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Reality as a Basis for Religious Education

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REALITY AS A BASIS FOR
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

A Research Paper Presented to the
Faculty of Concordia Seminary,
St. Louis in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
degree of Bachelor of Divinity

by

Donald L. Jerke

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Robert Conrad
Advisor

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On the same day He saw a man performing a work on the Sabbath. Then He said to him, "Man, if thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed; if thou knowest not, thou art cursed and a transgressor of the law."¹

Although this saying of Jesus defies any simple legalistic interpretation or educational application, it does underscore man's need to search for inner truth and self-awareness. The Educational Center of St. Louis is committed to this search. The Center originated in 1845 as the Episcopal Home for Children. However, when social change eliminated the need for an orphanage in the community, legal action was started to change its charter and define its function in terms of religious education. In 1941 the Home became the Educational Center, and a program of educational research and consultation was begun by Dr. Matthew Warren. After 1945 the program was expanded under the direction of Dr. Charles Penniman, to whom the Center owes many of its concepts, its understandings of the educational task, and its present character and depth. Reverend Elsom Eldridge, the present director, replaced Dr. Penniman in 1958. The present staff of the Educational Center are specialists in educational research, consultation, and design. It is their goal to develop, constantly revise, and maintain within the Church an educational methodology which will effectively provide a context for people to discover the appropriateness of seeking,

pursuing, and actualizing their own unique, God-given potential. In theological terms it is their purpose to help people to live their own lives as truly and fully as Christ lived His.²

The Educational Center contends that the Church has overlooked the obvious fact that adults are people. Adults in the Church have been educated in their roles as parents, Church members, and teachers. They have sat through lectures and classes on the Bible, on ecumenical efforts, on social relations, on stewardship, and on missions. But until they find, know, and accept themselves, the causes for which they live day after day are often mere hiding places for frenzied fragments of their lives. The Center is convinced that once people are enabled to be the persons they are, then their roles and causes will become facets of their personal freedom and responsibility, assuming their proper place as fulfillment of rather than substitution for the person.³

It is the purpose of the author to present in detail the theological, philosophical, and educational presuppositions and understandings of the Educational Center and indicate their application to the Center's unique educational method. In Chapter Two those concepts are presented and terms defined which express the Center's view of existence, its religious dimensions, its relationship to the Christian faith, and its implications for the educational task of the Church. Chapter Three presents an overview of the Center's methodology and its application to the structure of particular courses and the development of educational programs at the parish level. In Chapter Four

areas for further study are suggested and an evaluation offered. The appendices contain a current list of intensive courses available through the Educational Center and a sample lesson plan illustrating the structure of a class session.

The presentation of presuppositions and concepts is limited to those which pertain directly to the methodology of the Center. While some details are included to clarify the method itself, individual age level objectives and procedures were excluded in favor of basic features common to every course and age level. Since the purpose of the author is descriptive rather than apologetic, there will be no attempt to justify the Center's utilization of human existence as its educational starting point.

The materials for this paper come from a variety of sources. The primary sources are a limited number of manuals and booklets produced by the Educational Center. Since these materials are under constant revision, particular definitions, concepts, or phases of the method should not be considered final or absolute. Because the primary sources compile data from a number of intellectual disciplines and authorities, there are some concepts whose origin can no longer be traced. The written materials were supplemented with data from the tape library of the Educational Center, from personal interviews with the Director and his staff, from the author's participation in two of the intensive courses for adults, and from selected readings in the works of Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, Will Herberg, Aldous Huxley, Carl Jung, Francis Wickes, and Søren Kierkegaard.

CHAPTER II

PRESUPPOSITIONS OF THE EDUCATIONAL CENTER

The theological, philosophical, and educational presuppositions of the Educational Center are reflected in the language employed in its publications. In most cases the terms and concepts used indicate an existential approach. However, since existentialism often denotes the kind of philosophy of despair and meaninglessness proposed by authors like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, the Educational Center prefers to avoid the term as much as possible and speak instead in terms of existence and reality. This chapter will present definitions and concepts which express the Center's presuppositions about human existence, its relationship to the Christian faith, and its implications for religious education.

Personness and Existence

Every human being is a unique Person capable of description at three levels. First of all, a person has a unique history. Every person is born with unique potentials at a unique juncture of time and space to unique parents in a unique family situation. Thus, a person's background and accumulated relationships with other people make him what he is at a given moment. Secondly, a person is able to enter into I-Thou relationships with other persons. This relationship, as identified by Martin Buber, is more than the I-It relationship of persons

to things. Since it involves meeting and confronting other persons, this relationship can enable a person to move away from the strictures of a depersonalized culture toward true personness. Finally, a person has the ability to transcend or rise above himself, to live his life in terms of an ultimate concern, and to have a faith relationship with an object of supreme loyalty. As a person lives with this perspective of the "givenness of things," he has both the freedom and the responsibility to make decisions about the future even though he is uncertain of the outcome.¹

To be a person is to have Existence. Although "life" is often used as a synonym for this concept, existence implies more than a beating heart. A human being exists in that he can stand outside of the world of things, outside of himself, and outside of humanity in general. As a person in the process of "becoming," he can have and contemplate all three of these relationships. Existence is not the static essence of man's being but that dynamic quality which provides him the freedom to move from the present moment into the possibilities of the future. Therefore, true existence is the process of moving into potentialities. It is life lived under the pressure of having to face anxiety-producing decisions as the person deals with himself, with others, and with God.²

The Religious Dimensions of Existence

The origin of true existence is documented symbolically in Genesis 3. The Educational Center feels that the Fall of Man

was more than a "fall down." It can also be understood as a "fall up" or as that point in the evolutionary development at which man moved into self-awareness and recognized himself as a being distinct from his environment. Thus, the "eating of the apple" symbolizes a movement from the state of nature toward the state of human or true existence. This movement permits a person to leave behind the anxiety-free ignorance of animal instinct and enter into the dialectics of human existence with its attendant freedom, knowledge of good and evil, anxiety, and responsibility. Since the fall, man is able to be aware of himself as a "child" rather than a "puppet" of God, but he also has the freedom to spit out the apple, to lose himself in the commonness of humanity, and to live at the animal level of instinct and non-being.³

The concept of Awareness, alluded to above, is a basic aspect of the philosophy of the Educational Center. The following quote from Aldous Huxley indicates some of the profound implications and religious dimensions associated with this concept by the Center.

