

3. Christian education is so often *abstract*, concerned with the disputations of the clergy when people are asking for help with practical matters; the complex life of today demands *experiential* learning.
4. Christian education is *undisciplined* in the sense that it lacks clearly defined disciplinary structure. What exactly is it based on? Is it based on theology? Not even the “Christian colleges” really make good on that, with their devotion to pre-Christian Greek liberal arts maxims. What we need is a new rigor of responsible scholarship, bringing into education for the church a clearer sense of disciplinary linkage with both theology and social science.

Problem II: Leadership

Studying the brochures for leadership training programs, seminars, and conferences leads me to conclude that we have entered the “management era.” Not that this trend is a [bad] thing, but it’s important to know what’s happening to us. Either side of the argument *sounds* good. The church needs efficient management in order to do its work effectively, *or*, the church is not a factory. Since its major reason for being is hard to quantify, management techniques from business and industry are irrelevant. Indeed, truth may lie in between or in some third position; but meanwhile, we have to decide how to respond to the mounting enthusiasm for management by objectives (MBO), linear models of planning for goal achievement, reductionism of calling and mission to individualistic concepts of time management, and all the rest of the spillovers from systems logic as applied to profit-motive competition management.

Government is also being affected by this spillover—and the results are not very good, even in pragmatic terms. In any enterprise where the output cannot be reduced to fairly simple and easily-agreed-upon coinage—such as “the bottom line” of dollar gains over dollar costs or some specific counting of product output. These borrowings from business enterprise are deceptively inappropriate. Insidiously, they focus attention on some one or two criteria of “success” and overlook most anything not closely linked to those particular, narrowly defined criteria. This observation, now widely noted and hotly debated among educational planners, goes a long way to explain the ambivalence of many people about so-called church growth. Surely quantitative growth is a worthy outcome, but does it make a good goal? Except for such planners as those of General Motors, for whom more cars mean more money, simplistic goals can work against the more vital values. One must be concerned about the desirable beauties of life that can be destroyed by making them objectives: having many friends, having a good reputation, enjoying leisure time, to name a few. These are never really achieved if they are primary goals.

The craze to apply management techniques to the church is made more destructive because of the pseudo-scientism from which it gets its own righteousness. One looks hard and far to find more simplistic notions of what science is for! The bringing of scientific understandings to bear on all sorts of issues and problems of human nature and social transactions, in and for the church, is too important to be prostituted as a gimmick.

For example, consider the key problem: confusion between leadership and management. (Even *Time* magazine [November 8, 1976] calls headline attention to this issue.) Granted, it is easier to apply scientific findings to the tasks of management than to the processes of leadership. In the compulsive interest of being scientific, some people simply do a sleight of hand and, hocus-pocus, *leadership* is now management! And, thus, all the “scientific” resources are relevant. But sadly, those who advocate science aren’t very scientific about it! They preach science, but they don’t practice science. Science unfolds in the defining of terms, the describing of phenomena, and the searching for similarities, dissimilarities, and relationships.

Defining

In the interests of science rightly applied and in the best interests of Christian education, the term *leadership* should be defined with care and attention to the Biblical commitments and historical presuppositions of Christianity. *Leadership* is not a precise word. Anything from General Patton's swagger stick to Mahatma Gandhi's shrunken, bony body can be included. Endless-loop debates over what a leader is, what makes a leader, how to train a leader, and so forth, should be adequate warning that the semantic game doesn't pay. For the Christian community, the issue isn't leadership, anyway; it is *servanthood*. "He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all'" (Mark 9:35). But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. *But not so with you*; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves (Luke 22:25, 26 emphasis added). The church must define leadership differently. To do less, especially to borrow the secular frame of reference and concepts, is to secularize the church.

