

chapter fifteen

Teaching for Gratitude

In 1980, Wolterstorff published *Educating for Responsible Action*, a book that examined what it is to teach in ways that shape specific tendencies in students. In this keynote address given in Vancouver, B.C., in the early 1990s to the teachers of the Northwest Christian Teachers Association, Wolterstorff suggests that it might be wrong to think that faithfully carrying out one's obligations is basic in the Christian life and that joy and gratitude are things we are obligated to feel. Perhaps Christian teachers should teach in ways that show that gratitude is basic and that obedience is the proper expression of gratitude, rather than the other way around.

Everything I have to say today is contained, in kernel, in an episode that occurred some fifteen years ago now, when I was speaking at Rehoboth Christian High School in New Mexico. It happened in the discussion period after my last speech. I have no recollection whatsoever as to the theme of my talks, nor do I remember, more specifically, what it was that I said that led one of the Native Americans teaching in the school, a Navajo, to stand up and say what he said.

Always, he said, he had felt himself something of an outsider in the school—even though the school had been established to offer Christian education to the Navajos. He felt that his Navajo background was held against him. Accordingly, he had never felt free to talk with his fellow teachers about how he tried to integrate the best of his Navajo background with how he taught in the school. He wanted to take this occasion to do so.

His speech was quite long—and incredibly intense. No one stirred. What I remember especially was this: When he was a child, he said, he used to go hunting for small game and gathering reeds for baskets with older people in the tribe. Always, before they set out, they prayed to God, or the gods—I don't remember what he said—asking that God or the gods provide them with the game and reeds that they needed and

promising not to take more than needed. Then, before returning home after a successful hunt and search, they again prayed to God or the gods, giving thanks for the game and the reeds and promising to use them faithfully.

“And this,” said Elmer—Elmer is in fact his name—“is how I use what I learned from my elders in my teaching here.” Elmer is an art teacher. Before they start art class, he asks the students to take out all their materials and lay them on their tables, and then, before they begin working, they offer a prayer to God—no doubt in my mind now that it was *God* to whom the prayer was offered—thanking God for the wax of the crayons, the wood and graphite of the pencils, the paper, the trees from which the paper came, the paints, the chalk, and they promise to use them with care and to God's glory. Then at the end of the class, before they put their materials away, they thank God for the use of their materials.

Gratitude as Context and Act

On this occasion, I want to set off to the side the important question this episode raises about the relation of Christianity to other religions. Likewise, I want to set off to the side the ecological attitude that here comes to expression. What I want to emphasize is that hunting, gathering, and school education are here all set within the context of gratitude. Maybe it's appropriate to go a step further and say that hunting, gathering, and school education are not only set within the *context* of gratitude but are themselves understood as *acts* of gratitude.

Some of you will know that the Greek word for thanksgiving is *eucharistia*. In many Christian traditions, the Lord's Supper is called the Eucharist because it traditionally opens with a prayer of thanksgiving. Hunting, gathering, and school education were understood by Elmer as eucharistic activities. He had learned to regard them thus from his Navajo elders.

In 1980, I published a book on education called *Educating for Responsible Action*. Commissioned by Christian Schools International, my project was to offer a taxonomy of educational goals that was an

alternative to the many such taxonomies then floating around and to inquire especially into the dynamics of what I there called “dispositional learning.” I wanted to get some understanding of how the school can shape the way its students are disposed to act—both within the school and without. Specifically, I wanted an understanding of those dynamics that was faithful to the Christian understanding of the self.

I recently had occasion to reread the book and found myself still agreeing with almost everything in it. In fact, I found myself thinking it was better than I thought it was at the time! However, one rather troubling question kept insistently arising: Why had I called it educating for *responsible* action? Of course, we do want to educate for responsible action. But that’s not the whole of what we want to educate for. We also want to educate for joyful and delighted action—and for grateful action. (I assume that when I told the story about Elmer, you all said to yourself, “Yes, how right to set learning within the context of gratitude!”)

Within the book, I discussed how dispositions in general are shaped. But then, when I titled it, I called it educating for *responsible* action. Why did I do that? Could it be, I said to myself, that I was thinking that faithfully carrying out one’s obligations is basic in the Christian life, and that joy and gratitude are to be seen as obligatory? If so, is that right? Is it right to think that gratitude and joy enter the picture as things we are obligated to feel? If that was indeed how I was thinking, there’s an interpretation of the text you have chosen for your convention that could be cited as evidence for the propriety of this way of thinking: “And be thankful,” said Paul. The grammatical mood appears to be that of the imperative: the thought appears to be that his readers *ought to be* thankful.

Whether or not that was the way I was thinking back then, that is how the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition in which I was reared and that inspired the movement of Christian day-schools represented by Christian Schools International has customarily understood the relationship between obligation and gratitude. The fundamental relationship between God and the world is law. God sets the law *to*, or *for*, the world. In the case of nonhuman beings, this law is the law of their function-

ing. In the case of human beings, it is both the law *of* our functioning and the law *for* our functioning—the latter being then the laws of obligation. God is fundamentally lawgiver.

