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Teaching the Faith: Models and Methods

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This morning we tried to develop a strategy for Christian education in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. I suggested that our future lay in a renewal of the parish as the primary educating agency of Christian nurture. Within that parish, I argued that our best hope for the education of children was in the historical home-church-school synthesis. I tried to develop a clear statement for the value of the Christian day school as a vital mission of the contemporary church. At the same time I understand clearly the need for a dramatic shift in emphasis upon adult education and early childhood education.

Now our task is far more limited. I want to focus on the Christian classroom and specifically on the act of teaching the faith. I will develop my remarks in two parts. The first consideration will deal with past and present models used within the church to define the teaching act designed to teach faith. Secondly, I will attempt to underline crucial concerns toward a useful teaching method not only for the 1970s but for the future as well.

Models for Teaching the Faith

Models are useful symbols for approximating reality and making the kinds of observations and predictions which can lead to additional truth. Within the scientific realm, models are essential to make scientific prediction, determine practical applications, and narrow the realm of speculation. They assist in the designing of interplanetary transportation systems, in building technical machinery for communication, and in the creation of miracle machines for curing human illnesses. In the field of social sciences, models assist in community design, in the development of therapy styles, and in the cure of the human spirit.

Within the realm of education, models serve as maps or guidelines for the practical task of classroom teaching. Model construction has become popular among social science educators, curriculum builders, and religious educators. Though I suspect that education models are far less sophisticated than their scientific counterparts, they do measure, limit, approximate reality, and sometimes lead to useful application in the classroom.

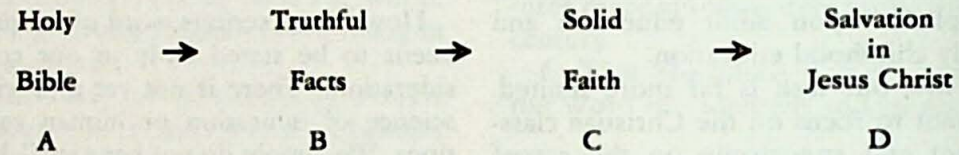
However, a serious word of caution needs to be stated early in our considerations. There is not yet a precise science of education or human relations. We simply do not have available a unified body of knowledge or single theory in the field of human development or education. Naturally many educators would dispute that statement, but the simple historical failure of our culture, or any culture, to produce humane human beings is ample evidence that we do not know how to educate a generation of truly warm, loving, productive people. That last statement may be more a statement of theological opinion than educational theory. But I believe it is simply an observable truism.

What I shall now attempt to do is to construct a series of models that do convey approximate reality in the specific arena of teaching the faith. Some models used in our synodical history have been, I believe, harmful, if not heretical. They represent presuppositions which I believe to be false. Others are worth serious consideration and reflect the best of our theological and educational tradition. Finally, one or two are speculative,

constructed to stimulate the imagination.

The task of model construction is useful and stimulating. Like a game, one can construct endless patterns of approximations to measure and limit truthing. The hope I have for us is that this presentation will stimulate your own individual model building. We need far more creativity in the construction of educational alternatives. If we truly believe the Gospel, we might be more free to be more creative, teaching with ecstasy rather than fear. From my observation of Lutheran classrooms across the Synod, we could do with a little ecstasy, a little celebration, a little fun.

Model 1: "Neo-Scholasticism"— A Lutheran Model



This model conveys what Walter Bouman calls the classic "Neo-Scholasticism" syndrome of the Missouri Synod.[1] Such a model might be characteristic of numerous teachers during Synod's past. In my doctoral research on "The Theology and Pedagogy of P. E. Kretzmann," I have shown that Kretzmann's model for teaching religion was similar to this representation.[2]

The sequence is as follows:

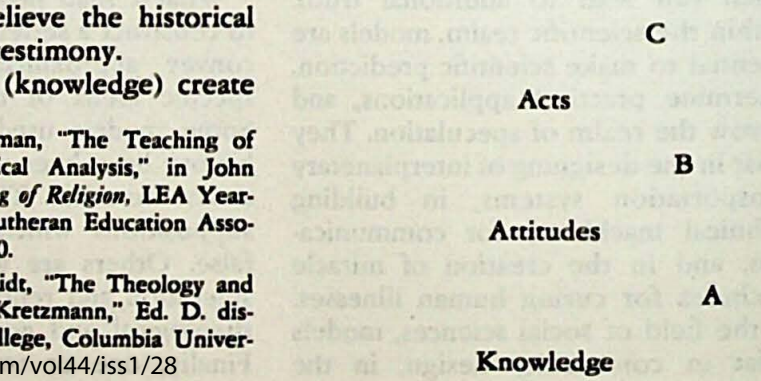
A) Given *a priori* an inerrant, reliable Holy Book, the Bible.
B) One can believe the historical fact of that testimony.
C) Those facts (knowledge) create faith. They are believable.
D) Therefore one can believe what they say about salvation in Jesus Christ.

The model tends toward cognitive values. Children are taught abundant facts from a literally true book so that their faith will grow. More facts, more faith.

Faith was first in facts, facts held truthful because the book was truthful. Some of those facts dealt with the story of our redemption. They were reliable because they were from a true book. Thus the Christ event could be believed. You will recognize the un-Lutheran neo-fundamentalistic approach. Sometimes such a method led to biblicism. Sometimes it led to dead orthodoxy. Sometimes the Gospel was muted and great concern was given to doctrine and correct believing.

This is not to make an unjust observation. There was surely the possibility that the Gospel was conveyed through this model. Many Lutherans who followed the outline were able to transcend its philosophical assumptions and gave witness to the true Gospel message of God's love in Christ —this in spite of some faulty presuppositions.

Model 2: Scholastic Objectives



[1] See Walter Bouman, "The Teaching of Religion: A Theological Analysis," in John S. Damm, *The Teaching of Religion*, LEA Yearbook (River Forest: Lutheran Education Association, 1965), pp. 31-60.

[2] Stephen A. Schmidt, "The Theology and Pedagogy of Paul E. Kretzmann," Ed. D. dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1969.

As a corollary to our first model we can readily trace the development of religious objectives for teaching the faith. Teachers, pastors, and Sunday school teachers were trained to develop objectives along these ideals. The base of the model is the same correct knowledge and the structure rises from that assumption.

A) Knowledge objectives were first and primary. Each lesson (Biblical) centered on some cognitive goal—the facts of the lesson, the doctrine of the lesson, or the bias of the teacher.

B) The idea was that correct knowledge would lead to a proper attitude. Thus, if one were sure that God does answer prayer, then the student would naturally develop a prayerful attitude, an attitude positive to the idea of praying.

C) Such an attitude would lead directly to action or skill. The student would be encouraged to pray because, of course, he wanted to pray. The end of the lesson was to manipulate the student to pray—a natural outgrowth to correct knowledge and correct attitude.

I have read hundreds of lesson plans constructed along the lines of this model. Alfred Schmieding, E. W. A. Koehler, and Allan H. Jahsmann, in his early years, taught us to construct our lessons by this process.[3] Decades of teaching methods firmly implanted that model on parish teachers.

The difficulty with the model is fairly clear. The assumption that we have absolute knowledge about anything except the Gospel is at least questionable. Secondly, attitudes do not necessarily flow from correct knowledge. Our experience and psychological experimentation indicate just the opposite. Often we feel the opposite attitude than the one sought by the teacher. Sometimes we are simply passive, especially when confronted with dull, unrelated facts. Sometimes we do the opposite of that which we know. Correct knowledge and good attitudes do not guarantee right actions. It's the old "road to hell is paved with good intentions." People who know better still hate, kill, and sin. Finally the model conveys again that knowledge in fact is really the top (bottom) priority. I believe these assumptions are questionable.

Pedagogically, the model is weak in that it places almost all the burden of teaching and learning on the teacher. The teacher writes objectives, molds attitudes, and dictates the correct outcome for the lesson. The lessons like the triangle tends to narrow rather than open youngsters. They proceed to manipulate the outcome so that each lesson aims at one thing—one skill, one act—the same, of course, for each child. Such a method, you will agree, does not allow for individual difference, creativity, or the joyful response to the good Word.

