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BOOK REVIEWS

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Communicative Competence and Religious Education

by Kieran Scott

Assistant Professor of Religious Education and Theology, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, N.Y.*

This study is the search for an adequate language form for discussion of education and religion in contemporary culture. In considering this topic, we are dealing with two of the key words in human speech and with two comprehensive concepts in human thought and practice. The two phenomena of religion and education permeate most aspects of our existence. Yet, this is largely unacknowledged and unnamed in our public world today.

The merger of religion and education has profound implications for our personal and public lives. This synthesis should appropriately be called religious education. Religious education is interpreted here as a particular and pervasive need confronting our society. It is offered as a test of the maturity of our culture, the health of our institutions, and the quality of our lives together.

This may seem an exaggeration for the words «religious education.» The claim is indeed overstated if the term is locked into the prevailing understanding associated with it. The term carries a burden of historical connotation¹ that links it linguistically to church affairs. This may discourage any attempt to search for a deeper and

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¹ The term «religious education» has a checkered history in the U.S. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the term embraced «general education.» However, recent decades have restricted its meaning, for the most part, to religious instruction of children in church and synagogue settings.

Policies That Fail

education has the dubious distinction of being a priori associated with the concept advocated by also Charles MELCHER', «What indoctrination. is advocated. But the restriction of the term to an in-school activity religious traditions are also granted a hearing. Furthermore, an educational solution and could, in fact, compound the problem. From the reverse side, Jean Holm 6 represents a British tradition of attempting hoff attempts to spread the term out beyond «a schooling-instruction paradigm» to «a community of faith-enculturation paradigm. » 4 But an expansion of the area of involvement may not be a satisfactory solution and could, in fact, compound the problem. From the reverse side, Jean Holm 6 represents a British tradition of attempting to locate the term specifically within schools. She states: «The aim of religious education is to help pupils understand what religion is and what it would mean to take a religion seriously. » 6 Holm grants the Christian religion a central place in schools, although other religious traditions are also granted a hearing. Furthermore, an educational rather than an evangelistic approach to religious education is advocated. But the restriction of the term to an in-school activity

3. See Barry CHAZAN, «'Indoctrination' and Religious Education,» Religious Education 67 (July-August 1972) : 262-253. Chazan states that religious education has the dubious distinction of being a priori associated with the concept of indoctrination.

fails to adequately embrace the depth and comprehensiveness inherent in it.
The encounter of religion and education should logically be called religious education. But when these words converge in our culture, they take on a strange and restrictive meaning. The operative meaning of the term is confined to a church context and whenever it attempts to operate outside that sphere, it still is affected by and carries with it much of the church's language.

Religious educators are baffled as to their self identity today. The community of discourse is in disarray, the field in dislocation, and the enterprise without a coherent directing theory. A kind of «lazy pluralism» (Marcuse) has set in in which all terms are uncritically accepted in a smorgasbord of linguistic options. What we currently name religious education lacks a public language form to articulate the full range of religious and educational questions that can emerge under its heading. The restrictive operation of the term conceals rather than reveals its scope, meaning, and purpose. The words need freeing from their domestication in a single institution. And the public needs to be empowered to discover and name the religious education at the center of their public lives.

There are considerable risks, however, in attempting to reconceptualize and reimage the meaning of the term. The dangers are twofold: (1) the reaction could become anti-ecclesiastical; (2) the term could acquire a vague and abstract meaning — devoid of concreteness and particularity. Both dangers can be avoided — with genuine care and a close eye on the practical. One can love the church and yet critique its political control and monopoly over certain language, thought, and practice. Likewise, the change in meaning of a term may allow it to have greater precision and, at the same time, a universal reference.

The problematic raised here, however, poses that the current language of religious education is tied to an ecclesiastical world, politically employed on behalf of that world, and, consequently, limits our power to name and converse with the many institutions involved in religious education. The result is a field held in captivity by church problems, bound by denominational interests and defined intramurally. It is unable to open avenues of communication and enter public discourse on the urgent religious and educational questions confronting the human race. At the heart of the problem is the fact that people tend to use the same words but in different semantic universes.

