
Pro Rege

Volume 21 | Number 2

Article 4

December 1992

Teaching for Christian Hearts, Souls & Minds: A Constructive Holistic Approach to Christian Education (Book Review)

John Van Dyk
Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege

Recommended Citation

Van Dyk, John (1992) "Teaching for Christian Hearts, Souls & Minds: A Constructive Holistic Approach to Christian Education (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 21: No. 2, 26 - 27.
Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol21/iss2/4

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

not making the poor *the* dominant hermeneutical, ecclesiastical, and missiological category risk politicizing the faith and undermining the uniqueness of the gospel and Christian mission? Is the most basic division in the human race the poor and the rich, the oppressed and the oppressor?

These questions demonstrate that in spite of the progress that has been made by liberation theologians

Teaching for Christian Hearts, Souls & Minds: A Constructive Holistic Approach to Christian Education, by Locke E. Bowman, Jr. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990). 118 pages, hardcover, \$15.95. Reviewed by John Van Dyk, Professor of Education.

Teaching for Christian Hearts, Souls & Minds is an interesting, readable book. Although its subtitle—*A Constructive, Holistic Approach to Christian Education*—suggests a broad range of application, the book is aimed primarily at teachers in church education. One reason for writing the book, Bowman tells us in his introduction, is to focus on the specific “human act of teaching” (ix). This reason merits attention. Bowman is quite right, in my view, when he says: “Professional educators in the field of religion seem easily distracted from the act of teaching” (x). Indeed, not only in the “field of religion,” but in Christian education generally, reflection on the concrete practice of teaching is easily neglected.

Another reason for writing the book was Bowman’s desire to introduce to a wider audience the thought of the late Rabbi Max Kadushin. Kadushin, a Jewish author of the thirties, resisted Jewish attempts to organize and systematize rabbinic thought. He rejected what he called the “philosophic approach” of the medieval Christian theologians, and preferred to elaborate a more concrete, even mystic approach (cf. note 7, 113).

Written in a chatty, conversational style, the seven somewhat loosely connected chapters call our attention to the importance of knowledge for teaching. The critical question is this: “As teachers, what is it we would like our learners to know?” (1). Bowman believes that this question cannot be answered without considering how we acquire knowledge. According to the author, the acquisition of knowledge is a mysterious process, though it clearly requires language, communication, and interaction with other people. Through such interaction teachers must strive to have their students develop “the mind of Christ” (18).

But what is this thing called “mind”? Critical of intellectual reductionism, Bowman rejects seeing the mind as merely a mental apparatus. On the contrary,

in the last few years to extricate themselves from Marxist accommodation, they have not entirely succeeded. However, with all its problems, liberation theology has left the Western church with profoundly distressing and provocative questions that need to be addressed. They present a distinct challenge to Western theology to deal with these issues. This book is no exception.

he writes, my mind is “my personally adopted framework for acting and being” (20). To the Hebrews, “mind” and “heart” meant much the same thing (66). A teacher, then, cannot simply instill his knowledge into the minds of his students, as if to fill an empty bucket. Rather, the teacher’s knowledge is to be offered and shared (23).

Fundamental to Bowman’s understanding of the mind is his notion of “concepts.” Concepts, he explains, “are ideas, but more than that, they are ideas formed into meaningful constellations of thought” (24). They form “the building blocks of human awareness and knowledge” (24), and are used to construct conceptual frameworks (26).

The question now arises: What kinds of concepts should compose the “Christian mind”? At this point Rabbi Kadushin enters the conversation. At the deepest level, the mind must possess what Kadushin called “value concepts.” Again Bowman cautions us against reductionism:

No single word captures the nature of value-concepts. They collect to themselves through generations a great corpus of faith experience recorded and passed on to others. A value-concept has the power to move us, and it gains in strength and power; it is dynamic and related to process rather than to a static definition. (37)

From Kadushin, Bowman borrows four fundamental “value concepts”—“magni-concepts” he calls them. These are (1) God’s love, (2) God’s justice, (3) the gospel of Christ, and (4) the Church and Christ’s body. These basic concepts are to form the background of all the conceptual frameworks to be developed, the rock bottom foundation from which all Christian learning is to proceed. Thus these magni-concepts must lie behind all of our teaching.