Model 3: Herbartian Method

A	Pre par atio n
B	Presentation
C	Assimilation
D	Generalization
E	Application

Educators in the Synod were able to adapt the best in secular method theory from the late 19th-century American and German educators. Herbartian method was widespread in education circles at the end of the century prior to the advent of modern

[3] See E. W. A. Koehler, *A Christian Pedagogy* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1930); Alfred Schmieding, *Teaching the Bible Story* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941); and Allan H. Jahsmann, *The Church Teaching God's Word* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963).

psychology.[4] The method was logically designed to communicate the factual basis of discipline subject matter. The method fit the synodical religion teaching like a glove. Delbert Schultz has carefully shown how successful this method was for Lutheran teachers. He shows as well the inherent weakness in the model.[5]

The preparation step was designed to review and synthesize experiences which had preceded the lesson. The review was to draw together all facts which were learned before the immediate lesson. The presentation was teacher work, as was the preparation step. Careful logical outlines of cognitive material were prepared. The teacher was again the crucial agent in the process. The lesson was his, the presenting his duty. The assimilation step was student work, a kind of rehearsal, review, or recitation of the facts taught by the teacher. Out of that review, students were encouraged to draw logical conclusions, generalizations, and finally to make direct application to the real-life situation.

There is danger involved for the educator to borrow one model from another discipline. Ever since Brunner's *The Process of Education*,[6] educators have recognized that the discipline does dictate the method. Thus, when theology or religion borrowed from the sciences the Herbartian teaching model, the inherent dangers surfaced. The application step, a logical extension for factual lessons, could very easily become a matter of moralism. Every lesson could end with "oughts" and "shoulds." And, as Schultz indicates, that problem has its roots deep in Missouri's pedagogy. It is natural and easy to moralize. The method made that natural process even more acceptable. A second weakness was the same as in the previous model. The method tended to accent the cognitive development and knowledge goals. Finally the model placed the teacher in the center of the process, making the teacher the key factor in success or failure. Such an authoritative lesson model fit Missouri theology well. Teachers passed on absolute truth by absolute methods and sought to mold students by a predetermined application. Moralism is anti-Gospel, and moralism became the benchmark of the Missouri Synod method of teaching the faith.

Model 4:

The Religion Curriculum

Doctrine (Catechism)

Bible

Confirmation

K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

The textbooks for teaching the faith in the Missouri Synod have always been the Bible and the Catechism. Those two books formed the basic curriculum for decades in synodical schools and Sunday schools. The model illustrated in the diagram reflects this pattern of curriculum in our

[4] See Charles de Garmo, *Herbart and the Herbartians*, Great Educators Series, ed. Nicholas Murray Buttler (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1895).

[5] Delbert Schulz, "Theology and Teaching," unpublished manuscript, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., 1965.

[6] Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education* (New York: Random House, 1960).

past history.

The Bible was singularly popular for teaching lower grades. We have always had a series of Bible story books for little people, continuing through the present in the form of the new Arch books. Some doctrine (catechism) was taught in lower grades, but the major subject matter was the Bible. As the child reached middle grades the curriculum became more catechetical. And by the time the youngster reached confirmation the curriculum was entirely the small Schwan Catechism, usually taught without the Bible references listed at the bottom of the proof texts.

Confirmation practices included a dogmatic catechism exam conducted with fervor before the entire congregation. Thus children demonstrated to their parents the old answers, answers comfortable to the adults for they were the same memory lessons they had learned decades earlier.

Experience-based education, the hallmark of the progressive period, hardly touched the Synod and certainly did not influence the teaching of religion. Our schools were always academically oriented, and there was little progressive, permissive, or child-centered education going on in the Synod. While religious educators in American Protestantism were enamored with experience as the basis for teaching the faith, Missouri held faithfully to teaching Catechism and Bible, in one sense not at all a bad idea.[7]

The model indicated our priorities. It indicated also our presuppositions—that theology was built on the Bible first and the Catechism second. Finally the model was entirely cognitive; it had to do with insuring that the Bible and Catechism facts would renew the heart of the Synod—the children—each decade.