Which brings me back to Elmer. For Elmer, with his Navajo background, the relationship between gratitude and obligation was exactly the reverse of that which has characterized the Dutch neo-Calvinist tradition. It was within the context of gratitude that the Navajos expressed their resolve to act responsibly. Gratitude was basic. Obedience was an act of gratitude rather than, the other way round, gratitude being an act of obedience.

What I want to suggest is that Elmer and his Navajo forebears got it right and that we have gotten it wrong. Gratitude is basic, and obedience is properly the expression of gratitude. Christian schools, at bottom, should be schools where gratitude is expressed and cultivated rather than schools where, at bottom, students are schooled in obedience. Don’t get me wrong: I’m not speaking up for irresponsibility. What I want to argue is that the fundamental ethos of the Christian school—that which the perceptive visitor picks up as the most fundamental character of the place—should be gratitude.

I could develop the point in several different ways. I could develop it purely systematically and ahistorically, ignoring the tradition out of which these schools came and the influence of that tradition on these schools. I have decided not to do it that way but instead to confront directly the habit in this tradition of making obedience basic and gratitude secondary by arguing that this habit of ours is unfaithful to the patriarch of the tradition, John Calvin. Only thus, so I judge, is there any chance of the habit being broken.

Let me first observe that at important points in Scripture, where we in the tradition have thought we saw divine commandment, close scrutiny reveals something else. I can examine only one example, but it’s perhaps the most important. Regularly in the history of the Christian school movement it has been said that at creation God gave humanity what has come to be called “the cultural mandate”—that is, the mandate, the command, to develop culture. This is our answer to the

pietists who see the Christian life as focused entirely on salvation. The basis for the claim has been the following passage from Genesis 1:

And God blessed them [i.e., the human beings], and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

verse 28

Is this initial speech of God to humankind to be understood as a command? I submit that it is much more plausibly understood as a blessing. The words are to be heard thus: “May you be fruitful and multiply, may you fill the earth and subdue it, may you have dominion over the animals.”

The speech is, for one thing, introduced with the words, “And God blessed them.” The traditional interpretation would have it that after these words, we are not then offered the content of the blessing but are instead offered the content of a commend, without anything at all being said about a command. Very odd! Words announcing a blessing, but then no content to the blessing. Instead, content to a command, but no words announcing a command. The traditional interpretation construes the words we have as if they were instead the following: “God blessed them; and then God also commanded them, saying . . .” Is it not much more plausible to read all the introductory words together as amounting to, “And God blessed them, saying . . .”?

Second, we must not overlook the remarkable parallelism between God’s address to humankind, which I quoted, and God’s earlier address to the creatures of sea and air after they had been created. This is what we read: “And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on earth’” (Gen. 1:21–22). Being spoken to animals, this obviously has to be a blessing; it cannot be a command. But then, given the parallelism, isn’t it compelling to regard the speech to humankind as also a blessing—especially so when we add the fact, already mentioned, that nothing is said about a command but only about a blessing?

The Historical Appreciation of Gratitude

Let me now move on to the historical reflections that I promised. What I wish to show is that the tradition that gave rise to these schools is unfaithful to its own founder, John Calvin, when it places obedience deeper than gratitude in the Christian life. Of course, it’s possible to argue that Calvin was mistaken on this matter. But when I have finished setting before you the pattern of his thought, I would guess that you will feel intuitively that there is something deeply biblical in his thought pattern.

Before I set out, let me say that my understanding of Calvin on this point has been decisively shaped by a remark that a Calvin scholar at the University of Chicago, Brian Gerrish, makes in his book *The Old Protestantism and the New*. Gerrish is talking about the overall structure of Calvin’s thought. This is the remark: “Man is defined as the point of creation at which the sheer goodness of God is reflected or imaged in an act of filial piety or thankful love.”¹ A good place to begin is with a remarkable passage in which Calvin argues that we should appreciate grasses, trees, and fruits not just for their utility in keeping us nourished and warm but for their “comeliness”; we should appreciate wine and oil not only because they are useful but because wine gladdens the heart and oil makes the face shine. He concludes the passage by asking whether God did “not, in short, render many things attractive to us, apart from their necessary use?” The question is, of course, rhetorical. Let this, he says, “be our principle; that the use of God’s *gifts* is not wrongly directed when it is referred to that end to which the Author himself created and destined them for us, since he created them for our good, not for our ruin.”²

The underlying point is that we are to see the things of this world not only as the *works* of God for which we are to give God praise but also as the *gifts* of God for which we are to give God thanks—and then, gifts not only for utility but for delight. “This life, however crammed with infinite miseries it may be, is still rightly to be counted among those blessings of God which are not to be spurned. Therefore,

if we recognize in it no divine benefit, we are already guilty of grave ingratitude toward God himself.” “Away then with that inhuman philosophy that, while conceding only a necessary use of creatures, not only malignantly deprives us of the lawful fruit of God’s beneficence but cannot be practiced unless it rob a man of all his senses and degrades him to a block.”³

