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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Current Interests and Concern: APRRE PAPERS

Volume 79, Number 3, Summer 1984

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Current Interests and Concern: APRRE PAPERS

Journal of the Religious Education Association and the
Professors and Researchers in Religious Education

Volume 79, Number 3, Summer 1984

This issue of *Religious Education* manifests some of the primary issues confronting the field as well as the major interests of its scholars. To that extent, in a general way, it reveals the state of the art. There are no great surprises. The theoretical foundations of the field are still in question; social concerns such as justice and peace still concern us; an awareness of the influence of culture on our ministries continues; the relationship between the social sciences and religious education is still being explored; the phenomenon of religious experience still intrigues us; the relationship of theology and education still troubles us; the arts, story and education still interest us; and the concern for evaluation continues. Each of the essays in this issue adds to our understanding, though none breaks new ground. At this point in our history there is little original scholarship in terms of the development of new paradigms, the discovery of new areas of research, or the opening of new vistas of knowledge. We seem at our best in offering critiques and original understandings of familiar materials. Perhaps that is because more of us are teachers than researchers; more of us are concerned with exploring practice than theory. After a period in which few scholars were educated and graduate programs in religious education were eliminated, new programs and a new generation of scholars are emerging. More important, more are being sought after and employed. And so this issue of the journal becomes both a testimony to the present situation and a challenge to the future. We apologize that the dissertation abstracts and research review usually published in this issue, due to changes in personnel, will appear in the fall issue devoted to the theme of the REA's conference, "Pursuing Justice and Peace."

John H. Westerhoff, Editor

Kieran Scott

St. Bonaventure University
St. Bonaventure, NY 14778

This essay is a proposal to satisfy a "blessed rage for order" in the current field of religious education. This order is necessary on the following accounts:

1. *No clearly defined field of religious education exists today.* As a logical consequence, there is no consensus on the foundational underpinnings, scope, methodology and operating principles.¹ The root problem is one of conceptualization.

2. *No consensus exists on the usage of key terminology in religious education today.* Our conceptual confusion is tied to a linguistic cluttering of terms. The terms catechesis, Christian nurture/education, Christian religious education, religious education, continue to be utilized interchangeably.² Seldom is there consistent awareness that each term "reflects a distinctive variance in our understanding of who we are and what we are about."³

Are the terms simply different manifestations (aspects, subsets) of the broader field of religious education?⁴ Currently, the terms run together or are juxtaposed without adequate attention to the conceptual gap between them.

3. *Consequently, no clearly defined purpose exists for religious education today.* Is our work maintenance or/and emanci-

¹ See Berard Marthaler, "A Discipline in Quest of an Identity: Religious Education," *Horizons* 3, 2 (1976), 203-215; Padraic O'Hare, ed., *Foundation of Religious Education* (New York: Paulist, 1978); John Westerhoff, ed., *Who Are We? The Quest for a Religious Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1978) and "A Discipline in Crisis," *Religious Education*, 74, 1 (1979): 7-15.

² 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.

³ Westerhoff, *Who Are We?*, pp. 12-13.

⁴ John Elias, "The Three Publics of Religious Educators," *Religious Education* 77, 6 (1982), 615-627.

pation, traditioning or/and transformation, conversion or/and critique, socialization or/and social reconstruction? Religious educators in the 1970s and 1980s, notes Norma Thompson, feel much like the King of Siam in the *King and I*: "Sometimes I think I am not sure of what I absolutely know. . . ."⁵

4. *Finally, in spite of some recent promising efforts, adequate attention to the theory of religious education has been found wanting.* The results have been: foundational principles go unquestioned, philosophical options blurred and professional identity confused.⁶ In effect, religious education as a field and profession remains notably undeveloped.

The work of this essay is to create a clearing for consistent conversation in the field. The task is to distinguish and clarify the terms we use — with their different languages and lenses on reality. I propose a three-pronged typology of traditions as a scheme for ordering the field and a device for systematic reflection on it. The traditions can be named as (1) *The Ecclesial Enculturation Tradition* (Inner Border Model) represented by catechesis, Christian nurture and socialization theories, (2) *The Revisionist Tradition* (Dialectical Border Model) portrayed by Christian religious education, and (3) *The Reconceptualist Tradition* (Border Crossing Model) noted for its attempt to retrieve and reconstruct the root meaning of the term religious education.

Each of these traditions has its own conceptual framework, educational process and purposes. Each structures our thinking and gives form to our lives in diverse and, sometimes, divergent ways. They are not conceived according to the same rationale or carry the same priorities and principles. Developmentally, each tradition could be conceived as a deeper stage in religious education development.⁷ My thesis is: the ecclesial enculturation and revisionist traditions can embody part of the meaning of religious education. However, neither can constitute a full reconceptualized theory of religious education. In this essay, I will explicate the conceptual framework, process and purpose of each of the traditions, indicate their strength and weakness, and conclude with some implications for parish religious education.

