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The Place of the Family in the Church's Educational Ministry

OSCAR E. FEUCHT

Parents are the child's most potent teachers. They provide the all-important environment. Good manners, good English, love of good books and music, life's ideals, in fact, the whole outlook on the world are developed largely in the home. And so are dislikes and prejudices, religious views as well as political views, habits of going to church, of receiving Holy Communion, of prayer and reading the Bible. The paths which adult feet travel find their origin in childhood, and one way is as likely to be traveled as another, if started upon in the preschool days.¹

Both experience and history support these common claims.² Yet, in a practical sense the church has been slow to translate these known factors into its educational philosophy and its day-to-day operations in the parish.³ This article intends to investigate these claims as they relate to the church's ministry, especially to its work in Christian education.

I. BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

The church is the company of the chosen people, called out of the world by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. They are called

into being by God, built up in the faith, then sent back into the world to bring salvation to man. For that reason the Christian congregation is to be a worshipping, witnessing, learning, and working fellowship. It should enable its people not merely to belong to church but to be the church in every context of life. The New Testament assigns ministry (*diakonia*) or service to everyone who is called into the church (Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Peter 2:9-10). We are saved by grace through faith for a ministry, and the living God initiates us into this ministry through Baptism. (Eph. 1:3-14; 2:1-10; Gal. 3:25-29)

The new life we receive from the Holy Spirit is a gift. Our incorporation into Christ is a gift. The object of our faith, the Son of God, is a gift. And the faith by which we receive Him is a gift. God's purpose with His gifts is not only personal salvation but also a new creation. We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:1-10). The Scriptures are God's gift to instruct us for salvation and to equip us for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

Christian education in its broadest sense embraces all those experiences of worshipping, learning, living, witnessing, and serving by which we become God's instruments in the world. We learn what a joyous thing the Christian calling is from experience more than from informational learning. Paul Harms says of the interrelation between instruction and practice: "Religion

¹ Samuel L. Hamilton, "The Family the Center of Religious Education," *Religion in Life*, XVIII (Summer 1949), 421.

² See Parts II and III of this article.

³ Randolph Crump Miller, *The Clue to Christian Education* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), p. 10.

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never has as its object the learning of religion." We need the knowledge (the noetic), he says, so that we know what pleases God, but the goal is obedience with joy. "In the teaching of religion, the teacher is, first of all, a witness to what he has seen and heard in the Christ event. If the students never hear and never see that the teacher has seen and heard, the noetic may remain just the noetic. The power of the Spirit has little opportunity to remold the students from within because there is little remolding power from without."⁴ Growing in knowledge, he asserts, is only the means for growing in faith, which is "God's becoming more and more dominant and kingly in areas in which He has not ruled before." The *Formula of Concord* is explicit on this faith-knowledge relationship, stating that "faith is not a mere knowledge of the stories about Christ."⁵

Education, then, is more than learning about the church, about the Bible, even Christ; it is also the experiencing of the grace of God in Christ and reflecting this grace by forgiving others and finding a new purpose for life. As Samuel L. Hamilton says, "Christian religious education therefore is much more than instruction in Christian doctrines. It is personal reconstruction, change, growth toward life more abundant. . . . It is . . . transformation, not so much the acquiring of facts as the re-

ceiving of power. Christian religious education is life-changing."⁶

Randolph Crump Miller, professor of religious education at the Yale University Divinity School, after visiting "public" schools in England and West Germany in which religion is taught, came to the conclusion that while mere information may be classified as religious instruction, it often does not give people who feel themselves members of the Christian community a mission for life. The intellectual grasp of Biblical information frequently failed to achieve a living connection with the church. He concluded that "religious instruction is not to be equated with Christian nurture." Only when church and home are to some degree communities of the Holy Spirit to which the pupil feels he belongs does information become a means for his Christian nurture.⁷ Miller believes the significant factor is helping the individual by the grace of God to become a working member of the Christian community.

While "education" is variously defined and understood, in this article we shall think of it mainly as "transmitting and acquiring information," as the general word for "schooling of whatever sort especially as gained in an institution of learning."⁸ The term "nurture" we shall accept as involving training, discipline, fostering care, "nourishing the whole person as under a nurse." We use nurture here because "ed-

⁴ Paul Harms, "The Noetic and the Functional: Teaching the Christian Man in Teaching Religion," unpublished paper (Workshop for Teachers of Theology, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., Aug. 22—25, 1965).

⁵ Paul Harms, *The Spirit of Power* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 25. See also *Formula of Concord*, Epitome III 4, *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theo. G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), p. 473.

⁶ Hamilton, pp. 418—419.