Calvin was clear on the fact that the counterpart of gratitude to God for the good things that come our way is lament to God for the bad things that come our way. “Among the Christians,” he says, “there are also new Stoics, who count it depraved not only to groan and weep but also to be sad and care ridden.” On this, says Calvin, they are quite wrong. We ought “not to be utterly stupefied and to be deprived of all feeling of pain. Our ideal is not that of what the Stoics of old foolishly described as ‘the great-souled man’; who, having cast off all human qualities, was affected equally by adversity and prosperity, by sad times and happy ones—nay, who like a stone was not affected at all.” The Stoic ideas paint “a likeness of forbearance that has never been found among men, and can never be realized,” for it is contrary to our created nature. “Thus afflicted by disease, we shall both groan and be uneasy and pant after health; thus pressed by poverty we shall be pricked by the arrows of care and sorrow; thus we shall be smitten by the pain of disgrace, contempt, injustice; thus at the funerals of our dead ones we shall weep the tears that are owed to our nature.”⁴

I find it impossible not to read the passage I cited above, in which Calvin says that the good things that come our way from the hand of God are not just the things of use but also the things of delight, as an implicit criticism of a famous formula of Augustine in his *On Christian Doctrine*. Admittedly, Calvin does not say that he is criticizing Augustine; his veneration for Augustine was so deep that when he did feel compelled to criticize his great predecessor, he much preferred just doing so without saying that he was doing so. But in the first book of *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine said that we are to use the things of the world, not to enjoy them; God alone is to be enjoyed. In Latin, the formula has an almost hypnotic ring: *uti, non frui*; to use, not to enjoy.

Obviously, this is not the occasion to engage in the niceties of Augustine scholarship. But if Calvin was indeed implicitly criticizing Augustine in the way suggested, I feel compelled to say that he was, in my judgment, misinterpreting Augustine. I grant that Augustine has regularly been misinterpreted in just that way; his words invite the misinterpretation. But I think that when one looks closely at the context of the famous *uti/frui* formula, Augustine is not saying that we are only to use the things of the world, not to enjoy them. What he is saying is that we are not to experience in them the kind of delight that comes from loving something, investing oneself in it, attaching oneself to it, and finding one’s love satisfied. God alone is to be loved (as an end in itself), not the things of this world; accordingly, in God alone are we to find the delight of satisfied love. As to the things of the world, we are allowed not only to use the useful things but also to delight in the delightful things, giving God thanks and praise for them. What we are not to do—to say it again—is pursue them, love them, desire them, attach ourselves to them, invest ourselves in them. In short, Calvin and Augustine are united in the view that God’s gifts to us are not only for our use but also for our delight.

Where they differ is over Augustine’s insistence that we are not to *love* any of these things—not to attach ourselves to them in such a way that we grieve when they change or die on us. What lies behind Calvin’s claim that it is appropriate to grieve at funerals is that it is appropriate to love our relatives and friends. When Augustine reflected on his former life, what struck him was not only the disobedient licentiousness of it but the unhappiness of it and his emotional vulnerability. He had attached his love to all sorts of things and persons that changed on him, died, turned away from him; grief ensued. It was to prevent that unhappiness and emotional vulnerability that he urged love for God alone. What is striking about Calvin, by contrast, is that he enjoins us to emotional vulnerability. Gratitude and lament belong together as intrinsic components in the Calvinist way of responding to experience and living in the world.

What’s especially important for my argument is the next step. As Calvin sees it, recognition of the goodness of God, and the practice of

gratitude that goes with that recognition, is what evokes and sustains faith. Faith does not arise out of the recognition of the sheer power of God. Neither does faith arise out of the fear of eternal punishment. Faith arises out of a perception of God’s goodness, received with gratitude. “Briefly, he alone is truly a believer who, convinced by a firm conviction that God is a kindly and well-disposed Father toward him, promises himself all things on the basis of his generosity; who, relying upon the promises of divine benevolence toward him, lays hold on an undoubted expectation of salvation.”⁵ And so, says Calvin:

let all readers know that they have with truth apprehended what it is for God to be Creator of heaven and earth, if they first of all follow the universal rule, not to pass over in ungrateful thoughtlessness or forgetfulness those conspicuous powers which God shows forth in his creatures, and then learn so to apply it to themselves that their very hearts are touched. The first part of the rule is exemplified when we reflect on the greatness of the Artificer who stationed, arranged, and fitted together the starry host of heaven in such wonderful order. . . .

There remains the second part of the rule, more closely related to faith. It is to recognize that God has destined all things for our good and salvation but at the same time to feel his power and grace in ourselves and in the great benefits he has conferred upon us, and so bestir ourselves to trust, invoke, praise, and love him.⁶

The point is clear. The fundamental response on our part to God’s good gifts is gratitude, grounding even faith itself. Gratitude lies at the foundation of Christian existence. From this, everything flows. If the Christian school is to educate for Christian life, it must educate for gratitude.

Modeling Gratitude

How is that to be done? In my *Educating for Responsible Action*, I argued that the three fundamental ways of shaping dispositions to action are discipline, reasoning, and modeling. In the case before us,

what strikes me as central is modeling. Discipline—punishing and rewarding—seem to me out of place. And reasoning? Well, yes, one can offer students reasons for feeling gratitude toward God. But above all, I think, it will be modeling that is effective here. We teachers must ourselves exhibit gratitude. Our schools must breathe the spirit of gratitude.