To unravel this confusion and perplexity that haunts the enterprise, we must first attempt to get behind the various languages operative in the field today. This can be executed best by dealing with a number of terms which capitalize the diverse discourses. The terms are catechetics, Christian education, theology, and the objective study of religion. The languages surrounding these terms emerge from various traditions, carry their own assumptions, and house their own interests. Words are wedded to particular perceptions and presuppositions about reality. Behind the words lie the ideologies that form the foundation of our perceptions, thoughts, and action. When the world mediated through the word or term remains undisclosed to speaker and listener alike, it interferes with or nullifies competent communication. It is important, then, to work our way through these terms, to unveil their historical roots, examine their current claims, and specify their relation to religious education. The words of George Orwell seem particularly apropos in our present state of linguistic disorder. «One ought to recognize,» he wrote, «that our present political chaos is connected with the decay of language, and that one can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end.»

Catechetics

When we enter the world of catechetics (and all its cognates), we are entering a universe of discourse which is specifically Catholic. Those who are not a part of that semantic universe tend to find much of its language incomprehensible and many of its assumptions questionable. This is not always clear to those who are deeply immersed in the tradition.

The use of the term «catechetics» or «catechesis» can be traced back to early Christian times. The original sense of the word suggests handing down speech from the heights. This root meaning was applied to the act of informing and instructing by oral repetition. It is this basic meaning which is the foundation of its special usage in the Catholic tradition. During the second, third, and fourth centuries catechesis signified instruction for the Christian neophyte. This coincided with the development of the catechumene 14 which involved preparation for baptism, baptismal rites, and post-baptismal instructions. By the late fifth century, however, the catechumene had begun a rapid decline, and, with its demise, the term «catechesis» fell into disuse. Oral instruction, participation in the liturgy, and communal experience remained the chief mode of transmission of the Christian tradition in succeeding centuries. The Reformation period goaded respective opponents to put «the message» into written (catechism) form, with a question-and-answer format to anticipate all likely objections. Prominent among the respective opponents were Martin Luther and Peter Canisius, whose catechisms dictated the form and content of religious instruction for centuries. A direct descendant of that mentality was the Baltimore Catechism. First published in 1885 and revised in 1941, the Baltimore Catechism remained the dominant text in Catholic religious education in the United States until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). 15

13. Berard Martraire defines catechetics as «the systematic presentation or study of the nature, goals, means, and principles of catechesis.» Catechesis, he writes, «suggests oral teaching. In the sense that it passes on what has been received, it is thought of as ‘resounding’ and ‘echoing’ a message. »

Catechetics in Context

(Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1973), p.35.


The contemporary catechetical movement, however, had its roots in central Europe at the beginning of the century. Basic questions with regard to methodology, content, and purpose were emerging in educational church circles in Europe. Traditional teaching methods and forms of presentation were brought under critique. A receptivity and openness arose to the insights of educational psychology and a new theology. These events sparked off an energetic catechetical movement, which began to have its major impact in the United States in the late 1950s. At this time the word «catechetics» (and its cognates) was reclaimed and reintroduced into church dialogue and academic discourse. The focus of the movement was pastoral and closely connected with evangelization. The new catechetics was influenced by ecumenism and it derived much of its substance from Protestantism. Preaching, scripture study, and liturgical renewal were the center of its concern. Through energetic leadership, a flurry of new activity, and International Study Conferences, the movement gained momentum in the 1960s. The Second Vatican Council had vindicated its founders and embraced its concerns.

However, by the 1970s, some glaring contradictions were becoming apparent: the more successful the catechetical work, the more the field and its people tended to disappear. Moran called for its reconstruction and redirection through immersion in an educational context, sensitivity to the new ecumenical situation, and the creation of a new church pattern. The challenge, however, seemed too threatening. During the last decade catechesis has turned away from education and turned toward ministerial, evangelical, and corporate works. My interest here is not an extended history of the United States, but I turn to the current catechetical scene in the United States.