⁷ Randolph Crump Miller, *Christian Nurture and the Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), pp. vii—viii, 1—4.

⁸ *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. Philip Babcock Gove (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1961), p. 723.

ucation" has often been limited to "indoc-trination" in our circles.⁹ Miller uses nurture as the broader term to describe the involvement of the pupil in the atmosphere and relationship of a church community, including the Christian family.¹⁰ We are speaking here of the Christian family as a working cell of the church for obviously the fires on the family altar are lighted by the Spirit and fed by the Gospel.

With reference to the broader aspects of nurturing the whole person Edward and Harriet Dowdy write:

The family is the basic unit of society. Every child is born into some kind of home. Babies do not arrive at the shipping dock of some large factory! In the wisdom of God, the home is still the major training unit in every individual's experience, and parents are still the first teachers. More education has taken place before a child enters school than will be possible in any other five years of his life. The mastery of a spoken language, for example, represents a tremendous educational feat. Even more dramatic is the development which takes place, to a very large degree, within the framework of the family.

More than any other influence, the family determines the lifelong direction in which a person is going to develop. Although the most dramatic evidence of this influence is discernible in childhood, the family places its mark on every sphere of a person's experience. Like the watermark on stationery, every page of one's personal story is written against the background of his family.¹¹

⁹ The essays in District and synodical *Proceedings* will indicate that the focus is strongly, if not exclusively, on indoctrination.

¹⁰ Miller, *Christian Nurture and the Church*, pp. 2, 17.

¹¹ Edward and Harriet Dowdy, *The Church*

II. NURTURE IN THE SCRIPTURES

A Biblical word for one aspect of nurture is the Hebrew word *musar*. Its Scriptural usage includes the concepts of correction, upbringing, and teaching. Its primary emphasis is not on edification but on discipline. When its verbal root *ysr* is used with God as its subject, it implies a person-to-person relationship of God toward man, even as it implies the same kind of relationship when it is used with a human subject and a human object. The Lord guides His people as a father guides a son. His motive is love. His goal is a right relation to Himself.¹² He uses various means to call the sinner to repentance, to nourish faith, and to sanctify all of life in His service. God's nurture is described in terms of parental care of children. God's own dealing with His children is the model for parents to bring up their children in the Lord, or as Luther puts it, "so that the children are conscious of the fact that they are reared and disciplined by God through their parents." The aim is to equip the young person to fulfill his God-given purpose in life.¹³

The concept is rooted in God's creation, in His design for man and woman who are the matrix for all human life. The rela-

Is Families (Valley Forge: The Judson Press, 1965), pp. 15—16. See the report of the Concordia Seminary Research Center on institutional and familial influences in this journal, XXXVII (March 1966), 169—172.

¹² One of the most significant and comprehensive studies of nurture is Werner Jentsch, *Urchristliches Erziehungdenken: Die Paideia Kyriou im Rahmen der hellenistisch-jüdischen Umwelt* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1951), pp. 85—136.

¹³ Fritz Rienecker, *Lexikon zur Bibel* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus Verlag, 1960), pp. 370 to 371.

relationship between man and woman is more than biological; it is educative in the fullest spiritual sense. Melford S. Knutson writes: "This makes the parents the direct representatives of God. A representative of God is one who takes God's place and has no authority or right except that given him by God. The parents through God's authority are responsible for our physical life. They are mediators of God's creative activity. They stand in a unique relationship to the child and the child to them, for they have given him life. So the parents also become the mediators between God the Father and the child because of his relationship to God through Jesus Christ."¹⁴

In the Old Testament view, parents were not only instruments of the ongoing creation of God, to whom the children owed their lives, but they were also the link in a long historical chain of God's people

through whom the Messianic promise or covenant and the holy commandments were to be passed on and preserved, thus giving the family a definite theological assignment (Ps. 78:1-8).¹⁵ The parent was to be ready and willing to rehearse to the child the great things God had done for His people (Joshua 4:1-7). The spiritual lineage, like the familial lineage of God's people, was to remain unbroken.

The Old Testament "Wisdom Books" appear to have been used as manuals for the teaching of Israelite youth. Proverbs stresses the pedagogical principle that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."¹⁶ The educative task echoes through all of Deuteronomy (6:1-9; 11:18-21). While memorization was important, learning through daily living is also clearly spelled out.

According to the Old Testament pattern, it was through the parents that the child was to learn of God's love and care and so get a sense of security; to learn God's Word and truth and get a sense of authority; to learn right from wrong and so get a proper sense of morality; to learn how to commune with God and so get the highest privilege of which man is capable, worship.

