The Pastor As Teacher

HAROLD C. MASON

The pulpit is the center of the evangelical Christian movement. It is the spearhead of the Christian advance. But Christian nurture, Christian teaching, has from the days of the Meeting for the Word in the early church been one of the basic functions of the church. While it is true that preaching and teaching are distinctive as functions yet there are indispensable didactic elements in preaching. The preacher must be informed, yet he must not merely dispense “certain intellectual nothings”. The heralding of the Gospel involves majestic content; the statement and defense of doctrine involves intellectual and spiritual acumen.

The pastor as teacher, then, functions in the pulpit, in prayer-meeting, in group meetings, in counselling, in the class room, and in supervision or the projection of his teaching office throughout the educational ministry of the church.

As the ambassador of Christ the pastor is deeply concerned to know what Jesus taught and how He taught. He must also know why Jesus taught, which question projects the basic problem of aim in Christian education.

Aim Controls Method

Aim in Christian teaching has been defined by Murch as “Fitting man to live in perfect harmony with the will of God.” This is, of course, the inclusive aim and its accomplishment involves various immediate aims. A very basic aim is the passing on of the Christian tradition from generation to generation. When Jesus said “I am the truth” it was a dated statement as well as a timeless one. Once ultimate truth is found tentativeness is ended. This statement is so significantly true that to preserve the doctrine of “creative activity” on a basis of evolutionary naturalism the idea of the finality of truth has been sacrificed. It is this basic principle, that Christ cannot be improved upon, which Robert E. Speer so strongly defends in The Finality of Jesus Christ. Christian teaching must include the claims of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God, concerning truth and concerning ethics. This involves the transmission of a body of truth from generation to generation. And at the cost of life and property, amidst untold suffering and with matchless heroism the church has maintained its witness and transmitted the truth down through the centuries. The pastor, then, cannot be true to the Christian tradition as a preacher and false to it as a teacher. The pastor is responsible for the theology of his class rooms. This theology will be reflected in personnel, plant and equipment, program, curriculum, promotion, methods of teaching, finance—the whole program of the church in Christian education. Doctrine is a pervasive thing and cannot be departmentalized in a church.

The Supervision of Instruction

Supervision properly begins with the selection of personnel. In Christian teach-
ing the Holy Ghost speaks through human personality, which means simply that the Christian teacher must be yielded to the Holy Spirit, and that His presence must be recognized in the activities of the class room. Nothing can take the place of the New Birth as a basic requirement in personnel. The teacher to be most effective must evidence holiness of heart and life. Whatever else a Sunday school teacher or leader of youth possess in the way of intelligence and charm, without Christ they can do nothing.\(^1\)

Having overseen appointments on this scriptural basis it is the pastor's responsibility to guide his teachers doctrinally and educationally. This he may do in many ways some of which are noted here.

For his teachers he may conduct pastor's classes in Christian doctrine, in denominational beliefs, in missions, in psychology and education on the various levels of age and experience. He should engage in doctrinal preaching with a sense of responsibility for the teaching ministry of his church. He must make sure that his teachers enjoy doctrinal clarity and that there is among them unanimity and fellowship on basic matters of faith and conduct. The trumpet must give no uncertain sound either in the pulpit or in the class room. When he speaks to a luncheon club or the chamber of commerce, when he preaches the funeral sermon of an outcast or that of the most influential man of the city or of the church there must be occasioned no feeling of ambiguity as to his basic position as a minister of the Gospel of Christ.

He will be concerned that everything which accords with the basic aim of his church be employed for the betterment of the educational program of the church. He will ask that his teachers be both child-centered and Bible centered; that they teach with a passion for souls and an undying loyalty to the Word of God. A child-centered philosophy of education which does not recognize the central fact that belief in the Bible and its presentation of the plan of salvation is necessary to the salvation of sinners is not the type of thing which Christian educators can endorse or espouse. On the other hand mere didacticism in handling the Word of God and the soul of a child is not enough.

