RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Profession: Religious Education

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EDITORIAL

In an uncertain world such as we live in, personal and professional priorities are being challenged on many fronts. Present-day conflicts over the distribution of the world's wealth and political power are taking place in contexts of great cultural pluralism. The liberation sought by developing nations presents challenges in the professional fields of law, health, governmental relations, business, education, science, technology and religion. Religious education is not impervious to these politics of human experience. As religious educators, how we perceive of ourselves and of our task is no private affair that is limited to the "more developed" first and second worlds. Whatever else professionalism connotes, it especially carries with it the notion of responsibility and right action toward the world community (human and non-human).

The theme of this issue of the journal is *The Profession of Religious Education*. It is devoted to carefully exploring some of the ramifications of recent thinking on the notion of "profession" for the field of religious education. The essays presented here suggest that what religious education can add to professional ethics *in general* is a new spirit by supplying a context and center as a framework supportive of moral reflection in a pluralistic setting. Such a religious framework could promote openness and cooperation among adherents of various points of view by emphasizing commonalities while at the same time recognizing differences. Regarding religious education *in particular*, these essays make clear that the direction needed at this juncture in the history of the field is a notion of professionalism that does not slip into naive religiosity nor become fixated on modernity.

The first two articles deal with historical context while the second two treat the religious educator's self-understanding as a professional. The discussion begins with an essay by Kieran Scott. His thesis is simple: the profession of religious education is currently domesticated. A reconceptualization of the profession is required to align it with the emerging emancipatory work of (religious) education. In investigating the identity of the field of religious education and the concept and character of a profession Scott directs his remarks to the role of the Director of Religious Education. Joseph Browde examines one of the criteria for claiming professional status that may offer religious educators an opportunity to decide whether or not striving to become professional is worth the effort. He challenges the Religious Education Association to eke out criteria of professionalism and a code of ethics for religious educators. John Elias illustrates how the plurality of religious educators' self-understandings reflects how they relate differently to the publics of the academy, religious bodies, and society. He then suggests we identify in the field of religious education three subdisciplines which are related to the efforts of religious educators to address the three publics of academy, church and society. Lastly, from across the ocean, Edward Robinson offers some clarifying thoughts on professionalism and the religious imagination. He gives a vision of a religious educator as one who can enable persons to appropriate the truths of the spiritual life through the work of art. For Robinson, this means being true to a vision of human beings in which the power of the creative imagination will have a central place.

In 1976 Berard Marthaler wrote that religious educators, for all their professional training, were in danger of becoming a guild of practitioners.[1] Two years later, reflecting on his comment, I wrote that religious education suffers from the same influential antiintellectualism which has become one of the striking features of American thought. I described this as the basic, deadly weakness that has prevented religious education preparation programs from being the wellspring of knowledge, the developer of methodology, and the fountainhead of new ideas with which to regenerate religious communities.[2] The discussion continues. The final word on religious education as a profession is not said here. But what is presented is more than enough both to keep the question alive, and to keep the question public.

Gloria Durka, Guest Editor

[1] Berard L. Marthaler, "A Discipline in Quest of an Identity," *Horizons*, 3, No. 2 (1976), 214.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A CONFLICT OF INTEREST?

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Let me begin with a few pertinent and provocative questions: Why is there a reluctance in Protestant and Catholic circles to embrace the term "religious education?" Why is the position of the parish Director of Religious Education (DRE) so precarious and transitory? What assumptions lie behind the current (uncritical) shift toward ministry in pastoral and academic programs? Why do Religious Education Association (REA) and Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education (APRRE) members have so little in common? These questions are all interrelated and crystallize around the question posed in the title of this essay.

The focus of my attention here is to set a context for addressing some critical issues: What is distinctive about the work of religious education? Is there something about practicing religious education as a profession today which is actually in conflict with (some of) the original and contemporary aims of religious education? Are there certain conditions which prevail between professional religious educators and the institutions which employ them which limit their options in the practice of their profession? Have DREs lost sight of their proper work and profession?

These critical issues, ironically, can be adequately addressed only by clarifying some further questions:

Are we sure what the question (and problem) is?

Are we clear what the terms mean?

Are we aware what the options are?

Are we cognizant what the church (a) wants and (b) needs?

In this essay I intend to contextualize these questions and work them through by investigating the following items: (1) The iden-

tity of the field of religious education; (2) The concept and character of a profession; and (3) The role of the DRE in the profession of religious education.

These three issues converge in the persons of the DRE in their current work and quest for professional status. What I hope to demonstrate as my argument proceeds is that these issues need to be uncluttered and clarified if occupational self-understanding is to be acquired and mistaken detours avoided. I will conclude my analysis with some specific and concrete recommendations for the future.