The National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States, entitled Sharing the Light of Faith, has as its purpose the establishment of norms, guidelines, and practical directives for the catechesis of all Catholics in the U.S. at all age levels and in all circumstances of life. Extensive consultation went into formation of the document. The result is a comprehensive statement of the nature, scope, purpose, and means of catechesis. The term «catechesis» is now expanded to embrace the total process of «maturating in the faith.» It refers to efforts which help individuals and communities acquire and deepen Christian faith and identity through initiation rites, instruction, and formation of conscience. Catechesis becomes a lifelong process for the individual, taking a multiplicity of forms, nurtured in numerous arenas and, in the final analysis, a constant and concerted pastoral activity performed by the whole church community. The directory sets catechesis within the framework of pastoral ministry. As a form of «ministry of the word,» it aims to foster the dispositions and nurture the attitudes leading to a deepening of one's religious affiliation and faith. There are few dimensions of church life that remain untouched by this new interpretation. In fact, catechesis has become an all-inclusive hermeneutical principle and process in the Roman Catholic church's self-understanding.

Sharing the Light of Faith has brought together and incorporated the best catechetical insights over the last thirty years. The document is rich in many respects. It shows an appropriate sensitivity to the formative influence of the total environment in people's lives. The central significance of the family in religious nurture is noted. The developmental character of «the life of faith» is acknowledged, along with particular tasks and methods appropriate for the principal stages of growth. And the naming of new ministries (and the church as a ministerial community) could have fundamental implications for the practice of church life.

However, my reservations with the directory and contemporary catechetics revolve around three major issues: language, church
pattern, and education. The linguistic world of catechetics is des-
cisively ecclesiastical and narrow in context. It is a self-enclosed re-
ligious world which uttera a language that has no currency outside
ecclesiastical circles. This intramural focus hinders its public viability.
Its language form lacks communicative competence in the public
forum. The linguistic nature of catechetics, as an intact universe of
discourse, place obstacles in its path to conversation with other re-
ligious and nonreligious traditions. Its ability to probe the religious
and educational questions of our time is severely curtailed by a
parochial and introverted self interest. Effective public discourse
today requires an empowering public language that cuts across
barriers (sexual, religious, nonreligious, etc.) and has universal im-
plications. Dwayne Huebner observes: «We need a public language,
as we need public buildings, public gardens, public transportation,
public ceremonies. These public spaces, public means, public occasions
provide grounds upon which we meet. They are the grounds for
commonality. The public resources position us in our meetings with
others. They offer orientation as we observe others work and listen
to them speak. They give us direction as we do things together. » 25
It is this lack of a common language, in which to converse and
hear each other, that cuts off much catechetical work from the
daily experience of people. It needs linguistic bridges to link it to
current societal (religious and educational) issues.

Contemporary catechetics receives its identity from a church in-
stitution and an ecclesiastical pattern back against which it fails to
bring adequate critical reflection. 26 Bureaucratic structures and hier-
archical control of the interpretative process remain unchallenged.
The contradiction between the process of human development («ma-
turing in faith ») 27 and the current church form is unrecognized or
acknowledged. An evangelistic undercurrent and an unrecon-
structed missionary mentality is part of established theory and prac-
tice. 28 However, the work and goals of catechesis, directed at the
initiation and socialization 29 of people into the church, has arrived
at a time when the present church pattern is being called into ques-
tion. The form and force of socialization within the prevailing church
structures needs continued and responsible challenging. If catechesis
is to participate in this work and contribute to the creation of an
alternative church form, an examination of some of its basic premises
would seem to be in order.