There is no explicit mention of schools in Jewish life until after the exile.¹⁷ The place of learning was the home in the earliest period. Instruction was in the hands of the parents, and teaching in the home

¹⁴ Melford S. Knutson, *I Write to You Fathers* (Hayfield, Minn.: The Hayfield Publishing Co., 1962), p. 42.

In "Parents' Rights" (unpublished paper [The Board of Parish Education, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1949], p. 1), A. C. Mueller says: "God willed the natural parent-child relationship as the proper sphere of education. He also endowed parents with a capacity for loving their offspring, and children with a capacity for loving their parents. . . . There is almost universal agreement among men that the duty of caring for children is first of all and primarily a parental duty."

In the same vein, Donald R. Pichaske, "The primary role of parents in Christian education can also be supported on the basis of psychological insights. There is hardly a theory of personality development from Freud to Rogers that does not place strong emphasis on the critical nature of the bond between primary parent and infant in the child's development." "Foundations for Curriculum: Theological and Educational," unpublished paper (The Lutheran Inter-synodical Parish Education Committee, 1965), p. 6.

¹⁵ Knutson, pp. 18, 39, 42.

¹⁶ See *yirab* in Hebrew lexicons. Job 28:28; Ps. 34:11; 111:10; 119:38; Prov. 1:7; 2:5; 9:10; 14:27; 15:33.

¹⁷ Most authorities believe that the synagogue is no older than the Babylonian Exile (I. Sonne, "Synagogue," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962] 478—480.)

continued to play an important part in the whole of the Biblical period. The Talmud speaks of the father's responsibility to inculcate the law, to teach a trade, and to get his son married.

In the New Testament there is a blending of instruction and discipline in the concept *paideia*, the basic term for nurture. Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich defines the noun as "upbringing, training, instruction, . . . chiefly as it is attained by discipline, correction. . . ." ¹⁸ The apostolic injunctions concerning nurture are in practically every instance directed to the father although not to the exclusion of the mother (Eph. 6: 1-4). While nurture is not restricted to the family, the home is always especially mentioned, also in the regulations for bishops and deacons. The teaching, learning, correcting, and guiding are closely associated with all interpersonal relationships in the Christian community. (Col. 3:12-25; Eph. 5:21—6:4)

The content and character of *paideia* is indicated by the phrase "in the Lord," that is, directed to spiritual and moral goals. "In the Lord" is closely related to the Pauline phrase "in Christ" and denotes that Christian teaching is related to a grace-faith-love theology.

It was functional as well as noetic, as the many examples in New Testament letters disclose. Jesus Himself asked for more than knowledge, and He disapproved sharply of mere academic or cultic religion (Mat-

thew 23, etc.). He insisted that faith works by love and demanded fruits as proof (Matt. 7:20; John 15:1-17). After the footwashing He told His disciples: "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:17). "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). It is not mere truth that the apostles seek as the goal of nurture but doing the truth in love (Eph. 4:11-16). Christ emphasized that true discipleship is a chain of relationships: John 15:9-10, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love." Religious information is not enough. "Before information about Christ turns into belief, power, action, the Holy Spirit must act." ¹⁹ The whole Christian community, including parents, are to be the agents of the Spirit. The curriculum for the first disciples was a person-to-person relationship with Christ. Christian nurture today is an exposure of people to persons who know Jesus as Savior and Lord and rejoice in the grace of God that has given them new life. When parents recognize that the everyday relationships of the home are part of the educational curriculum, then they begin to understand Christian nurture.

"The New Testament," writes William Barclay, "lays down no kind of curriculum of training for the child, knows nothing about religious education and nothing about schools; for the New Testament is certain that the only training which really matters is given within the home, and that there are no teachers so effective for good

¹⁸ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 608. See also Georg Bertram, "παιδεύω," *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel und Gerhard Friedrich, V (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1954), 596—624.

¹⁹ Harms, *Spirit of Power*, p. 7.

or evil as parents are."²⁰ "As the church saw it, the school is at best only an adjunct to the home. It is the parent who is responsible for bringing the child to God. The child is a gift of God to the parent, and the child must be a gift of the parent to God."²¹

Richard R. Caemmerer sums up Biblical teaching on the family: "God planned the family. He made it the keystone in human living. It launches human beings into the world; it starts them out on their journey of life; it protects them in mind and body in their first perilous years and gives them the personality which they will have and use always. Above all: the family must insert into people the life which they do not have by physical birth, the life that God Himself must give them through the Spirit and because of Jesus Christ."²²

III. THE OPINIONS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATORS

In 1847 Horace Bushnell underscored this understanding of the role of personal contact in the educative process.²³ The bond between parents and children is so intimate, he said, that parents are constantly educating their children, even though unconsciously and undesignedly.²⁴

²⁰ William Barclay, *Train Up a Child: Educational Ideals in the Ancient World* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 236.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

²² Richard R. Caemmerer, "The Human Family in God's Design," *Helping Families Through the Church*, Oscar E. Feucht, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), p. 9.