The Field of Religious Education

No consensus exists today on the nature, purpose, scope and role of religious education. The current search for an identity revolves around differing usages of key terms: religious education, Christian education, church education, Christian nurture, educational ministry and catechesis.[1] The term under which one stands can place you in one field (and profession) and take you out of another. There is little awareness of this as the terms tend to be used interchangeably without regard to their historical origins and contemporary context. The problem is one of conceptualization.

"Good order," said Confucius, "depends entirely upon correctness of language." It is the means of passage from chaos to cosmos. Concern for the right expression is bound up with concern for true reality. Each thing deserves the name which suits it. Accuracy and integrity are two related virtues.[2] Concern for the correct terminology, then, is not a matter of linguistic obsession. When we buy into a certain term (or words), we buy into a world, a structure of knowledge, a process, a set of principles and mode of social relations. What is at stake is how we will be present in a given educational setting. Religious educators, however, cannot agree on the words to use. They have no consistent linguistic discourse. No stable pattern of conversation is currently operative in the field.[3]

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[1] See Kieran Scott, "Communicative Competence and Religious Education," *Lumen Vitae* 35 (1980): 75-96 and "Catechesis and Religious Education: Uncovering the Nature of Our Work," *PACE* 12 (April 1981-82), Issue F:1-4.

[2] George Gusdorf, *Speaking* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965).

[3] See David S. Steward, "Patterns of Conversation: An Interpretation of the Recent Work of Christian Education Theorists," *Religious Education* 63, 4 (1968): 259-269. Steward's interpretation is restricted to variations within the internal dialogue among Protestant Christian educators.

Two recent publications illustrate the situation. *Contemporary Approaches Christian Education*[4] emerged from a consultation on the future of Christian education held in Chicago in the fall of 1980. Each paper represents a way Christian education can be defined and its task understood in light of primary metaphors. Five contemporary approaches to the theory and practice of Christian education are offered with representative examples. The hope, according to Jack Seymour and Donald E. Miller, is to stimulate dialogue that will contribute to a more comprehensive and coherent theory of Christian education.

Contemporary Approaches Christian Education exhibits rather than explores the crisis of identity. It is fair to say that it represents the traditional liberal Protestant approaches to the field since the 1940s. The clue is in its usage of the words "religious," "Christian" and "religious education." There is an unconscious use of these words that lacks precision, sensitivity and comprehensiveness. It is the underlying assumptions that need resistance. Throughout the book it is taken for granted that the discipline and ministry of Christian education is synonymous with the field and profession of religious education. There is constant interchange of terms. Likewise, the word "religious" is subsumed under Christian, and "Christian" is identified with Protestant. The former is intolerant in a context of religious diversity, while the latter excludes the legitimate claims of other groups to share in its meaning. The result is a reinforcement of the current reductionist model of religious education and a mis-naming of our profession.

The second source of illustration is *Ministry and Education in Conversation*.[5] This collection of essays is the product of a symposium at Boston College on the relationship between pastoral ministry and religious education. The conveners of this symposium have a feel for the question and a sense of the problem. Each of the essays, however, misses the mark by its inability to distinguish ministerial and educational concepts. Ministry receives the focus of attention. No one seems to know what to say about religious education. It accurately represents the confusion and off-balance emphasis on ministry in Roman Catholic circles today. No progress will be made until we correctly name what we are doing and understand its foundational principles.

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[4] Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller, *Contemporary Approaches Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982).

[5] Mary C. Boys, ed., *Ministry and Education in Conversation* (Winona, Minn.: St. Mary's Press, 1981).

What is religious education? What is its distinctive function? What is its scope and basic orientation? John Westerhoff writes: "Though the name religious education has been used most frequently, there has been no complete or consistent agreement on what those words mean or to what they refer. Today there is less concurrence than ever before."[6] This perception is correct. If we are to move, however, beyond the current dislocation and reconstruct a more specific and comprehensive theoretical framework, two items are required: (1) an historical sense of the origin and meaning of the term in the United States; and (2) an imaginative sense of the fullest possibility of its meaning in our current cultural context.

