

# Concordia Theological Monthly



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## BRIEF STUDIES

### THE EDUCATIONAL USE OF SCRIPTURE IN THE LIGHT OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Lutheran Christians like to think of the Bible as their chief textbook. From the first years of the tiny child, on through every level of formal training, out into the discussions of the family circle or of Christian groups, the Bible is basic for study and living. The present study should promote discussion of this question: How is Scripture to be termed educational? What are the underlying methods and forms of a truly educational use of Scripture? The topic has been assigned with the specification, "in the light of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit." Therewith our attention is at once directed to the fact that education of and with Scripture pertains not simply to gathering its facts, but that its facts and the use of Scripture are a tool and vehicle by which the Holy Spirit aims at His goals in the human heart. The Holy Spirit is God Himself, as God lives and rules in the heart. In the Savior's teachings He is the synonym for the kingdom of God (Luke 11:1-13), the rule of God in the heart. It is in the light of this specification that we purpose to discuss this topic.

#### I

#### *How the Holy Spirit Educates*

The word "educates" is not used in the KJV. We do have important synonyms, however, which reflect basic Biblical words. Thus "teach" reflects the Greek διδάσκειν in such basic passages as Matt. 28:20: "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"; Acts 5:42: "They ceased not to teach and preach Jesus"; Col. 3:16: "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." A familiar word translated "teach" is κατηχεῖν, Gal. 6:6: "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." Another familiar word translated "teach" is παιδεύειν, of which more in a moment, and is used particularly with the connotation of "training up." This word seems to mark the training for overcoming obstacles and is translated "instruct" in 2 Tim. 2:25: "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves." Κατηχεῖν is translated "instruct" also in Acts 18:25, of the training of Apollos and of the Jewish training in the Law, Rom. 2:18.

Christian theologians, mindful of Jesus Christ as a master teacher, have frequently described His entire message, both Law and Gospel, as a teaching of the Gospel (Formula of Concord, SD V 1—9). The program of instruction of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 4 and 11), and the catechetical training of children in our Lutheran custom, has placed an emphasis on both Law and Gospel as the training program of Christian education. To this construction the analogy in Galatians 3, of the Law as a schoolmaster (3:24,25), has contributed. It is important for our purpose today to notice, therefore, that the great New Testament passage on training speaks more narrowly. This is the Christmas Epistle climaxing Paul's recommendations to Titus how he should train the Cretans for good works. This paraphrase adheres to the Goodspeed version:

For God's mercy has appeared and brought salvation to all men, training us; with the purpose that, renouncing godless ways and worldly passions, we might live serious, upright and reverent lives in the present age, as we wait for the blessed hope and appearing of glory of the great God and our Savior Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us with the purpose that He might free us from all wickedness and purify unto Himself a people of His own, zealous of good works (2:11-14).

The program of training comprehended in this excerpt is comprehensive, comprising the disciplining and overthrow of evil, the guidance and unfolding of the new life toward service and love, and the persistence in faith out to the life beyond. The power for all of this, however, resides in the proclamation of the grace and mercy of God which has already appeared in Jesus Christ and the message that He has freed us and equipped us. This is the great *παιδεύειν* passage. A parallel use of *διδάσκειν* is the passage in 1 John 2:18. The Apostle has been describing the necessity of thrusting away the lusts of world and flesh and serving God wholly, and he has been warning against the attacks of antichrists. What is to sustain his Christian readers in these attacks and for the fellowship which he is fostering? Let him ponder the words of 1 John 2:20-27. These passages suggest that the great shaping, training, and therefore educating agency under God is the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, brought to bear upon the individual.

In the Western world the concept of truth is that of information, systematized through the process of abstraction and imparted through instruction. This has led to the assumptions of Western theology that the human personality is chiefly intellectual (cf. "The Melanchthonian

Blight," CTM, XVIII [1947], 321—338). But the structure of thought and personality with which the Bible is at home regards knowledge as the process of apprehending people and not merely facts about people; and the truth of which Old and New Testament speak, with reference to God, is God Himself, keeping His promises (*Wahrhaftigkeit* rather than *Wahrheit*). All of this does not minimize or even reduce the role of factual information, but it accentuates the basic premise that in Christian education God Himself seeks to impart Himself to people in an ever-increasing degree.