For one thing—difficult as it surely is in the modern world—we must cultivate a sort of meditative reflection on God’s wisdom and goodness as exhibited in God’s works. Allow me to quote a lovely passage from Calvin:

There is no doubt that the Lord would have us uninterruptedly occupied in this holy meditation; that, while we contemplate in all creatures, as in mirrors, those immense riches of his wisdom, justice, goodness, and power, we should not merely run over them cursorily, and so to speak, with a fleeting glance; but we should ponder them at length.⁷

To which he interestingly adds something eminently relevant to you and me: People “who have either quaffed or even tasted the liberal arts penetrate with their aid far more deeply into the secrets of the divine wisdom.”⁸

“And be thankful,” says Paul. “Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with *thankfulness* in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving *thanks* to God the Father through him” (Col. 4:15–17, emphasis added).

Was Paul laying on us an obligation? Was he casting gratitude as one among other obligations that God lays on us—who knows why? I doubt it. I think he was reminding us of what is deepest in our Christian and human existence. Reminding us that if we are true to what we are, we will be eucharistic beings who break out into song and then go forth to perform works of obedience as acts of gratitude.

END OF EDUCATING FOR LIFE EXCERPT

A Shalom View of Human Flourishing

You and I here are members of the church; as such, we take the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as authoritative. What in them is authoritative for us, and how we are to apply that to our contemporary world, are, of course, matters of much dispute. But that they are authoritative is not in dispute; indeed, their being authoritative for us contributes to our very identity as a people. Let us then, in our reflections on moral education, allow ourselves to be instructed by Scripture.

Kant, in the famous opening sentence of the body of his *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, said that “nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a *good will*.”⁴ What Kant meant is that it will always be a good thing that a person have a good will; it is impossible that there be a situation in which it would be better that a person not have a good will. Of nothing else, says Kant, is this true. It is because Kant regards a good will and a good will alone as unqualifiedly good, that he placed the phenomenon of a good will in the center of his reflections on how one should live. He develops a theory as to what it is that makes a will good; and he thereby also answers the question as to what must be done so as to bring about this phenomenon of unqualified goodness.

I submit that the center of the main line of biblical reflection on how one should live is very different. The center is not at all so lean and invulnerable. In the Old Testament prophets and song-writers, and in the New Testament gospel writers, the center of reflection is a certain vision of human well-being, of human flourishing. I am inclined to think that the same vision is operative in the New Testament letters, though there, it must be said, it remains more in the background. *Shalom* is the name that the Old Testament prophets and song-writers gave to the mode of human flourishing that they had in mind. Whereas Kant places on center stage the ideal of the dignity of the transcendent, su-

pranatural, fully autonomous self, these biblical writers place on center stage the ideal of the shalom community. No doubt the full instauration of shalom requires that those who participate in shalom have good wills—though the biblical writers would not agree with Kant as to what makes for the goodness of will. But shalom goes radically beyond goodness of will.⁵

I shall assume that all of us here are acquainted with that ideal of human flourishing which the biblical writers call shalom. In particular, I shall assume that all of us here are acquainted with the fact that an indispensable component in shalom is justice: the honoring of every person’s rights.⁶ It is sometimes said that the recognition of rights, and especially the recognition of natural human rights, begins in the late medieval or early modern periods.⁷ That seems to me certainly wrong. There is some plausibility to the claim that *theories* of rights, and more particularly, *theories* of *natural human* rights, first appear then. But the writers of the Old Testament seem to me unmistakably to have worked with the notion of rights. And though there may be some question as to whether they had a clear grasp of the notion of *natural human* rights, as opposed, say, to the rights of Israelis, there can be no doubt whatsoever that the church fathers did. When I am in the presence of an Other, I am in the presence of someone who has legitimate claims on me and others, at least some of these being claims that that

⁵ In Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), one finds a sustained attack on the Kantian approach to the question “How should one live?” and a sustained defense of the Aristotelian approach, which centers on well-being rather than goodness of will. Though making clear that he does not entirely accept Aristotle’s understanding of well-being, Williams leaves quite undeveloped what he understands well-being to be. It is the *approach* that he wants to recommend; and as will be clear from the text, I am heartily in agreement with that. Unfortunately, Williams repeatedly indicates his conviction that Christian ethics is committed to something different.

⁶ See Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1976). See also my book entitled *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 69–72.

⁷ Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 67. For further discussion of this topic, see my essay “Christianity and Social Justice” in *Christian Scholar’s Review* 16, no. 3 (March 1987): 211–28.

⁴ Kant, *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, translated by T. K. Abbott (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1949), p. 1.

Other comes bearing just by virtue of the fact that he or she is human. The shalom community is indeed more than the just community; it is the *ethical* community. And more than that: It is the community whose members exist in harmony with God and nature, before God, among one's fellows and their works, with oneself, is a prominent part of shalom. But so also, to say it again, is justice. Justice and happiness, though connected in various ways, are nonetheless distinct; shalom requires the presence of both. Just as someone whose rights are honored may nonetheless be intensely unhappy, so too people can be made to feel quite content in situations in which their rights are violated. Neither situation is shalom.

In the prophets and song-writers of the Old Testament one finds highly distinctive views on what is required for justice—on what are the rights of persons.⁸ I do not hold that we must confine our recognition of rights to those recognized by the biblical writers. We too, after all, have moral intuitions and reflective capacities that we ought to put to work. Yet we would do well here too to allow ourselves to be instructed.