Leadership, as it should be in the church, demands a dynamic definition of the sort that social scientists call a *model*. Leadership is not what one *does* so much as what one *is* within the given contexts of the development of the body of believers. Leadership is not so much bringing people out of a wilderness as it is sharing a journey. This sharing is as a peer. ("But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah" [Matthew 23: 8, 10]) and sharing is to be done as would a servant. In the church, those who lead (better to say *minister*?) are to serve as agents of the Holy Spirit's gifts to the church. Perhaps there are points of similarity between the Christian and the secular definition of leadership, but they are much less important than the points of dissimilarity.

Describing

Judging by the current fads, the following terms constitute a description of the church leader at work: *inducing*, *motivating*, and *congratulating*. With all the emphasis on leading as something to be done *to* people, it is not surprising that the heart of the behavioristic view of human learning finds its way into the church. Indeed, when the role of the leader centers on getting people involved, inducing them to do something that the leader (or "the program") has decided they need to do, and rewarding them selectively for "appropriate" behavior (good works), we see the whole vicious menace not only of philosophical determinism but also of sociological elitism, smack dab in the middle of the sanctuary of God.³ We need to get serious about describing what passes as "leadership" and evaluate it against firm criteria.

As for the criteria, we need a theological framework for understanding leadership in the church. Any human enterprise is entitled to define its presuppositions and to describe its philosophical biases: why should the church be slow to put forth its presuppositions and biases on the basis of Biblical theology?

Slowness in this key matter is likely due to one or another of these problems: delegation of "Christian education" to the less theoretical tacticians of the church; isolation of the preaching/studying minister from the developmental flow of the lives of the congregation; the unchallenged assumption that the Bible offers little to the theological foundation of the educator

³ Determinism is the assumption that life is completely "programmed" and thus beyond one's own will or control. "What will be will be." "We are what our environment makes us." Ultimately, determinism runs afoul of Biblical teaching on the crucial issue of whether or not a person can be responsible for what he or she does in life.

beyond the handful of recited proof-texts; or simple neglect (after all, theological scholarship sometimes values Hebrew verb points higher than the understanding of human behavior.) Help!

We must change the *induce*, *motivate*, and *congratulate* model of leadership into *accept*, *share*, and *grow together* or we have no business at all putting the word *Christian* ahead of the word *leadership*.

Searching for Relationships

The scientist seeks to understand in order to explain and predict. In complex human settings, it is all the scientist can do to explain; prediction is a very iffy matter. The social scientist is usually satisfied just to be able to understand the relationships thus, from a scientific point of view, the questions change: no longer is it, “What leadership style gets best results?” but, “How does this or that leadership process relate to particular persons, situations, and needs?” In other words, generalizations such as “best” and “most effective” are expanded to “best for whom?”, “for what?”, “when?”, and the spotlight pattern is enlarged to look at whole situations and complex sets of relationships. What a leader *knows*, what he or she *does*, and what he or she *is*, all become part of the whole picture. In this broader view, the particular distinctive of leadership for the church become more visible: to lead the church is to be engaged in *process*—the on-going work of God in lives—hardly a repetition of a sequence of mechanical operations. The process is highly *developmental*, not tightly structured and programmed, and the most significant output is, itself, a *continuing fulfillment* (washing, renewal, and perfection) rather than the arrival at some end state or nirvana.

Problem III: Separation—Distinctives or Distance?

The practical outcomes of separation are convincing evidence that the effects of the fall hang over the redeemed as well as the unredeemed. They are stultifying and sometimes ugly. While there is a good wisdom in keeping one’s distance from snares, the Biblical teachings on separation of the Christian give us no basis for ignoring or being unresponsive to the needs of humankind, nor can they give us a basis for ignoring scientific and scholarly inquiry in the secular pursuits of science.

The development of leadership for the church has much to learn from research done on human behavior, human learning, and social development. Should it be necessary for Christians to re-run every experiment or to ignore any findings that haven’t been baptized? (I find it ironic that Christians have been fascinated by natural science research, raising the challenge—the issue of evolution—but have stubbornly ignored, or refused to accept, the value of social science until rather recently.) A Christian in science sooner or later learns how to make two judgments about the worth of a given research study:

1. The scientific core and “replicability” of the inquiry.
2. The presuppositions of the research or the way these affect the conclusions that the researcher has drawn.