These considerations facilitate the understanding of the remarkable statements in the New Testament concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in education. The above passage from 1 John 2, while not expressly mentioning the Holy Spirit, seems to be an echo of the great words of Jesus Christ in the Upper Room. Already in John 7:38 Jesus described the Spirit as a fountain residing within the human being. In John 14:26 Jesus promises to His bewildered disciples, shortly before His crucifixion, the gift of the Comforter, "one who stands close by at call." "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). The great burden of this promise, that the Holy Spirit would teach the disciples, pertains to the continuing and deepening understanding of what Jesus was about to do through His crucifixion, an understanding which would be there because the Spirit would "dwell with you and be in you" (14:17). A little later the same promise is given: "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me" (John 15:26). Similar is the statement from the next chapter: "When He, the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you." (John 16:13, 14.)

The work of the Holy Spirit therefore is one contingent upon the Savior's completing His redemptive work (John 16:7). It is this work which He keeps uppermost in the minds of believers and which He, as an ever-flowing fountain, continually makes available within the heart of the believer. This is called a teaching function, for in the exact sense of the term it stems the ravages of disorder, provides nourishment, and fosters growth. At this point we might well ask whether it is the work of the Spirit to operate not only with the

Gospel but also with the Law. Obviously it is not a complete answer simply to identify Law, as contrasted with Gospel, with the "law that is written in the inward parts" of God's people in the New Testament age (Jer. 31:33) or to assert that this is a synonym of the Holy Spirit. We shall have more to say about the function of the Law in the Scriptures; at this point we confront the relation of the Law to the work of the Spirit. One passage is frequently quoted: "And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and ye see Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:8-11).

This passage is variously interpreted. Luther and others find it saying: The Spirit will make sin seem very sinful to people of the world. Stoeckhardt and others interpret: The Spirit, by constructing a church of the faithful, will again and again demonstrate to the world the differences between faith and unbelief; He will again and again demonstrate to the world that there is one righteousness, that by faith of Jesus Christ, who went to the Father to atone for our sins; He will again and again make clear to the world, in the freedom from sin, death, and devil, which He brings to God's people, that the prince of this world is judged.

## II

### *How the Scriptures Convey the Educating by the Holy Spirit*

Here fit the two major Bible passages on the business of the Holy Scriptures. The first is 2 Tim. 3:14-17:

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

The Holy Spirit is not spoken of in a noun in this passage. But the verb "given by inspiration" inescapably reminds of His function, for it means literally "God-spirited" (θεόπνευστος). The passage as a whole, however, restates even more transparently the facts which we have been reviewing about the educating work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Scriptures — in this setting denoting specifically the books

of the Old Testament — are the tool by which the reader is able again and again to “continue in” the things which he has once learned and found faith in. Timothy had first heard these truths from his mother and grandmother and from St. Paul. These truths he can continually remember by means of the Scriptures. But the Scriptures do their work primarily in this, that they “are able to make wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus,” more literally, “continuously able to make wise.” The Scriptures thus have basically this core function of the Spirit’s own teaching, namely, to bring to recollection the saving work of Jesus Christ. This educative process of the Spirit through the Scriptures is expounded more fully in further words. The goal of the training through Scripture is “that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” The word “perfect” does not denote simply moral perfection or sinlessness, but it denotes being equipped, being fitted out, with the same root of the word later translated “throughly furnished.” The function of Scripture, then, is to equip the individual for all the good works which his life in the Spirit under God is to produce. The passage defines more closely how this equipment is brought about. We tend to ascribe to the words the meaning of a series of intellectual operations. Actually much more is involved. The Scriptures are profitable for “doctrine” in the sense of the teaching which the Holy Spirit gives of Jesus. Reproof and correction imply the setting straight concerning falsehood. Words prior to this passage, in 2 Timothy 3, describe the false teaching and false behavior of religious teachers which will mark the last time, “ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (v.7). The Scriptures are able to unfold the shame of the convicted person and bring it to light and then to set up the course of true doctrine and behavior. The Scriptures do this in that they are profitable for instruction in righteousness. The word “instruction” is not ambiguous, but the word “righteousness” is. This has been widely interpreted to mean that the Scriptures provide moral precepts, the blueprint for virtuous living. But in view of the fact that St. Paul in all of his epistles regards righteousness as the situation in which a man possesses favor of God not by reason of his virtuous life at all (note particularly Rom. 3:10 ff.), and does so in this very epistle (4:8), it seems unlikely that these words refer to moral excellence at all. Rather do they, in keeping with v.15, describe the process by which the Scriptures and their account of the saving work of Jesus place and keep a man in the justified relation with God. It is