²³ Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947). Bushnell did not accept the Biblical teaching of baptismal regeneration in his educational psychology.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

He warned against religious sham, mock piety, or sanctimony which defeats true nurture.²⁵ "After all there is no cheap way of making Christians of our children. Nothing but practically to live it makes it sure."²⁶ Nonverbal teaching, namely, by the character, faith, love, spirit, and example of parents, is the most effective, for children can tell whether there is indifference toward God or holy devotion. The character of children "is yet to be born, and in you [parents] is to have its rootage. Your spirit is to pass into them, by a law of transition that is natural, and well nigh irresistible."²⁷

He emphasized that some of the most basic learning takes place in the early, pre-school years before the age of language. In fact, all language presupposes earlier impressions. "The word love is unmeaning to one who has not loved and received love."²⁸

In recent times, Regina Westcott Wieman has defined the family ideally as a creative, interactive relationship between parents and children which develops the personality of the individual and provides for growth of the culture and community.²⁹ Harry Munro experimented with a family-centered curriculum because he was convinced that "the home is the first and potentially the most important educational agency in moral and spiritual values. . . ." ³⁰ Wesner Fallaw has made an extensive ex-

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 51, and 275.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 204 and 212.

²⁹ Regina Westcott Wieman, *The Family Lives Its Religion* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), p. 44.

³⁰ Harry C. Munro, "A Family-Centered Curriculum," *Religious Education*, XXXIX (May-June 1944), 164.

ploration of the place of the family in the educational ministry of the church.³¹

There are exceptions, but it is nonetheless true that when values and viewpoints of the home run counter to those espoused by the church school, the child generally adheres to the standards of the home.³²

Until the home becomes as purposefully a teaching arm of the church as the church school . . . we are not likely to find much satisfaction in our programs of religious education.³³

It is unrealistic and unwise to think that a child or adolescent can change himself from futile or antisocial and irreligious living into purposeful Christian living if he has to overcome both his own drives toward perdition and also the prevailing values and conduct of perdition bound parents.³⁴

Home and church, says Fallaw, must "interpenetrate" if nurture and education are to be combined effectively. Nurture or training is possible in a Christian school, but every school is limited in the actual training it can give. The school cannot go home with the child and follow up its teaching with training. The home has the child first and longest. It has access to all sides of the child's person. Parents have the authority, confidence, and opportunities which no one else possesses in the same measure. "What your child becomes is largely up to you, the kind of a person you, the parent, are."³⁵

³¹ Wesner Fallaw, *The Modern Parent and the Teaching Church* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1946).

³² Ibid., p. 21.

³³ Ibid., p. 24.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 53.

³⁵ Wesner Fallaw, "Nurture and the Christian Person," *Christian Century*, XXXIX (Sept. 25, 1957), 1130.

Samuel L. Hamilton, chairman of the department of religious education of New York University, gives the following reasons for family-centered religious education.

All individual personal growth is interpersonal. At every stage of life from birth to death the family in the home can provide the setting, the occasions, the atmosphere, the inspiration, the behavior patterns, the controls, and the dynamic of the most meaningful, the most satisfying, the most creative, the most joyous, the most profoundly forming and transforming interpersonal relationships of human existence. Sad to say, it is also true that in the family growth can be arrested, and in some homes personalities are marred and scarred by some of the most devastating, humiliating, frustrating, and degrading of interpersonal relationships. There is life-changing, but the change may be for the worse! For good or ill, for weal or woe, the family is the matrix of whatever personality we grow, the center of the culture, the repository of the values we first set up.³⁶

Go through the list of the traits that make up a beautiful personality, and you will find in family life all the occasions and opportunities for their acquisition. Nowhere else is there so much opportunity for giving and forgiving. In fact, the home can be a little foretaste of the kingdom of God.³⁷

Edith Hunter calls attention to the fact that home and church, though confessing the same creeds, may nevertheless have quite disparate theologies, in fact completely different religions. Parents need help because all of them already are teaching some religion (and cannot keep from

³⁶ Hamilton, p. 419.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 421.

doing so). "Unless the churches," she says, "become more concerned with and aware of the day-to-day religion that their member families are living, they will play an ineffectual and trivial role."³⁸