First, a look at some selective but significant early writings can shed light on the initial impulse and motivating force of the movement. The term "religious education" as we understand it today was born from the spirit of modernity. At the beginning of the century, three streams (liberal theology, the social gospel, and progressive education) flowed into one movement, which became known as the religious education movement.[7] The pioneers who met in Chicago in 1903[8] shared a widespread dissatisfaction with the revivalistic thrust of the Sunday school. They were committed to an *educational* approach, which would utilize the insights of modern psychology and pedagogy. They were driven by a concern for the education of the public that would be compatible with the modern spirit. Critical and historical scholarship would be applied to biblical studies. Religious instruction would be correlated with education in history, literature, and the sciences. And, the influence and role of all institutions of society in religious education — the home, school, seminary, associations, social organizations, colleges and universities — would be explored and unified in a common educational effort.

At its birth, religious education had the character of an ideal type. It was a program of action, a quality and method of education, an ethical ideal and a means to realize the highest societal hopes. Two years later in 1905 at its Third Annual Convention in Boston, the movement articulated its oft quoted but little understood three-fold purpose: "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."[9]

On its tenth anniversary, Henry F. Cope, the General Secretary and early chronicler of the movement, proudly reports that religious education "has become part of our national consciousness."[10] Personal life and public agencies are tested and evaluated in terms of whether they promote or demote religious education. Cope lists the major advances of the decade:

1. *Religious education has acquired a new and generally accepted meaning*. No longer is it an ecclesiastical process information system. Rather, it has broadened its scope and concerns itself with the dominant interests and supreme values of life. "It is a program of life development that is religious in aim, in method and in its conception of the person being educated. It signifies the development of persons into the fullness of a religiously conceived social ideal."[11]

2. *Religious education has shifted its aim and elevated its ideals*. It has turned from an excessive privacy toward the development of positive social competency.

3. *Religious education has embraced the scientific spirit and incorporated psychological insights on developmental patterns into its programming*.

4. *Religious education has become devotion to a great cause . . . a truly religious hope and educational ideal*.

5. *Religious education has brought dramatic improvements in specific fields — in methods, textbooks, graded materials and teacher training*.

Religious education was born of the fusion of the scientific spirit with the spirit of humanistic idealism. It had an abiding

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[6] John Westerhoff, *Who Are We? The Quest for a Religious Education* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1978): 3.

[7] See Kenneth Barker, "Historical Background," in *Religious Education, Catechesis and Freedom* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1981): 25-62; and Robert W. Lynn, "Continuity & Change," in *Protestant Strategies in Education* (New York: Association Press, 1964): 27-50.

[8] See Boardman Kathan, "William Rainey Harper: Founder of the Religious Education Association," *Religious Education* 73, S-5, Special Edition (September-October 1978): S7-S16.

[9] *The Aims of Religious Education*. The Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention of the Religious Education Association, Boston (Chicago: Religious Education Association, 1905): 474.

[10] Henry F. Cope, "Ten Years Progress" in *Religious Education* 8, 2 (June 1913): 117-149.

[11] Ibid., p. 118.

hope, a belief in inevitable growth and a prophetic orientation toward social reconstruction. George Albert Coe aptly caught its fledgling spirit: "We have felt in it," he wrote, "the inspiration of something broadly human, progressive, and unifying."[12]

On its twentieth anniversary, Cope again reflects on the movement's progress.[13] It has moved, he notes, in two main directions: (1) religion and education take religious education more seriously and recognize its scientific basis; and (2) religious education is acknowledged as a social necessity. "If twenty years ago," writes Cope, "the agitation for religious education seemed to promise better Sunday schools, today it seemed to offer the way of a new and spiritual society."[14] Religion is now discovered to be intellectually defensible. Religious education is seen as one of the forces uniting the world of thought. It has been part of the professionalization of general education. It has fostered a spirit of criticism and embraced the educational process. Its progress is that of a movement, under loyalty to the scientific method, to the vision of a just and compassionate social order.[15]

For a time, according to Coe, religious education was almost a cult. It seemed to have the future in its hands and to promise a religiously and ethically mature character and culture. But by the 1930s with the arrival of the depression, religious education was already losing its standing in Protestant circles.[16] What at first seemed to be firmly established quickly became secondary and dispensable. The term itself came under attack as a liability. Elmer Homrighausen expressed the rising sentiments: " 'Religious education' has been too hazy and nebulous, primarily because we have no clear-cut idea as to the nature of the religion in which we desire to educate people . . . we will get nowhere so long as we make Christianity a mere nebulous religion without definite things to which people may be attached."[17] Ministers, he says, feel religious education lacks attachment to the church. They perceive it as largely untheological and controlled by a specialized laity who are more interested in popular aesthetic and moral Christian-

ity than in specifically Christian affiliation. "It is amazing," notes Homrighausen, "how we try to educate people 'religiously,' as though Christianity were an abstract 'religiousness,' indefinite and meaningless." He declares, "We are Christians! We are not vague 'religionists'!"[18] So let the prodigal return home, he advises, and be rebaptized in the name of "Christian nurture."

