

Christian Education

Colleagues,

For starting the new year we have Bob Conrad's review of Norma Cook Everist's recent book—both of the principals dear friends from ancient days—Norma a Valparaiso University student when I first started teaching there ages ago, and Bob, seminary classmate in the 1950s and then faculty colleague at Seminex two decades later.

Since I've dabbled in the field myself for half a century, I've pasted a couple of related items at the end after Bob's review. But his review is this week's main attraction. That comes first.

Peace and joy!

Ed Schroeder

Christian Education as Evangelism.

Edited by Norma Cook Everist.

Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007. 163 Pages.

This is a book well worth reading. However, I have some reservations about the title. The book is written by Christian Education professors at Lutheran seminaries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America [ELCA] and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada [ELCIC]. All of them are at pains to make the case that Christian Education is evangelism. Evangelism is only one of the functions of the church.

There are four others besides education (paideia) and witness (marturia): leiturgia (worship); diakonia (service); koinonia (fellowship); and oikonomia (stewardship).

Why all the attention to witness to the exclusion of the others? Is it a perceived notion that witness is the most important function for a stalemated church? I find it interesting that Christian Education professors would put all their eggs in one basket to the detriment of the other functions of the church, including Christian Education.

Be that as it may, there are interesting points made in the separate chapters of the book. The most interesting chapters are those which report experiences of Christian Education as evangelism. Mary Hughes reports the experiences of three Ohio congregations. Eddie Kwok reports on education in a multicultural situation with the Chinese in Canada. Nelson Strobel reports on his experience in a parochial elementary school in New York and makes the case for church schools also at the secondary and higher education levels.

The remaining chapters are split between an emphasis on evangelism and education. Four focus on education and five on evangelism. Diane Hymans' opening chapter focuses on education. Education, she says, helps people to understand what something means. Understanding is more than simply knowing. It moves from facts to what the facts mean. She says that we need to maintain the language of education to name and describe what is an essential ministry of the church. Education focuses on understanding the gospel and how it shapes who we are and how we live our lives.

Mary Hess, in her chapter, uses the work of Keagan and Lacey to describe language that transforms. The first language is From Complaint to Commitment. The second personal language is From Blame to Personal Responsibility. The third language is From New Year's Resolutions to Competing Commitments. And the fourth is From Assumptions that Hold Us to Assumptions We Hold. The three social languages are: From Prizes and Praising to Ongoing

Regard; From Rules and Policies to Public Agreement; from Constructive to Deconstructive Criticism. As helpful as these languages are, Hess barely indicates how they are related to Christian Education.

Norma Everist offers a four stage approach to the education of people.

- First: Who are the people among whom we are called to teach? What daily language do they speak?
- Second: How are people interpreting what they hear?
- Third: Beyond the church doors where do people go to carry out their mission and ministry?
- Fourth: How are people hearing the gospel that members live and speak? The emphasis on the language of daily living is very helpful.

The final chapter by Susan McArver is the story of the development of the ELCA 2007 Social Statement on Education which states that Lutherans have a rich heritage upon which to draw. The statement posits a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the concept of education connected with both faith and world; it states that Lutherans support public education; the statement addresses the church and its institutions rather than the church's response to society; and the statement indicates that education often leads to evangelism.

The following five chapters are essentially about evangelism. Margaret Krych uses Paul Tillich as one of her primary sources. Tillich says that there are three primary functions of the church: missions, education and evangelism. Oddly enough, he speaks of evangelism as that which is directed to disaffected church members.

The weight of Tillich's argument is placed on evangelism rather than education. Carol Jacobsen's emphasis is on living outside

oneself for God and the neighbor. That is the impetus for evangelism. Donald Just's emphasis is on making evangelism not just another program of the church. Phyllis Kersten's contribution is on women hearing in their own language and men hearing in theirs – a notable admonition. Kristine Lund targets young adults and how to reach them in cyberspace. As the reader can see, the emphasis in these five chapters is on evangelism. Education is secondary.

Addendum to book review.

I would entitle the book, "Christian Education and Evangelism" and be rid of the implication that Christian Education and evangelism are the same. Evangelism is proclamation of the gospel to those who have not heard it. Christian Education is for understanding the meaning of what is believed. However, the effect of the Gospel is determined by the situation of the learner. The Gospel is good news to the person convicted of sin. It is bad news to the person trapped in sin and unwilling to acknowledge it.

The phrase, "Jesus died so that your sins can be forgiven" can be law or Gospel depending on the situation of the learner. When the Gospel is proclaimed it can be good news or bad news regardless of the setting in which it is spoken. In that regard there is similarity between education and evangelism. However, there is still the distinction between coming to believe (evangelism) and understanding the meaning of what is believed (education).

