

## Teaching and Teachers in the Early and Contemporary Church

Richard S. Rawls

Richard Rawls writes this article after having a Christmas conversation with some junior high students. “I was trying to encourage the youth to engage in some basic textual exegesis through conversation, a subtle way of educating them without their knowing it. However, he was brought to the sad realization that, at many levels, we have failed miserably in the role of Christian education.”<sup>1</sup>

After discovering that the youth did not know the difference in the Luke account compared to the Matthew account of the birth narrative of Jesus Christ; Rawls began to go through a series of questions. Rawls states, “That he was somewhat alarmed and that he later resorted to self-recrimination and remonstrance”.<sup>2</sup> Rawls raised question after question on how could this possibly have happened from a parent perspective and a church perspective. Rawls attributes this issue to busy people and a busy church. “It seems evident that some of the problem stems from the fact that we corporately spend less time at church than we used to. I remember the days when a week’s activity centering around the church involved not only the Sunday morning service but also Sunday evening gatherings and Wednesday night activities. By and large these have fallen away.”<sup>3</sup> I agree that people are busier than ever now especially those with children in all types of activities. Rawls writes, “It is understandable that people expect the church to fulfill a role (Christian education) that they themselves do not have the time, energy, and sometimes the

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1 Richard S. Rawls, "Teaching and Teachers in the Early and Contemporary Church," *Ministry Compass*, Spring, 36, no. 1 (07), accessed September 14, 17.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

inclination to perform.”<sup>4</sup> Rawls identifies that the churches are stretched by their obligations. They fulfill far more functions than in the past. The logical way to manage such obligations is to form a committee to handle specific duties. Many parishioners assume Christian Education is taken care of by a committee.”<sup>5</sup>

According to Rawls, “The chief issue is that many congregational members are not concerned about Christian Education because they do not see it as their concern. It does not pertain to them because they are already active in another area in the church. To elucidate this insight further, I must resort to the Bible. Although, the Bible is not a manual for ecclesiastical discipline, management or education in the same way those later documents stipulated rules for each of these areas; it certainly ought to inform how we think about the responsibility for teaching ourselves about our own faith.”<sup>6</sup>

It is our responsibility to teach, know and understand our own faith. It is vital that our youth know who they are in the Kingdom of God. I remember watching the movie *God’s Not Dead*. It was very easy for the professor to lure those to sign the paper that did not know their faith. This is the reason that Christian Education is vital for laity (in this article youth) so they will have a foundation. These are our future leaders of the world we live in.

Some of the words of Rawls’ conclusion are “solving the situation is not easy because contemporary families possess so little time. Any proposed solution must be descriptive rather than prescriptive because congregations, people, and situations differ.”<sup>7</sup>

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid

7 Ibid

## NOTES FROM ARTICLE

1. Charles Foster, "Why Don't They Remember?" in *Forging a Better Religious Education in the Third Millennium*, ed. James Michael Lee (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education, 2000), 90-94.
2. Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Schools We Deserve," in *Schooling Christians*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and John H. Westerhoff (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 3.
3. For a full treatment of education as a reflection of the spiritual values of a community or civilization, see Werner Jaeger, *Paideia*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), vol. 1.
4. See, for example, the *Didache*, in Cyril C. Richardson, *Early Christian Fathers* (New York: Collier, 1970), 161-79.
5. Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, "*didaskalos*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 2:148ff.
6. Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 1.

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