

BEULAH HEIGHTS UNIVERSITY

Relevance of Christian Education for Clergy and Laity

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The Relevance of Christian Education for Clergy and Laity

Introduction

“I don’t want to teach anybody anything.” Those are the words that were spoken out the mouth of the student/teacher that authors this paper. Education has always been a part of her life. Her aunt and mother were both elementary school teachers and her father was superintendent of Sunday School and Dean of the Congress for many years. Her father continued his daily study of the Word until he no longer could. The legacy that education is a life-long process is embedded in her very being from a natural perspective as well as a spiritual perspective. When her father passed there were many books, Bibles, correspondence school lessons and pamphlets. These items were left as a part of her inheritance. That inheritance came with the mantle 2 Timothy 2:15. Study to shew thyself approved a workman rightly dividing the word truth.

In this crucial 21st century, we desperately need Christian education for our laity and clergy. Our headlines, news reports, and social media are screaming about unethical ministerial practices while our children are dying like animals in the street. The belief of the student author is that we must get back to the basic. The African American church for so long was the safe haven and knowledge fountain of our communities. The Holy Bible provides scriptural support for one to believe; that our survival in this world is dependent on Christian education for clergy and laity. The author believes Hosea 4:6 states it best, My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. Therefore, she believes that Christian education will always be relevant for the entire Body of Christ.

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. While 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. These are future leaders/clergy of the world.

Richard Rawls in a conversation with some youth discovered that they did not know the Luke/Matthew comparative narrative of Jesus's birth. This was very disturbing for him and caused him to seek inward and outward for an answer. Rawls assumption was that the church has become too busy with other activities in their lives. 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 inclination to perform."¹ This article was familiar to the status quo. Fellow students who serve as youth pastors in their churches often express the concern about the youth level of knowledge of the Bible. Some of the comments are that it's not important or their home life does not reflect what is being taught at the church.

As a previous member of a Word of Faith Church, there was a layperson (2 year program) and also a Bible School for Clergy. These programs were vital to the church. Of course, there were the traditional classes and conferences. However, there was no established program for youth other than youth services. In retrospect, the student wonders if the establishment of a formal program for youth would have been beneficial. Some of our youth that are being destroyed are not all from unchurched families. The question is what must we do as a people to

1 Richard S Rawls. "Teaching and Teachers in the Early and Contemporary Church." *Direction: Teaching and Teachers in the Early and Contemporary Church*. Spring 2007. Accessed September 14, 2017. <http://www.directionjournal.org/36/1/teaching-and-teachers-in-early-and.html>.

educate or better educate our clergy and laity? Our world is dying and we are watching. Calvin E. Malcor pens,

“Christian education is particularly important as we consider the modern American scene: seven to eight hours of television being watched each day, the baby boomers, groups with special needs, family fragmentation, high mobility, the declining popularity of Christianity, increased secularization, indifference to moral absolutes, entertainment saturation, Bible illiteracy, the explosion of technology to name but a few things. These cultural influences can easily affect the local church adversely. It cannot afford to have its educational ministry characterized by sporadic attendance, unfulfilled assignments, sloppy instruction, boring classes, and limited methods. The church of Jesus Christ must stand tall over against the world-and-life view of a pagan society.”²

Christian Education

The basis for a Christian education program is given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20: making disciples, baptizing them, and “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” R. B. Kuiper has observed,

“A noteworthy feature of the great commission is that it bids the apostles and the church of all ages to *teach*. In fact, *teaching* is spoken of as their chief missionary task. They are to go in order to *teach*. *Going* is but a means to the end of *teaching*. And they are to *baptize* those who accept their *teaching*. But they must *teach*, whether or not men give heed. And, significantly, they are told not once, but twice, to *teach*”³

“Christian education as an internal activity of the church is concerned to prepare and sustain the community in the life of faith. Such Christian education is not only an education about Christian faith, but also education in the Christian faith.”⁴

2 Calvin E. Malcor, Christian Education in the Local Church, , accessed December 05, 2017, http://opc.org/new_horizons/NH00/0006f.html.

3 Rienk Bouke Kuiper, *The doctrine of Biblical church: the glorious body of Christ* (Seoul: Sung Kwang Pub. Co., 1978), 45.

4 John Bowden, *Encyclopedia of Christianity* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005), 369.

According to Malcor, the goal of Christian Education is

“the growth of the whole church into the image of Christ. As each member develops his own particular gifts and abilities, the whole community of believers grows. The church is people changed by the grace of God from darkness into light, but people who still need to be changed throughout their Christian pilgrimage (2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Pet. 3:18). The teacher equips his students by helping them through this growing process. To a large extent, this means helping them teach themselves. What the learner contributes to the learning process is just as important as what the teacher contributes (“I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes,” Ps. 119:99). Probably your church has had lots of “teaching” going on, but how much “training” that helps people live out what has been taught?”⁵

Glance of Historical Christian Education 1812-2012

“Sunday School class began in England in the late 1700’s and migrated to the United States in the early 1800’s and began to take on a distinctive shape: the learners were both children and adult laypeople who needed basic biblical content, general literacy and morals and manners for life in Western society. Sunday Schools in the U.S. wove together all these aspects.”⁶ Legg writes, “There are some roots during this period that are still familiar to us today. However, some important differences between these early American efforts and what is dominant in our churches today.”⁷

“ In the decades prior to the Civil War in the U.S. , a host of denominational, Bible society, and independent publishers issued catechisms and basic Bible focused lesson plans for various ages in the local church. After the destructive years of the Civil War, however, the impetus for

5 Ibid

6 Pamela Mitchell Legg, "The Work of Christian Education in the Seminary and the Church: Then (1812) and Now (2012)," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 66, no. 4 (2012): doi: 10.1177/0020964312451420.