What is striking in the Old Testament declarations about justice is the passionate insistence that all the members of the community are entitled to a full and secure place in the life of the community. Hence the clanging repetitive reference to orphans, widows, and sojourners. Over and over when justice is spoken of, that trinity is brought into view. For these were the marginal ones in ancient Israeli society. Justice arrives only when the marginal ones are no longer marginal. Here is just one example from many: The Lord God “executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing” (Deut. 10:18). The modern Western liberal notion, that a society is just when each person is free to exercise his or her own will, provided only that no one harms the will of another, is most emphatically not the biblical notion of justice.

⁸ See my essay entitled “Why Care about Justice?” in *The Evangelical Round Table*, vol. 22, *Evangelicalism: Surviving Its Success*, edited by David A. Fraser (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

Actions Guided by Shalom

So suppose we begin our reflections with this ideal of the shalom community. We must then go on to speak of how one should act with respect to this ideal. Let us here too allow ourselves to be instructed by the biblical writers. While I readily grant the rich variety of what they have to say on the matter, let me suggest that very much of what they say can be put under one or the other of four headings. We are, for one thing, called to engage in the endeavor and struggle to bring about shalom—to introduce one and another dimension of shalom into our human existence. This can be seen as having two quite different dimensions. Some actions are to be seen as themselves part of shalom; they are samples. Others find their validity in their effect of bringing about some phase of shalom; they are instruments. We are called, for example, both to act justly and to struggle against injustice and for justice. Secondly, we are called to pray for shalom, as in the prayer “Thy kingdom come.” For we confess that the coming of God’s Reign of peace is far from entirely in our own hands; we confess vulnerability and incapacity. The contrast with Kant, great Stoic that he was, is striking: whether a person will attain the ideal of unalloyed autonomous dignity is entirely within that person’s hands. Thirdly, we are invited to savor, to enjoy, to celebrate such traces of shalom as come our way—not just grimly rushing on in joyless dutiful activism. Even in the midst of pain, we enjoy the wine. And lastly, we are invited to mourn the shortfall of shalom in our world. We weep, we cry, in the realization that our Lord has pronounced his blessing on those who mourn. We ache; for we realize that the messianic age in its fullness is not yet here. To act in these ways is to act in the messianic light.

But what, you ask, about *love*? Is this not the first and great commandment, that we should love God above all? And is not the second commandment like it—that we should love our neighbor as ourselves? Yes, indeed. But to love God above all is to struggle and pray for the coming of God’s Reign of shalom, to savor its presence and mourn its absence. And if we must say, in a word, how those who act in the messianic light will treat their fellows, that word is *love*. In particular,

justice flows forth from love: loving one's neighbor requires and includes respecting his or her rights. In Kant, the center of the picture is always me and the moral law—this moral law being the deliverance of my own transcendent self. In the prophets the center of attention is not the moral law but persons—the widow, the alien, and the orphan, the little ones, the voiceless ones, the oppressed ones, the poor ones—the hundredth one, the one left outside. Of course there is law. But the law is grounded in God's love for the little ones.

Cultivating Dispositions to Act Justly

In the light of our discussion up to this point, let me now rephrase the central question to which we must address ourselves: How can we cultivate in students the disposition to work and pray for shalom, savoring its presence and mourning its absence? More specifically, how can we cultivate in them these dispositions with respect to justice? Notice, once again, that I speak of *dispositions*. If it is the coming of shalom that we care about, and more particularly, the doing of justice and the struggling for a just society, then we will not confine our attention to acts of good will but will devote the bulk of our attention to stable traits of character—dispositions of action, desire, and feeling. Of course we shall also cultivate the disposition to deliberate and choose in certain ways in quandary situations.

It would be relevant here to reflect on the obstacles we face in the cultivation of such dispositions. Some of the obstacles are ones present in humanity down through the ages—the “rich young ruler” syndrome, for example. Others are obstacles located in the formation of students peculiar to our own time and place. For obviously students do not come to school unshaped and unformed. They are already disposed to act, desire, and feel in certain ways by virtue of the educative impact of society on them. I think if we scrutinized the character formation of students as they come to us, we would find in them a great deal of the individualism to which Bellah et al. called attention in *Habits of the Heart*. We would also, I think, find a great deal of what I shall call “oblivion to the normative”—a phenomenon that overlaps individual-

ism but is not identical with it. An economy of industrial capitalism, such as ours, systematically destroys a society of ethically infused social roles and replaces that with a society of a generalized ethic of contract. Then in turn it acts destructively on an ethic of contract and exerts pressure toward replacing that with a system in which people's deliberations over whether to keep their contracts are conducted in terms of the pleasant and unpleasant consequences to themselves of doing or not doing so. In such a society, ethical discourse is endangered. Discourse about action is more and more tacitly or explicitly couched in terms of what one would feel comfortable doing, or what would be in the interest of one's nation or state. So-called “values clarification” is the pedagogy that fits such a society.⁹

But important—indeed, indispensable—as such an analysis of obstacles would be for a full treatment of our topic, let me here forego that analysis and move on to the question of educational praxis: How, in the light of the wisdom of the ages and the discoveries of contemporary psychology, can we educate students for engaging in that “specific uprising” of which Barth spoke? How can we cultivate in them the disposition to act justly and to struggle against injustice?