Only a few years later H. Shelton Smith published his *Faith and Nurture*.[19] The book was a watershed and a turning point. Smith launched a criticism of the liberal foundations (educational, theological and social) undergirding modern religious education. He challenged religious educators to reclaim their distinctive Christian roots, insisted on a sharp distinction between the nurturing process within the church and any other educational activity, and sought to ground the enterprise in a neo-orthodox theology. The typical way of interpreting this shift is to say that theorists and practitioners now preferred the term "Christian education" to "religious education." What, in fact, transpired were four things: (1) the church reclaimed and regained control of its education; (2) there was a switch of allegiance and interests toward ministry and Christian nurture; (3) the link between religion and public education was broken; and (4) religious education received a near fatal blow.

In the judgment of some, religious education had, in fact, died. Others saw an irreconcilable conflict of interests between its original vision and the premises and process of Christian nurture.[20] If, in fact, a recognizable field still existed, it was now in disarray. An identity crisis had set in from which it has never recovered. The limits of the past had caught up with it.[21] The pioneers of the movement were on to something important. But their vision was flawed and narrow. It was largely, white, liberal and Protestant. They failed to grasp a sufficient concrete and comprehensive interpretation of the *religious* and *educational*.

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[12] George A. Coe, "What is 'Religious' Education?" *Religious Education*, 18 (1923): 93.

[13] Henry F. Cope, "Twenty Years Progress in Religious Education," *Religious Education*, 18 (1923): 307.

[14] Ibid., p. 314.

[15] Ibid., pp. 308-315.

[16] George A. Coe, "The Present Crisis in Religious Education," *Religious Education* 28 (1933): 181-185.

[17] Elmer Homrighausen, "The Minister and Religious Education," *Christian Education* (April 1939): 242.

[18] Ibid., p. 243.

[19] H. Shelton Smith, *Faith and Nurture* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1941). See also Smith's "Christian Education: Do Progressive Religious Educators Have a Theology?" in *America at the End of the Protestant Era* (New York: Macmillan, 1951): 255-256, ed. A. S. Nash, and "Let Religious Educators Reckon with the Barthians," *Religious Education* 24 (1934): 45-51.

[20] Harrison S. Elliott's book *Can Religious Education be Christian?* (New York: Macmillan, 1940) illuminates this conflict. Elliott, of course, endorsed the original liberal ideal and his book title indirectly raises the quest of identity.

[21] Gabriel Moran, "The Limits of the Past," in *Interplay* (Winona: St. Mary's Press, 1981): 21-36 and "Religious Education: Past, Present and Future," *Religious Education* 66, 5 (September-October 1971).

The Roman Catholic church played a very minor role in the religious education movement between 1903-1940. It was investing heavily in its own educational institutions, but was culturally curtailed by its parochial and defensive posture. The term *Catholic education* usually referred to Catholic schools, while instruction in Christian doctrine outside those schools was frequently called *religious education*. In the 1960s significant theological, biblical, liturgical and educational changes were ushered in with the new catechetical movement. Catechesis was the name for a process of evangelization and enculturation. Its aim was to solidify one's religious identity, to deepen one's affiliation and faith. Protestant and Catholic educational efforts converged at this point. Both focused on denominational education in the faith. Protestants called it "Christian education." Catholics had reclaimed the ancient term "catechetics." The assumption, shared by both, was that the two terms were synonymous with religious education. Most current literature tends to reinforce this presumption — in spite of its illogical and unhistorical claim.

The attempted merger of religion and education in the early part of the century was daring but premature. Adequate concepts, context and linguistic sensitivities were lacking. Today we have a better opportunity and a greater urgency to succeed. If the term is to be reconstructed and a new field emerge, the surplus of meaning contained in each word needs to be tapped and articulated. This is a large and complex agenda. I will list here a number of guiding posts toward this undertaking:

1. Religious education needs to incorporate the best of its past and re-image the future so as to make visible the revolutionary religious possibilities of the present.

2. Religious education is a field where we learn to live religiously and intelligently in the modern world.

3. The field cannot be reduced to church matters and maintenance. It ought to be a process of emancipation in which religions reconstruct themselves in their self-understanding and interrelatedness to each other.

4. The justification for the field of religious education ought to be generated by educational rather than ecclesial concerns. It ought to declare for the educational ideal in religion.

5. The field ought to promote a theory of religious education which resists mindless religious fanaticism and offers religion intellectually unafraid.

