

David I. Smith and John Shortt

Editorial

A number of otherwise discrete recent discussions among Christian educators have exhibited a common broad concern that can be very loosely stated as follows. The recent history of Christian educational theorizing has included a great deal of work focusing on matters such as worldview, faith-learning integration, Christian perspectives on various matters, and so on—all formulae that are at least potentially susceptible to construal in terms of a primary focus on the relationships between concepts and intellectual frameworks. This focus has served to demarcate space for intentionally Christian discussions of education and to identify obstacles to such discussions in secular frameworks of thought as these have influenced educational paradigms. Dissatisfactions arise when the task of Christian conceptualization seems to lack full traction in the daily practices of teachers, learners, and school communities. Schooling does partake of the world of ideas, but the shape it takes in any given place and time is also a result of concrete institutional practices and constraints, the life patterns of the surrounding community, the pressures regarding time and resources facing teachers, the cultures that grow up within schools, departments and groups of learners, shifting patterns of student experience and maturation, and so on. These and various other factors seem disturbingly capable of trumping the most carefully elaborated conceptualization of how things ought to be.

Naturally, this is a sweepingly generalized statement of a complex set of issues, but it does offer one way of glimpsing deep connections between the various specific projects reflected in this volume. Doug Blomberg's opening paper is indeed a contribution to the philosophy of Christian education; however, it is one that cautions against overreliance on a disembodied ideal of conceptual clarity, an "autonomous reason focusing on relatively self-contained subject matters." Blomberg contends that debates concerning the nature and shape of rationality as pursued in educational settings are not merely struggles to hone concepts but also a confrontation between rival spiritualities. Blomberg illustrates his claims using examples from recent accounts of moral development, before outlining a "relational rationality" drawing substantially on a narrative experience of reality. He suggests that this kind of knowing is better suited than autonomous rationality to nurture students toward fulfilling a variety of vocations in the world.

Matthew Phelps and Scott Waalkes offer an actual narrative, one designed to illuminate the role of intentional friendship groups in the growth of teachers in a North American college setting. The task of practicing education as a Christian implicitly raises the prior question of what kinds of spiritual practices might sustain the kind of presence and commitment that this task requires. Phelps and Waalkes point out that relationship building outside of more formal faculty development structures can function as such a practice. More than just socializing, intentional friendship groups can be both a form of Christian community and

an important resource for the teacher's growth as a Christian and educator. The claim that teachers need the practice of Christian friendship in order to grow is heard less commonly than proposals that they adopt a new theory or technique; like Blomberg, these authors find connections between knowing, spirituality, narrative, and living out our vocations.

Ted Newell revisits the perennial topic of what we can learn from Jesus' own teaching ministry—can we use what is known of Jesus' teaching as a model for Christian educators? Reviewing the problems that have arisen from past attempts, Newell points to significant gaps between our current notions of the role of "teacher" and what Jesus was doing. He goes on to use those recent studies of Jesus commonly collected under the heading of the Third Quest, together with Gramsci's account of how the "organic intellectual" resists worldview hegemony, and proposes an alternative way of understanding Jesus' impact as a teacher, one that connects with our own need to find ways of resisting dominant social ideologies. This take on Jesus-as-educator emphasizes the value of practices and enacted symbols that embody a counterstory to the oppressive stories shaping both teachers and learners. Following Jesus as a teacher will require more than picking up a few techniques or theological concepts; it is tied to the practicing and showing of a way of being in the world.

John Hull, in conversation with Harro Van Brummelen, picks up on related concerns from the standpoint of curriculum theory. Hull draws Van Brummelen's work on Christian curriculum, which he summarizes under the heading "education for discipleship," into dialogue with Philip Jackson's seminal critique of curriculum theory as having misunderstood the way in which curriculum change actually takes place in concrete school settings, placing too much faith in the application of coherent conceptual models. Agreeing with Jackson's critique, Hull explores how implementing a Christian educational orientation must be a two-way street between the educational community's lived experience and the articulation of Christian approaches to teaching. Van Brummelen's work, Hull argues, is vulnerable to certain aspects of Jackson's critique, yet goes beyond the approaches targeted by Jackson. A rejoinder by Van Brummelen and a final response from Hull push further the conversation initiated by Hull's article.

While each article has its own particular focus and specific conversation partners, each is concerned in some way with the relationship between how we formulate conceptual accounts of what we need to know and do and how we communally embody Christian faith as a way of being in the world. This shared concern adds up to a common relevance to questions that are both widespread and pressing in contemporary Christian education, questions of how to find the nexus that connects seeking the truth with walking in the way.