A Cognitive Framework: Social Ethic, World-Systems, and Critical Consciousness

We must, in the first place, assist our students in acquiring an adequate cognitive framework for thinking about issues of social justice. Of course our students do not come empty-headed on these matters. They come with some grasp of the concept of justice and its correlative concepts, infirm as that grasp may be; they come with some inclinations to apply to those concepts in certain ways, mistaken

⁹ One of the large themes in Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* is the spread of this “oblivion to the normative.” In tracing the causes of this phenomenon, MacIntyre is inclined to give much more credit to the influence of great thinkers than I am. I see it as one of the natural consequences of our economic structure. I also believe, however, that the continuation of industrial capitalism requires a strong ethical base. Thus I see capitalism as destroying what it requires for its continuation.

though those may be. Furthermore, they typically come with a cognitive framework for interpreting many of the phenomena relevant to social justice, even though they may not themselves interpret those in terms of justice. They may interpret them in terms, say, of freedom. Hence a phase that is pedagogically important in the process of assisting one's students to acquire an adequate cognitive framework for dealing with issues of justice is that of making them aware of their present framework. This point is especially emphasized by Thomas Groome in his *Christian Religious Education*. Groome argues that the cultivation of such self-awareness is best accomplished in group dialogue situations that begin with student judgments as to what should be done in quite specific situations calling for action.¹⁰ I think there is much to be said for this suggestion, though it should not be followed rigidly. But normally one must go beyond the cultivation of self-awareness. Normally one must assist one's students into an amplification and critique of their present cognitive framework for justice.

An adequate framework can be thought of as having three distinct dimensions. It will, for one thing, incorporate a *Christian social ethic*. Such an ethic will, in my judgment, be faithful to, and appropriately grounded in, the story and the torah and the vision of Scripture. In turn, I think we have arrived at a time in Christian history when our exegesis of Scripture must be both ecumenically and globally informed if it is to be responsible. For example, those who are Reformed must listen to how Catholics and Orthodox and Anabaptists interpret Scripture. We who occupy top rungs in the political economy of the world must listen to those who are on the bottom.

A Christian social ethic will have to go beyond biblical exegesis, however. It will even have to go beyond the theological determination of what, in the biblical writers, is authoritative for us today. For it must be an ethic capable of dealing with issues that never arose in New or

Old Testament times.¹¹ I have already made clear that, in my judgment, such an ethic will take *shalom* as one of its basic categories. Partly that is because *shalom* is the context within which the biblical concern for justice is placed. In addition, the concept of *shalom* provides us a way of fitting together justice and worship, evangelism and art, piety and rights, and so forth. Unless we do find an adequate framework for fitting together these various dimensions of the Christian life, we will find ourselves forever impaled on tired but intense controversies that find no resolution: those interested in social action pitted against those interested in liturgy; those interested in personal piety pitted against those interested in art; those interested in evangelism against those interested in theology. Surely these all belong together. They belong together as the content of what the biblical writers call the Kingdom of God. *Shalom* is simply the content of God's Reign.

A second indispensable dimension of an adequate cognitive framework for dealing with issues of justice is a structural analysis of our present-day social world. Issues of social justice by their very nature involve issues of social structure. I am myself persuaded that this analysis must, from the ground up, be global in character. We must reject the modernization model of our modern social world, which thinks first in terms of separate societies and only later remarks on their interactions, replacing that model with some form or other of a world-systems model.¹² Secondly, we must not shrink from attending to the phenomena of domination and exploitation that result from social structures—domination and exploitation both within areas of the world and among areas. In particular, we must not shrink from attending to such phenomena within our own American society, and in the impact of our area of the world on other areas. We must, in my judg-

¹¹ I discuss the formation of a Christian social ethic somewhat more amply in "The Bible and Economics: The Hermeneutical Issues" in *Transformation* 4, nos. 3 & 4 (June–Sept./Oct.–Dec. 1987): 11–19.

¹² See Chapter 11 of my book entitled *Until Justice and Peace Embrace*. In addition to the books cited there, see Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982).

¹⁰ Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (New York: HarperCollins, 1980).

ment, reject the notion that the fundamental structural reality of capitalist economies is a free market and that domination and exploitation are purely personal and accidental. That should be seen as heresy, in the strict sense of heresy. If someone in one of our colleges taught theological anthropology by extolling the glories of humanity for twelve and a half weeks and then, at the end of the thirteenth, remarked that “Now, my dear students, before we end this course, let me mention that here and there, now and then, human beings have done what they ought not to have done,” we would regard that a heresy. I fail to see why we should regard economists who speak thus any differently. Thirdly, our social analysis should be genuinely *social* analysis; we should resist the tendency of academics to suppose that we have done our work when we have talked about ideas. Social reality is not simply the implementation of big ideas, such as the idea of individualism, the idea of progress, and so on. Social dynamics interact with ideas; there is a circular relation between them. Ideas which arise as the reflection in thought of social dynamics will often slightly alter the dynamics of which they are the reflection; and so forth. In our social analysis we should be neither idealists nor materialists. Lastly, our social analysis should itself be informed by, and faithful to, the Christian gospel. Social analysis is not a religiously neutral practice.¹³

A third dimension in an adequate cognitive framework for dealing with issues of justice consists in the bringing together of the ethic with the analysis. We must apply the general ethic to specific issues. On a Reformed view of things, this will always involve a discriminating Yes and No response to our present societies. Much in our present societies is good; and what is good is to be seen ultimately as divine gift, as grace. But much is also evil, fallen, even idolatrous. What is required, then, is a discerning combination of affirmation and negation. Following Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* we may give the title of “critical consciousness” to such a discriminating analysis and

appraisal of one’s society¹⁴—assuming that Freire does indeed regard a *truly* critical consciousness as incorporating not only negation but affirmation.

