



Teaching Values¹

Ted Ward

In the Fall of 1980, Eternity Magazine included Ted Ward among its list of 50 scholars whose research and writing is influencing the church. The editors of Eternity identified Dr. Ward as an educator to whom Christian Education pays attention—especially in matters of education for Value Development

Unfortunately the article in *Eternity Magazine* used the term Values Clarification in the reference to my particular contributions in this area. And that term Values Clarification is somewhat misleading and perhaps inflammatory, because of the controversy today over the matter of Values Clarification as a strategy in moral education. My own research work and educational development work has been focused on various sorts of moral development education as can be conducted in schools, in religious education and most particularly in homes. I might mention in passing that as far as I am concerned no matter what you do in schools, no matter what you do in churches, the basic issue of values education is a concern for the home. I mention that not simply to suggest that the church or the Christian community can use it as an argument against the schools being involved in moral education, but rather to suggest that the most important place that moral education occurs is in the home and for better or worse whatever the home does in the way of moral development is far more powerful than virtually any other impact that the child will be under in the course of life.

But I am particularly concerned about the criticisms of Values Clarification, some of which strike me as being a bit excessive if not downright irrational. I think sometimes we see the danger in things and then we decide that we must go all out to get rid of them or at least to talk them down. I share the concern over Values Clarification that is most commonly made; namely that it is essentially a humanistic strategy tending to quite relativistic and in the hands of some educators it tends to communicate the impression that really there are no moral anchor points, that what anyone of us believes about a moral value is as good as what anyone else may believe, and that all we can really do is to clarify our positions so that we are in a better position to communicate with other people and to appreciate other people's different points of views. That clearly is unsatisfying for me as a Christian. I think there are elements of life that we would have to call dealing with moral truth. The moral truth that we find in the Word of God is itself compelling and demands our attention and we cannot leave moral questions simply to that relativistic position that says that one opinion is as good as another. So I share that criticism. Another criticism that clearly I will join is that much of what is done in the name of Values Clarification tends to be of a meddling sort of activity. Quite often what we find in schools is teachers moving beyond their own moral competency as educators. Sometimes even beyond their pedagogical competency to meddle in matters of moral truth. And sometimes to disturb the moral framework of children on grounds that I believe are very unwarranted.

In addition to these criticisms I would like to add one that rarely is heard. The strategy of Values Clarification itself is quite clearly a peer-oriented strategy. It is focused on discussing values and sharing one's values with others in such a way that we critique one another values. In the hands

¹ Ted Ward. Teaching Values. For Teach Tapes: ICL Leadership Resource, 1981

especially of young people who we know are prone to be influenced by each other and seeking the group norm, this can be a very peer-oriented kind of educational experience in which people to the extent that they change at all, change not in the sense of some of desirable direction or some qualitative direction, but simply change in the direction of conformity with the norm. And I am afraid this conformity to the norm can even happen among Christian youth. God's men and women are expected to be at the edge of things not at the center or the mean of things. I think in terms of the distribution of moral truth and moral qualities in a society we would expect that the people who belong to God through Jesus Christ would be expected to be not at the mean or the norm but rather at the edge. At the qualitative edge.

I'll add another criticism namely that much of what is done in the name of Values Clarification borders on amateur psychotherapy. It's all well and good for us to get in touch with our feelings and to become more acquainted with where we stand on issues. There is nothing inherently bad about being clear about where one's moral values are. But when there is a person as teacher drawing this out of individuals in a group situation, it can quickly border on amateur psychotherapy and sometimes people expose themselves, their ideas, their innermost concerns and anxieties in a situation that is not properly guarded, not properly therapeutic; and after having (what our slang calls) dumped their guts, there is nobody there to help put it all back together again.

But let me speak to the positive. What happens in much Values Clarification is as much good as it is bad. And in the right hands it can be extremely good. For one thing it is important for Christians to become acquainted with themselves to gain self-understanding, self-awareness, consciousness of where one stands on issues and value questions and moral problems, and to be in a position of knowing oneself clearly enough that we see what it is that the Word of God is saying to us. Sometimes we don't hear adequately the messages of the Word of God because we are not that clear on where we are. In the Epistle of James we are encouraged to think of this in terms of people who look at themselves in a mirror; and they see this image in a mirror and become more conscious of what it is that they are and what it is that God is doing with them. The sort of thing that I am after in Values Clarification is to recognize Values Clarification as but a part of a larger process.