Total awareness, then, reveals the following facts: that I am profoundly ignorant, that I am impotent to the point of helplessness and that the most valuable elements in my personality are unknown qualities existing 'out there,' as mental objects more or less completely independent of my control. This discovery may seem at first rather humiliating and even depressing. But if I wholeheartedly accept them, the facts become a source of peace, a reason for serenity and cheerfulness. I am ignorant and impotent and yet, somehow or other, here I am, unhappy, no doubt, profoundly dissatisfied, but alive and kicking. In spite of everything, I survive, I get by, sometimes I even get on. From these two sets of facts--my survival on the one hand and my ignorance and impotence on the other--I can only infer that the not-I, which looks after my body and gives me my best ideas, must be amazingly intelligent, know-

ledgeable and strong. As a self-centered ego, I do my best to interfere with the beneficent workings of this not-I. But in spite of my likes and dislikes, in spite of my malice, my infatuations, my gnawing anxieties, in spite of all my over-valuation of words, in spite of my self-stultifying insistence on living, not in present reality, but in memory and anticipation, this not-I, with whom I am associated, sustains me, preserves me, gives me a long succession of second chances. We know very little and can achieve very little; but we are at liberty, if we so choose, to co-operate with a greater power and a completer knowledge, an unknown quantity at once immanent and transcendent, at once physical and mental, at once subjective and objective. If we co-operate, we shall be all right, even if the worst should happen. If we refuse to co-operate, we shall be all wrong even in the most propitious of circumstances.⁴

Since every aspect of human existence has its religious dimension and character, the Educational Center defines Religion as that conscious or unconscious process by which people attempt to find meaning in existence and affirm sense in the midst of things which by nature are nonsense.⁵

Religion is not some isolated element, but a life, and a teaching transmitted by life. It is man standing in the presence of God, man encountering the mystery in himself and others, living men and women, endeavoring toward wholeness and the hallowing of all life, now and always. It pertains not to a part of life, but to the whole of life and intends its hallowing.⁶

The Christian religion rests on the discovery of

the Lord who has a kingdom (order out of chaos), power (that which He gives by grace that we may stand), and glory (that which reveals itself by its very effulgence both in us and through us).

Within the context of the Church it is Baptism which initiates the discovery and the possession of that meaning which can empower a person to stand erect in the dialectics of human existence.⁷

Since religion is a means by which man attempts to find

meaning and purpose in life, its primary function is not to affirm and defend dogmatic statements. According to the Educational Center, the basic religious questions of man are:

- a. Who am I? Who is the person who is my self? Why do I respond to life as I do? What is the true shape of my personhood? What is the meaning of me?
- b. Who are you? What is the meaning of you? In relation to me? Are our lives inextricably interwoven? Who are my people? What do we mean to each other?
- c. Where do I live? Where is my place in all this, my true place? Where do I belong? Where is home for me?
- d. What's around the corner? What is life? What is my destiny? In what can I place my faith? Am I tossed around by fate or is there an eternal destiny for me?

Only as religious education pursues these deepest questions of being and meaning is it possible to ask meaningful questions about motivation, behavior, and morality.⁸

As a person questions his being and starts moving toward his potential, there are Stages on Life's Way through which he moves. The first stage is the Aesthetic. At this level a person is primarily concerned about himself, his personal desires, and his personal comforts. The second stage is the Ethical. As a person matures and lives within a community, he becomes aware of the demands of others and feels the need to be accepted. The final stage is the Religious. At this level of existence the question of life's meaning is faced.⁹ Here the individual discovers that God forgives his inability to make a proper adjustment between the first two stages. As he learns to accept this forgiveness, he learns to accept himself.¹⁰ The religious person continues to live in community with others and in the constant tension of wants and demands but is able to live

with a power which both includes and transcends them all.¹¹

As a person moves through life, there are certain times when he experiences the Shaking of the Foundations of his being. This shaking occurs when fate controls a person and the last word is death, when guilt controls a person and the last word is self-condemnation, and when emptiness controls a person and the last word is meaninglessness. In the face of these forces a person searches for a religion which will not remove fate, guilt, or emptiness, but may empower him to live within them with meaning.¹²

As a creature and child of God, man has a particular Vocation. In the Gospel of Thomas Jesus is recorded as saying, "He who knows God but knows not himself lacks everything." Thus, it becomes man's responsibility not only to know about God but to move toward Him, the Ground of Being, through the being he can know within himself. God calls man to the task of actualizing his unique, unprecedented, and never recurring potential.¹³

A diagram used by the Educational Center to present the concept of Actualization and its various religious dimensions is reproduced below in Figure 1. The Mark, which refers symbolically to the Imago Dei in each person, represents those unique and distinct potentialities into which a person has the freedom to move at the moment of decision.¹⁴ The wholeness and fullness associated with meeting the mark perfectly is illustrated by the series of straight lines. To respond faithfully to life is to be the person one was created to be, to say "yes" to the

Ground of Being, and to meet life's calling by fulfilling one's potential. Thus, Faith is not an intellectual concept but a response to life defined as the "will to be myself in the power that created me."¹⁵ As the opposite of sin, faith is that which enables a person to say "yes" to existence and respond from the integrity of his own personhood rather than from idealistic principles or social pressures for conformity.¹⁶

When a person makes an unfaithful decision, he commits Sin and Misses the Mark. The sinful actuality of life is represented by the solid wavy line which continually crosses above and below the mark line. Missing the mark can be identified at three distinct levels. It is a sinful response for a person to will to be himself out of his own power and determination, to will not to be himself and in effect deny the person he is, or to not will to be himself and in effect become nothing by giving up the power to decide.¹⁷

When a person sins, he says "no" to his potential and starts on the road to the Death of Unawareness. This death, which is the result of continued refusal to meet one's mark, is quite distinct from physical death or the death associated with movement through unawareness into the resurrected life of awareness. People show the death of unawareness in their lives when their behavior indicates complete surrender to fate and emptiness and utter conformity to society. It is also present in those people's lives whose behavior shows an egocentric use of power to destroy both themselves and others as persons.¹⁸

The Leap of Faith provides a person with the courage to

look at himself in the two-fold mirror of Christ and discover his potential or mark. As the symbol of the Self,¹⁹ Jesus Christ holds before each person the double picture of his potential and his actuality. Christ is the one for whom a person cries when he looks at himself and wants to know how to face and know himself as he really is. As Guilt arises from sensitivity to the deviation of sin, a person will either try to justify himself and allow sin to control his future decisions, or he will turn back from sin in Repentance or Metanoia. As a person turns back to his potential, he receives from Christ Resurrection or Life and can then "identify without blasphemy Him whom ye/we have crucified and whom God has made both Lord and Christ."²⁰