6. Finally, religious education ought to provide a context and mode of discourse to link the religious to the pressing public and educational issues of our time.

Currently, this field of religious education scarcely exists. It is struggling to come alive. The civility of our public life may depend on its progress. Churches, synagogues and mosques could benefit inestimably from its resources and vision.

The Concept and Character of a Profession

Does the emerging field of religious education have a guild of professionals? Should parish Directors of Religious Education seek to become professionals? Is professionalism required and in harmony with the interests of religious education? The answer to these questions may seem self-evident. However, the questions become much more complex whenever we investigate the meaning of profession.

"If you wish to converse with me," said Voltaire, "define your terms." In the twentieth century, however, the concept of profession resists neat and tidy boundaries. The word has become increasingly ambiguous under pressure of current usage and its departure from its traditional connotations. The lines of demarcation of the group system we generally call the professions are fluid and indistinct today. Over the centuries, there has been a significant shift in the meaning, and the public perception is in a state of flux. The current indiscriminate use of the term is tied to the effort of many persons and groups to secure prestige, power and status. It is also linked to their desire to separate themselves from the "unprofessional" — commonly identified with the incompetent, the volunteer, the amateur. The situation is a paradox: nearly everyone wants to be a professional today,[22] yet many of the established professions are criticized for their severe shortcomings. Two illustrations will indicate the problem.

Vincent Fuller headed a high-powered legal defense team for John W. Hinckley, Jr. Fuller was asked to comment on the acquittal of his client, who shot President Reagan. His terse reply is indicative of the crisis in the legal profession: "Another day, another dollar."[23] The public intuitively expects more from their profes-

[22] Harold L. Wilensky, "The Professionalization of Everyone?" *American Journal of Sociology* 70, 2 (1964): 137-158.

[23] *The New York Times*, June 22, 1982, p. 27. For a critical and constructive analysis of the modern legal profession see Jethro Lieberman, *Crisis at the Bar* (New York: Norton, 1978) and Philip Stern, *Lawyers on Trial* (New York: Times Books, 1980). On the medical

sionals, but they are also aware of the creeping toll on their integrity.[24]

Early in the century John Dewey expressed some misgivings about the tendencies to professionalize teaching and learning. "Even if it could be proved," he wrote, "that the present movement toward professionalism in education were historically inevitable, it would not follow that it is wholly desirable or admirable."[25] Dewey contrasts "professional" with "amateur," and maintains that in education and sport the amateur is ranked above professional. The latter is primarily concerned with rewards extrinsic to the activity pursued. The amateur, on the other hand, loves the activity for its own sake. Dewey does not consider the two mutually exclusive. "Schools need to develop what might be called," he said, "the amateur professional: the man and woman who unites the seriousness, unity of purpose and skill of the professional with the breadth and freedom of thought and desire characteristic of the amateur."[26] Dewey was struggling with the basic meaning of profession. His conceptualization, however, was inadequate. For him, professional denotes trained skills and technical competencies — a meaning that emerged only in the nineteenth century.[27] His use of the term "amateur professional" is nearly a contradiction in terms today. What is required is a reconstruction of the concept of profession — a retrieval of its medieval meaning integrated with our modern understanding.[28]

Talcott Parson claims that the development of the modern "professional complex" is the crucial structural development in the twentieth century society.[29] It has led to the formation of the New Class[30] and a culture of professionalism.[31] Still, many people who prize professionalism highly have also criticized it on many counts. The values of modern professions, they discern, are closely in line with the values normative for our society — money, specialization and self-interest. Many of the traditional characteristics associated with professionalism, they perceive, are often ignored today.[32] If this current contradiction is to be resolved, we need to consider the (historical and contemporary) foundations of professionalism. This will enable us to judge the appropriateness of our professional quest and its possible contribution to the public good.

An early meaning of the concept of profession was identified with taking a vow of consecration made by one entering a religious order. The novice "professed" a new way of life, made a pledge to uphold ultimate values and dedicated his/her life to communal service.[33] These ideals were assumed and identified with the first three learned professions of divinity, law and medicine. These traditional professions mediated the human's relations to God, to each other and to their biological environment. At first, these professions were co-extensive with the church. Inherent in their vocation was the sense that they existed to perform public service. They were to be the embodiment of public virtue, a symbol of social conscience and guardians of the public well-being. Gradually, however, the church lost control of the medical and legal professions. And, what we know today as "the culture of professionalism" emerged with the rise of the universities in the nineteenth century.[34] At this point the meaning of profession came to be identified with the independent, self-governing, technically trained, male individual. This model is currently in crisis. It is self-serving and unable to respond adequately to the critical issues of our day.