The pastor will recognize that a soul out of harmony with God is not ready for Pestalozzi's "harmonious development"; that Herbart's mere subject matter cannot change the nature of an unregenerated person; that Christian methodology cannot be based on Dewey's experimentalism, nor on the progressive educationists' idea of an eternally ongoing process in the natural realm. The term "creative activity" will be dealt with by the pastor in its true connotation that the mind is not merely a physical organism acting in response to a materialistic environment; he will explain to his teachers that the term "creative activity" as projected by those who devised it means that the mind is active only as a muscle is active and that "creativity" is based upon the concept of a "fortuitous combination of circumstances" entirely in the natural realm, producing the unique, de nova. There is no concept of God as supernatural and personal, or of man as a living soul in the "creative activity" of progressive education. Explanation of these shall, to the Christian mind, constitute a warning against them.

On the other hand he will recognize the principle of "learning to do by doing" which many decades before contemporary educationists used the term was being projected by the Moravian bishop, Comenius, by Johann Pestalozzi, the Swiss innovator and advocated by Colonel Francis Parker in Quincy, Massachusetts, as early as 1880.\(^1\) The project method is ours to use, as is the discussion method, within its true limits. Within the past few days a senior high school boy told this writer how his teacher in Sunday school was taking the problems of boys named by the boys in his class from Sunday to Sunday as the succeeding Sunday school lesson. The wisdom question if he uses

---

\(^1\)John 15:5.

---

the Bible as authority and guide. He is reaching boys in the area of their life situations, of their pressing problems. Thus did Christ teach, but with a totally different philosophy from present day humanism or emergent evolution.

Workers’ conferences afford opportunity to the pastor to indoctrinate his teachers in the field of true Christian education. While the pastor is earnestly preaching Christian doctrine in the pulpit, unless he and his teachers understand the implications of liberalism for present day religious education, some one in the class room may be sweeping from under him the very ground on which he stands.

At all times the pastor must be aware of the fact that his workers are volunteers, without salary. Out of the goodness of their hearts they give of their time and strength. To hurt one of the least of these is a serious thing. Hence supervision in Christian education is a thing of love, patience, understanding and utmost tact.

The church library should be an instrument in the hands of the pastor for the guidance of the teachers in his church school. With what care and understanding this library should be selected and used! Also, there should be provided for the teacher the best literature available for her in the performance of her task. How to understand children, young people and adults should be seriously considered by every Christian teacher, and always in the light of the Christian revelation and the Christian faith.

The new teacher or worker should be acquainted with the aim, the organization, the personnel, the curriculum, the plant, and the program of the whole church. Time schedules should be provided indicating time of arrival of workers, time of closing of class periods, schedule of weekly and monthly meetings, staff meetings, special days, etc. There should be an overall schedule of the church’s program for the year in the hands of every worker. The schedule should be arranged by the pastor and the staff of workers in a meeting, if possible.

In his doctoral dissertation *The Pastor as Educational Director* J. Clark Hensley sets forth some of the ways in which the teacher may be aided in her work. She should be encouraged to visit classes in other schools or in the same school to observe methods and reactions. She should regularly attend teachers’ meetings, both departmental and workers’ conferences. She should know her pupils, calling faithfully at their homes, visiting with them often as friend and counsellor. She should know about tools and supplies and how best to use them. She should be given opportunity to attend institutes, conventions, workshops, laboratory schools and training courses with expenses paid, if possible.

The incompetent teacher should not be continued in her position. Her removal from a teaching position should be very thoughtfully and kindly arranged by finding another worthwhile task for her so as to prevent a sense of stigma or frustration on the part of herself or her friends.

**Conclusion**

The pastor as supervising teacher must work within the framework of a philosophy or theology of Christian education. No supervision is adequate or possible without clear insight into the purposes of the program and the relation of methodology to philosophy and theology in Christian education. He must realize and meet his responsibility to God and man for the accomplishment of the basic objective. He must see to it that every opportunity for in-service training be provided and that tools and materials with which the teacher can work are at hand. He must be human and brotherly in his supervision and avoid wounding or crushing one who with the best of intentions has been endeavoring to serve God in the church’s program of Christian education. In all situations, however, he must make it known that his first loyalty is to the Lord Jesus Christ and the revealed Word of God.

J. Clark Hensley, *The Pastor as Educational Director*, (Central Seminary Press, Kansas City, Kansas), pp. 64-65.