The recent shift in catechesis to an expanded paradigm was mo-
tivated by a desire to go beyond a schooling model and to give
greater priority to adults. This change of paradigm, however, has
taken the enterprise outside an educational framework. It intention-
ally resists identification with education (and religious education).
But this resistance has been costly. Religion, and religious issues and
concerns, need to be placed today in an interactive (educational)
framework of critical intelligence. This setting is needed to avoid
the pitfalls of fundamentalism and fanaticism. When religion is
placed in an educational context, it can make a decisively positive
contribution to personal development and the quality of public life.
However, the decision of catechesis to define itself in relation to
church ministry limits its content and vision. There is a bureaucratic
political power built into this semantic world, and words like ministry,
faith, evangelization, etc. are rather well controlled within this eccle-
siastical setting. They may not be sufficient for opening the church
to public discourse and probing the issues of religious education today.

In sum, the terms « catechetics » and « religious education » can-
not be used interchangeably. The former is limited and restricted
to an ecclesial semantic world, whereas the latter has the ability to
house the full range of religious and educational questions and con-
cerns emerging in contemporary culture.

Christian Education

The Protestant counterpart to « catechetics » is « Christian edu-
cation. » The term is relatively recent in its current meaning but
now firmly established. Any continued use of the term cannot ignore
the historical connotations embedded in it. At the beginning of this

24. Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, commenting on the General Catechetical
Directory, has noted how « the use of language is such that Judaism and the
Jewish people are completely eclipsed or negated.» See « A Jewish Response, »
The Living Light 3, 3 (1973) : 94-104. While the National Catechetical Directory
attempts to correct this flaw (par 77), Jews, I believe, will remain uneasy with the
document’s claims and unsympathetic to its language.

and Transformation in Religious Education, p. 90.

26. See Chapter IV, « The Church and Catechesis. »

27. Chapter VIII, « Catechesis Toward Maturity in Faith. »

28. Par. 34 and 35. See also Berard Martinaler, «Evangelization and Cate-
chesis: Word, Memory, Witness, » The Living Light 16, 1 (Spring 1979) :
33-45.

29. Berard Martinaler, « Socialization as a Model for Catechetics, » in Foun-
dations of Religious Education, ed. Padraic O’Hare (New York: Paulist Press,
century, religious education became an established field of study and inquiry. In 1903 the Religious Education Association was founded in Chicago with its chartered purpose (as formulated two years later) «to inspire the educational forces of our country with the religious ideal; to inspire the religious forces of our country with the educational ideal; and to keep before the public mind the ideal of religious education, and the sense of its need and value.» The founders were an outstanding group of mainline Protestant leaders and educators. They were motivated by a desire to unify and broaden the nation's understanding of religious education, particularly through an educational reform of the Sunday School and the preservation of moral and religious perspectives in the public school. John Dewey was a keynote speaker at its first convention.

Spurred by the twin influences of progressive education and liberal theology, the movement displayed an optimism with deep social concerns and broad religious interests. George Albert Coe's A Social Theory of Religious Education and Harrison Elliott's Can Religious Education Be Christian could roughly act as bookends to mark off and characterize its first distinctive period — the progressive era. In many respects, it can be said that religious education during these first few decades tended to spread out into a kind of vague amorphous generation beyond all denominations. People wanted to be religious in a general way but not in any particular sense. A « common faith, » it was suggested, bound people together. 30

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This led to a down playing of the particularity and distinctiveness of one's religious tradition. But the events of World War I and the collapse of idealism in Europe signaled a counterattack. A reaction came within the Christian church itself — a reaction against the reduction of the Christian life to one religion in the general category of religion. In the 1930s the effects of this counter-offensive were felt in the United States with the impact of a neo-orthodox theology. Neo-orthodoxy was concerned with the specificity of the Christian tradition and the transmission of its belief systems. It insisted that Christianity is based upon a revealed word: a pure message beyond human experience. Inspired by the new theology and challenged particularly by H. Shelton Smith, religious educators were now urged to re-examine their (liberal) theological foundations and to redirect their work by reclaiming their distinctive Christian roots. One of the implications of this theological reconstruction was the emergence and self-conscious embracing of the term «Christian education» in Protestant circles. Christian education, in effect, became the educational method to apply neo-orthodox theology. And educational techniques and related sciences were put at the service of «proclaiming a message of salvation.»