Perhaps we should be clearer about what Values Clarification really is. In most Values Clarification exercises, regardless of who has designed them or written them, there are generally three parts. The first part is a self-examination in which people are asked to look into themselves to see where they stand in reference to a dilemma, a paradox or issue and to become clear enough to be able to verbalize this.

The second part is the verbalizing or the self-disclosure part. And of course here is where we begin to run into some serious questions when we ask people to verbalize and share in certain kinds of groups things that are near to the very center core of their moral being. But, at any rate, if guarded properly and exercised carefully it can be a constructive thing to learn to share feelings and values and concerns that are the deep part of being human beings.

The third part of a Values Clarification exercise is in the discussion. After the disclosure, usually discussion or mutual criticism is encouraged. Here again we the peer influence can become very strong and must be properly protected lest people who are valuing and holding for positions that are Biblical, carefully developed and deeply held, are pushed in the direction of the common or the norm in an otherwise unhealthy situation.

As I see it the Christian who uses Values Clarification should go to yet another stage. It's a stage that I have called Values Confrontation. Many of my colleagues in the professional field at this point take exception to my position. They argue that it violates the very spirit of Values Clarification to engage at all in confrontation. But I hold my ground. I believe that it is appropriate to raise questions, for example, not only about what we in a given group feel with reference to a moral issue but what for example we might find stated in law. And, particularly, what are Biblical principles that relate to the issue, and what are writings of exemplary philosophers through history. In other words, there is a ground in historical thought that quite often critiques the contemporary view of what is good and bad. And especially those of us who are committed to a Biblical view of values need to engage in the confrontation that says not just what do I feel and what we feel in this group, but in fact what has God said.

There are three ways to reason about moral matters and the research work of Lawrence Kohlberg has described this rather well. The first way to reason is characteristic of small children and I am afraid characteristic of some adults because apparently its possible not to grow out of this stage where we reason about moral truth in very self-centered terms. It's right or its wrong because it feels good or it feels bad to me when I do it or when I see it done. I have a moral judgment base inside myself. I am my source of moral truth. And of course this might be regarded as fairly normal in childhood but rather dangerous for a mature person.

The second level which Kohlberg's research shows that young people quite often grow into fairly naturally in the process of developmental change through childhood changes the locus of moral truth outside self and invests it in others or surrounding factors and surrounding rule systems and laws and the orderliness of an environment and recognizes that moral truth is not in me, but it is in source material outside me that I must come to grips with. This second level, of course, is characteristic of much religious argument about moral truth. But yet in a perspective that we might call properly Christ-centered it falls short because Christ indicated that he had come to fulfill the law; not to destroy it but to fulfill it. And as he described the fulfilling of law he moved in a principle direction which of course conforms rather precisely with Lawrence Kohlberg's argument that there is a third level of moral judging, the principle level.

It does not follow that all adults become principled moral judges. As a matter of fact, the empirical research suggests that in our society at least a fairly substantial percentage of adults never arrive at this level of principled moral judgment. The sorts of things that we are interested in Christian education though are concerned with helping children explore the limitations of a self-centered moral judgment; then in turn exploring the good and the limiting characteristics of an other-centered, or an outside the self-centered, moral judgment and moving in as adults to a principled moral judgment. I have attempted to write about this in a little book that Victor Books published a year ago entitled *Values Begin at Home*. It is an attempt to put an emphasis where I believe it should be put in the home and in the responsibilities of the family for the ongoing moral development of boys and girls. If people are interested in seeing what sorts of things schools can do, I would recommend a book published by McGraw Hill: *You Are Somebody Special*. It's a fascinating project growing out of the work of an outstanding young man by the name of Rick Little. He developed a project called "Quest" that has been influential in a number of states in facilitating within public schools a values educational experience that has Christian values at its very core.

Those who are interested in the professional literature and the research and theoretical literature on values education might find useful a book published by National Education Association: Cheryl

Goldbecker's *Values Teaching*. I recommend that people within Christian education become sensitive to the emphasis in our society on moral education. It is important that Christian educators be alert to the literature in this field, that they be informed, that they be involved in constructive ways in those sorts of things that will make a difference as the Christian community continues to make impact on the secular society in which we live for the cause of Jesus Christ.