this relation out of which flow, as "fruits of righteousness," the good works of the Christian man; this relation equips a man for good works.

The second great passage on the use of the Scriptures is 2 Peter 1:15-21:

Moreover, I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory: This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with Him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure Word of Prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the Day Star arise in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Here we have a major statement of the New Testament on the Scriptures of the New Testament books. Again the "power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" is made the basic message. The result of the Word of Prophecy which the Apostles spoke and which they now record in writing is that "the Day Star arise in your hearts." For they are speaking and writing not on their own behalf merely but as instruments of the Holy Spirit. The gift of their speech and writing to men is the light and life of God in the heart, the same gift of which our Lord spoke to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again."

St. John, though not employing the term "Scripture" or talking about writing, seems to traverse this same ground when in 1 John 5:8-13, he describes the witness of the Holy Spirit as the witness of God "which He hath testified of His Son." Unbelief is to refuse the "record that God gave of His Son, and this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life and this life is in His Son."

From these passages we are able to assert that the Scriptures perform their educating function as the Holy Spirit, in and through them, brings the redeeming work of Christ again to the mind and into the lives of people.

Let us, then, ask more accurately: What must the Scriptures do in order to educate? Obviously they must register "the truth," the plan which God conceived before the foundation of the world by which He would have mercy on men and make and keep them His own, the truth which finally came true in Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth,

and the Life through whom men come to the Father (John 14:1 ff.). This is the informing of fact. A story, a message, confronts men. For this process of information the Bible uses the term "Gospel," the good news brought and propagandized and proclaimed and affirmed to people. This is the function of Scripture to which our Lord refers in John 5:39, that they testify of Him, and which He employed on the first Easter with His disciples (Luke 24).

When St. Paul describes the work of bringing this message of reconciliation to people, he describes the pressure and concern with which the man of God speaks His Word (2 Cor. 5:18-21). That pressure is necessary because God, "who will have all men to come to the knowledge of the truth," has this tremendous pressure of concern. Hence the Apostles spoke and wrote their letters with the urgency of concern (cf. 1 John 5:13; 2 Thess. 2:1 ff.; 2:15; Gal. 1:6; 3:1 ff.). Into this subject would fit the urgency of Moses and his exhortations to teach the Word of God, in Deuteronomy; the vivid concern of the prophets, particularly Isaiah and Jeremiah. This same warmth of concern the Scriptures must communicate to the present-day reader so that the reader is helped to confront God and His plan in Christ and not merely the printed page.

To this point we have dealt almost exclusively with the function of the Scriptures in training men for God through conveying the message of the redeeming work of Christ. What is the place of training in morals on the basis of Biblical commands or injunctions? What about the "third use of the Law"? What of the tremendous moral values of the Scriptures as achieved by even non-Christians, such as the Jews or Christians with a legal rather than evangelical emphasis, like the Puritans? One reason for our narrowing of the method by which the education of Scripture works has been the insertion into our topic of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are remarkably silent on the relation of the Holy Spirit to moral values achieved through prescription of Scripture. Theologians like Werner Elert have earnestly questioned the validity of the "third use of the Law" if therewith any motives for action be implied. St. Paul is most explicit in asserting the punitive and diagnostic significance of the Law to the point of outlawing other functions. 1 Tim. 1:9-11: Sins are things against the Law; virtues are according to the "sound doctrine of the glorious Gospel" (Rom. 3:19; Gal. 3:19, 21). The Law for him has always one great purpose: to lead to Christ (Gal. 3:24, 26), that is to say, cause the individual to sense his need for the mercy of God and cling to the covenant in which he has forgiveness of his sin.