There are plenty of research studies that scientists (whether Christian or secular) must discard on the basis of the first question. They lack scientific worth. And there are many that the Christian must re-analyze on the basis of Biblical presuppositions. Many times the *findings* are respectable enough, and a simple re-analysis of the findings on the basis of Biblical presuppositions, particularly about the nature of humanity, brings out *conclusions* that are very valuable for the Christian.

Indeed, there are ways to bring Christian education into a closer and more responsible relationship with the world of social science research. Properly handled, this poses no threat to the integrity of the church.

But there is another separation that may not be so easy to handle. Sad to say, the church in North America has largely accepted the non-Biblical distinctions between clergy and laity, and between educational ministry and pastoral ministry. It is the latter which will be addressed, though it

is, in large part, a natural extension of the delegational concepts that come from separating the clergy from the rest of the flock.

Education in the church needs to be redefined. In common practice, “Christian education” is whatever the “senior pastor” wants to delegate. Not only does this demean the central importance of the development of the Christian, but it also gets pastors too far off the mark of what should be their greatest responsibility: nurture. The reference here to education as *the development of the Christian* reflects my non-schooling view of education. As I see it, something is not education merely because it can be carried out in a school; it is educational because it facilitates human development! Sad to say, preaching to the saints is rarely thought of as being educational. And while we’re at it, consider: if liturgy isn’t educational, it is simply ritual.

The separation between pastoral and educational roles is the great mother of the proliferation of disjointed programs. Say what you will, the basic criterion of “success” for the Director of Christian Education too often is how much program action he or she has underway. How many classes? How many groups? How many programs? Parties? And, of course, how many young people are involved? I despair: How can the qualitative questions get any attention in the face of the current fad of counting things and making church-growth charts?

When separation of the church, or particularly of the educational mission of the church, is a matter of distance—either of distance from the needs of humankind or of distance from much-needed sources of basic insight into human nature—separateness does not fulfill its Biblical intention. Leadership people in Christian education should turn things around until separation is a matter of *distinctiveness*. Education for the church should be everything good from whatever sources of ideas and procedures, but it should be *distinct*. It is most important that we know the theological and philosophical premises on which we are educating, and it is important not to bring in practices, procedures, and materials simply because they have “caught on” in the secular educational setting. We need to do well what we do, but do nothing that does not pass the tests of contributing to the development of the Christian as God intended and to the development of the church as a unified body.

A Growing Split in Social Science

Social science is a divergent field. There are all sorts of positions on all sorts of issues. You can easily get a debate going on almost any subject, including some that would seem to be long foreclosed—for example, do we really gain practical insights from experimental research? Do the animal lab studies mislead us into making wrong generalizations about humans? Is political science really a science?

Modern science has emerged from the need to describe and understand. Even so, social science’s several specialties: sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, and perhaps geography and history, have come into being not as fields of applied engineering but as explanatory and descriptive scholarship. In the twentieth century, the desire to “do something practical” has become a prominent feature of certain of the social sciences, particularly psychology. Beginning with those who were committed to helping people with disorders (i.e., the psychoanalysts,) the activism has broadened.

Two categories of application of the social sciences have emerged. (This over-simplification is flawed in several particulars; for example, it doesn’t even suggest a third category which the psychoanalysts themselves [make up].) The two, the behaviorists and the developmentalists, are increasingly in conflict and are becoming more evenly matched despite an earlier serious setback handed the developmentalists. That near extinction of developmentalism was a result of their own excessive tendency to label people and to be too firm in their predictions.

Crucial differences in the views of man held, respectively, in the two “camps” account for the liveliness of the conflict. The Christian may see certain features of the respective views of which the secular scholar is perhaps unaware. For example, the alert Christian will reject the behaviorist’s assumption that people are merely a high-form animal and can be described in propositions drawn from pigeon, rat, and primate research. The alert Christian will also have trouble with the behaviorist’s determinism, and with the presupposition that the more educated should decide what the less educated should learn. Equally unacceptable, of course, is the social-learning view that the child is a “blank slate” to be written on by parents, preachers, teachers, friends, and others. A Christian should not be content with any view of leadership that sees structuring the environment and controlling the contingency systems of rewards and punishments as the ultimate basis of determining what will be learned and what will be believed.