What, then, would constitute an appropriate professional model for us to aspire to? What would be its characteristics? What common attributes should distinguish the contemporary professional *as* a professional and *from* non-professionals? On the basis

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Tragedy (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1977): 184-202, and Stephen Toulmin, "The Meaning of Professionalism: Doctor's Ethics and Biomedical Science," in *Knowledge Values and Belief*, eds. H. Tristam Engelhardt and Daniel Callahan (Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.: The Hastings Center, 1977): 254-278.

[24] See Harold Laski, "The Decline of the Professions," *Harper's Magazine* (November 1935): 676-685; George Schurr, "Academics, Ethics and Professionalism," *Christian Century* (October 15, 1980): 969-972, and Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York: Basic Books, 1977). Laski criticizes the legal and medical profession, Schurr the values of the modern academic, and Lasch the intrusion of professionals on the family in the twentieth century.

[25] John Dewey, "Culture and Professionalism in Education," in *School and Society* 18, 459 (October 13, 1923): 422.

[26] Ibid., p. 424.

[27] See Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976).

[28] See Gabriel Moran, "Professionalism: Friend or Foe?" *Education toward Adulthood* (New York: Paulist, 1979): 130-149, and "The Ambiguity of Professionalization," *PACE 9* (1978), Issue F:1-4.

[29] Talcott Parsons, "The Professions," in *The International Encyclopedia of Social Science* 12 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968): 536-546.

[30] Alvin Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of New Class* (New York: Seabury, 1979): 19.

[31] Bledstein.

[32] Schurr.

[33] Morris L. Cogan, "Toward a Definition of Profession," *Harvard Educational Review* 23 (Winter 1953): 30-50.

[34] Bledstein, pp. 80-128.

of my research of sociological literature, I offer the following six elements as distinguishing features of a profession.[35]

1. A profession and its practice is founded upon a fund of knowledge that is organized into a *systematic body of theory*. This constitutes the knowledge base of the profession. It is a body of abstract propositions that describes in general terms the phenomena comprising the profession's focus of interest. The theory offers conceptual clarity and serves as a grounding in which the professional rationalizes his or her practice in concrete situations.

    Preparation for a profession usually involves prolonged specialized training in this body of abstract knowledge. On-the-job training through apprenticeship is inadequate. Intellectual understanding is a prerequisite. In the evolution of each profession, the importance of theory normally precipitates systematic research, continuous theory construction, validation through application and an ongoing spirit of group self-criticism.

2. The profession *applies its intellectual understanding* to the vital practical affairs of life. This practical application of intellectual skills to significant and ordinary social relations is inseparable from the idea of profession. These practices, in turn, are frequently modified and corrected by the accumulated wisdom and experience of society.

3. The profession acquires *public legitimacy and authority by its ability to sustain its claim* to special knowledge and training. When an occupation strives toward professionalism, one of its aspirations is to convince a sizeable public of its monopoly and superior judgment in those spheres within which the professional has been educated.

4. The *community sanctions* the authority of the professional and *confers* upon him/her a *series of powers and privileges*. Some of these powers and privileges may be informal; others may be legally reinforced.

    Among its powers is the profession's control over its own standards of education and training. These include admissions, examinations, accreditation and licensing. Among the professional privileges are autonomy of work in their specialized area, relative freedom from outside evaluation, judgment only by one's own peers and the honoring of confidentiality.

5. At the heart of a profession is an *essential idealism*. Work is never viewed solely as a means to an end; it is an end in itself. Self-interest and personal gain is contrary to its traditional service ideal. The profession considers its first ethical imperative to be altruistic service to the client. This devotion to public service is the pivot around which the moral claim to professional status revolves. Every profession attempts to protect this claim by a built-in regulative code of ethics (formal and informal) which directs the conduct of its members.

6. Finally, as a profession comes into being or an occupation approaches the pole of professionalism, it begins to take on the traits of a *formal association, an organization and a community*. It establishes its own charter and creates a professional culture based on its values, norms and symbols.

Strictly speaking, these attributes are not the monopoly of the professions. The distinguishing and distinctive mark, however, is not quantitative but qualitative. There is also consensus that the two core characteristics of a professional group are: (1) the claim to a specialized and systematic body of knowledge; and (2) the claim to the service ideal. All of the above characteristics are closely interdependent. They are also socially orientated. They assert a set of obligations and rights between the profession and the community.

How does religious education measure up against these criteria? Is it a profession? Or with what professional community do religious educators share common interests? It is to these questions that I now turn.