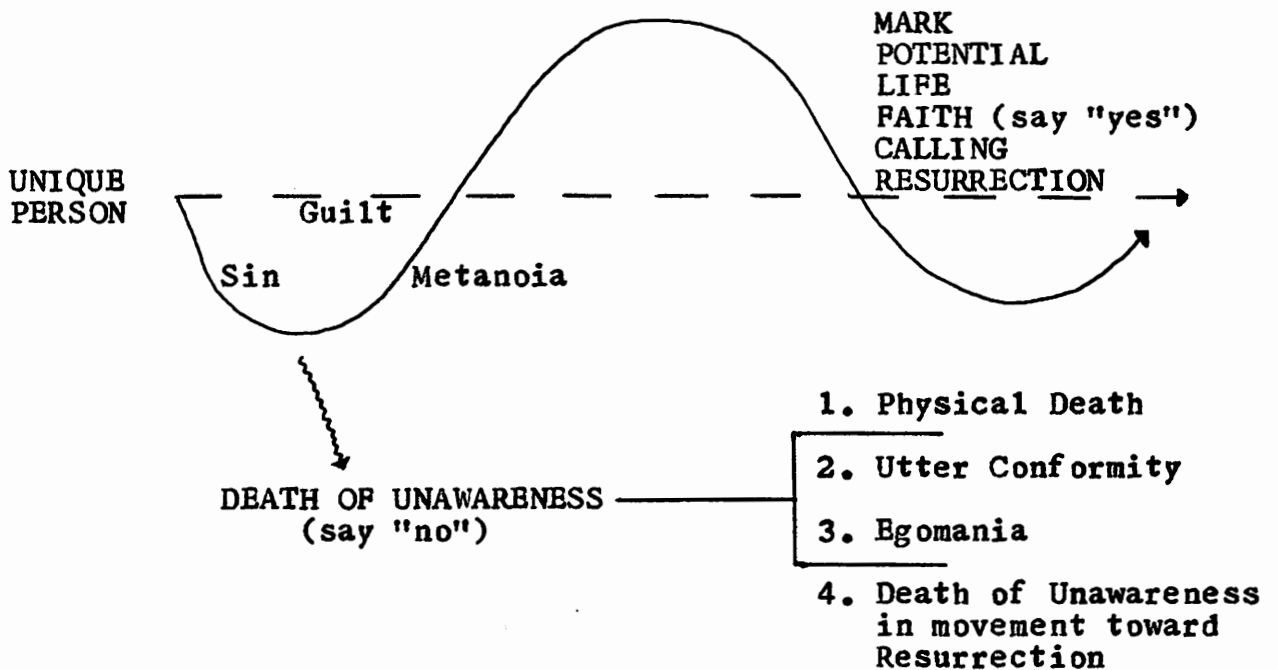


Figure 1. Mark Chart

Decisions and Responses

The person who lives a faithful life in the power of Christ constantly faces the necessity of making Decisions. Every decision involves a Promise and a Cost, and no amount of idealism can brush off the tension between what a person can get and what he must give. The Educational Center feels that the dynamic tension of the decision process is the dialectic of life itself.²¹

Since people are aware of the need to make the Right Decision, the Educational Center distinguishes the possible depth and meanings of this concept. A decision is right if it produces the desired outcome, if it conforms to the explicit or implicit quality of morality expected by society, if it holds up under logical analysis, or if it pleases a person whose favor is desired. While each of these aspects of being right is necessary and unavoidable in daily life, they all involve an element of sin and more or less miss the mark. For the religious person, however, it is possible to make a decision which is Faithful. The faithful decision is one that corresponds with the mark, one that is made in Christ's power, one that avoids sin and enables the person to continue being what he is meant to be.²²

A deeper analysis of the process of making a decision or responding to a situation reveals four distinct steps. These steps, which may extend over a period of time or take place instantaneously, are just as much a part of the faithful response as the sinful one. The process of a Response is illustrated in

Figure 2 below. Step One is Perception. The person views the tension of the situation through the eyes of his own particular history. As he considers himself and others, he weighs the promise and cost of the given situation. At this step he must consider the possibility that his perception is distorted. Step Two is the initial response of a person's Feelings to the given situation. Here the person must consider the appropriateness of his feelings in relation to the situation. Step Three is the act of Decision. Since each decision is made with the anxiety of being uncertain about the outcome, a person must question the inclusiveness of his response and the basis on which the probable behavior

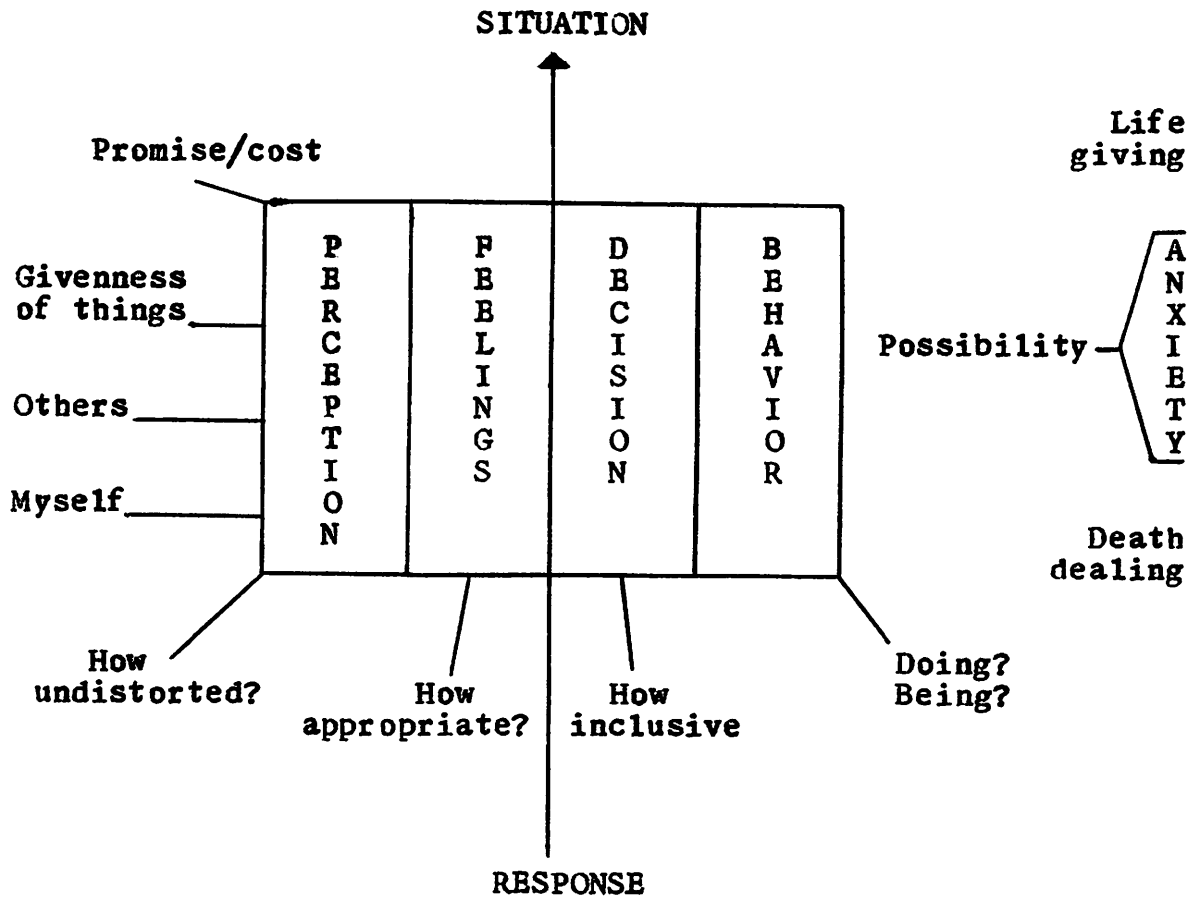


Figure 2. Response Chart

is grounded. Step Four is the Overt Behavior itself. Since the actual behavior is judged as faithful or sinful, it is necessary for the person to question whether his response is representative of his "doing" or "being." In either case the response leads on to the next situation with its anxiety-producing possibility that the result may be either life-giving or death-dealing for the individual.²³

The response process indicates that the ontological condition of man is Anxiety. In describing this condition the Educational Center uses the analysis of Will Herberg. Anxiety is not externally or neurotically engendered but it arises from the human situation.