Let me add here that one’s attempt to assist one’s students in developing a more adequate cognitive framework for dealing with issues of justice is more likely to succeed if one’s attempt is characterized by justice and mercy. To teach justice, it helps to teach justly.

Ethical Formation: Reasons, Discipline, Models, and Empathy

But now I want to raise what seems to me the most important issue for us to reflect on: Is this enough? If we succeed in leading our students to adopt a more adequate cognitive framework for dealing with issues of justice, is that sufficient for disposing them to act justly and to struggle against injustice? As the last stage in the dialogic process that Groome practices and recommends, he urges the members of the dialogue to *decide* to *choose*, then he breaks off. Is that enough?

Sometimes it probably is. If Freire succeeds in illuminating his oppressed people as to the roots of their oppression, and as to strategies for alleviating their oppression which do not threaten even more unhappiness that the oppression itself, that will probably increase their disposition to engage in emancipatory action. In an obvious way, such illumination taps into what those people want—taps into their valorize experience. And if Groome’s students are ultimately committed to living by the story and vision and torah of the Scriptures, then presenting them with what they come to see as the implications of that commitment will probably increase their disposition to act accordingly.

But notice the cautious *if’s* in what I have said. I myself find Freire and Groome expecting too much of reasoning, and too myopic in their focus on reasoning. There remains too much rationalism in them. Illumination, whether acquired on one’s own under the promptings of dialogue, or acquired by receiving it from another, does indeed some-

¹³ For discussion of this point, see my book entitled *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, 2d edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).
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¹⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by M. G. Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1970).

times dispose us to act differently. But it does not always. And there are other ways of cultivating dispositions than by offering reasons or promptings to the discovery of reasons.

Groome's strategy, scrutinized closely, proves to consist of giving the student, or helping the student to discover, *reasons* for acting a certain way—reasons that go back to his or her deep religious convictions. So too Freire's procedure, scrutinized closely, proves to consist of giving, or helping discussants to discover, *reasons* for taking steps to alleviate their oppression—reasons whose effectiveness inheres in the person's dislike for oppression. But such reasons, though sometimes effective, also have their inadequacies. Though apparently it is the characteristic of human beings to prefer consonance between belief and action, sometimes the perceived benefit of continuing to believe as we do and act inconsistently with that is greater than our discomfort over dissonance; so we do what we can to remain in our unstable state of hypocrisy. Or alternatively, when dissonance between belief and action turns up we sometimes change our beliefs rather than our actions.

But let me move on. In addition to offering reasons or assisting in the discovery of reasons, what, according to the wisdom of the ages and contemporary psychology, are some of the great shapers of dispositions to action?

If one expects the consequences or concomitants of acting a certain way to be to one's liking, the chances are greater, other things being equal, that one will act that way; and if one expects the consequences or concomitants of acting a certain way to be not to one's liking, the chances are greater, other things being equal, that one will not act that way. This fundamental fact about human nature makes possible the formative strategy that, for want of a better word, I call *discipline*. We can sometimes, as society or as individuals, attach liked or unliked consequences and concomitants to actions—or at least, produce in people the *belief* that they are attached. We can do things that will lead members of society, young and old, to expect that if they act in a certain way, consequences or concomitants that they find to their liking will ensue—or not to their liking. Probably the word “discipline” con-

notes, for most of us, *physical* rewards and punishments. But what I am here using the word “discipline” to cover goes well beyond that. Words of praise and words of dis-praise also function as discipline. Of course such words can be spoken in purely cynical, manipulative, fashion. But they need not be: One may praise what one finds praiseworthy. Schools, among other things, are places in which words of encouragement and of chastisement are spoken, words of praise and dis-praise. They contribute, in that way, to the ethical formation of their students.

Discipline regularly evokes skepticism as to its role in truly ethical formation. We heard Kant expressing the skepticism. It is said that if we encourage truth-telling in someone by attaching likeable consequences or concomitants to his or her telling the truth, or unpleasant ones to not telling the truth, then the person will tell or not tell the truth for the sake of those pleasant or unpleasant attachments. What we want, though, is a person who tells the truth because he or she finds truth-telling itself appealing or obligatory.

This negative evaluation of discipline strikes me as reflecting too negative a picture of its workings. May it not be that the outcome of the discipline is that the disciplined person eventually finds something attractive in truth-telling; and may it not be that the person would be less likely to have discovered that without discipline? Typically when children begin music lessons it takes the application of considerable discipline on the part of parents and teachers to get them to practice. But eventually, for at least some students, music-making proves to provide its own intrinsic rewards. Let us also remember that whether or not discipline contributes to the formation of a good will, it is an indispensable component in our struggle for justice. Murder is so horrible a violation of justice that, though of course it would be *best* if everyone loved everyone sufficiently to make it unknown, in our world of defective love it is *better* that the assurance of punishment be attached to murder so as to decrease its incidence than that it not be attached.