Randolph Crump Miller believes that Christian growth is a process of increased integration centered in the living God, in a grace-faith relationship in Christ.³⁹ "Human integration of a child does not evolve from his *idea* of his parents. It comes from his *relationship* with his parents. So also his religious integration does not come primarily from his *idea* of God. It comes from his *personal relationship* with God." One of the first elements in educational theory is understanding the place of the home in the development of the young Christian, because there is little chance that the church in one hour per week can do more than build on the habit patterns already established. "The Christian home may be the greatest aid to the church, and through their mutual interdependence there is the opportunity for a more sound and permanent Christian education." The influence of parents on character development is crucial.⁴⁰ "The end result of faith in Christ which is assisted by the educational process has its roots in the earliest teaching of a child, even before church school has any influence at all."⁴¹ Over the past 30 years Ernest M. Ligon has made an extended and thorough study of behavioral changes. He found measurable

evidence of effective character education only in situations in which the home has effectively participated.⁴²

One of the highly significant developments in religious education is the substantial consensus of Christian education curricular studies of most denominations that nurture must include and rely on the home. The Lutheran Church in America's new curriculum provides seven courses for parents, one at every stage of the child's development.⁴³ The United Church of Canada's new curriculum aims first at parents and all adults, confident that they set the pattern for home, church, and community.⁴⁴

A very explicit statement on the place of the home in the church's teaching ministry was prepared by the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

The most immediate and far-reaching form of Christian nurture which the church can provide takes place in the Christian household where persons live together intimately, expressing their faith to one another and absorbing the Christian faith from one another in both verbal and non-verbal ways. . . . Moreover the basic nurture of all church members, of whatever age, must necessarily be carried out in the household setting where the most elemental facts of life and death are met and the most intimate relationships established. Whatever is believed in the household is communicated to all members of the

³⁸ Edith Hunter, "The Family Lives Its Religion," *Religious Education*, LII (March-April 1957), 94-97.

³⁹ Miller, *The Clue to Christian Education*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-14.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁴² Ernest M. Ligon, *Dimensions of Character* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956).

⁴³ James P. Claypool, *Your Program of Christian Family Education* (Philadelphia: Board of Parish Education, The Lutheran Church in America, 1963).

⁴⁴ *A Look at the New Curriculum*, The United Church of Canada (The United Church House, 85 St. Clair Avenue E., Toronto 7, Ontario, 1961), pp. 11, 40, 45, 46.

household. . . . Although a great deal of the teaching done here will of necessity take place situationally or conversationally and even nonverbally, this fact does not make the teaching less significant. This teaching in the home would seem to be the Scriptural way. . . . Unless this basic sort of nurture in the Christian faith is done here, it is doubtful that it can be done at all effectively anywhere.⁴⁵

The Christian family is always to be thought of within the context of the Christian church. Nor is the work of parents a substitute for the Holy Spirit. Parents are the necessary human channel, just as the first disciples were channels of the Spirit (John 16:13-15). This channel is broadest in the Christian family. Yet families are not the only channel, since we all know of persons to whom, despite a non-Christian home, the Holy Spirit communicated His power.

There exists down through the centuries an almost unbroken chain of witness, not only in the Scriptures and Christian tradition, but also in empirical studies made by modern Christian educators, favoring the family as the center of Christian nurture when closely aligned to the church.

IV. THE CONTINUOUS TEACHING ROLE OF PARENTS

It has already been established that instruction in the Christian faith is the vital foundation for the practice of the Christian faith. What has not been widely enough

accepted is that the Christian religion is both taught and caught. Herman J. Sweet summarizes this point. "We are learning today, moreover, that religion which is taught, but not woven into life by being lived every day in the family and the community, tends to become divorced from life and superficial, if not hypocritical. On the other hand, religion which is the result of indirect influence only, with no knowledge of beliefs, no content, no definite teaching, tends to disintegrate. It will not stand the test."⁴⁶

Nurture is focused especially on practice. It is here that there is no substitute for parents and no training ground as important as the home.

The home provides an ideal environment for all types of learning. Precept and demonstrated examples on the part of adults are followed by questions and answers, close observation, imitation, and experimentation in oft-repeated sequence by the children. If the home did not exist, the wise Christian educator might well seek to create a similar small group in which meaningful, one-to-one fellowship might take place. The family group is the most adequate educational unit men can devise.

Social participation in the family group is one hundred percent. It would be impossible to create a more intimate arrangement than is provided in the twenty-four hours of normal daily family life. Such a situation is obviously an ideal vehicle for Christian education, but too often much of the teaching-learning in the home environment detracts from, rather than adds to, education for Christian living.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ "The Life of the Particular Church as the Context for the Educational Work of the Church," *Foundation Paper VI*, p. 9; "Principles for the Development of the Christian Family Life Aspect of Curriculum," *Curriculum Principles Paper III* (Richmond, Va.: Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church in the United States), pp. 2-9.