Robert Conrad, Educational Ministry Professor Emeritus
The Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

A lengthy postscript: Some thoughts on theology and pedagogy.

Fifty years ago at Valparaiso University Bob Bertram, just-appointed head of the theology department, put Bob Schultz and

me to work with a guinea-pig group of college freshmen to concoct the first-ever class of "Crossings theology." It was intended to be Course number 1 in the new theology curriculum at Valparaiso grounded in the lectionary readings of the Church Year—"New Testament Readings: Gospels" and then "New Testament Readings: Epistles." Bertram had mesmerized President O.P.Kretzmann into accepting it as the required theology sequence for all degree students. Schultz and I, young Turks just back from Germany (he already a Dr.theol, me still an "all-butter") confected a syllabus, articulated a pedagogy and then team-taught the trial-run experiment—scissors-and-pasting as we went. In the coming fall semester an "improved" version—having been"field-tested"—was inflicted on 1000 freshmen entering the university. Also, so said some departmental colleagues, was it "inflicted" on them to teach it! For teaching NTR was also not the same as teaching the old standard church-college religion sequence—one course in Bible, one in doctrine, one in church history and one in ethics. NTR sought to weave those four threads together—in every course—starting with the church lectionary readings for the previous Sunday. And the pedagogical method was different—or so we thought.

Here was our initial statement. I think it's basically Bob Schultz's prose.

INTRODUCTION TO NTR

Theology can be studied in a number of ways. One method with which many of you are familiar is through the simple learning of true statements about God and our relationship to him. This method achieves its goal when the student understands these statements and is able to apply them to new problems of thought and of understanding which present themselves. This method of study presupposes that our relationship to God is determined by what we know about him and identifies our present problem as not

knowing enough.

A second method of study has been developed by those who disagree with these basic presuppositions. In this method, the aim of theological study is not basically changed but something is added to it. In addition to the intellectual study the student is also expected to undergo a personal experience. These two, the acquisition of knowledge and the personal experience, are not necessarily related to one another. This is the weakness of this method. Its strength is that it recognizes that our relationship to God is not only an intellectual one but one which involves our total existence.

In our NTR courses we propose to follow a third method. Rather than simply communicating the results of our study we shall be more interested in helping you to carry on your own studies. We realize that your results will often not be as deep or even as true as those which your instructor has achieved. This is a disadvantage. We feel that it is outweighed by other considerations. Theological knowledge is, we think, not really knowledge until you have personally come to terms with it. First of all, then, we want you to learn to hear what the New Testament is saying to you in your own situation. Whatever that is, it will call for a change not only in your thinking about yourself but in your very relationship to God. For the primary purpose of the New Testament is not to tell us how to think about ourselves or even about God but rather to tell us how God thinks about us. Sometimes you will find the whole structure of your life transformed by hearing what God has to say about you (faith). At other times you will find yourself in violent opposition to God's word about your life and the nature of your existence (unbelief). All of us find both reactions within ourselves. We as a staff are personally concerned that you increasingly grow in the faith relationship. We shall, however, neither consider ourselves nor you academic failures if you

reject God's word to you.

President Kretzmann has stated this purpose very well in an article on the "Idea of the Christian University" in the CRESSET (September 1959, p.8):

"...the truly Christian university can proudly engage in what Kierkegaard called 'passionate thinking.' It becomes less cold, less abstract, less 'objective.' Kierkegaard notes: 'All Christian knowledge, however strict its form, ought to be anxiously concerned ... the high aloofness of indifferent learning is, from the Christian point of view, far from being seriousness; it is, from the Christian point of view, jest and vanity.' This is the major reason why the truly Christian university can be the home of the liberal arts at their highest and best. It pursues their teaching and learning under a dynamic of love and faith which can change them radically from a mere quality of the mind to an imperative for action in the world. Since they are known and communicated in love they represent high learning transmuted by the alchemy of personal involvement. Under this view the university becomes as no one else the high follower of the Man Whose love for man flowered into magnificent expression amid the cold traditionalism of the synagogue."

Our concern in the following weeks then is primarily a religious concern. We shall try to help you confront God's word in its depth. We shall, for that reason, not always be able to confront you with the full breadth of its intellectual content. We shall not even be able to cover the full range of the material suggested by the syllabus in our classroom discussions. The syllabus is designed to help you come to grips with the material personally. We shall give you stimulation and help in the classroom. For this reason, we feel that your personal

participation in the discussions is essential to your work in this course. Only through that will we be able to help you and you be able to help one another at the point where it is needed.