- a. Man is amphibious. Even though he lives in history and nature, he is able to transcend both and realize that he is mortal. He is aware that his world can be destroyed and that he can become nothing.
- b. Man is responsible. While he is free to decide for himself, he is not free to determine the outcome of his decisions.
- c. Man is insatiable. His imagination transforms all desires into limitless and unsatisfiable possibilities.
- d. Man is guilt-laden and self-alienated. He is caught in the dialectic of the "want" and the "ought."
- e. Man is forlorn and estranged. He lives along with others but feels quite alone in a world he neither wanted nor made. He is not sure who he is or where he belongs.²⁴

Since it is impossible to escape anxiety without giving up freedom and becoming an animal or vegetable, a person must continue to live in freedom, make decisions with responsibility, and derive from courage the power needed to be the person he was created to be.²⁵

Beside the existential and psychological views of decisions and responses, the Educational Center also uses a socio-religious perspective which has three levels of response. These levels correspond to the stages on life's way and indicate the relationship between Response and Law. The response of Autonomy derives its courage from the person himself, since he makes himself his own law. At this level he responds to personal needs and desires while living for and by himself. The response of Heteronomy becomes important when a person lives in community with others and finds it necessary to live by the collective law of the group. This response derives its courage from the group and corresponds with the expectations and desires of the group. While both the autonomous and the heteronomous responses are a necessary part of life, those responses most closely associated with the purposes of the Educational Center are found at the level of Theonomy. The theonomous person derives his courage from himself and the group through the grace of God. Thus, his response is not grounded in ego impulses or social pressures for conformity but in a confrontation with God, whose Law is written in his heart. As such, the theonomous response is more closely related to meeting the mark than a wooden, heteronomous obedience to codes like the Ten Commandments.²⁶ At the theonomous level,

Law is not a description of what ought to be; it is a description of what is. Thus, anything to which I belong has its own shape, and its law is precisely the description of that shape. If the law does not seem to fit me, it is actually I who do not fit into the shape of the belonging. If I do truly belong, the law describes me and is my law. The summary of the Law is not a description of what I ought to do; it is a description of me if I am a child of God.²⁷

The Gospel and the Church

In Western culture the Christian Church is the context within which people come into contact with the Gospel and carry out their search for meaning and truth. The Good News is the symbolic form in which the meaning of human life is reflected and through which God operates powerfully to hold together and interpret life as it is experienced.²⁸ When people are in the wrong and realize the need to be right, the Church is the context in which they come to know that Justification does not depend on wit, skill, energy, or superhuman effort. It depends on God's Grace or confirmation of their being and on their faithful "yes" to God's acceptance of their unacceptability.²⁹

As an institution, people can identify with the Church at various levels. Those who hold to the prerequisite theological ideas and concepts belong to the Church at the Ideological level. Those who live within the institutional structure and standards of the Church belong at the Organizational level. Every active member is involved at these first two levels. However, there is another level, more important than the first two, at which most people do not belong. At the Functional-Existential level the Church becomes the means whereby a person can truly begin to live his own life and discover substance, power, and meaning.³⁰ Since this level of membership is not only the most vital but also the most neglected, the Educational Center has attempted to direct its activities at this plane.

It is the hope of the Center's staff that their particular educational methodology will help in reshaping and revitalizing the liturgical, pastoral, and educational ministries of the Church.³¹

Religious Language and Communication

In order for the educational ministry of the Church to begin involving more people at the functional-existential level it is necessary to re-examine the nature of Religious Language. If a person wishes to speak about the Realm of God, the appropriate mode of expression is conjecture and fantasy. The Educational Center is quite sure that little is gained from speculation at this level. When speaking about the Realm of the World, the proper modes of expression are history, science, psychology, philosophy, ect. Human existence is definitely in the realm of the world, but the Christian is acutely aware of the impact which comes from beyond the world to which he responds with faith. The tension between the realm of God and the realm of the world is bridged by the Realm of Heilsgeschichte. Since this is the area in which the Church lives and attempts to engage people's lives, the proper mode of expression for religious communication is the language of symbol and myth.³²

At the popular level the words symbol and myth have been misused to denote something basicly untrue. For this reason these terms must be redefined and used properly. A Myth is a story which arises from either history or human fantasy. It contains a truth which speaks to the inner meaning of man's

life. Because its implications can never be fully spelled out, it is symbolic in nature. A Symbol is a dramatic form which reflects a truth so profound as to make it unutterable and inexhaustible. At the same time it points beyond itself to that person or thing which gives power and meaning to life.³³ Only as Christians begin to realize the full implications of the symbolic and mythical nature of the Biblical materials will they be able to avoid the pitfalls of skepticism and fundamentalism and continue using the Bible as an effective means of communication at the functional-existential level of the Church.³⁴

In classifying materials according to their educational function the Educational Center distinguishes between Lore and Gospel. Church Lore includes the Bible, Prayer Book, Hymnal, Liturgy, and all traditions. Since this material arises from history, it should be taught objectively as well as possible. However, the Gospel arises from the realm of Heilsgeschichte. In its symbolic form it cannot be taught objectively but must be caught, confided in, and lived into by the individual. History in itself has no inherent meaning but does provide the context for past, present, and future confrontations between the realm of God and the realm of the world.³⁵

Anthropology and Educational Approaches

In order to clarify the educational presuppositions of the Educational Center it is helpful to analyze Three Views of

Man which have shaped educational methods and goals in the Western world. These views have been identified by Will Herberg as the intellectualistic, the naturalistic, and the personalistic.³⁶ A brief survey of these views and their educational applications will indicate the motivation behind the Center's choice of the third view as its methodological base.

The Intellectualistic view, which is based on Greek philosophy, has been dominant in Western culture up to the present. According to this view, man is essentially a mind enclosed in a mortal body. The essence of his being resides in his rational and logical processes. Therefore, "the function of education is to pursue the life of reason, to develop the rational processes, and to expand the mind to encompass greater quantities of knowledge."³⁷

The intellectualistic view leads to problems when applied to Christian education. Its basic premise has produced the typical Sunday School approach in which the teacher assumes the task is complete if the content is taught effectively. It assumes that a person can find fulfillment for his life by using content materials to formulate and answer religious questions.³⁸ It continues the process begun in the fourth century when the Church began to substitute outer formulations, creeds, and confessions for the inner truth and fire so prevalent in the early Church.³⁹

The Naturalistic view, which emerged during the eighteenth century, is also deeply implanted in our culture. This view sees man as a biological and psychological organism acting and

reacting to his environment. Accordingly, the function of education is to "help provide man with the skills whereby and with which he may be able to adjust to the environment which surrounds him."⁴⁰

The naturalistic view also leads to certain difficulties for Christian education. It is partially responsible for the current assumption of many teachers that the function of Christian education is to "make Johnny a good boy."⁴¹ The Educational Center feels that there is no particularly Christian dimension to this function when so often the teacher's approach is nothing more than a moralistic extension of the home, the schools, and the pressures of society. The contributions and insights of this view have been expressed in developmental psychology, but so far the Church has been unable to allow a psychologically orientated type of progressive education to develop on a naturalistic basis.⁴² What has happened was exemplified by the early materials of the Seabury Series, which attempted to apply subject content to developmental and process needs.⁴³

The third view of man is the Personalistic. Although this view is almost forgotten in Western culture, its roots are in Scripture and in Judaeo-Christian thinking. It

does not deny that man has a mind or that he is an organism, but it would deny that either of these describes the essence of what a man is. Rather, he is to be seen as a dynamic person meeting other persons in the context of life and history.⁴⁴

The Educational Center feels that the personalistic view of man has revolutionary implications for Christian education.