⁴⁶ Herman J. Sweet, *Opening the Door for God: A Manual for Parents* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 26.

⁴⁷ Dowdy, p. 17.

The teaching activity of parents is sometimes described under three types: relational, motivational, and formal.

The Christian religion is a relationship between God and man and so parents do relational teaching. Our fellowship with God through Christ reflects itself in a new relationship to other people — believers and unbelievers. *Koinonia* as a relationship to God affects all other relationships. Forgiven, we are forgiving. Having been ministered unto, we minister to others. This is especially reflected in the Christian home where its members learn to bear each other's burdens and so fulfill the law of love. "The most gifted serves the most, and the least gifted sometimes gets the most. Yes, the home is the laboratory of Christian love."⁴⁸

We are discovering that relationships teach much more than we have thought. Lewis Sherrill writes: "The self is formed in its relationships with others. If it becomes de-formed, it becomes so in its relationships. If it is re-formed or transformed, that too will be in relationships." ⁴⁹ The observant child picks up what is important to mother and father. It discerns which interests, actions, and attitudes bring approval, disapproval, or indifference. Parents' aims in life and their scale of values are imperceptibly taught by their actions and absorbed by the child. Communicating our faith to little children and adults is done not only by means of words but in the language of relationships, through emotional overtones, through our habits and actions.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Hamilton, p. 421.

⁴⁹ Lewis Sherrill, *The Gift of Power* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 44.

⁵⁰ Roy Warren Fairchild, *Christians in Families* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), pp.

Parents are teaching all the time by what they are and do. We call this non-verbal or relational teaching. They provide the moral and spiritual climate—or lack of it. This environment supports or negates the church school teaching. The child learns trust or distrust, love or hate from others.

Example is most powerful! The greatest task, according to Sweet, is not to satisfy the mind but to train the emotions and the will. We cannot impatiently teach patience. We cannot with faltering uncertainty teach faith. We cannot anxiously and fearfully teach courage. We cannot in bitterness and strife teach the love of our fellowman. We cannot without affection teach the abiding love of God.⁵¹

Parents also do situational teaching. They see the whole child, all sides of his personality, the good child and the naughty child. They are with the child as he passes through all developmental stages from infancy to adulthood. They are on the scene when incidents take place that call for Christian judgment and Christian forgiveness. The quarrels between children, disobedience at school, deception, and many other incidents require parents to be on the scene with the Gospel as well as with the Law, with love and forgiveness as well as exhortation. They can utilize the teachable moments when receptivity is greatest. When the moment has passed, the opportunity for teaching has gone by.

Fairchild and Wynn cite a practical example:

We try to bring God into our family life every day somewhere through our discus-

115—116; John C. Wynn, *Pastoral Ministry to Families* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957).

⁵¹ Sweet, p. 23.

sion. Whether it's when we're washing the dishes, or making beds, or just talking about what the kids have done, or in saying their prayers. But we make out of it an everyday conversation so that God is not just "The Man Upstairs," but someone who is a part of our life. . . . I want my children to gain a close feeling to God so that when they grow up they will know they have a God to depend on. That's my highest ideal; and I want that for my family, no matter what else I do.⁵²

In every family there are situations which must be met as they arise. Thus, for instance, the ways in which a child's fears, his efforts to get attention, his successes and failures, his tantrums, his daily physical needs are dealt with by parents and teachers will make a great difference in the kind of person he becomes. The child needs wise guidance so that he can grow up in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. Deut. 6:6-9 suggests situational teaching—"when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise." Faith and life are not to be divorced. They belong together. The everyday activities of the family are part of the curriculum for Christian nurture. The curriculum of the family is as broad as the experiences of the family.

The home has a significant interpretive role. The family is a sort of home base. It can take the varied currents that play upon the child in a complex world and give to them wholeness and meaning. Only the family can help to make a pattern of living out of a jumble of influences. It gives direction and purpose. It stimulates

and guides growth. It interprets and demonstrates. That is why it is so important for parents to share as fully as possible the life of their children.⁵³

Parents will also concern themselves with formal teaching activities. They will teach the Christian doctrine in a way and at a level suited to their family. Over the years, they will try to teach the knowledge of the chief parts of Christian doctrine which are outlined in Luther's Small Catechism. In their teaching they will repeatedly emphasize the creating and preserving grace of God; His standards of right and wrong; human sinfulness and God's forgiving grace in Christ Jesus; the work of the Holy Spirit in working repentance, faith, and the new life; the church as the body of Christ carrying out His mission; worship as the daily relationship with God, the Scriptures as the source of our faith, and the sacraments as the means by which God confers His grace.