Professional Religious Education: The DRE Role

No occupation becomes a profession without a struggle. Money,

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[35] The sources to which I am indebted here include Ernest Greenwood, "Attributes of a Profession," *Social Work* 2, 3 (1957): 45-55; A. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson, "The Professions," in *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 12, ed. R. A. Seligman (New York: Macmillan, 1934): 471-480; William J. Goode, "Encroachment, Charlatanism, and the Emerging Profession: Psychology, Sociology, and Medicine," *American Sociological Review* 25, 6 (1960): 902-914; and "Community within a Community: The Professions," *American Sociological Review* 22 (April 1957): 194-200; Harold L. Wilensky, Morris L. Cogan and Harold J. Laski. See also Charles Kammer, III, "Vocation and the Professions," in *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics 1981*, ed. Thomas W. Ogletree with assistance from Alan Anderson and Lisa Cahill (Waterloo, Ontario: Council on the Study of Religion, 1981): 153-182. Kammer attempts to develop a model for the professions by

struct the quest: lack of autonomy, shortage of members, the absence of consensus on a systematic body of theory and lack of public acceptance. In a country permeated by "the culture of professionalism," many occupations may be tempted to claim the name too soon — without fulfilling the recognized norms or the ability to back up their claims.

The religious educators who gathered in Chicago in 1903 and established the Association were a group of genuine professionals. They organized to espouse and promote the ideal of an *educational* approach to religion. Four hundred delegates attended the first convention — including university presidents, administrators, public school teachers and church educators. It did not take long before the REA had a charter membership of 1,259. Few would claim today that the Association has lived up to its idealistic hopes. However, a greater error may be the fact that it has strayed away from its original constituency — *professional educators*.

Contemporary religious education is emerging as a field and is in critical need of development as a profession. A critical issue is *what* profession? What do religious educators want to be? This question becomes acute when we examine the role of the parish Director of Religious Education. Two writings on the topic will illustrate the problem.

In a recent essay, Robert W. Lynn traces the rise and fall of the DRE in Protestant churches.[36] The DRE, he notes, was "a promising blend of a revised tradition and relevant modernity." In a few decades, however, the new post faded away. Lynn blames a failure of vision and the reduction of the role to church management. "The movement floundered," he writes, "in part because of its inability to grasp a sufficiently comprehensive and compelling interpretation of ministry."[37] In contrast, it can be legitimately claimed that the demise of the DRE in Protestant circles lies precisely in it becoming a *ministry*.

Joseph Neiman made a pioneering contribution with his perception and knowledge of the DRE in Catholic churches.[38] In his judgment, religious education had not achieved the status of a profession within North American society. He warns DREs against the trend and advocates that they abandon their preoccu-

pation with becoming a profession.[39] It is incompatible, he claims, with the work of religious education — which should be conceived as a ministry. Neiman is aware of the deficiencies in the modern professional model. He is unable, however, to reconstruct its meaning or to identify the appropriate profession for religious educators.

Are DREs on the right track in seeking professional status? Do they understand the process? Can they back up their claims? And are they clear what profession they want to enter? In this regard, I would advise a look at the past in order not to repeat its mistakes.

In the early part of the century, the hope was to form an academic *field* of religious education and a *profession*. The profession was clearly identified with *education* and with the overall effort to professionalize all education. Standards, policies and an Association were established to evaluate, direct and coordinate the new "profession of religious education." The movement was full of promise.

At the same time in Protestant churches, there was a growing sense of inadequacy and the need to meet the challenges of modernity. There was dissatisfaction with its educational agencies and philosophy. In response to this challenge, the new parish Director of Religious Education began to appear in 1909 in several of the larger churches. At the beginning of 1915, more than one hundred directors were at work in local churches, and the number was steadily increasing.[40] By 1926 it was estimated that there were over eight hundred.[41] A Department of Church Directors of Religious Education was created *within* the Religious Education Association. They adopted a constitution and elected officers at the REA Eleventh Annual Convention in New Haven in 1914.[42]

From the beginning, serious attempts were made to clarify the work, role and status of the parish director.[43] The efforts were not

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[36] Robert Wood Lynn, "Tradition and Modernity: Managerial Images of Ministry in Protestant Church Education, 1900-1920," in Boys, *Ministry and Education in Conversation*, pp. 97-112.

[37] Ibid., p. 107.

[38] Joseph C. Neiman, *Coordinators* (Winona, Minn.: St. Mary's Press, 1971).

[39] Joseph C. Neiman, "Is Religious Education a Profession?" *Religious Education* 67, 5 (1972): 363-367, and "The Religious Education Profession: Parish Coordinators," *Religious Education* 68, 2 (1973): 264-265.