The net effect, however, was the escape of «Christian education» out of the educational mainstream. It acquired an understanding of itself as a theological discipline, a branch of pastoral theology, and was assigned to the practical life of the church — especially the church-school. The rise of Nazism and World War II would only strengthen this trend and hasten its exit from an educational context.

The term «Christian education» reigned supreme in Protestant church-schools and seminaries in the United States — and continues to do so to this day. Attempts were made to broaden the term and

33. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917).
34. (New York: Macmillan, 1940).
extend its implications. But, substantially, it retained its close ties to neo-orthodoxy. The interchange of terms «religious education» and «Christian education» became common parlance. However, this casual interchange of words had pervasive implications in the form of political control.

In recent years, the traditional framework of «Christian education» has been challenged, particularly by John Westerhoff, but the term retained. Westerhoff’s point of departure is the observation that we have become victimized by a schooling-instruction paradigm and bound by its limits. He directs our attention to the broader educational context in church, namely, its worship, congregational life, social action, etc. Christian education is now defined as a deliberate and systematic «faith enculturation» process of the community enabling people to evolve Christian lifestyles. The aim is to shift our attention from school to community locus, from child to adult focus, and from individual to communal concerns. The new paradigm is an eclectic attempt to link education (broadly defined) with a liberation mode of theology.


In spite of the best efforts at reconstruction and reform, Christian education today remains weighed down with many of the restrictions and limitations previously noted in catechetics. Its problems are linguistic, ecclesial, and educational. Discourse takes place in a field where words are politically (ecclesiastically) controlled and intramurally defined. There is no way the word «Christian» can embrace the diversity of religious expression in contemporary United States. The Christian tradition has a unique contribution to make to religious education. However, a free and easy interchange of terms is intolerable and insensitive in our current religious situation. The term «Christian education» is a block to interreligious dialogue today and excludes the introduction of an adequate public language to open up communication in our public world. Its perspective turns the mind of each denomination upon itself and leaves unchallenged the prevailing church pattern of power and classification. Recent attempts to critically reclaim the term leave unchallenged its linguistic inadequacies and the historical presuppositions built into it.

One can legitimately suspect, I believe, that the unsolved problem of «Christian education» is inextricably tied to the question George Albert Coe raised some fifty years ago: «Shall the primary purpose of Christian education be to hand on a religion or to create a new world?» I am not sure that that question has been confidently answered to this day. However, I do feel assured that a creative response can only be worked out in a larger context, under the term «religious education, » where the full scope of religious and educational questions is allowed to emerge.
Theology

The need to attend to the term theology arises on two fronts: first, the ever-recurring debate in the field with regard to the relationship of theology to catechetics/Christian education/religious education; and second, the question of the viability of the term itself.

The way religious educators connect to theology has been an issue since the inception of religious education as a field of study. At the turn of the century, the first generation of (Protestant) religious educators embraced a liberal theology and wed it to modern psychology and a progressive pedagogy. This synthesis laid the foundation for the initial vitality of the field. However, by the late 30s and early 40s, the previous optimism had dissipated and new concerns revolved around the distinctiveness of the Christian tradition and a recognition of the sinfulness of the human condition.

These concerns were expressed theologically in the form of neo-orthodoxy, and religious educators (read «Christian educators») turned in its direction for inspiration and guidance. In the 1950s Randolph Crump Miller reinforced the link with his proposal that theology be «the clue» to Christian education by undergirding it and providing a backdrop for its work.