Christian parents wish to help their children get a working knowledge of the Bible and so will assist them with church school lessons, will introduce daily Bible reading and discussion, and will witness to their own faith and share their own insights in the process.

The pious disciplines of the Christian life will be part of family practices—regular worship with the Christian congregation, ongoing growth through Christian schools and study groups, daily home devotions that go beyond the routine of "mere devotionism."

Relational, situational, and formal teaching in the home supply a very vital part of Christian nurture. Parents must supply a sense of values; they must supply the spark,

⁵² Roy W. Fairchild and John C. Wynn, *Families in the Church: A Protestant Survey* (New York: Association Press, 1961), p. 185.

⁵³ Sweet, p. 117.

the outlook on life, the self-confidence, the interests that will make the difference in the child. They will need to give examples of a radiant faith and to show the joy of worthwhile work. In other words parents are uniquely equipped to give to the child the vision of excellence.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH'S TEACHING MINISTRY

It has already been stated that the church in its educational thinking has not adequately taken into consideration the decisive role that the family plays for good or for ill in the nurture of children. There is now a new interest on the part of religious educators in building a program of Christian nurture which deals with this factor.⁵⁴ Let us consider some of the implications for a sound program of Christian education.

1. We need to maintain the distinction between the transmission of "informational religion" and the development of a living faith. Where the lifelong nurture of the whole person through a series of meaningful Christian experiences is the goal, one will probably find the family moving more and more toward the center of the Christian education perspective. Nurture involves more than the school provides.

Education happens not in school but in the child. Yet in our faith in mere schooling, we too often attribute exaggerated values to institutions and programs rather than to people for whom they were designed. We become lulled into feeling that we can put children into schools as we put biscuits into an oven and expect them to come out done. We assign an overwhelming importance to the formality

of education, rather than the love of learning, and then expect a miracle. The mystical thing doesn't happen in the school; it happens in the child.

No institution ever gave a child tenderness, compassion, a lively curiosity, quick humor, self-confidence — these qualities grow in response to an all-encompassing education, the "leading forth" that only parents can provide. Only we can kindle in our children the movements in the spirit that mysteriously evolve into permanent qualities of character and mind. Without those qualities, our lavishly schooled children will receive very little real education at all.⁵⁵

2. We need a clear conception of the place of the family in the teaching ministry of the church as a part of our working philosophy of Christian education. This means that serving the family will not be an afterthought or an accidental part of parish life and work. Instead it will form the foundation of the education triangle. Working with families will be a first step in sound educational administration. It has been frequently said that the church's teaching agencies can only supplement the work of the home, but practice has not always followed this thesis. Parents have been allowed to assume too easily that sending a child to a church school was equivalent to providing him with religious education. The acceptance of a pupil in the church school should carry with it the acceptance on the part of parents of an obligation to carry forward a home program. This is achieved by showing parents how spiritual growth takes place and by giving them proper attitudes and skills for Christian nurture.

⁵⁴ Sweet, pp. 30, 116, and 127.

⁵⁵ From "Strangers in Our Midst," *The Saturday Evening Post*, 237 (Dec. 19, 1964), p. 74.

It seems to this writer that only a reversal of the order in education will achieve the desired goal. That is, that taking Deuteronomy 6 seriously, we begin by giving deeper convictions to the parents and adults and then entrusting them with the task of giving their children those experiences by which they grow up into Christ in every way.

We owe a high tribute to Christian schools and their teachers. The explosion of knowledge makes it impossible for parents to impart all that is necessary for life in the modern world. The quantity of things to be learned for life in our society has already extended formal education not only into college but into adulthood. Yet, as far as nurture is concerned, homes are still the launching pads. They set the vital machinery into motion.

3. Since parents play such a significant role in the process of Christian nurture, the church must prepare them for their priestly functions in the home. Courses in Christian doctrine or common sense cannot equip them satisfactorily for their Creator-given role as providers and teachers. The home must be made a part of the church school. Classes, courses, and capable teachers must be offered on a regular basis as part of an extended curriculum for all adults. Instead of being a mere "holding operation," the local church needs to transform itself into a school for Christian growth to equip its people for their basic Christian living tasks. Parents cannot give what they do not have. "Unless adults are growing in Christian faith and understanding there will be little vitality in the program of Christian education offered to children and youth."⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Dowdy, p. 44.