Somewhat more compatible with the Biblical view of humanity are the key presuppositions of the developmental view: Development is a process of unfolding, following patterns that are genetically programmed and, within broad limits, in common with all humankind; environment affects but does not control development; the intellectual processes are deeply interlocked with physical and emotional aspects of the person; the person has broad responsibility for affecting his or her own destiny.

Both social learning and behaviorism in education are marked by a high degree of planning *for* people; developmentalism in education is more inclined toward planning *with* people. Tightly programmed instructional strategies are usually based on the assumptions that the designer knows what the learner needs and can anticipate, or predict, the particular experiential sequence which will result in the needed learning; a behaviorist is more comfortable with programmed instruction of this sort.

In one respect, the behaviorist of today is nothing more than a “highly-armed” version of the ancient social-learning strategist dating back to the pre-Christian Greek era, or before. They share many traits in common, including their view of knowledge as a sort of “out there” stuff that must be acquired by bringing it into one’s knowledge storehouse; a task most easily accomplished with the help of a teacher whose job it is to organize it into appropriate bundles.

It seems ironic that the Christian education field contains so much behaviorism!

Behaviorism’s basic tenets are antithetical to Christianity! But Christians are apparently more comfortable with knowledge as perceptual information rather than as developed experience. Surely this is justified to some extent, since the Bible is our authoritative basis. But wait! The Bible itself is a developmental document—developmentally unfolding God’s processes of dealing redemptively with people.

Many developmentalists are humanists (whose “people are the measure of all things” fails the Biblical test of truth.) Perhaps then, Christians, and especially Christian educators, tend to reject them, consequently failing to recognize the crucial validity of a developmental posture on teaching and learning.

The growing split in social science between developmentalism and behaviorism affects all educators. We each need to know where we stand and why. A small handful of us are describing our own position as “creational developmentalism” to identify both our belief in God as source and origin, and our views of the nature of humanity, though fallen, as capable of unfolding and developing in ways that reflect the grandeur and beauty of the Creator’s great goodness.⁴

⁴ The concept does not imply innate goodness of humanity, though it does accept that the Creator has graciously provided humankind a moral conscience, capable of enlightening them to the ways of the created moral universe, though inadequate in itself to establish righteousness before God, q.v., Romans 1:18-2:16.

The Case for Developmental Leadership

The Bible makes frequent reference to vines, grain, and trees in order to make abstract points more concrete. The long-standing explanation is that since the people among whom the Biblical incidents occurred were mostly agrarian folk, this heavy use of analogies from farming made the messages more understandable. Reasonable enough; but the developmentalist sees more. The analogies are not just agrarian, most are botanical. Aside from the heavy use of the shepherd/sheep relationship and an occasional donkey or ox, the heavy emphasis is on things that grow as plants. The features that are given attention create a sort of master analogy: human development and the process of maturity are like those of the plant: Its nature and pattern of unfolding is within it. Its environment (water, light, and air) significantly affects or alters its rate of growth and sometimes determines its physical survival, but it is not the determinant of the nature or growth pattern of the plant. Purposing (goal-setting) within the plant is not the crucial issue. God provides for the growth (“lilies . . . take no thought for tomorrow;”) blooming is a fulfilling phase, not a constant condition; fruit is a seasonal matter; and dormancy is normal. What a boost to mental health is provided by this non-compulsive Biblical analogy. One even gets the impressions that it’s OK to shrivel a bit on dry days, get brittle from over-exposure to the wind, and have periods when barrenness isn’t even embarrassing! Could such a view be part of Paul’s awareness of this freedom in Christ (1 Cor. 10:29; Gal. 5:1)?