7 Ibid.

“reunification” of a torn country was evident. Lethal divisions, war, and the end of slavery played a key role in shifting Christian Education.”⁸

“In the early 20th century, the communication media scene became more complex. The impact of this communication media on Christian Education can be seen in the rise of what became known the “Religious Education Movement which reflected the influence of burgeoning mass communication media connecting Christian Faith to current events.”⁹ “By the middle of the 20th century, print, radio, and film communication technologies were a regular part of North American life. By the 1960’s however, they were joined, challenged by, and in some ways replaced by television, which became an “electronic hearth” around which families and friends gathered.”¹⁰

In 2012, “Sunday School continued to be the dominant form and location for Christian Education. Sunday School classes for children, youth, and adults were still listed as key components in Christian Education by most churches.”¹¹ At this point, Christian Education became to utilize a range of electronic media like Facebook, online curriculum resources, and websites that offered resource-sharing for Christian Education. Online media became a central source and resource in Christian Education.”¹² “James Smart words of 1954 still echo more strongly; “The Church must teach, just as it must preach, or it will not be the church.”¹³ “The

8 Ibid

9 Ibid

10 Cecelia Tichi, *Electronic hearth: creating an American television culture* (New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991).

11 Ibid

12 Ibid

13 James D. Smart. *The teaching ministry of the Church: an examination of the basic principles of Christian education*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1954.

question is exactly what shape this teaching ministry should take in an environment dominated by internet, computers, video streaming, cellphones, websites, text messages, online movies and television.”¹⁴

Biblical View of Clergy and Laity

“The term *laity* has often been used in contrast to the term clergy. The first denotes the role of church members who are not employed by the church; the second defines the role of those who are employed in the services of the church. This cannot help but lead to the idea that the primary responsibility for the work of the church rests upon the clergy. However, the Biblical view of the laity is quite different. In the New Testament, the singular form of the word *laos* is used almost exclusively when referring to the church as God's people. (See [Hebrews 4:9](#); [11:25](#); [1 Peter 2:10](#).)

This points to a very important characteristic of the Biblical view of the laity. It does not refer to a group within the church but to the entire church itself. *Laos*, used in the context of the church, literally means "God's own people." It is nowhere used in contrast to others within the church.”¹⁵

Gottfried Oosterwal develops this point clearly, stating:

"The terms laity and clergy in the Bible are used for one and the same people. These are not each other's opposites, or even distinct from one another. The laity is clergy. As God's chosen people, they are called laity." He goes on to

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ "What Is the Biblical View of the Laity?" Ministry Magazine accessed October 1, 2017, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1977/12/what-is-the-biblical-view-of-the-laity>.

show the proper distinction between the terms, leading us to see more clearly the intended role of the entire membership of the church: "One might also say that the term laity stresses in particular the privileges of being chosen by God from among the many others to the *exalted status of God's own people*, separated and different from the world; while the term clergy emphasizes in particular the function and role of the laity, namely to share their gift of grace with others. Laity stands for the status of God's people. Ministry is their function."¹⁶

Martin Luther wrote: "Every Christian man is a priest, and every Christian woman is a priestess, whether they be young or old, master or servant, mistress or maid, scholar or illiterate. All Christians are, properly speaking, members of the ecclesiastical order, and there is no difference between them except as they hold different offices."¹⁷

"The Greek word translated "clergy" is *kleros*,

which refers to the inheritance laid up for all the saints ([Colossians 1:12](#); [Acts 26:18](#)). Believers as a whole make up the *kleros*, inheriting forgiveness of sins and the power of the Holy Spirit. Biblically speaking, the clergy are not a special group of elite leaders. Paul considered himself a "brother" and "fellow servant" with Tychicus ([Colossians 4:7](#)), Epaphras ([Colossians 1:7](#)), Epaphroditus ([Philippians 2:25](#)), and Silvanus ([1 Peter 5:12](#)). The apostles never talked in terms of "us" and "them" in the context of serving Christ. They considered themselves to be fellow laborers with all believers in the church. It was not until the third century that "clergy" was employed to designate a limited number of persons who functioned in the church. Gradually, the professional, full-time ministers were seen as a special, separate class instead of as fellow servants of Jesus Christ. Out of this mindset grew the hierarchical system in which the distance between clergy and laity increased, seen in the use of titles such as "Pastor Smith," "Reverend Jones," and "Father Brown." Such a distance is not biblical."¹⁸

16 Oosterwal, "The Role of the Laity," *Andrews University Focus*, vol. 9, no. 3, supplement (July, August 1973).

17 Home Missionary Department - General Conference Of S. D. A, *The lay preacher and his work* (Tennessee, 1940), 9

18 Does the Bible make a distinction between clergy and laity?" *CompellingTruth.org*, , accessed October 1, 2017, <https://www.compellingtruth.org/clergy-laity.html>.