Weaknesses in the model are more apparent today than they were a decade or two past. Due to the work of Piaget and Goldman we are able better to assess the success or failure of such a method.[8] We know that children cannot handle abstractions intellectually so early. They cannot think historically much before the fifth grade. We also know, from historical scholarship and Biblical criticism, that the Bible is a difficult adult book written by and for adults.

On the basis of those kinds of insights, the model, judged seriously, is a mistake and an inappropriate way to teach mature Christian faith. The method managed to lock Lutheran adults into their child-view of Scripture. It arrested the mature faith of countless Lutherans by too early literalizing images and metaphors which deal with significant abstractions rather than pure literalisms. I believe it assisted in developing a confirmation complex. The notion that one learned the faith factually stemmed from this idea. The model tended to oversimplify the Biblical message and introduced systematic theology too early. Systematics requires serious, difficult adult interaction. Bible study is mature adult work. By introducing both systematics and Biblical study too early in the life of the student, I believe we nurtured simplistic notions about our faith, not at all the same as a "child-like" faith.

Model 5: The Exegesis of Life

The model is an attempt to teach the faith as a Lutheran would view the structure of reality. The model suggests the world as it is, filled with the results of death symptoms, assorted kinds of bad news which seem to press upon us. God's judgment is alive in the real world; there is no escape. What

[7] See Schmidt, pp. 190 ff.

[8] See Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, trans. Marjorie Gabain (New York: The Free Press, 1965); and Ronald Goldman, *Readiness for Religion: A Basis for Developmental Religious Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965).

we have as life is really death; there is a sure end for everyone—a dead end.

The best hidden secret in America is death. Grief therapists replace funeral directors. Wakes are no longer in the family home but are conducted antiseptically in funeral parlors. The grass at the cemetery is phony. We don't even die—we "pass on," or as some insurance salesmen would have it—"something happens to us." The reality that we all want to escape is written over all of life; it is DEATH, one per person.

Loneliness

Pollution

Fear

War

Death

Prejudice

Sickness

Hatred

Cancer

Teaching the faith by this model helps young children acknowledge the truth of God's "No," His judgment against us, built into the very structure of life. To say "Yes" to that reality is to have been confronted with the reality of the love of God acted out in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the Good News is better than the bad news. The "Yes" is greater than the "No"; Christ overcomes death in life.

But that reality is not discovered; it is proclaimed. In that sense it is a transcendent reality, a word event. As we teach life we announce the *kerygma*. We announce it by Bible stories, by rehearsing God's acts in His church. We summon faith by the spoken Word and by the nurture of our own words.

The model implies that this kind of teaching begins from the bottom up—"naturally"—and "naturally" that leads to a dead end. The Gospel, then, is announced and acted out in the midst of death. The experience of Jesus is always "now and not yet," it is always experiential, yet more than experiential. We point to the symptoms of His love in life. We see His movement in His saints—in Martin Luther, Martin Luther King Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and other great men of faith. But we remember, as the playwright Arthur Miller reminds us, "whoever goes to save another person with the life of limitless love throws a shadow on the face of God."[9] So we point beyond human experience to the experience of hope.

We act out this hope with children in the witness of worship, in bread and wine, in milk and cookies—as we say His name and announce His love. We act out forgiveness, but we say the words as well, for we remember that the reality of God is always masked in the midst of our best attempts in the very words we call the "foolishness of preaching."

Model 6: The Cycle of Redemption

Those of you who have read my "Teaching Religion on the Edge of the 70s" are acquainted with this model. The form is borrowed from the pastoral counseling profession. Dr. Granger Westberg first proposed this model in his small book, *Good Grief*,[10] as a useful way to indicate the normal sequence for grieving persons. I have adapted that model to illustrate the reality that occurs as we teach the Word of God.