Going one step beyond these particulars of the botanical model, we can suggest some propositions about leadership. Consider the leader as a gardener (not the farm *owner*—be careful.) In the current fad of houseplant care, it is expected that the gardener will talk to the plants; even singing to them is alleged to help. Be that as it may, one thing that gardeners *don’t* do now, or in Bible times, is to exhort the plants to be plants. No amount of lecturing, argument, or even shouting will change a tomato plant into a cucumber or make a rose bloom. The gardener cares for the environmental needs so that the plant can be what it is, in itself; so that it can develop into its own fulfillment. The gardener doesn’t bring on the bloom; the plant does—because it is in its nature. The gardener facilitates, that is, he or she helps to assure the conditions that the plant needs.

The botanical analogies also remind us that there are all sorts of plants in the world—all sorts of *good* plants. What a pity if we didn’t have watermelon vines! And what a pity if *all* we had were watermelon vines—everywhere, as far as you could see, watermelons, watermelons, watermelons. *The church needs leadership that values differences!*

The competent gardener knows the plants and provides for them according to their particular needs. Isn’t the “new nature in Christ” deserving of such a gentle, loving treatment? Do leaders in the church need a big stick or a watering pot? Surely, a little hoeing of weeds is important, but here, too, the Bible speaks: When the hoeing of weeds would likely also disturb the roots of the good grain, put the hoe away until the Lord of the Harvest comes to do his own sorting out! *The church needs non-judgmental leadership.* “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged” (Matt. 7:1).

Things that come in for heavy judgment of the Lord of the Harvest are those that violate their nature, particularly trees that don’t bear fruit. But a good gardener knows you have to give a tree many years to demonstrate its nature—some much more than others. How damaging to count success in terms of short-range goals! *The church needs patient leadership—faithful leadership*, not suspicious leadership. “Love is patient . . . love is not jealous.”

Pruning is part of the picture, but it is attuned to the nature of the plant. Pruning helps grapevines and roses; but it would be absurd to prune a carrot. The good gardener doesn’t come down on everything with the same tactics. The church needs leadership that accommodates individual development characteristics.

I’ve seen many beautiful gardens, ranging from my daughter’s greenhouse bedroom to the magnificent sprawling gardens of Europe. I’ve learned to expect one thing to always be true: In every beautiful garden, not only are there many varieties and species of growing things, each encouraged

and supported to be the very best of what it is within itself, but somewhere in the shadows is a gardener. Rarely out front, but usually just out of sight—watching, caring, enjoying—is a very happy, loving gardener. Gardeners are a funny bunch: They like people to enjoy and praise the gardens, but they don't need much praise themselves. I'll never forget the gardener in Geneva who had spent about an hour happily showing the little group of Americans one after another of the specimens in a magnificent, but small, public park. The conversation shifted from the beauty of the garden to his competency as a great gardener. We turned from the flowers to pursue our questions about how he brought it all about. But to our surprise, he had disappeared. *The church needs leadership that plays down its own importance.*

These may sound more like the remarks of a poet than of a scientist. I was asked to bring a paper on “what the new research in education suggests about developing effective leadership for the church.” What I have said here may not fulfill expectations behind the original request, but I believe I am doing what I was asked to do. The truth is that there are vast shelves of research reports that have one or another bits to add to our understanding of effective leadership in the church. They can be divided into two categories: those bits that give more about the techniques and technologies for changing people, and those bits that help us better understand what human development is all about and how it can be facilitated.