4. Parents need to be and can be involved. An investment of time and effort in training parents will pay off. We should demolish such concepts as "Sunday school is for children," "confirmation is the finishing school," and other traditional impediments. Parents will need to be enrolled with the child and be given training not only in teaching Bible stories and prayers but in understanding and fulfilling their work in relational and situational teaching. For parent education there is now available a considerable teaching literature, and there is material on the market for every type of class and for every parental need.⁵⁷ But it must begin long before the child enters Sunday school or the Christian day school. It begins with prenatal guidance, prebaptism orientation, the charge to parents at baptism, post-baptismal counseling, supplying materials for father and mother, enrolling them in courses for parents. God has given each child a birthright—an adequate spiritual heritage. At baptism parents and the church promise to give each child his full spiritual inheritance. To achieve this end, parents can be involved in lesson preparation, in pledging to have table prayers and regular devotions with the child or family, in having regular conferences with the church school teachers, in discussing educational objectives, methods, curriculum, and outcomes with the teachers. Many parents will not come naturally but they can be enlisted by involving them in the educative process. They must be enlisted if their offspring are to receive more than a fraction of the loaf of the Bread of Life.

⁵⁷ Oscar E. Feucht, *Ministry to Families* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1963), Chapters 7—11.

5. Better communication with the home is needed. An analysis of the records of 228 confirmed children from three classes and the Communion and stewardship records of their parents over a 4-year period (one before, three after confirmation) disclosed the following: 37 parents and their children received the sacrament only on the day of confirmation. These parents had been lax even before this time in church attendance and in receiving Holy Communion. Six children received Holy Communion consistently after confirmation even though their parents did not. Nine children continued, though the father dropped out. 176 children remained faithful throughout the three post-confirmation years. It is significant that both mother and father of the 176 were regular in church attendance and in the reception of Holy Communion.⁵⁸

Many churches have inadequate contact with the home. A survey of one parish with 240 families showed that only 77 families were actively represented by both fathers and mothers, slightly more than that number had one or the other parent, while children were the only connection in the remainder. In those cases church and family were touching each other only at the fringes.⁵⁹

Every church needs to ask: How often and how meaningfully are we communicating to family groups? How deeply are the parents involved? How many come to parent-teacher meetings? How many are enrolled in a Bible or parents' class? What kind of visitation takes place? Are we supplying help to people in their needs and equipping them for their mission?

The church occupies a rather unique role in the life of the family in that it is the only community organization working with the whole family. Wallace Denton points out that while other groups are concerned with children or with adults within limited spheres of responsibility, they are seldom concerned with the whole person. The church ministers to all family members of all ages, not merely individually but as a group. The pastor is one of the few professionally concerned persons going into the modern home. Physicians and some social workers ask people to come to their offices. Family counselors do not often go into the homes. Fortunately, the Christian pastor still has a ready entry into many homes, but he will need to multiply himself with a corps of well-trained family visitors, if the church is to give the family its strategic, God-given place in the educational program.⁶⁰

6. The church must help fathers assume their responsibility in Christian nurture. A great many social conditions have contributed to shifting family roles, resulting in father's physical absence from the home. Many an American mother is called on to play both a mother and a father role. This has caused serious damage, especially in families where the father has abdicated. He is the interpreter of the masculine, of the outside world, and the transmitter of norms and goals. The father should be a source of spiritual strength; he should supply identity, integrity, and purpose to all members of the household. To be a spiritual leader he must be accessible, interested, understanding, and kind—but to

⁵⁸ Knutson, pp. 60—61.

⁵⁹ Sweet, p. 120.

⁶⁰ Wallace Denton, *What's Happening to Our Families?* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), p. 190.

be a Christian father he needs the power of the Spirit and the mind of Christ. In fact he is to be God's representative. The father can convey many things that a mother cannot convey to the child. The church can do a great deal to help the father be a father. Because the father is meant to be a priest in his house, the church has a responsibility to help him become a better priest.⁶¹

The renewal of the church is closely re-

lated to the recovery of a greater ministry to people. The pastor who learns to work with families will find that it improves his preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and general effectiveness. The teachers who learn to work with parents and not merely for parents, those that put nurture first in their pedagogy and as a consequence employ a twin approach—one to the parent, one to youth—will labor with greater satisfaction.

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⁶¹ Knutson, p. 89.

See the story of 26 Twin Cities churches which are enabling fathers to assume more fully their spiritual roles: "New Churches Stress Dad's Key Role," *The Lutheran Witness*, LXXXIV (March 2, 1965), p. 15.

For additional guidelines to action see also *Helping Families Through the Church* (I: The Christian Family; II. The American Family in

Need; III: The Church and Family Guidance; IV: Family Counseling; V: Helping Families) and *Ministry to Families* (Part One: Why the Church Must Be Concerned About Its Ministry to Families; Part Two: What Your Parish Can Do to Help Families; Part Three: How Your Parish Can Fulfill Its Ministry to Families).