Because we are aiming at this type of knowledge in which the understanding of God's truth takes place through a personal experience, your own progress will not follow a definite pattern. Do not despair if any particular week's work strikes you as unsuccessful. Sometimes it is only the preparation for next week's insight.

Now perhaps some of you are thinking: "What kind of examinations can they possibly give to test whether this purpose has been achieved? Am I going to have to fabricate personal confessions of faith in order to get a grade?" By no means. We shall not try to test for personal experience nor to grade on the basis of it. On the other hand, neither shall we test for your ability to simply repeat the "truths" which we have given our official stamp of approval. What we shall test for is your ability to confront a paragraph of the Bible and to analyze and communicate its message to a person in a particular situation. We shall give you the section of Scripture. We shall also give you a life-situation. You will on the basis of the assigned text formulate God's word to a person in that situation (A completely "true" answer may receive an F because it misses the point.) Sometimes we shall also give you a quick examination to determine whether you have worked through the material for any particular day. But that will only be a test of preparation and not of our common success in achieving the goals of this course.

In order to test your preparation we shall also require specific use of the assigned readings in your formulation of the essays. This must be more than a mere reference. You must show how the point of this particular reading assignment contributes to our total understanding of our relationship to God. The essays are

for your benefit, not ours. We shall not grade all your essays every week. Rather we shall use them as an occasional check on the level of your preparation. It is possible for us to get an accurate picture of several weeks' work from one week's essay because the work of each semester is cumulative in nature. Each week presupposes all the weeks (+ NTR courses) which preceded it. The reading assignments should be prepared for the first class meeting each week. The essays should be prepared for the second class meeting. The Honor Code applies to all written work. Use any help for your thinking you can, but do your OWN writing.

A postscript to that postscript:

Speaking of Valparaiso University, just a few days ago a new president was elected. I asked a VU staffer to give me the inside story. Here's what he told me. His words are cheering. As a VU alum (B.A. (1950) and a long-term staffer (1957-71) I couldn't be more pleased. Almost wish I could turn the clock back and start those 14 years all over again. Almost.

"I am delighted with the board's choice of Mark Heckler as new president for Valparaiso University. The three finalists were very different from one another. The only LCMSer, and only cleric to boot, was Patrick Ferry, current president of Concordia College [LCMS], Mequon, Wisconsin. His appearance among the finalists had some of us spooked, as he's a Ft. Wayne Seminary grad and has spent pretty much his whole career at Mequon, where all kinds of theological craziness goes on. He seemed like a pleasant enough person, and he professed to be affirmative toward things like ELCA/LCMS cooperation at VU and even toward women's ministries. He grew up without a church or a religious background, but went to St John's College [LCMS], Winfield, Kansas, to play basketball and fell in love with Prof. X's daughter and, as so often happens with a glandular attack,

got religion at the same time.

Wayne Powell, currently president of ELCA college Lenoir Rhyne, is an academic through and through-mathematician son and grandson of academics (all in the sciences). His brother Mark teaches New Testament at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. He was a provost at Texas A & M before going to Lenoir Rhyne. An ELCA lay person, he was the only life-long Lutheran in the group.

Mark Heckler is the first member of his eastern Pennsylvania, blue-collar family to go to college. He grew up in the Church of the Brethren and went to one of that denomination's colleges, then taught at another such school before going to University of Colorado-Denver to be an administrator. His wife, Veronica, grew up in the (Russian) Orthodox Church. They picked a Lutheran church as their "compromise" 20 or so years ago, and they're active ELCA lay people. Veronica, in fact, served for a few years as the Youth Director at their church in Littleton, CO—the church Don Marxhausen served at the time of the Columbine School massacre.

The Columbine story plays a large part in the Hecklers' lives, as their son Zack was a close friend of Dylan Klebold, one of the Columbine perpetrators, up until a short time before the killings. It was Mark and Veronica Heckler who urged Don Marxhausen to minister to the Klebold parents and to have a funeral for Dylan—which Don did, with only the Klebolds and Hecklers in attendance.

I got to drive Mark back to O'Hare (Chicago) Airport after his interview and we talked a long time about all that. Mark said that nothing in his life tested him and the rest of his family like that experience. His faith, theology, sanity, grip on reality, trust in other human beings—everything seemed to have

come unglued for a while. But having come through that, his tested faith and harshly-examined theology are stronger and deeper than ever, he says.

I came away from this conversation convinced that Mark is a man of deep and genuine faith who will work hard to keep church-relatedness, theology, and the cultivation of faith along with learning central elements of Valpo's identity and mission.

On top of all this, Mark is a truly charismatic and winsome person. A man with stage presence, he's also quite articulate, something it will take us time to get used to. You can actually hear all nine syllables when he says, 'Valparaiso University.'"