As time goes on, I'm less and less interested in the first—with advancing age comes ever lower confidence in my ability to decide how other people should change. And I am more and more convinced that in the second category of research, there is little that is fundamentally new. Perhaps it would be better to say that the second category reiterates, amplifies, and finds new application of the developmental concepts we find in the Bible. And so it should be. The Author of the Bible is the Creator of the magnificent sixth-day creature. As we study this creature—personal attributes and social transactions—we recognize more of the detail lying within human development, that most complex process which sprang from those seven words: “Let us make humankind in our image . . .” (Gen. 1: 26). The research on human development, learning, and social transaction is saying this to me: Leadership is a serving relationship that has the effect of facilitating development of human beings. With this sort of definition in hand, we can draw from the most significant research of the past 30 years: Jean Piaget on cognitive development, Erik Erikson on stages of life, Carl Rogers on personhood and human transactions, Cartwright and Zander on human groups, Ron Lippitt on leader behaviors and change, Claude Levi-Strauss on social structure, Lawrence Kohlberg on moral development, Biddle and Thomas on role-taking, Jerome Kagan on bio-social development, Flavell on self-actualization, Bernice Neugarten on adult socialization, Jane Loevinger on ego strength, Urie Bronfenbrenner on family development, and many others whose studies interlock and complement.

But is it practical? Can we say anything further than generalizations about what leadership ought to be? Always we come back to these questions, and the theorist is not turned off. It was once said, “There is nothing more practical than good theory.” The following section is illustrative of the practical advice that can come from the developmental research. The content of this example, motivation, is the key to effective leadership.

Understanding Motivation Developmentally

A major issue, perhaps *the* major issue of leadership, is the matter of motivation. High on any list of leadership skills is the leader's capacity to motivate. How much do we really know about this process?

Motivation is still largely a mystery. Among the findings of social science are all sorts of information about moral judgment, for example, but very little about moral action. It is now fairly clear how people determine what they *should do*, but we lack understanding of the basis on which a person decides actually *to do* something. Thus, we still must speculate about the important matter of

what causes a person to act on his or her motivations. All we can say now is that moral behavior has at least three facets: *knowing* to do, *willing* to do, and *strength* to do.

We need to know more, but that should be no excuse for failing to use wisely what we do know. We should be aware of the basic facts about motivation; and we should know what they suggest about ways to help people. There are several important things that we can know from the research on human development.

For example, we know these things about motivation as a process:

1. The roots of motivation are deep within a person. Motivation comes from inside!
2. Motivations are complex, and in no two persons is the pattern of motivation exactly alike.
3. In certain ways, we are all very much alike as human beings. The ways we are basically alike underlie our motivations:
 - a) We all have essentially the *same basic human needs*, though we may find different ways to meet these needs.
 - b) We all develop through the *same stages of intellectual (cognitive) function*, though we develop at different rates.
 - c) We all develop through the *same stages of moral judgment*, though we each may get “stuck” at different stages.

The research suggests these things about our own motivation:

1. We are rarely aware of all our own motivations.
2. We can become more aware of our own motivations.
3. As we better understand where our own motivations come from, we become more able to accept another person’s motivations.
4. Our opinions and prejudices about an experience or object will affect, to some extent, whether or not we are motivated by the experience or object.
5. We cannot always be sure in advance whether or not we will find an experience or object to be motivating.
6. A wider range of motivations can be awakened through a wider variety of experiences.

We have ways to see the motivations of others:

1. If one knows enough about how people develop, particularly about the stages of development people move through, it is possible to predict the particular factors that might make an experience or object motivating to a person.
2. We can often see a distinction between *intrinsic motivations* (motivations embedded in the person’s own experience,) and *extrinsic motivations* (motivations that are attached to the experience by another person’s arbitrary action.) The distinction is like the difference between enjoyment of raising flowers because of the (intrinsic) satisfaction of it, versus the reward of getting (extrinsic) blue ribbons at the flower show.
3. Two persons might be motivated by a given experience or object for two very different reasons.

The research even enlightens us about the matter of motivating other people:

1. Whatever is done to “motivate” a person must somehow connect with the roots of motivation—drives, urges, needs—within that person.
2. Relating a motivational emphasis to the person’s own development will increase the likelihood of engaging the person’s motivations.
3. We cannot *give* motivation to a person, though we can expose the person to an experience or object that might relate to the person’s basic motivation.