[9] Arthur Miller, *After the Fall* (New York: Bantam Books, 1965), p. 152.

[10] Granger Westberg, *Good Grief* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962).

1. Crisis

2. Encounter
(data)

3. Dialog
(Confession-Absolution)

4. Response
(Freedom)

1) The first step, Crisis, begins the process. We pose a problem, set the stage for the lesson, and begin the process of Law—exposure. Theologically the opening of the lesson announces experientially the "No" of God's Word.

Pedagogically the step is teacher-pupil work. The teacher sets out the problem or barrier so that the students can become involved in the process. Ideally the approach is dialog between teacher and students. The more participation, the better the process. The model affirms one position of learning theory, that to learn there must be an unknown, a conflict, a little trauma. The more significant the trauma, the more significant will be the entire experience.

2) Step two is teacher work. The teacher has the task of adding data, of taking a slice of life and presenting data about it. The presentation is a story, a picture, a play, a record, a film, or an activity. The attempt, like that of a good playwright, is to pose a situation and to tell the truth about a part of human life. The teacher's task is to provide enough data to initiate interest and allow discussion and conclusion. The data should be a Word of God; if it is a word about reality, it will also be a Word of God. The lesson in the model tends to amplify the crisis, leading to a deeper understanding of the terror of life itself.

3) Step three is pupil work, under the Spirit. It is dialog and discussion around the data provided earlier. The teacher steps out of the center and sits with the circle of students. Now there are no experts, for all are sharing the experience of faith. Hopefully, by careful question and quiet patience the teacher leads the students to deeper insights into the experience. The children are encouraged to openness and sharing. In a classroom where youngsters know and trust each other, the discussion can lead to confession and healing. Children can admit their fears and say and do the words of forgiveness. This is no exercise in sensitivity training; rather it is an experience in the Christian life.

4) Step four leads to response. The activity is also pupil centered. The teacher will listen well for directives that the children pose. There is no single response to the Good News. The teacher allows and encourages latitude in response. A group of children may choose to write a liturgy, make a collage, or visit a home for the aged. The style of the teacher and classroom must be open enough to allow for different responses. Preplanned teacher responses are not appropriate. The response to forgiveness and hope is spontaneous and joyful. Fun, celebration, and singing are moments of happening for the Christian classroom. If there is a "dancing God" in Lutheran classrooms, the time to join in His dance is certainly in response to the Good News. The experience of "Yes" in the "No" leads to freedom. The end of the lesson is unpredictable.

I recognize weaknesses in the model, as in all models. The model can become repetitive, a kind of forced pattern. Or the model can become contrived and meaningless. Crisis may be

phony and the teaching can become unconcerned with reality.

I suspect the model best illustrates the spontaneous events of confession and absolution in the daily life of the children. Yet most teachers, and I include myself, are uncomfortable in allowing the teaching of the faith to be accidental. Care must be taken to plan from the life experience of the class and build crisis and cure on the basis of one's communal life with the youngsters.

I value this model for leading new teachers into a format for teaching the faith, concentrating on the theology of forgiveness rather than the cognitive pattern of values. I believe the model is especially useful for Sunday school teachers. Teachers can develop this simple lesson plan weekly, and it seems to serve as a corrective to our natural tendency to dogmatize and moralize. Combined with a good set of "goal-malady-mean" objectives after the Caemmerer model,[11] the approach seems to help students focus their teaching on the task of doing the Word of God, not just the review of facts and stories.

Model 7:
A Parish Curriculum Design

Games		Experience				Bible				Systematic Theology	Topic & Bible Study
3-4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14–20	Adult

In contrast to the model presented before, which represented our current practice, I propose the above as a better curriculum pattern for parish education. Jesus "played with children and taught adults" is more than a truism. The model develops religion lessons out of life experience during the early years, introducing only carefully selected Bible narratives. During the middle grades the Bible is introduced in increasing proportion until confirmation, or eighth grade. The works of Piaget, Bruner, and Goldman indicate that this pattern is more in keeping with the development pattern of children. Upper-grade youngsters ought not be denied the excitement of Bible study. They are capable of developing skills in Bible study and understanding some of the historical and textual problems.