It implies that a proper area of concern is personal relationships. At this level it is no longer appropriate to pass out answers and solutions before the proper questions have been raised. Therefore, the educational process can focus on the questions, problems, and issues of life as they must be faced.⁴⁵ At the personalistic level the Church can stop trying to make the Bible, the Liturgy, and the Church meaningful and get to its primary task of enabling people to discover the meaning of their personal lives.⁴⁶ The Educational Center grants that neither educator nor education can automatically give fullness of life. Nevertheless, the personalistic approach provides an opportunity for people to be involved at the level of "being and becoming" rather than "doing and behavior."⁴⁷ It can also provide a context within which the quality of a person's being is at stake, where dialogue replaces monologue, and where people find "the power to live in the givenness of things."⁴⁸

The direction and some of the possibilities of the personalistic approach to education are spelled out in the publications of the Educational Center.

Perhaps we will recognize that our every meeting with a group of people is a life or death business -- that is, that each meeting has within it the possibility of life or death for any individual involved -- life or death as a person. We can help them grow in their inherent right to be deciding beings and in the areas in which they can make decisions. Or we can deny them this right. We can help them to live in a realistic world, helping them to say "Yes" to the God who enables them to live with power in the givenness of things -- a givenness which does not always seem nice and good and easy. Or we can help them try to live in a world of cardboard on a painted scene, where God solves all our problems, and things are nice if we are Christians. One day this falls apart, and they are unable, in all honesty, to say "Yes" to a God who doesn't do what they have been taught He will do.⁴⁹

Methodological Presuppositions

The Educational Center's unique adaptation of the personalistic view of man is partially explained by certain methodological presuppositions. First of all, certain cultural misconceptions have caused many Churches to limit their parish educational programs to the children and youth. The Educational Center cites solid psychological evidence to show that the second half of life can be the time when people are most able to pursue life's meanings and values with the greatest degree of intensity and success. For this reason the Center places most of its emphasis on the adult level. It is felt that a congregation can not expect to undertake effectively the religious education of children until the parents and teachers themselves have renewed their quest for meaning and truth.⁵⁰ Secondly, since people learn what they are ready to learn and what they can use, the Center's courses begin with life, identify the basic issue and tensions of a problem, and refrain from concentrating on goals which might hinder the dialogical process of the class.⁵¹ Finally, the Center assumes that the most progress is made when there is a disciplined structure for the teacher and class to follow.⁵² The details of this discipline and structure will provide the material for Chapter Three.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY OF THE EDUCATIONAL CENTER

The approach of the Educational Center uniquely combines the theology of Paul Tillich, the psychology of Carl Jung, and the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard. The result is an educational methodology which centers on man's existence as a person. Various aspects of this method will be presented in this chapter.

Course Design

A significant question for the personalistic approach to religious education is, "Where are you in your world?"¹ This question, which emphasizes both the person and the world, indicates the starting point of courses designed by the Educational Center.

This is in no way to move away from God but rather to move directly toward Him through the only channels open--me and the world. If I would move toward the Ground of Being--Ultimate Reality--let me move toward Him through the knowledge of what being I can know and what reality I can touch.²

Creation is not a hurdle on the road to God, it is the road itself.³

Life is lived on various levels of depth. Unless we take total flight from it (which means real illness), we find that we move up and down--into the heights and into the depths. Even if we just skim the surface, we alternate between or live concurrently with an anxiety and a hope. And we find that to live life in its fullness, we must plumb the depths to reach the heights. It cannot be otherwise--a real savior can come to us only after we have been honest enough to recognize our need for salvation and virtually face the point of despair--where I become aware that I can do no other than give up the attempt to justify myself. Resurrection can come only after death. Life

lived fully, with power and meaning, swings down through hope and anxiety, and descends to its lowest point, the depth of despair, before it can rise again to its peak of faith. We must travel the whole sweep if we are to reach that highest peak. We must have the honesty and the courage to face the cross, for it is only here, at the point of the cross, that we can dare to take the leap that sweeps us on to faith.⁴

The courses of the Educational Center are designed to take into account the levels of depth through which a person fluctuates as he lives his life. Since a teacher does not have the time required to live a full life with his class, the courses, whether short-term or long-term, are educationally structured to let each level happen for the class.⁵ The structure of each course contains five Units, each of which correspond to one level of depth in life. In proper sequence the five units form an expanded picture of the nature of life, lead naturally into each other, and determine the depth and continuity of the course.⁶

Unit One establishes an atmosphere of rapport among the class members so that the "door of awareness may be opened." At this level the Center structures a rather intellectual or surface Exploration of some of the issues of life. Normal situations pointing out the ambiguities of life are presented and discussed to bring to the surface feelings of joy, fear, anger, loneliness, love, ect. The purpose is not to probe, push, or pull but to offer the possibility of movement toward greater awareness.⁷

Unit Two is the level of Anxiety. This ontological condition is not created by the course, but it emerges as the class moves more deeply into the issues and multiplicity of forces pulling in opposite directions. The individual feels the tension between the promises and the demands of existence, between personal

integrity and social conformity, between personal freedom and personal responsibility, and between his actuality and his potential. As a person faces anxiety with honesty and courage, he finds a spark of hope that he can find his way through the tensions of life. But at the same time he also senses despairingly the impossibility of the task.⁸

Unit Three is designed to take a deeper look at the spark of Hope. As a person pushes aside the other pressures of anxiety, he discovers a sense of universality with the group. Support is felt in the knowledge that the group is together and has the same pains, fears, and anxieties. "To love and be loved, to need and be needed, to give and be given to are worth whatever the price." The "something of value" is worth the cost of being, living, and dying.⁹

Unit Four is the level of Despair. As a person tests his hope, he finds it insufficient to hold life together and senses the inherent despair. The prior experience of hope and universality provides the courage for the individual to look deeper. When he does, he discovers that there is nothing wrong with hope but something wrong with him. He has not lived up to the inner truth of hope. He has kept himself fragmented by being everything but the person he was created to be. He is responsible for those responses which bring death to himself and others, and the self-made self slowly dies. The person finds himself open to a search for meaning and value which goes beyond himself, and in the face of insoluble circumstances he is driven to look for an ultimate ground of being.¹⁰

Unit Five is the level of Faith or Resurrection. The person cries out in despair, "Lord, have mercy!" He takes the leap of faith, opens himself to a resurrection experience, and moves to a discovery of new being. The leap of faith is taken with fear and trembling because the outcome is uncertain. But it is also taken with joy and gratitude because he knows the pain of dying and the glory of living and being reborn. The world, things, and people are not new, but the person looks at them with the eyes of the New Man and sees everything in a different perspective. A living Truth is found, and he must pay the cost of living according to its requirements. It is here discovered that even though life means joy, pain, promise, and cost, the individual is willing to give himself to it.¹¹

Every course designed by the Educational Center includes the five units described above. In Sunday School programs directed by the Center the units are spread over a nine month period. In the intensive courses at the adult level each unit corresponds with a two hour session. The normal adult course is designed to provide one class session per week for five consecutive weeks.