However, the student does believe that ministers should be seen as professional. Trull and Carter write,

“The Christian minister is a professional; he or she is committed to certain ideas. The standards of professional practice that apply to the Christian ministry include six ethical obligations and education is listed first. The minister will prepare for Christian service by experiencing a broad liberal arts education, followed by specialized training in theology and ministry. Ministers will also be committed to a lifelong process of study and growth that prepares them for continued service (2Tim.2:15). James Glasse suggests that a religious professional should embody five important characters. The Christian minister is an educated person, the master of some body of knowledge. This knowledge is neither esoteric nor mundane but essential to ministry and avail through accredited educational institutions.”¹⁹

Conclusion

In this 21st century, it is true that Biblical information is readily available at our fingertips. It is true that people are being educated in Bible Schools and Seminaries. But is it true that we are making a great difference in our communities. Or could we do more? It is evident that the author of this paper believes in the relevance and value of education. However, she would like to see more emphasis on intentionally educating our youth between the ages of 12 and 17 in our local churches.

There are many approaches and curriculums that exist. However, one holistic approach stood out in the research for this paper. Jackie L. Smallbones “developed a holistic and unique approach to Bible study that she calls Storymakers, primary because the focus is on telling and living the Grand Story (meta-narrative) of Scripture. It is an approach to reading and engaging

¹⁹ Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial ethics: moral formation for church leaders* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2004), 38-39.

Scripture that is both simple and profound, that pays attention to the text and also one's personal story."²⁰

The student/author believes that a curriculum for youth between the ages of 12-17 starting with the Book of Romans would be a great idea. A proposed title could be entitled Saved... Now What? "Romans is the fort Knox of the Christians faith, written to the center of the Roman civilization, it is the doctrine of the gospel – the problem with mankind and the living hope in Christ. Paul reveals to us that salvation is about grace alone, about faith in what He has done – "the righteous shall live by faith."²¹ Romans 10:9-10, and 13 records, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved ... For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (NLT) Although, by faith those words have been spoken and accepted most people don't understand the plan of salvation especially youth. The theological foundation in Romans is Christology. Moo writes, "It is not a systematic theology but a letter, written in specific circumstances and with specific purposes."²²

In conclusion, our laity needs more education and so does our clergy. We must educate the next generation for Christ. Eight suggestions to strengthen your Christian Education program or to use when you create one:

20 Jackie L. Smallbones "Storymakers: A Holistic Approach to Bible Reading and Study." *Christian Education Journal*, 3rd ser., 12, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 81-92.

21 "Romans Themes," Romans Major Themes, , accessed December 07, 2017, <https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/themes/Romans>.

22 Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2015).

Have a Christian education board or committee. Even if your church is small, someone needs to be planning for the future. The small church can achieve progress in surveying needs, formulating the program, approving curriculum, selecting personnel, overseeing facilities and equipment, and making the congregation more aware of Christian education. *Enlarge your educational vision*. Don't limit Christian education to Sunday school. Consider implementing such programs as weekday clubs, Bible studies, training classes, outdoor education, and catechism. Broaden your scope to include youth and adult ministries, not just work with children; all three are important areas. *Emphasize your positives*. While we need to be realistic about our educational limitations, don't overlook the particular strengths and advantages of your local situation. This should be done even if you have a small congregation. Says Kenneth O. Gangel: "Here's a strange thing: the church that most needs good Christian education is often the church with cramped space, few helpers and outmoded programming. It is sometimes difficult to convince leaders in small churches that the same principles which function adequately in large churches can also function in small churches" (*Leadership for Church Education*, page 139). Build upon the ability to know everyone by name, your strong family units, the crossing of age lines, your sense of purpose, and your creativity in the use of the facilities and resources that God has given to you. Work closely with the home. Church and family (as well as day school) must work together to achieve the purpose of preparing individuals to be disciples of Christ. If the student has the influence of the covenant church community and the "twenty-four-hour day" model of Deuteronomy 6:5-9, his educational training will be a cohesive whole. Teachers in your local congregation must communicate regularly with the home to make sure that what is taught at church is being lived at home. Take advantage of all available resources. In Christian education, you don't have to reinvent the wheel. Cooperate with other churches Evaluate what you have been doing."²³

"Yes, we do have weaknesses and face difficulties at the level of the local church, and yet, significant results do continue to be accomplished in the lives of our people. Why? How? Because we don't do the educating God does! This should encourage us in our task of Christian education. Christ not only told his church to teach, but added, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." He who has mandated the task will see to it that it is ultimately fulfilled."²⁴

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

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