

# EDITORIAL

## CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AS A SUBJECT MATTER DISCIPLINE

H. W. Byrne \*

As a field of study Christian education is that academic discipline which is concerned with the teaching and learning of professional Christian education—to prepare students for church-related educational ministries. It is that area of study which is concerned with the theory and practice of the educational work of the local church.

Each field of academic pursuit should have a distinct body of content or subject matter with which it is concerned. It must deal with a segment of subject matter or division of truth that no other area of study can properly include within its pale. For Christian education, such content includes the history and philosophy of Christian education (including aims and theological bases), principles of church organization and administration, facets of the teaching-learning process, leadership development, pupil characteristics and needs, group dynamics, educational methods and materials, recreational leadership, principles of counseling, etc. Obviously, such subject matter deals with far more than Sunday school work.

Curriculum includes not only subject matter, but also guided pupil activity. As a discipline Christian education qualifies at this point also by guiding its students into specific activities. Such activities include experience in teaching and leading various age groups in a wide variety of local-church agencies; preparing lessons and programs for such age groups; evaluating and using educational methods and materials; devising curriculum plans and programs; observing and studying the needs of pupils at each age level; organizing, administering and supervising various phases of local church work; learning to work with others in group-dynamic procedures; counseling others in spiritual matters; etc.

If Christian education is not included in the Seminary curriculum, then they may study Bible but not learn how to communicate Bible truths to various age levels. They may study psychology, but not learn the spiritual needs and nature of pupils in various age levels. They may study sociology but not learn how they can help meet sociological needs through the educational work of the church. They may study

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\* Professor of Christian Education, Asbury Theological Seminary

history but not learn the history of Christian teaching and its relevance to present-day Christian education. They may study philosophy without learning about educational philosophy in the ministry of the local church.

The very nature, function, purpose and goals of the Church point to the inclusion of a ministry of teaching in its program. The purpose, pattern, and program of Christian education in the local church finds its basis, justification and amplification in the light of the ministry of the Gospel through the Church. Both pastors and lay workers, therefore, are directly and dynamically involved in teaching (Acts 5:42) as a part of the Church and its work, and in following the example set forth by Jesus Christ in His life and work. The Apostle Paul extended and elaborated on the foundations laid by Jesus Christ and early church leaders. In fact the Pauline Epistles themselves are the product of the teaching activity of the New Testament community.

Christian education is also distinctive in its objectives. It trains future professional educators for leadership in the church. It also assists other disciplines in the training of pastors, missionaries, and other vocational churchworkers. While the discipline specializes in the training of directors of Christian education, it also contributes to the training of other full-time church workers. Thus, Christian education has a specialty while it provides a service. In addition to these objectives, Christian education provides training for future volunteer workers in the local church. Thus it makes a contribution to all graduates, since each one should know how to serve in the local church.

The content of Christian education as a discipline should furnish students with a three-fold phase of training: (1) precise understanding of the concepts of Christian education, (2) proper attitudes toward the contribution of Christian education, and (3) proficient skill in the conduct of carrying out its program. While it may be emphasized that all pastors should not major in this field, they should take some courses, perhaps even enough for a minor, because many of them, usually at the beginning of their ministry, will have to serve simultaneously as minister and Christian education director. Through the means of teaching his congregation, the pastor can find support for all his ministries since teaching undergirds, strengthens, and enlightens all efforts put forth by laymen.

The purpose of the educational work of the Church, therefore, is not different from the overall purpose of the Church. The ministry of teaching provides the context and situation within which people can hear and respond to God's Word. Christian education thus has no message of its own, it makes no addition to preaching and the sacraments,

but it seeks to complement these ministries. It offers people opportunity to study, consider and experience the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this way the Gospel is communicated and the needs of men are met.

Today the Church teaches through many schools. In the local church, the church school has carried forward the educational program. Actually, however, the Church teaches throughout its total life. People are continually learning attitudes, practices, and patterns of behavior as well as the meaning of the Christian faith as they participate in the various experiences within the Church and the home. Program elements are provided in the Bible-teaching program, leadership education, teacher training, stewardship program, and adult education. Special efforts are made through Christian education to make all teaching relevant to the present day.

### **The Nature of Christian Education**

Christian education is distinguished from religious education. The former is centered in and concerned with education about Jesus Christ and Christianity, while the latter encompasses the study of other religions. Christian education is a term which is broad in scope and covers several different types or forms of education.

*General* "Christian education is the Bible-based, Christ-centered process of leading the student into a transforming experience of Truth, ever maturing into the fullness of Christ, and of equipping him by fundamental knowledge, attitudes, and skills to render effective service in the will of God." <sup>1</sup> This kind of education can be applied in the home, church, special schools, liberal art colleges, universities, and theological seminaries, under church auspices and the direction of Christian people.

*Church education* is a more specific and explicit term, applying to that kind of Christian education which is conducted within the framework of the local church for the purpose of realizing the objectives of the Church. "A church program of Christian education consists of all the activities, materials, resources, physical facilities, and personnel involved in carrying forward the full range of ministries of the Church to its total constituency . . . All activities which produce the kind of experiences needed to transform the life into that which God intended for the individual must be taken into account when planning a total church program of Christian education."<sup>2</sup>

Christian education is the Church at work in education, teaching and learning. Thus, the task of the Church is Christian education. Here understood, it includes both the transforming influences of evangelism and the guiding and developing influences of creative teaching, both of

which release spiritual, intellectual and volitional forces. There is no activity of the church—worship, service, evangelism, preaching, money-raising, missions, fellowship—that does not respond to the educational approach.