4. The basic legitimate motivational activities are the following:
 - a) *Sharing* (involving another person in one's own experience) is the most effective means of motivation through exposure to new experiences; setting examples plays a part.
 - b) *Encouragement* (selectively encouraging the worthy things a person is experiencing) has a positive motivational effect.
 - c) *Stimulation*, sometimes called prodding, works well only if the person being prodded is quite accepting and has respect for the one who provides the stimulus.
 - d) *Association*, helping a person see the similarities between a new experience or object and one for which he or she already has a motivation, can help the motivation to "transfer."
 - e) *Facilitation*, helping a person accomplish and be successful in an experience, will help him or her gain satisfaction and thus gain motivation.

But through it all, we recognize that there are hazards in motivating others:

1. Only a fine line separates motivating from manipulating. The key issue is whether or not what one does to "motivate" overpowers the other person's own judgment and needs. Manipulation involves serious moral and ethical issues.
2. When we engage in manipulation, it shows our own lack of respect for the soundness and reasonableness of our purposes.
3. A person motivated (manipulated) against his or her better judgments will likely turn against the manipulator sooner or later.
4. Plotting and manipulating, even if they catch the "target" person's attention, may turn him or her off cold!

Back to the Scripture, with Developmental Perspective

What would happen to "Christian education" if the teachings of Jesus were taken seriously? For one thing, there would be less emphasis on talk and more on action. But changes in leadership style would be even more noticeable.

Much of "Christian education" is patterned on secular instructional and cultural approaches to teaching and learning. From Sunday school to seminary, the approaches are adaptations of the ancient Greek academic traditions—traditions that were well established by the time of Christ.

The Greek concepts of knowledge and learning were sharply in contrast with those of the Hebrew Scriptures; Jesus deliberately chose not to adopt them. He built no school, put himself in no high-status lectureships, and raised no funds to perpetuate his teachings through an endowed institution. He could have done so; among the elite of that day, such practices were more acceptable than what he chose to do. He selected a handful of candidates and lived among them, an itinerant community of friends.

Toward the end of his earthly ministry with this close circle of disciples, he stated very clearly what he had been demonstrating for three years. The most influential leader the world has ever known went on record squarely against the prevailing secular approach to leadership. What he said has been largely ignored down through the years because the secular concept of leadership seems more reasonable than Christ's propositions.

Leaders must lead. To lead, one must have authority. And to lead with authority, one must be prestigiously and conspicuously above those who are to be led. Preferable the leader must deserve and merit his or her position and lead with honor and competence. Leaders have command and 'presence,' and great leaders exercise authority. Thus it is among the Greeks and Romans.

“It will not be so among you . . .” Jesus said (Matt. 20: 26). Since Jesus rejected the time-honored secular concept of leadership, what did he suggest instead? “. . . whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave” (Matt. 20: 26-27).

Is servanthood—the text suggests the lowest servanthood, that of a slave—perhaps a punishment for wanting to be a leader? Or maybe the point here is that one should prove his or her humility through a probationary servanthood. (Americans are especially fond of the idea that true greatness is a dramatic rising from a lowly beginning.) No, the true message of this Scripture is clarified in a hard-to-accept jolt: Jesus refers to *himself* as the example of the servant-leader—“Just as I did not come to be served, but to *serve* and to *give my life* . . .” How powerful this contrast becomes in Paul’s review of it: ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross (Phil. 2: 5-8). So *this* is what Jesus had in mind as a contrast with the elegant, secular view of prestigious leadership! It is hardly an appealing alternative. What would the church look like if leadership were defined in these terms?

As if his straightforward rejection of the secular (“Gentle” or Greek) concept of leadership weren’t enough, Jesus brings it up again (Matthew 23:1-12) this time in reference to what had gone wrong in the synagogues and temple: those who sit in Moses’ seat, taking responsibility for the religious leadership of God’s people (1) have made a faulty division between word and deed. They talk a good line, but they don’t put it into action. (2) They take it upon themselves to tie up neat bundles of tasks for their followers. They see leadership as a matter of deciding what others should do, but they don’t actually get down to the hard part themselves. (3) They make good works highly visible and take their satisfactions from the praises of others. (4) They perpetuate and expand on the traditions of “pomp and circumstance” so as to make themselves more distinct from the common people. (5) They bask in the honors of their rank and accept favors and privileges as if they were entitled to them. (6) They like to be called by a distinctive title that represents their authority and prestige: Rabbi!