Session Design

Each Session or class meeting of an Educational Center course is educationally structured to provide the class with the possibility of moving into the level of depth planned for the unit under consideration. Although the Center provides the basic structure and direction for each course and unit, the teacher is

expected to write his own lesson plan for each session. This lesson plan, which insures the "freedom within order" necessary to lead a class constructively, has four parts.¹²

- a. A sharp descriptive statement of the issue within existence to be lived into in this session. (Definition)
- b. A launching device to help the class move into the issue. (Entrance)
- c. A listing of the turning points through which the class might move. (Movement)
- d. An imaginative survey of the possible places the class might go in this session. (Anticipation)¹³

Since each of these parts has a precise function, it is necessary to define and describe each one in detail. The Issue is a description of those forces within a person which respond to a given situation. Since it defines universal and internal forces which everyone feels at certain times in life, the subject of an issue is always "I."¹⁴ An issue identifies that point in life at which a person lives under pressure and finds himself confronted with the necessity of making a real decision.¹⁵ When a person is pulled in conflicting directions by the internal forces of the decision situation, he seeks a savior and finds in religion the power to live within the tension.¹⁶

The issue of a session must be properly stated in order to be functional. An issue can not be Abstract or Topical. The forces and situation must be described rather than named. An issue can not be Moralistic. "It states the way things are, not the way they should be." An issue can not be Circumstantial. It describes a person's inner responses rather than the external factors causing tension.¹⁷ In order to properly express the

tension an issue can not be Mistimed. The two sides or forces within a person must be simultaneous or the tension is eliminated.¹⁸

Because an issue is both internal and universal, it is true for the teacher as well as for the class. While a difference in age between the teacher and class will require different circumstances for presenting the issue, the issue itself remains the same for both.¹⁹ The issue is written out for the benefit and understanding of the teacher. It is not read or discussed with the class members aside from its launching device.²⁰

To move the class into the issue of the session the teacher uses a Launching Device. This can be a story, a provocative quote, a role play, or a picture which presents in dramatic fashion the issue to be faced by the teacher and class.

A launching device should be simple enough that the issue can be heard; it should be right for the particular group and within their experience; it should be interesting enough to capture attention, but not so intriguing that they can't move out of it.²¹

In the adult courses several launching devices for each session are provided by the Center as part of the course. However, for the children's classes it is the responsibility of the teacher to devise his own launching devices to suit the class situation. The launching devices may be used to launch both the issue and the turning points.²²

"Turning Points are the dimensions in which the issue can be explored and deepened."²³ By structuring these points the teacher can explore the possible movement prior to the actual class meeting, know ahead of time what to ask and listen for,

and help the class move through the issue fruitfully.²⁴

The dimensions of an issue to be brought out by the turning points are often indicated by the questions appropriate to each step of the response situation discussed in Chapter Two.²⁵

These dimensions might include:

What is the situation?
Why do I perceive this way?
How undistorted is my perception?

How do I feel? (or think?)
To what degree do my feelings pull against each other?
What does feeling this way do to me?
How appropriate are my feelings?

What am I going to do?
Why am I going to do it?
Do I have the capacity? (Can I do it?)
What will I be as I do it?
How inclusive is my decision? (Did I make it from my whole self or only a part?)

How did I feel as I did it?
Who was I as I did it?
How do I feel now?
What is really at stake here?²⁶

As the teacher works out his lesson plan, he should write his turning points and Entries. The entry is a possible question, observation, or quote which can be offered to the class for entering the turning point and deepening the discussion.

In execution, the issue and the turning points are for the leader's understanding; the launching device and the entries which offer the turning points are the portion of the plan actually used in the session.²⁷

The Anticipation is "an imaginative survey of the possible places the class might go in this session." It offers a check on the structure and freedom of the session's issue, launching devices, and turning points.²⁸ A sample class plan illustrating session structure and design is in Appendix A.

The Educational Center and Parish Programs

Since intensive educational programs do not develop by accident, it is the function of the Educational Center to provide the stimulus, planning, and supervision needed to initiate and develop effective programs at the parish level. At the present time there are sixty-five congregations throughout the United States associated with the Center and committed to its discipline. Each congregation is asked to make a minimum annual payment of \$400 as partial reimbursement for the Center's materials and time. However, congregations who are serious about the educational task are not excluded if they can not meet this minimum. In addition to the financial obligation each congregation is expected to provide the Center with data from its classes. Each teacher must do his share by writing lesson plans, transcripts, and evaluations.

When a congregation desires to develop an educational program with the assistance of the Center, the steps are usually as follows. The initial task is the orientation and training of the first group of teachers. The first teachers, who are usually the professional staff of the congregation, then begin and lead a series of short-term adult courses. These initial adult courses serve to familiarize the congregation with the Center approach and arouse interest in those members who may be prospective teachers at a later date. After a period of time, often as long as several years, the congregation is ready for phase two. At this point the first teachers become the parish consultants.

In addition to maintaining the adult courses they begin to recruit, orientate, and train teachers for Sunday School classes. To avoid confusion it is normal to start with the upper grade levels. As the teachers gain confidence and as more teachers are trained in the Center's methods and techniques, an additional class or two can be incorporated into the program each year. In this way the program begins with the adults and gradually works its way down into the grade school level. While the average congregation has courses only for adults and three or four high school classes, some of the congregations have developed the Center approach and now use it quite successfully with ages as low as kindergarden.

When the Center approach is used at the Sunday School level, the content for class sessions is divided between a discussion of the issues of existence and presentation of Lore. To avoid over-repetition and moralizing the Center has definite areas of Lore to be used at each grade level and definite instructions as to the manner in which it is taught. Particularly at the lower levels, Lore is used for its own sake. Stories from the Bible or Church History are to be presented as stories of God's people and their responses. If the children themselves begin to see similarities underlying the stories and their own existence, then discussion should bring out the connections. But at no time is the teacher to present, suggest, or imply moral application. In the upper grades Lore is used for factual presentation and at times offered for reflection. Teachers are advised to pray that the Lore will speak to the lives of their

class members but are asked not to plan it.²⁹

The key to an effective program at the congregational level is constant consultation and training with the teachers. The parish consultants are required to have biweekly meetings with their teachers to discuss lesson plans, transcripts, and evaluation sheets. These materials are then forwarded to the Center for evaluation and use by the Center staff member when he meets with the local consultants at the parish twice each year. The Center staff also sends a midyear written evaluation of this material to every parish. In addition, four regional conferences are held each year for all consultants and adult leaders.

Parish Teachers

Since the approach of the Educational Center is rather sophisticated, it is necessary for parish teachers to receive the proper orientation and training prior to any teaching attempt. First of all, a teacher needs to "gain an intellectual grasp of the theological, philosophical, and educational presuppositions upon which this approach to religious education rests." Since these presuppositions are unique and at times almost esoteric, it is necessary for the individual teacher to be "sold" on the process. This is often done most effectively through personal participation in the initial adult courses offered at the congregational level. As the teachers grow into the process and realize its dimensions and potentials, they in turn become the resources from which the Center receives

new insights and suggestions.³⁰

Secondly, the teachers need "an intellectual grasp of the specific mechanics of carrying out their purposes in the educational process." This means developing the necessary skills to keep up the Center discipline and to avoid falling into any previous misconceptions about the educational task.³¹

Thirdly, the intellectual materials of the first two steps must be put into action. Teaching and practice are needed to gain "a functional knowing of that which he knows abstractly."³²

The final but most important step requires the teacher to find a kind of inner knowledge and wisdom about what it means to be a human being. "He needs to be grasped--convinced (conquered) existentially--by the realities with which he is dealing." This self-knowledge can be found in depth through continuous attendance at the adult courses led by the parish consultants.³³

Course Materials

The materials needed to initiate and develop this dialogical approach are produced and supplied by the Educational Center. Detailed manuals have been written for both teachers and consultants. These booklets discuss the basic presuppositions and understandings of the Educational Center and outline the exact role of the consultant or teacher.