It is of interest to speculate about the “magni-concepts” we, in the Reformed tradition, would posit as “rock bottom.” Surely such themes as creation/fall/redemption/eschaton, God’s Word for created

reality, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the kingdom of God would play an equally fundamental role as those suggested by Kadushin and Bowman.

The key epistemological topics, then, are discussed in the first four chapters. At times it is difficult to shake the impression that Bowman is merely rehashing a stale intellectualism. After all, he places great stress on the role of cognition, the need for definition, and the appropriate arrangement and classification of concepts and subconcepts. But in chapter 5, tellingly titled "Organic Thinking and Wholeness," Bowman begins in earnest to work on linking his description of cognition to a more fully rabbinic understanding of knowledge. "As the rabbis read Scripture," Bowman reminds us, ". . . they were under no heavy compunction to arrange their thoughts into theological outlines" (70). After all, the Bible itself "was not written as a servant to logic" (74).

The final two chapters appear to function more or less as appendices reaffirming the importance of correct use of language in order to develop our Christian minds. These chapters restate what has been

Bowman's central point. "The thrust of this book," he says, "has been a renewed focus on our need to conceptualize, to acquire a vital religious language, and to enrich our vocabularies, in the conviction that such an emphasis is uniquely at the heart of good religious education" (95).

There are some curious tensions in the book. One of these I have already suggested, viz., the tension between a tendency towards an intellectualism which interprets "mind" as primarily concerned with concepts and cognition, and a larger, organic view of knowing. In addition, the reader occasionally experiences an unexpected call to freshness and innovation amidst strong affirmations of tradition. In the same vein, the author sometimes describes education as a communal affair (cf. 99), and at other times as independent and self-directed learning (cf. 69).

On balance, the book is well worth reading. Its readability, the diverse insights, the numerous reminders, and, above all, the gentle but persistent call to train a new generation in the "mind of Christ" ensure that the time invested in this book is not wasted.

The Mission of the Church in the World: A Biblical Theology, by Roger E. Hedlund (Grand Rapids: Baker) 1991. 300 pages, paperback, \$16.95. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

As Hedlund's subtitle suggests, this book is an attempt to present a biblical theology from a missiological point of view. While I have some doubts about whether the entire biblical corpus can be poured through the missiological sieve, the idea is exciting, and it does bear considerable fruit.

Hedlund is by no means a theological innovator. Presenting missiology as a paradigm for biblical theology is something of a fad of late, and Hedlund has thoroughly mined the works of the first wave of missiological theologians. There are frequent references to Blauw, De Ridder, Boer, Glasser, and Newbigen throughout the work. This is not a work intended to contribute to missiological theology. Its frequent, almost monotonous use of citation, along with its textbook style and simplistic exegesis suggest that the book is intended rather as a primer. One could say a primer on theology of missions, but that would miss the genius of the missiological theology movement. At one time, evangelical contributions in missiology came primarily from systematic theology. Today they are coming from missiologists doing biblical theology. Thus we might better describe Hedlund's work as an introduction to the Bible from a missiological perspective.

The missionary emphasis of the New Testament is

well known in evangelical circles. Unfortunately, the fact that the Old Testament also has a strong missiological element has often gone unnoticed. Hedlund cogently presents the Old Testament emphasis upon missions. The Old Testament never presents Yahweh as the exclusive deity of the Hebrews. There is a strong universalistic streak running throughout the Old Testament. Yahweh is the Lord of history. His sovereignty is proclaimed over all peoples, all nations and tribes. If on no other score, this book is worth reading for its emphasis upon the fact that Israel was elected in order to play a servant role among the nations. Hedlund does a workman like job of pointing out that the election of Israel was not a matter of privilege but rather of responsibility (36-39).

To say that Yahweh is the Lord over the nations and that his election is a particularistic act (the election of Israel) with a universal object (the redemption of the nations) is not to fall into an easy universalism. Hedlund takes on the universalistic trends coming from some missiological quarters today. He rejects the notion that all religions represent legitimate roads to God. The evidence comes not only from the Old Testament's running critique and outright ridicule of the idols, but it also, and most powerfully proceeds from the lips of God himself in the first commandment: "You shall