While there are some similarities between secular learning and Christian learning, there are some distinctive elements in church education. Christian education views man in relationship to God and is carried forward in the light of the Gospel. In the teaching-learning situation there is always Christian content both of subject matter and of interpersonal relationships. Church education is focused on the meeting between God and man in Christ. It points beyond the human situation to God and seeks to lead the learner into a meeting with God.

Church education is not just a human process. At all times God as Holy Spirit is active and empowering. As the learner explores knowledge, value, and meaning, God is active in revelation. As the learner appropriates Truth and seeks to make it part of himself, God is active in redemption. As the learner assumes responsibility as a free person, God is active in sanctification. Thus, in a sense, God is the initiator, guide, and sustainer of the process by which the learner comes to live his Christian commitment.

## EDUCATION IN THE SEMINARY PROGRAM

### **The Place of Church Education in Pastoral Training**

Pastors are concerned with the total life and program of the local church. The ministry of teaching is one of the ministries of the church and therefore becomes the direct responsibility of the pastor.

As preacher, the pastor proclaims the message of the *kerygma*. As shepherd he teaches (the *didache*), counsels, and visits the people. As administrator he leads in all functions of the Church. According to Ephesians 4:11-12 he functions in the capacity of shepherd-teacher to perfect the saints, to equip the saints and outfit them for the work of ministry and for edifying the body of Christ.

Church education as a discipline, therefore, plays a twofold part in the preparation of the pastor for his work: (1) it gives him personal professional competence, and (2) it places him in a position to assist the laymen through teaching, that they may perform the work of their priestly ministry in the Church, at home, and abroad.

### **The Educational Program and Church Education**

The seminary recognizes that "there is an increasing diversification in the forms of Christian ministry, and that various forms of min-

istry serve a vital role in the Church.”<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in addition to making provision for elective hours in church education to be taken within the framework of the M.Div. program, which issues in preparation for an ordained ministry, the curriculum makes provision also for professional training for full-time people in church education, issuing in the MAR degree.

At the same time, the seminary holds to the educational philosophy that all students should participate in a common core because they require the same fundamental training if they are to be equipped adequately for any form of ministry. Accordingly, a program of required courses has been planned to provide acquaintance with the various basic theological disciplines necessary for all ministry. These disciplines are incorporated in the various division of the curriculum.

The required course in the Division of Christian Education affords an opportunity to study the scriptural, theological, and philosophical functions of the total church program concept of Christian education in the local church, with particular attention to the place of the pastor and major officers of the Church in administering such a program. In addition to this contribution to the M.Div. program, other professional courses for specialized educational workers in church work are provided as a part of preparation for professional work in church agencies in several MAR programs.

### **The Division of Christian Education**

The *purpose* of the Division of Christian Education is to prepare people for service in church-related ministries with emphasis on the educational work of the church. This is accomplished, first, through subject matter concerned with a study of human characteristics at each age level, with principles and practices of the teaching-learning process, and with the organization and administration of a total church program of Christian education through the various educational agencies; and, second, through learning experiences that develop requisite skills in teaching, leadership, and supervision providing for growth in spiritual maturity for effective Christian service. Various programs are provided which combine biblical and theological training with professional training in the educational work of the Church. Well-balanced and adequate training in both theory and practice is supplied. Such programs expose students to a full academic experience in church education and are carried out through classroom courses, library research, and field work in the local church and in other agencies. Such courses issue in the MAR degree.

**MAR Degree Programs**

The MAR degree programs are designed for those who feel the call to Christian service but whose needs and interests do not center in the M. Div. Program, nor in the pastorate, nor necessarily in the local church. Among these persons are:

1. Directors of Christian Education for field programs of denominations.
2. People who wish to secure professional training as Directors.
3. Pastors who wish further work at the master's degree level.
4. Missionaries who serve abroad in fields outside of theology, such as medicine, but who wish further training in Bible or education.
5. Missionaries on furlough who desire refresher courses.
6. Teachers in Bible schools, Bible colleges, Christian day schools, and even public schools, where the master's degree is needed.
7. Teachers for Christian liberal arts colleges and seminaries.
8. Workers in denominational agencies, offices, and field programs.
9. Ministers of Education and Music, equipped for service and leadership in churches and denominational agencies.
10. Lay people who desire professional training for purposes of personal competence and witness, but who do not plan necessarily to enter any professional ministry.
11. Laymen and professionals who wish to prepare for such specialized ministries as youth work and campus ministry programs in higher education.
12. Music specialists who may also work with the agencies of the Church.

These diversified interests show how the Christian education curriculum is used to help meet the need for combination workers in local church work as well as field work in the larger program of the Church. It is also possible that the curriculum might help to meet the need for workers in independent Christian organizations and institutions.

The entire discipline of Christian education is thus a necessary part of the academic life of a seminary. Its inclusion is a vital part of the total curriculum of the institutions.

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<sup>1</sup>Professor's Section, *National Sunday School Association, Research Synopsis, N.D.*

<sup>2</sup>Frank McKibben, *Guiding Workers in Christian Education*, Abingdon, 1953, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup>1972-73 *Bulletin, Asbury Theological Seminary*, p. 51.