Systematic theology ought to be reserved for secondary education and adult activity, for systematic theology is really a matter of mature thought about the faith. Finally, adult education is best taught around topics of interest to the membership of the parish in dialog with the Biblical tradition. The experience raises the religious question. The tradition (Bible and church history) is placed in tension with what is. This inductive method, I believe, is superior to the older pattern of "commentary Bible study" of previous generations. It also assumes that laymen can teach the faith in the context of their life. If the data is to be only Bible study, then perhaps the pastor, the expert, ought to teach the lesson. Otherwise, the model implies that we trust adult Christians under the Spirit to be able to exegete life and sort out Good News and bad news. We trust that they can share mature Christian doubt and faith and express mutual consolation and comfort. Pastors and teachers do not have to lead every nurturing effort of every

[11] Richard R. Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), pp. 15-32.

congregation. If we trust the Christian experience, we will be free to allow it to happen.

Other models need to be constructed. I am presently struggling with the practice of the Eucharist as a model for children's education in the church and in the home. As we move to early Communion practices we need to think through the impact of the Eucharist for new patterns of parish education. The practice of doing the Eucharist is noncognitive, very much a matter of eating and drinking—all the experiences of children. I do not yet have a visual image or clear picture of the practice of the Sacrament in our parish educational life. I feel it may change many of our patterns of education. Our own family experience with the Eucharist has been exciting with its problems and blessings. I suspect the place of the Eucharist in our educational practices raises also the role of the teacher as celebrant and the place of the home as a possible house-church setting for nurture. My colleague, Walter Bouman, seems to suggest that the pattern of home Eucharist is open to creative experiment even within our present polity practices.[12] This area needs serious study.

I have not dealt with the matter of teacher questions. I suppose that is another lecture. There is research and model work available in the area of question technique. We must become more sophisticated and thoughtful about process. I acknowledge the value of question technique and teacher effectiveness research. Yet my own priority remains that teaching is more art than science. I believe teaching the faith is more an act of the Spirit than of programmed response. Technique is secondary to hearing the new news in Christ.

[12] Walter Bouman, "Historical Notes on the Practice of the Eucharist," unpublished manuscript, Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill., 1970.

Method: A Postscript

Much of what one can say about methods of teaching the faith has been present in the discussion of models. I wish only to highlight a few motifs which are important regardless of which model one chooses to follow.

A) *Structure the environment.* Implicit in my remarks this morning was the idea that all the parish is an environment which does educate. Nothing happens in a classroom or school that is not surrounded by what one author calls the "hidden curriculum."[13] The hidden curriculum of a parish school or Sunday school classroom is the life-style of the parish environment. That environment may be repressive, narrow, constricting, or it may be nurturing, organismic, healing, and stimulating.

The classroom too is a specific environment. We can take a cue from George Leonard in his recent *Education and Ecstasy.*[14] The environment of the learning situation is the teacher. The medium is the message. We choose our educational position, our method, and we structure the environment accordingly. We arrange the room, row by row, or cluster by cluster. Our bulletin boards reflect our values. The desks and materials all structure learning. What we say or do is either negated or reinforced by the learning environment. I am reminded of a unit I observed in social studies—a lesson on brotherhood. Nowhere in the entire school was a single picture of persons black, brown, red, or yellow. The world of the school was white—the discussion was about integration. The environment spoke one lesson, the teacher another. The result could only be confusion for the learner.

[13] George Gerbner, "Teacher Image and the Hidden Curriculum," *American Scholar* (Winter 1972–73), 66-93.

[14] George B. Leonard, *Education and Ecstasy* (New York: Delta Books, 1968).

We structure for decision, for discussion, for equality, or for dogmatism and absolute teacher domination. I muse about the construction of the River Forest classrooms, in 1921, with raised platforms in front and heavy oak desks separating teachers from students. I cannot help but wonder about the symbolic value of pulpits—raised or flat—or altar rails separating clergy from laity, or laymen always kneeling for Communion, gazing up at a figure dressed in large flowing white robes. I wonder, and I suspect we teach a great deal about deference and dogmatism as well as paternalism and authoritarianism by our hidden curriculum.