The many synonyms for the Word of God as instructive, in Psalm 119, include also the term "Law." In their setting, many of these passages mean much more than rules for moral behavior. Note Ps. 119:54, 55: "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. I have remembered Thy name, O Lord, in the night and have kept Thy Law." There the Law of God is kept when the believer rehearses in his heart the goodness of God. Similar are vv. 76, 77: "Let, I pray thee, Thy merciful kindness be for my comfort, according to Thy Word unto Thy servant. Let Thy tender mercies come unto me, that I may live; for Thy Law is my delight." Perhaps a reason for this inclusive use of the term "Law" was the situation that the Hebrew worshiper, the one who was hearing this psalm, was according to the Mosaic Law celebrating the festivals and keeping the ritual of the offerings, which were the Sacrament of God's mercy to him. In general, as we survey the customs of Old Testament training, we are likely to forget that what the fathers were to communicate to their children was not merely the moral content of the commandments, but training in all the Word of God. Just as in the Savior's utterances through John the "commandments" are that we should believe in Jesus and love the brother (1 John 3:23), and as the Savior's "learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29) is not a moral injunction but a promise of His redeeming grace, so the Old Testament people were to train their progeny in the whole covenant relation, on the basis of the evident demonstration of His mercy (Deut. 11:1-7).

But perhaps more realistic is this question: What must the reader do in order that the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures, educate him? Obviously he must first understand what he reads. There is no worth to reading even the finest Gospel if it is not talking about Jesus Christ to that reader (Acts 8:30-38). This applies not only to acts of formal instruction in schools and courses, but also to the use of Scripture in preaching, in the worship of the Christian congregation or family, and in the conversations of Christian friends.

Secondly—and this is simultaneously a fact in psychology and theology—the reader and learner must be looking for what he is to find. Touching is the account in Acts 17:11 about the difference between the Thessalonians and their reception of the Gospel and the Bereans. Paul gave the Thessalonians the compliment that when they first heard him they received his Word as the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13). The Bereans, however, "searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so." They tried not merely to match teachings, but

they sought for the thrust and power of Paul's message to them, to be duplicated and perpetuated by means of that same Word from the Scriptures—the Scriptures of the Old Testament. We are reminded of the dullness of the disciples before Emmaus and their burning hearts afterward when Jesus had helped them to search the Scriptures (Luke 24:32,45). Evidently when Luke says that Jesus "opened the understanding" of the disciples, He refers to a knowledge coupled with this sense of concern and search that is basic for understanding and for the work of the Holy Spirit. It is precisely at this point that the significance of prayer, of search and desire, enters the Christian scene: Christians are to desire the Spirit (Luke 11:1-13). All that even a Christian has to do to rid his heart and desires of the Spirit is not to desire Him. Conversely the yearning prayer for the Spirit receives its answer through this great educative action of the Spirit, for which He employs the mutual speech of Christians and the writings of the Scriptures.

Scripture does its task in the sharing by Christians of each other's findings and faith. Therein lay the safeguard for the early church (Acts 2:42). Our Lord told His disciples in the Upper Room, in the context of their own troubled selfishness and of His promise of the Holy Spirit: "Ye also shall bear witness because ye have been with Me from the beginning" (John 15:27). The educative work of the Spirit and therefore the use of the Scriptures comes to finest flower in the manner in which the Word of Christ dwells in the people as a group who are the body of Christ (Col. 3:15,16). In this setting of group activity many psychological laws of learning and teaching can find their place. But always in all of them the plan of God is reaching its purpose when the Holy Spirit Himself is equipping His people for their life under God in the world and keeping them justified and righteous through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. That He does through many ways, and the Scriptures that bring that Christ to mind are at work in all of them.

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