The materials for the intensive adult courses designed by the Educational Center come in mimeographed form. They contain instructions for the teacher, launching devices, content materials,

and suggested schedules for the most effective use of time. At the adult level the teacher is responsible for working out a lesson plan and for using the materials provided. A complete list of the adult courses currently available is included in Appendix B.

At the Sunday School level the teachers have a greater degree of freedom. Their manuals provide guidance in understanding children at the age level of their class. The basic issue for each grade is given and suggestions made concerning the proper use of Lore. However, it is still the teacher's responsibility to plan the lessons, develop his own launching devices, and devise his own time schedule.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The Educational Center of St. Louis has successfully established itself as a pioneer in Christian educational design, research, and consultation. A combination of contemporary theology, philosophy, and psychology has enabled the development of an educational methodology which creates an atmosphere for people of every age to become increasingly aware of the deepest realities of life. Educational Center courses are not designed to pass out advice or religious content, but they are structured to create personal dialogue about the issues of existence. Since these courses are offered within the context of the local Church, it is hoped that the class members would find themselves making connections between the issues of existence and the theology of the Church without lectures and suggestions from the leader.

The author would suggest that further study be done to determine the exact extent to which the Educational Center's approach can be used at the parish level.

- a. How effective is the dialogical approach with younger children less able to conceptualize and analyze their inner being?
- b. Is this method useful with all adults? Would not the emotional investment required have serious repercussions on ~~some~~ individuals?
- c. What is the precise balance needed between discussion of existence and discussion of Christian teachings to avoid a strictly humanistic outcome?

- d. What tangible results or positive contributions can a congregation expect from an association with the Educational Center?
- e. Is it absolutely necessary to accept the theology and philosophy of the Educational Center in order to use its method successfully?

Personal participation in two of the adult courses leads me to feel that the Educational Center's methodology has a valid place in the educational ministry of the Church. The honesty, openness, personal concern, and sincere fellowship which developed among the class members was a gratifying result for the amount of time spent in the sessions. People are not being unrealistic when they remark at the end of a course that it has been the most significant religious experience in their life. Although certain theological and philosophical adjustments or eliminations may have to be made, it would seem that the methodology and approach could be used quite profitably in Lutheran circles as a supplement to our usual content centered and Biblically oriented educational programs. The dialogical process is a welcome change from the person-thing relationships so highly prized by our culture and an effective means of discovering the Gospel at a very personal level.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

¹Luke 6:4 in Codex Bezae. This western manuscript, which contains the Gospels, Acts, and a few verses of the Catholic Epistles, is characterized by free addition and occasional omission of words, sentences, and incidents. Frederic Kenyon, Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts (Revised edition; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), pp. 207-212.

²Mrs. Chandler Brown, "Educational Center: Research, Consultation, Educational Design," Publicity Bulletin (St. Louis: The Educational Center, 1967).

³Mrs. Chandler Brown, Adult Manual (St. Louis: The Educational Center, 1965), p. 1.

CHAPTER II

¹Elsom Eldridge, "Man, if thou knowest..." (Annual Reports; St. Louis: The Educational Center, 1959-1966), pp. 3-4.

²"Basic Understandings," Addenda of Adult Manual (St. Louis: The Educational Center, 1965), pp. 4-5. Also Addenda of Consultant's Manual (St. Louis: The Educational Center, 1962), pp. 4-5.

³Eldridge, p. 29.

⁴Aldous Huxley, Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow (New York: The New American Library of World Literature Inc., 1964), p. 54.

⁵"Basic Understandings," p. 5.

⁶"The Narrow Ridge," (Adult Course; St. Louis: The Educational Center, January 1966), Session III, Sheet C.

⁷"Basic Understandings," p. 5.

⁸Eldridge, p. 25.

⁹"Basic Understandings," p. 6.

¹⁰Eldridge, p. 12.

¹¹"Basic Understandings," p. 6.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Eldridge, p. 31.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁵"Basic Understandings," p. 10.

¹⁶Eldridge, p. 10.

¹⁷"Basic Understandings," p. 10.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 6-7 and Eldridge, pp. 23-24.

¹⁹Carl Jung speaks of Jesus Christ as the symbol of the Self. For Western culture Christ is a living symbol which represents wholeness and fullness of life. For a full discussion of this concept see Carl Jung, Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self, in The Collected Works of C. G. Jung, edited by Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, and Gerhard Adler, translated by R. F. C. Hull (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1959) IX.2 of Bollingen Series XX, 36-71.

20"Basic Understandings," p. 12.

21Ibid., p. 8.

22Ibid., pp. 11-12.

23Elsom Eldridge, "Basic Understandings of The Narrow Ridge," Tape recording explaining presuppositions and concepts employed in "The Narrow Ridge" (St. Louis: The Educational Center, 1966). Hereafter referred to as "Eldridge Tape."

24"Basic Understandings," pp. 8-9.

25"Eldridge Tape."

26Eldridge, p. 21 and "Basic Understandings," p. 8.

27Eldridge, p. 21.

28"Basic Understandings," p. 5.

29Ibid., pp. 8 and 10.

30Ibid., p. 4.

31Eldridge, p. 30.

32"Basic Understandings," p. 13.

33Ibid., p. 7.

34Ibid., p. 14.

35Ibid.

36Eldridge, pp. 1-2.

37Ibid., p. 2.

38Ibid., p. 5.

39Gertrude Ingersoll, "Psychological Reflections on Christian Beginnings," Tape recording of lecture delivered to Jungian Analyst Club (St. Louis: The Educational Center, May 1964).

40Eldridge, p. 3.

41Ibid., p. 11.

42Ibid., p. 5.

43Ibid., p. 8.

44Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁸Mrs. Chandler Brown, Adult Manual (St. Louis: The Educational Center, 1965), p. 2.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 1.

⁵⁰Eldridge, p. 35.

⁵¹"Basic Understandings," p. 4.

⁵²Ibid., p. 2.

CHAPTER III

¹Elsom Eldridge, "Man, if thou knowest..." (Annual Reports; St. Louis: The Educational Center, 1959-1966), p. 31.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 19.

⁴Mrs. Chandler Brown, Teacher's Manual (6th Grade Edition; St. Louis: The Educational Center, 1961), p. 10.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Eldridge, pp. 10, 35-36.

⁷Mrs. Chandler Brown, Adult Manual (St. Louis: The Educational Center, 1965), p. 4.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 5.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., p. 6.

¹³Brown, Teacher's, p. 24.

¹⁴Brown, Adult, p. 6.

¹⁵"Basic Understandings," p. 2.

¹⁶Brown, Teacher's, p. 24.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Brown, Adult, p. 7.