“Do not be called Rabbi,” said Jesus, as if to summarize his rejection of this whole secular leadership style that had infected the worship of Jehovah. Why not be called Rabbi? “. . . for you have one teacher, and you are all students!”

He was talking to his disciples, to the Apostles upon whose shoulders rested the vital responsibility of continuing after his departure to carry out the most dynamic leadership task ever assigned to a group of human beings. And not one of these men was to let himself be called “Rabbi”—honored religious teacher and leader. And if this weren’t clear enough (perhaps to close all the loopholes), he goes on to point out that he is talking broadly about *leadership*: “Don’t call anyone ‘Father.’” You can’t create relationships with labels; make relationship-building your approach, not labeling. “And don’t let anyone call you ‘Leader,’ because you have only one Leader, Christ!” He follows this with a deliberate review of what he said earlier about leadership: “You know your leaders by their servanthood.”

What changes in our concept of the church would result from taking Jesus seriously? The mind boggles. And what about changes in the education of leadership persons for the church? Leadership for the church is what theological education is all about, lest we forget! The issue that demands more careful attention is *what concept of leadership is being practiced and taught*. What is its source? Christ or culture?

The six faults pointed out by Jesus in Matthew 23:1-7 might serve well as evaluative criteria for “Christian education.” If we assume the logical contrast with the faulty conditions to be the appropriate criteria, here is an example of how the list would look:

1. Emphasis on *knowing* is to be accompanied by emphasis on *doing*. Human development is a holistic matter—you can't split off one aspect of the person to deal with. Further, enhancement of mental processes (such as recall of information) is an insufficient goal of education.
2. People are to help in identifying their own needs and should participate in goal setting. Leading is a matter of working encouragingly as a sharer of experiences. It is not the place of the leader to determine what the learner needs and to pre-package and prescribe a load of tasks.
3. Those who teach are to show, by precept *and by example*, the value of avoiding the praises of others, doing nothing for self-glorification or for the gratification of self-serving rewards. Instead, the beauty and deeper satisfaction of glorifying God and bringing encouragement and honor to others should be sought.
4. Traditions and symbols are to be evaluated against the criterion of servanthood. Whatever would attract attention to the glorification of the merits of any person other than Christ should be brought under specific scrutiny. "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3).
5. Access to resources, matters of convenience, and other privileges are to be shared as peers. If special treatment is in order, such as circumstances that can be alleviated by temporary granting of preferential treatment, the criterion should be *need*, not rank, status, age, seniority, or gender.
6. The whole environment is to reflect the unity of a true community. The lordship of Christ and the mutual indebtedness of all—teachers and learners alike—to the reality of his presence as sole Teacher should not be compromised by titles of distinction and honorific symbols of rank or prestige. The main issue is less the use or non-use of titles but more the seeking after true functional relationships within the family of Christ.

Some of these criteria may need to be compromised or softened to some extent for effective nurturing of children whose motivations and values are still in the self-oriented early stages. But for normal adolescents and adults, "Christian education" would be more truly *Christian* if these criteria were observed. Why don't we see more of it? The ease with which certain of Jesus' teachings are overlooked by those who claim to be engaged in his work is amazing indeed.

What can scientific research and sound educational theory offer to the development of more appropriate leadership in the church? A more thorough grounding in what is known about human development, for one thing, and a new impetus to get our theology into action, for another!

For Reflection

1. What is the "management era" in leadership training? How does Professor Ward respond to this?
2. How are *leadership* and *servanthood* related? Different?
3. Describe *developmental leadership*. Give a good example of leadership and/or a bad example of leadership. Can you judge these by the developmental description?
4. How would your own experience as a leader need to change if it were to conform to Ward's suggestions?