[40] On the history of the profession in Protestant churches see Dorothy Jean Furnish, *DRE/DCE — The History of a Profession* (Nashville, Tenn.: Christian Education Fellowship of the United Methodist Church, 1976).

[41] Paul H. Vieth, *A Study of the Personnel and Work of the Office of Director of Religious Education*, 1, 3, & 4 (Chicago: International Council of Religious Education, 1926).

[42] "Department of Church Directors," *Religious Education* 9 (April 1914): 186-188.

[43] See William H. Boocock, "Director of Religious Education," *The Encyclopedia of Sunday School and Religious Education* I. (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1915): 348-350; "Director of Religious Education: A Discussion of Some of their Problems," *Religious Education* 10 (February 1915): 55-60; and "Directors and Ministers of Religious Education," *Religious Education* 22 (June 1927): 657-659.

completely successful. In general, the DRE was expected to bring the best of education to the life of the church. The position, however, was always precarious and its educational work suspicious. Conflict rose repeatedly between the minister and director over questions of authority, areas of responsibility and the nature of the activity. When the depression arrived in the 1930s, the slogan "last hired and first fired" became the fate of a large number of parish directors.

In the 1940s a more subtle but significant change evolved. Under the guise of a renewal and reform, Directors of Religious Education changed their nomenclature to "Minister of Christian Education." This corresponded to the shift in the field (noted in the first part of this essay) from religious education to Christian education. "The title Director of Religious Education," writes Dorothy Jean Furnish, "was the commonly used one until the mid-1940s when Protestant religious education began to self-consciously lay claim to roots in theological as well as in educational thought. In an effort to express this new found theological dimension, Protestant Directors began to insist on the title 'Director of Christian Education.' "[44] Furnish, however, mis-reads and under-estimates the turn of events. What, in fact, transpired was that one profession (and field) went into decline and another re-asserted itself. Gabriel Moran accurately notes the transformation. "The change from religious education to Christian education was not the reform of a profession," he writes, "but the end of a hoped-for profession and the beginning or re-establishing of a (sub) profession. *Christian education* became the name for a professional role within the church's own profession, the profession which Protestants have always called *ministry*."[45] In effect, the DRE movement came to a halt in Protestant churches, and the Director of Christian Education (DCE) role emerged in its place.

On the Catholic side, the role of parish Director of Religious Education is only twenty-five years old.[46] It blossomed in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Currently attempts are being made to organize and move toward professionalization.[47] The movement, however, seems likely to follow a similar Protestant path. Many churches do not know what to expect from the DRE, and many DREs do not know what to expect from themselves. There is an acute lack of clear identity, confusion of roles and a blurred comprehension of the nature of their work.[48] Ministry seems to be the first option of the majority. Few identify themselves, self-consciously, with the profession of religious education.

In light of the foregoing discussion, I will conclude with the following observations and suggestions:

1. We need a profession of religious education that embodies the characteristics listed in this essay.

2. Religious educators need to link up with other professional educators — school principals, administrators, teachers, school boards and committees — in and beyond church circles.

3. Conceptual clarity is needed in academic programs. We need to be clear on what preparation we are giving to whom and for what.

4. The DRE ought to be perceived as a *role* within the profession of religious education. Its function needs to be realigned with the purpose and principles of all genuine education.

5. The DRE ought to be free of many of the limitations in current ecclesiastical settings. Freedom to do their work, as they judge best, is a basic test as to the honoring of their professional integrity.

6. Finally, the DRE, with prudence, insight and skill can creatively balance ministerial and educational concerns. He/she can move from one focus to another as the situation requires. No conflict of interest need prevail in these respective standpoints.

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[44] Dorothy Jean Furnish, "The Future of the Profession from a Protestant Perspective," in *Parish Religious Education*, ed. Maria Harris (New York: Paulist Press, 1978): 208.

[45] Moran, "The Limits of the Past," *Interplay*, p. 24. See also pp. 90-105 on professionalizing religious education.

[46] See Maria Harris, "DREs in the U.S.: The First Twenty Years," *The Living Light* 17, 3 (Fall 1980): 250-259, and *The DRE Book* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976).

[47] See Marie Martens Hill, "Albany DREs Make Haste Slowly," *PACE 12* (1981-1982), and Jean Peters Pilch, "Wisconsin DRE Federation Update," *PACE 12* (1981-1982).

[48] See Eugene Hemerick, "The Need to Define Roles," *Origins* 10, 10 (1980): 151-154, and "The Once and Future Role of DRE," *The Living Light* 17, 3 (1980): 270-276.