¹⁹Brown, Teacher's, p. 25.

²⁰Brown, Adult, p. 10.

²¹Ibid., p. 8.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Brown, Teacher's, p. 27.

²⁵Supra, p. 13.

²⁶Brown, Teacher's, p. 28.

²⁷Brown, Adult, p. 10.

²⁸Brown, Teacher's, p. 28 $\frac{1}{4}$.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 35-36.

³⁰Eldridge, p. 35.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

APPENDIX A

Sample Class Plan

THE FOCUS OF THE COURSE IS, "HOW CAN I FIND MYSELF IN THIS WORLD OF EVER-SHIFTING DIMENSIONS?"

(Teacher sees situation as: The children seem to be expressing real anxiety about their own reactions when they get in a tight spot. They seem to be somewhat aware that these things don't happen only to them, that we're all in this. But they have been saying that everything is going along fine when suddenly, wham! something happens and they get in trouble with a brother or sister or friend or parent, and they're lost. They feel awful, and they don't know what's the matter.)

(1) Issue - When someone hurts me, I want revenge, but both the cost of getting it and not getting it is too high.

(2) Launching Device - Will use a story with three endings. We were talking about Susie last week, and they seemed to identify well with her, so will use her again. Story - Susie and little sister and mother have been shopping--long, tiring day. Little sister teasing Susie and picking on her, but always so mother won't see. Susie has gotten cross several times and has been scolded by mother. Mother leaves for one minute, and little sister gives Susie a real hard pinch. Mother returns. Susie is outraged. What shall she do? 1. Pinch sister right here and now and take the consequences? 2. Tell on sister to mother and hope maybe she'll get punished? 3. Wait until mother isn't around and wallop sister, but hard?

(3) Turning Points -

When someone deliberately hurts me, I get angry, and I have to get even. (In class - What do you think Susie will do? What would you do if you were Susie?)

I want to satisfy my anger, but I'm afraid of what it might cost me. (How do you think you'd feel?)

I get a certain satisfaction out of revenge - it somehow seems to justify me. (Suppose you could get back at her without being caught, what then?)

If I get revenge or if I forgo it, I find I don't feel so good about myself. (If you get your revenge and hurt back or if you don't --how do you feel now? Are you beginning to find that you have to live with yourself either way?)

(4) Anticipation - Perhaps we can see that Susie was facing a pull in two directions. This always happens when we're faced with a decision. We might only be able to move as far as, "Yes, I seek revenge, but revenge is sweet and worth the possible cost." Or we might be able to see that no matter how sweet, the cost of revenge is one I must count.

APPENDIX B

Short-term Intensive Adult Courses

1. The Narrow Ridge - The focus is: DO I DARE TO BE WHO I AM IN A WORLD THAT IS AT BEST UNCERTAIN? This is sometimes called the "paper doll" conference, as it is built around a variety of quotes from a variety of sources, and these quotes are usually given to the participants on small slips of paper. This course leads to an awareness of the "narrow ridge" we all live on, and to a knowledge that there are no absolutes, no infallible rules that will turn this narrow ridge into a broad plateau. This course also comes in a form adapted for use with college students.
2. The Wicket Gate - The focus: IN ACCEPTING THE FREEDOM TO BE MYSELF, CAN I BEAR THE IMPLICIT DEMAND IT CARRIES--- THAT I BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MY LIFE AND WHAT I DO WITH IT? It deals with commitment, basically the commitment to be who we are. It uses a variety of quotes also, and two longer passages which are available on tape. One is a reading of Tillich's sermon, "Be Strong," and the other deals with the concept of "dying daily." The "wicket gate" signifies the point of no return, in a sense--a point at which we have moved far enough into awareness that we must choose to go forward in order to live at all.
3. Stone, Water, and Wine - Focus: I KNOW NOW THAT AWARENESS IS A TRUE BLESSING AND MY FIRST STEP TOWARD MY POTENTIAL, BUT WHAT IS THE GOOD OF BEING AWARE THAT I'M UNCHANGED? This is the deepest of the first three and progresses beyond the point of the Narrow Ridge and the Wicket Gate. Here we can see ourselves in sharp relation to the values we now hold, and begin to realize that our lives and our beings must somehow reflect these values. This course is structured around Kierkegaard's "Stages on Life's Way" and the paralleling concept of stone, water and wine as three stages of understanding. The first session picks up Kierkegaard's story of the domestic goose, and in ensuing sessions, he moves along through the Units with us, offering us reflection of ourselves.
4. A Many Splendored Thing - As its title implies, this one deals with love, first as a concept and then as a part of life, and finally as we look at ourselves in relation to love. The focus is: CAN I FULLY ACCEPT THE GIFT OF LOVE WHEN MANY OF ITS SPLENDORS SEEM TO DEMAND THE APPALLING COST OF A SELF-SACRIFICE WAY BEYOND WHAT I AM ABLE OR WILLING TO MAKE? This course begins with Tillich on tape with a portion about the qualities of love from "Love, Power, and Justice." In addition to that, resources for leaders and the quotes used in the sessions come from both theology and psychology.

5. The Parables - The focus is: DO I DARE TO LEAVE THE SAFETY OF PLATITUDES WHEN MEANING IS SO THREATENING AND SO SHAKING? Be ye not deceived by the simplicity of the title. This, perhaps, is the most sophisticated of all the courses. It presents first a way of looking at the parables and then deals with five of them in terms of the basic issue each one holds. This course offers an extremely meaningful (and sometimes threatening) framework for the parables. Its difficulty lies not in the course, but in the fact that most church people have been taught so firmly that the parables are moralistic tales that they find it very hard to drop this presupposition. The group should not only have gone through "The Narrow Ridge" (and perhaps "The Wicket Gate"), but they should have truly appropriated the narrow ridge concept before this course is attempted.

6. The Next Thing - Unlike the other courses, the title of this one is not revealed until the last session. It is publicized by its Focus, "The Name of the Game is Life." This course is structured in four sessions, in which the "Best" thing, the "Responsible" thing, and the "Right" thing are explored through a series of vignettes, and quotes, moving to a deep look at the stake involved in each of them. The fourth session is an exploration of the "Next" thing and its implications. Quotes used are from a variety of disciplines and sources.

7. The Fraught Possibility is a course which deals essentially with the possibility of being. The Focus is: THE NECESSITY OF BEING WHO MY WORLD DEMANDS IS SO GREAT THAT OTHER POSSIBILITIES ONLY THREATEN ME, AND YET... This might be picked up by everyone at whatever level he is. It could be used pre-Narrow Ridge and lead directly into it. It could be used by a group who had already been through four or five other courses. And, it could be used by a mixture of both, without the experienced people threatening the neophytes or the neophytes holding back the pros.

8. The Imposed Necessity is an advanced course which should not be used until after the Trilogy (i.e. Narrow Ridge, Wicket Gate, and Stone, Water, and Wine) at least. It is designed, however, to speak directly to FRAUGHT, so it could be used immediately after it for groups who have had several previous courses. It might not be used for new groups until a year or two later. Much of this course is built around psychological thoughts. The Focus is: I'M FAR ENOUGH INTO THE WAY OF LIFE THAT I CANNOT TURN BACK, AND YET I CAN NOT LIVE UP TO THE VALUES THAT THIS WAY DEMANDS.

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