On the Roman Catholic side, the catechetical movement in this century was initially a form of protest against an «intellectualized theology.» Josef Andreas Jungmann's book, The Good News Yesterday and Today, had broken new ground with its pastoral theology approach and gave the catechetical movement an orientation it has not lost to this day. Jungmann's work and ideas were effectively disseminated by Johannes Hofinger and became the basis for kerygmatic and salvation history movements, which were very influential in the 1950s and early 1960s. Liberalism had a rebirth of sorts in Roman Catholicism in the 1960s, but it never attained a solid footing in established catechetical circles, where a (neo)orthodox spirit predominated. In the current state of theological pluralism, however, Protestant and Catholic religious educators freely participate in the diversity of options available.

For the most part, throughout our history, there has been an unquestioned assumption that the health and future of religious education is bound to the future of theology. The only variation has been the school of theology followed. It is not an exaggeration to say that the story of religious education has, in effect, been the story of an educational method in the service of the prevailing theology. The result has been the subservience of catechetics/Christian education/religious education to the discipline of theology. This historical fact has politically controlled the conceptualization of theory within the field, given professionals in academia an inferiority complex, and restricted the activities of practitioners.

In practice, theology (and theologians) have controlled the symbols of our religious imagination, supplying the terms, metaphors, and meanings for our work. Gabriel Moran notes the problem: «The ecclesiastical language of religious education is governed by the relation of theology (including the Christian Scriptures) to catechetics/Christian education. Nothing is allowed into the 'content' of catechetics/Christian education unless approved by theology. The main thing to be studied about the ecclesiastical form of religious education is the meaning of theology.» This situation has largely...
gone unchallenged, \textsuperscript{56} with the result that the field of religious education has been captive to theological/ecclesiastical language and limited in its content and scope.

These remarks are \textit{not} meant in any way to disparage theology (or theologians) or to suggest that religious educators in our churches (or other public agencies) can neglect the Christian past, its sacred writings and symbolic life. Religious educators working, for example, within the Christian tradition would be irresponsible to ignore this material or fail to use it for the enrichment of people's lives. At issue here, however, is a simple linguistic distinction between the \textit{religious} and the \textit{theological}, but a distinction nevertheless, not easily admitted in church discussion due to political control. I wish to anchor my analysis again around the questions of language, church form, and education.

The prevailing tendency to interchange the words religious/theology indicates little awareness of the religious as (1) a wider field and (2) having a variety of different expressions than theology. The word «religious» is a term capable of embracing all the ultimate questions and concerns arising in contemporary civilization. It has a conciseness and comprehensiveness to it that allows people (Christian, Jew, Hindu, etc.) to claim it as their own and meet in ecumenical dialogue under its canopy. On the other hand, theology, \textit{historically}, is almost exclusively a Christian term. \textsuperscript{57} Some people have worked to expand its meaning and to bring in a broader variety of activities under its heading. \textsuperscript{58} However, I doubt that the term can be shaken loose from its deep association with Christian


\textsuperscript{58} For two representative examples see David Tracy, \textit{Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology} (New York: Seabury, 1975); and Robert McAfee Brown, «The New Pluralism in Theology in a New Key» (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978). Tracy distinguishes between fundamental theology («philosophical reflection upon the meanings present in common human experience and language, and upon the meanings present in the Christian fact») (p. 43), and dogmatic theology (as a confess'ional discipline). Brown focuses his work on liberation themes and advocates Christian solidarity with the oppressed.

\textsuperscript{59} See Carl L. Raschke, «The End of Theology», \textit{Journal of the American Academy of Religion} 46, 2 (1978): 159-179. Raschke critiques theology for its representational thinking and its prodigity for «referring to the divine as an 'object' that can be re-presented and manipulated in accordance with the structures of the expressing subject» (p. 170).

\textsuperscript{60} This criticism is also made by Tom Driver in \textit{Patterns of Grace: Human Experience at Work} (New York: Harper & Row, 1978). The method of story and journey are some constructive attempts to come to terms with this problem in contemporary theology.

