



Empirical Theory In Christian Education: *The Christian Educator's Responsibility to the Whole of Revelation*¹

Ted Ward

- I. Implications of Christian Eschatology: Actualization of Hope
Lecture: The Church in the Intermediate Future
Thesis: The educator's view of the future determines the choice of educational purpose. The centrality of hope in Christian values requires a forward-looking educational perspective; the redemptive qualities of the church requires an orientation toward healing and restoration.
- II. Disciplined Uses of Empirical Research: A Foundation for Christian Education
Lecture/Workshop: Moral Development Research—Implications for Religious Education
Thesis: Careful scientific inquiry and careful theological analysis are the complementary essentials of a well-founded discipline of religious education. The recent handling of Kohlberg's findings about the development of moral judgment illustrates the problems and the possibilities.
- III. Hazards of Habit and Frozen Tradition: The Need for New Models
Lecture: Trends in Theological Education—Feedback from the Third World
Thesis: Cross-cultural research has the twin benefits of helping us understand others better and allowing us to see ourselves more clearly. Increasing difficulties of making transplanted models of institutional education work effectively in the emerging Third World churches are stimulating the search for alternatives. (Holding revealed truth as absolute does not justify a rigid view of human institutions.)
- IV. The Christian Educator's Epistemology: Revealed Truth and Disciplined Inquiry
Dialogue: A Creational Developmentalist's View of Education
Thesis: God reveals; humans inquire. The disciplined inquiry into God's special revelation (theology) and the disciplined inquiry into God's general revelation (science) provide the two rudimentary foundations of Christian education. The human being must be comprehended as a spiritual *essence* with empirical *aspects* if one is to effectively relate "educationally" to the matter of spiritual development.

¹ Ted Ward. Empirical Theory in Christian Education: The Christian Educator's Responsibility to the Whole of Revelation. Outline for Religious Education lectureship. Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, Mill Valley, California, 1982.

- V. Spiritual Development as a Pastoral Responsibility: More Than Information, Platitudes, and Challenges
 Lecture: The Pastor's Stake in Religious Education
 Thesis: Separating the ministry of education from pastoral ministry raises serious theological and sociological questions. The building of Christian communities is a broadly shared mandate. Leadership in this task must be disciplined to the teachings of Christ. An explicit concept of spiritual development is needed.
- VI. Educational Ministries: Preparatory and Remedial Helps, Informed by a Clear View of Personhood and Society
 Lecture/Workshop: Family and Church—Who's Bringing Up Our Kids?
 Thesis: Christian education is becoming more responsive to needs within the Christian community. The legacy of the Sunday school movement has tended toward over-emphasis on educational ministries to children and to an over-emphasis on conversion (at the expense of nurture). Trends in the church and society require a pro-active educational emphasis which anticipates human needs and prepares people for servanthood in family relationship, in marriage, in parenthood, in neighborhoods, and in the market place. Both preparatory and remedial helps are needed.

Organizing Propositions

1. Development rather than acquisition is the best way to understand where values and moral judgment comes from.
2. Various approaches to values/moral growth and education are based on one or the other of these assumptions about learning.
3. Development is a natural rather than programmed or mechanistic phenomenon.
4. Development cannot be externally caused, but conditions can be created which will allow normal development to occur.
5. One aspect of the conditions of learning is the moral quality of the learning environment.
6. If people are going to be developing and refining their conceptions of justice, they need to be in environments that represent a high quality of justice.
7. Defining and establishing a learning community that characterizes the principles of justice is a major responsibility of the professional educator.

The Scope of Christian Education

1. Sources of Knowledge (Psalm 19)
 Empirical evidence of the created universe: Natural phenomena, Days 1-5,
 Image of God, Day 6
2. Priorities for Research
 - a) Importance of inquiry.
 - b) Spiritual development: What is it? What encourages it? What feeds it? The nurturing communities: family, church, education of youth, educating of leadership.
3. Domains of Service
 Needs in the community of Christ
 Needs in society

Options for the Church in the Intermediate Future

1. The unheeded conscience
2. The church as ghetto
3. The church as the underground
4. The church as field hospital in a broken world

What Sort of Church Education?

Theme: Religious Superiority Mode: Witnessing as Informing

Theme: Survival Mode: Preserving and Conserving

Theme: Subversion Mode: Preparation for Action

Theme: Redemption Mode: Service as Praxis

An Agenda of Outcomes for Christian Education

Given: *Christian education* is the practical engagement in experiences which encourage, nurture and integrate the use of cognitive and affective processes to more fully relate to the whole of education.

Christian, as in Christian education, denotes centering in the person and work of Jesus Christ, biblically revealed as the Son of God, Redeemer, Lord.

. . . People who value empirical inquiry, enlightened by biblical evidence, respecting the creative and communicative acts of God in each.

. . . People who use biblical language and teachings to describe and evaluate their experiences.

. . . People who develop a Christian world-and-life view in which humankind is the object of God's love and major participant with God in the redemptive process.

. . . People who integrate their experiences through religious reflection. (Note: religious is an integrating process within all of life, not a separate category of experience.)

. . . People who accept revelation as the basis of moral values and ethical truth.