The wisdom of the ages and contemporary psychology also teach us that *modeling* is a great shaper of action; under conditions not very

well understood, people are disposed to act in certain ways when certain of the people presented to them act in those ways, especially people they love or admire. To develop in students the disposition to act justly and to struggle for justice, it helps for us and our institutions to teach justly, to live justly, and to struggle for justice. It helps to be models.

The psychological literature, to the best of my knowledge, leaves obscure the dynamics operative in modeling. Is there in human beings a tendency to act as certain of those around us act in certain respects? And does this, at least in its more self-aware manifestations, take the form of *liking* to act as those around us act? If so, then modeling works by tapping in to one's valorized experience, as presently constituted. But perhaps there is also another dynamic at work in modeling.

We must not suppose that valorization of experience is fixed and static. In fact it is constantly changing. I have suggested that discipline contributes to some of the changes. The music student of six years old finds no happiness in music-making; that same student six years later does. Something has changed in what that student likes. Perhaps modeling too does not just tap in to some already-present desire to imitate; perhaps modeling in its own way, like discipline in its way, sometimes changes us. Perhaps the model presents to us a way of being that we find attractive. Our imagination was inadequate. Our expectations as to what will prove to our liking are now different. If that is how it sometimes works, and I rather think it does, then models—live models, described models, filmed models—often function in the same way that fictional narratives do. These too sometimes aid our imagination by presenting to us in an attractive light ways of acting that we had either not considered, or considered but found unattractive. Our expectations are different.

Reasoning, disciplining, modeling, be the models actual or fictional—these are ways of cultivating dispositions. Let me suggest one more. It appears that there is in all, or almost all, human beings a dynamic of empathy. There is in us a tendency to empathize with the plight and delight of certain others—to stand in their shoes, in the sense that we feel sorrow over their sorrow and happiness over their

happiness. Obviously it is not strong enough in its effects, nor universal enough in its objects, to prevent the most appalling cases of taking satisfaction in causing others to suffer. The Milgram experiments confirm in the laboratory what we know from life: Some people would rather knowingly cause suffering to others than violate others. But even those who torture with a smile are rarely so empty of empathy as not to feel unhappiness over the unhappiness of anyone other than themselves. Kant, as we have seen, dismisses sympathy and empathy as of no moral significance. In fact I think that empathy is of fundamental importance in ethical formation. The disposition to struggle against some injustice can often be cultivated by evoking in the person empathy for those suffering under the injustice. And in my experience, one of the most effective ways of doing this, in turn, is by presenting to the person the human faces and the human voices of suffering—"the voices of the night."¹⁵ Many have argued that the main factor causing the revulsion of the American people to the Viet Nam war was the images of suffering on our TV screens. Whether right or wrong, the South African government is persuaded: it has banned all images and recording of violence in the country.

The lesson to be learned by schools is that they must look for ways to confront their students with the faces and voices of suffering—with images and voices of the night. If one is to love another as oneself, it helps to have that other presented in such a way that one suffers over his or her suffering and rejoices over his or her rejoicing.

Empathy is no more all-conquering than any of the other dynamics that can be tapped into so as to cultivate the disposition to justice. We have seen that the impulse to follow orders often overwhelms empathy. So also does *fear*. What prevent Israelis from genuinely hearing the suffering in the voices, and seeing the suffering the faces, of the Palestinians, and then responding appropriately, is the awful fear of the consequences for their lives if they did genuinely hear and see and respond. So too, what prevents Afrikaners from genuinely hearing the

¹⁵ I take the phrase from Walter Brueggemann, "Voices of the Night against Justice," in *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly* by Walter Brueggemann, Sharon Parks, and Thomas Groome (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), pp. 5–28.

suffering in the voices, and seeing the suffering in the faces, of the blacks in South Africa, and then responding appropriately, is the awful fear of the consequences for their lives if they did respond appropriately. This is a species of the “rich young ruler” syndrome of which I spoke earlier. An important contribution we as teachers can make to the ethical formation of our students is dealing with such fear.

These, as I see it, are some of the great shapers of ethical character: reasoning, disciplining, modeling, offering narratives, expanding the scope of empathy by presenting the faces and voices of suffering, dealing pastorally with fear of the unknown. I suppose I do not have to point out that the implications of taking them seriously are appallingly radical for our teaching, for our living, and for the comportment of our institutions.¹⁶

¹⁶ For a more ample discussion of some of the points I have made here, along with citation of evidence in the psychology literature, see my book entitled *Educating for Responsible Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

It is possible to classify the ways, abstractly considered, in which dispositions to actions can be influenced:

- (1) One may contribute to S’s believing that some valorized experience, which S formerly did not believe was available to S, now is available (or the converse)—for example, by contributing to S’s actually having had that valorized experience (our example of skilled music-making), or by contributing to S’s envisaging it (models, narratives).
- (2) One may contribute to S’s believing, of some experience which was previously available to S, that it has changed its valorization relative to other experiences of S—by, for example, contributing to S’s actually experiencing changes in the relative

END OF EDUCATING FOR SHALOM EXCERPT