B) *Trust.* Before any act of sharing confession or absolution can happen, the class must trust. Build trust and then teach with abandon. If our students trust each other and us, then openness can begin. My view of the parish classroom is that of a miniature church. The classroom can reflect a trusting climate where sin can be open, acted, and forgiven.

How does one teach trust? First, I believe, by being what we are. As the teacher becomes more trustworthy, more whole in her being, she will generate trust. The first step to trust is a healthy, trusting teacher, one who has come to trust herself.

Much of what I said about teacher identity this morning is applicable here. Teachers who are secure in their being are more trusting teachers. Clear professional and personal identity are essential to a healthy teacher. Most teachers are relatively healthy and need encouragement to risk and share. As teachers reveal their inner selves to students, students are encouraged to more honesty. We can do many good things for each other as staffs. Trust is built on shared experiences. As we become more open to ourselves and each other, our classrooms can become more like they are to be. The implication for teacher education is apparent. We need far more experience and skill in human relationships and group interaction.

C) *Relationships.* Mutuality is a key word about the relationship in the parish classroom. We are all equal as human, sinful persons. We cannot lord it over each other when the only gift we have to share is always a gift. Yet exclusive mutuality is a myth for the teacher. As Martin Buber so correctly points out, the teacher is always one with the student, but always shares with intentionality. He stands over against the student as one who brings to the relationship a special intention—the healing of the student.[15]

Buber's words are helpful. We are not children, or students, first. Our office as teacher places us in a relationship of trust and intention. Like a good therapist, the teacher cannot allow himself the privilege of patient.

The relationship is one of informer, resource catalyst, of approachability, cordiality and warmth. Yet in the relationship the teacher stands objectively with intention, or else the relationship deteriorates into that of friend, brother, buddy—and the possibility for education is in jeopardy.

D) *Materials.* The materials for teaching the faith are part of the method. I have said before that I believe the chief tools for teaching the faith are the Bible (hymnal), the world, and the participants. I harbor mistrust for other materials, even the most creative and the best constructed. Mission:Life is obviously the best curriculum developed by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, but it remains a tool in our craft and not an end in itself. All published materials suffer from some important limitations.

1) They tend to hinder creativity and innovation by the class and the teacher.

[15] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2d ed. (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1958), pp. 131-134.

2) They cannot be written for the specific circumstance of every local parish.
3) They remain guidelines, sometimes limiting rather than enhancing good teaching.

I suppose we will need to use materials for some years to come. Publishing houses need to exist, and the religious education materials are big business, even at Concordia Publishing House.

My view is, of course, somewhat negative to programmed curriculum mass-produced. The best materials will grow like good music out of the real situation. There is no mass-produced Law-Gospel answer for each specific person. There is no catechism of correct responses. The good news must be targeted into the real lives of our youngsters. Materials are only tools to help us get acquainted with the real child.

I would recommend a minimum of canned curriculum. If teachers have time and assistance from professional teachers, they can develop their own lessons. Far too much teaching of the faith is still plastic and glossy, more gimmick and glitter than reality and life. I suggest a moratorium on packets of "stuff" and a good deal more time spent on serious Bible study and serious attention to the events of modern history, general and specific.

Whatever materials we use, we need to review them carefully. Do they really convey the Good News? The silent symbols of white faces, middle-class housing, and smiling blue-eyed, blonde-haired children betray a culture capturing the truth of the Word.

A caution then is in order. Use only as few materials as possible, and attempt to seek out materials which approximate reality. Avoid the multimedia clutter and the polished new packets. Life is not all that cute, certainly not that packaged. Teach life as realistically as you can.

In summary: The method of teaching the faith is not unrelated from living life. As our classrooms become spaces where open inquiry happens, they can become temples of His Word. The Good News turns the death of life to life in death and bids us participate.

River Forest, Ill.