\textsuperscript{61} For the terms «passing over» and «coming home» are John Dunne's. See \textit{A Search for God in Time and Memory} (New York: Macmillan, 1967); \textit{The Way of All the Earth} (New York: Macmillan, 1972); and \textit{The Reasons of the Heart} (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

\textsuperscript{62} William Johnson predicts that «Western theology of the next century will address itself primarily to dialogue with the East.» At the same time Johnson is convinced that we do not as yet have an adequate theological vocabulary to enter fully into such a dialogue. See \textit{The Inner Eye of Love} (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 9-10.
act as a liberating force in people's lives. In this endeavor, however, theology needs some outside help, namely, the domain of education.

Theology has a glaring educational problem. The problem is not simply the lack of an educational method to transmit its content. Rather, the difficulty is a lack of a wider educational context in which to look at itself and its claims in relation to other competing perspectives. This process will not come easy and could heighten the points of tension between the two. However, there is no viable alternative. Theology needs an educational context to enable it to be self-critical, to examine its basic claims and the word itself. This would allow theology to shed itself of ideological distortions, have emancipatory educational interests, and reestablish its work on new religious foundations. This reconstruction may more appropriately be named Christian studies.

In this regard, Norma Thompson observes: «When one sits in a class which includes Roman Catholic, Protestantists of many theological persuasions, Jews, Buddhists, and sometimes others, one wonders if there is any meaningful usage of the term, 'theology,' because it is so related to Christian thought.» In like manner, Gabriel Moran writes, «The first and obvious question for theology is the appropriateness of the word theology. The word has pretentious connotations of speaking for God or about God. For the purpose of articulating the Christian class which includes Roman Catholic, Protestants of many theological persuasions, Jews, Buddhists, and sometimes others, and of speaking for God or about God, the word theology ought to be sensitive to the fact that many people are immediately suspicious of the claims inherent to the word.» A renaming of this important work could alleviate some current con­


fusion and indicate a shift to a less arrogant and more open public posture.

In sum, «theology» can no longer assume to control religious discourse in contemporary society. The term could legitimately designate one paradigm for understanding (the Christian) religion. What it cannot do, however, is supply all the metaphors, models, and meanings for the «new religious consciousness.»

«The Objective Study of Religion»

The final section focuses on the term «the objective study of religion.» The selection of this term allows the opportunity to examine one component of religious education, namely, religious studies, and to unravel some of the issues involved.

Religion is an ingrained part of our national life in the United States. Historically, the nation and its people have been lured by religious dreams and lived under religious ideals. For better and worse these effects have spilled over into our frontier spirit, space programs, foreign policy, national holidays, communal experiments, and current liberation movements, etc. An understanding of the religious phenomenon and religious traditions, then, is indispensable for an adequate comprehension of our culture. It is an educational necessity and one means to promote cultural awareness. Religion, then, ought to be taught and studied.

The public sector of education is an obvious place to engage in religious studies. In spite of the widespread contrary assumption, this study of religion is constitutionally acceptable in public schools in the United States: On the college and university level, a considerable number of programs have been initiated during the last decade or so. However, little progress has been made at the elementary and secondary school levels. Efforts are being hampered here by an unsure search for an appropriate form. The root of the problem here is linguistic, due to the inadequate terms controlling discourse on the topic.


Two phrases inevitably emerge in the literature on religion and public schooling: "the objective study of religion" and "teach about religion." In terms of clarifying the discussion, it is doubtful if this phraseology can aid the advancement of this sector of religious education. It is misleading, miseducational, and has an anti-ecclesiastical tone.

The term "the objective study of religion" has its roots in the nineteenth century. The critique of religion was in full swing and many of its critics wanted to get out from under theology and have the freedom to examine religion scientifically. They wanted to make it clear to academia and the church that the study of religion in the university was independent of external ecclesiastical control and governed by its own criteria. This move was successful and served its purpose. However, it also brought its problems. In reaction to church domination, this new science claimed total neutrality and scientific objectivity. Consequently, its language displayed an attitude of "antisepic observation." This shows up today in much of the literature on religion and public education.

If the meaning of the word "objectivity" is to be uninvolved in the subject and to present the "bare facts" uncolored by human interests, that is impossible — and not educationally desirable. If, on the other hand, objectivity means to transcend one's own individual standpoint and, by the power of sympathetic imagination, to present one's own world and the world of others in a fair, balanced, and sympathetic manner, then objectivity is demanded in any teaching-learning situation. Philip Phenix wisely notes, however, that this posture is better named and interpreted as disciplined intersubjectivity. There is no neutral point: only a commitment to uninhibited interaction and inquiry in which understanding is sought. Disciplined intersubjectivity excludes proselytizing or dogmatic platforms, and includes any perspectives or domain for consideration and investigation.

The second term "teaching about religion" is taken from a Supreme Court ruling and enjoys wide usage in educational circles. The term is counterposed to the phrase: "teaching of religion." It may be beneficial, then, if the terms "the objective study of religion" and "teaching about religion" are left aside in favor of an educational language befitting an educational setting.

In church and synagogue settings, religious studies should operate with the same educational spirit and function with similar academic methods and standards. They should be characterized by an honest critical comparison of all religious traditions so as to guarantee the integrity and freedom of the educational process. This study within religious traditions needs "an adequate rhetoric" if it is to open authentic dialogue and move us toward mutual understanding. This is not a call for a homogeneous language form or a neglect of the specific symbols and semantic world expressive of distinct religious traditions. Rather, the position outlined in this essay respects the rights of particular communities of faith to construct their own specific terminology and to develop language forms (e.g., liturgical, catechetical, etc.) that honor their uniqueness and consolidate their identity. In fact, fidelity to truth and to the religious adventure.

75. For representative examples of the distinctiveness of specific religious languages see Paul Ricoeur, The Language of Faith, USQR: Union Sc-
Kieran Scott beckons us to rediscover and reclaim our own religious roots and rhetoric. It is through, with, and in our particular communities of faith that we are allowed to see the universal truth beyond our own traditions. My concern here, however, is to guard the educational integrity of the study of religion in all educative settings so that the educational process will facilitate the formulation of intelligible religion. This meeting of religion and education (in the form of religious studies) does not exhaust their encounter in our culture. It is, however, one important component of religious education. But, for its own health, it needs interaction with other forms and diverse expressions of religious education.

This study has been an examination of the language currently operative in religious education. The investigation focused on some key terms closely tied to the identity of the field. Through the educative work of linguistic discrimination and critique, I attempted to uncover the meaning of these terms and their relation to religious education. My observation has been that the terms catechetics/Christian education/theology/"objective study of religion" are ecclesiastically governed: the first two directly by theology; the latter in reaction to it. The language lacks communicative competence in the public world and restricts religious education in its search for an identity.

Religious education is the logical and appropriate name for a field that embraces educational and religious concerns. The term allows us to stand Janus-faced: looking back to our origins and forward to undreamt possibilities. The challenge now is to take the words seriously, with a kind of precision and comprehensiveness that the words deserve. This will allow religious educators to reconceptualize their work, name the multiplicity of arenas where it can be found, and rediscover a new identity and constituency.


Religious Instruction
In the Belgian Official Schools
A Twenty-Year-Old Educational Agreement
by Maurice Simon
Professor in the Theological Faculty of the Catholic University of Louvain*

Over the past fifteen years, the Church's hierarchy has several times expressed its concern to ensure that the Christian education of all the young baptized is carefully attended to, whether or not they go to Catholic schools. I am thinking here of Vatican II's Declaration on Christian Education, in which the Council Fathers state: «The Church is keenly aware of her very grave obligation to give zealous attention to the moral and religious education of all her children. To those large numbers of them who are not Catholic, she needs to be present with her special affection and helpfulness.» I am thinking, too, of the General Catechetical Directory, published by the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy in accord with the conciliar decree on the pastoral office of bishops: the Directory invites the Episcopal