⁵ See Norma H. Thompson, "What's Going On in Religious Education?" *Intellect* (December 1976), 163.

⁶ I attempt to deal with some of the historical origins and identity of the field and profession in "Religious Education and Professional Religious: A Conflict of Interest?" *Religious Education* 77, 6 (1982), 587-603.

⁷ See Gabriel Moran, "A Theory of Religious Education Development," *Religious Education Development* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1983), 183-207. Henry C. Simmons reaffirmed this interpretation in a personal correspondence (August 9, 1983).

The Ecclesial Enculturation Tradition

In the ecclesial enculturation tradition, I identify religious educators engaged in catechesis, Christian nurture/education and religious socialization.⁸ (Much of what goes on under the heading of Jewish education could also be included here.) I name the tradition ecclesial enculturation as an apt and accurate description of its conceptual framework, process and purpose. It is an Inner Border Model in terms of its enclosed ecclesial interests and external focus.

Conceptual Framework. Catechesis, Christian nurture and religious socialization theories take as their frame of reference service in and on behalf of the church. It is educative work carried on in the name of, with the approbation of, and under the guidance of the church. I recognize that there are minor differences between these terms. Yet, I believe they are substantially united in their attempt to situate church religious education within an enculturation model. Here I will focus on the catechetical expression of this tradition.

Catechesis is unabashedly confessional. Its constitutive interest is to awaken, nourish and develop one's personal belief, to hand on the tradition, solidify one's religious identity and build up the ecclesial body.⁹ It is "enculturation in a transforming community."¹⁰

The identity of catechesis is currently tied to denominational (Roman Catholic) religion. It is "the nursery of the church."¹¹ It

⁸ Some representative examples include *Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1979); *Catechesi Tradendae* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1980); C. Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1967); Charles Foster, "The Faith Community as a Guiding Image for Christian Education," in *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education* by Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 53-71; John Westerhoff, *Generation to Generation* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1974) and *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (New York: Seabury, 1976), Chap. 3; Berard Marthaler, "Socialization as a Model for Catechesis," in O'Hare, pp. 64-92. In Kenneth Barker's typology this tradition is named "The Cultural Type": See *Religious Education, Catechesis and Freedom* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1981), Chap. 5.

⁹ See D. S. Amalorpavadas, "Catechesis as a Pastoral Task of the Church," *Lumen Vitae* 27 (1972), 259-280; Berard Marthaler, "Handing on the Symbols of Faith," *Chicago Studies*, 19, 1 (1980), 21-33; and Michael Warren, ed., *Sourcebook for Modern Catechetics* (Winona: St. Mary's Press, 1983). Warren's edited collection contains 31 articles charting the history of catechetics and analyzing some of its current seminal issues.

¹⁰ Henry C. Simmons.

¹¹ See Jack L. Seymour, *From Sunday School to Church School: Continuities in Protestant Church Education in the United States, 1860-1929* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982). Seymour's scholarly revisionist history of the Sunday school uncovers the enduring assumptions undergirding Protestant church education. A parallel case, I believe, could be made for some similar continuities and change in the Roman Catholic catechetical tradition.

tasks are defined as acquiring and transmitting a religion: to become rooted and identified with a body of people and molded into the character and meaning system of its communal life. It could be called the tribal phase of religious education.

Catechesis is set in the framework of church *ministry*. This self-understanding (educational ministry) is its guiding vision — directing it to focus on conservation of tradition and deepening of religious affiliation. These concerns are an indigenous part of the church's mission.

In its conceptual stance, this model sticks to its own tradition. It claims to respect the territorial rights of others, but its prevailing concern is to be vigilant about its own borders. Here Catholic, Protestant and Jew pursue their own way, but this inner border model does not provide an adequate comprehensive context for meaningful dialogues in the contemporary religious world.

Process. Religious educators in the catechetical tradition view their work as initiation, adaption, transmission, translation, church-maintenance. It is a life-long process and the work of the entire Christian community. Its process is one of enculturation, nurture, evangelization and conversion. Its main educational effort is to provide people with experience of belonging to a community. In general, the catechetical enterprise understands itself as the total church process whereby the faithful deepen their fidelity and mature in their commitment to the ecclesial community.

Purpose. Catechetical objectives have always been closely related to practical outcomes: practicing church membership, transmission of the heritage, handing on the symbols of the tradition and deepening of loyalty to one's beliefs, meanings and values. The *National Catechetical Directory* concisely notes its four major tasks: (1) to proclaim the Christian gospel; (2) to participate in efforts to develop and maintain the Christian community; (3) to lead people to worship and prayer; and (4) to motivate them to serve others. This delineation of tasks broadens the scope of catechesis from the almost-exclusive cognitive confinement associated with it from the sixteenth century down to the early twentieth century. Padraic O'Hare captures well its current spirit and aim: "The most invariant intention of catechetical ministers," he writes, "is to induct persons into what Tillich called 'the present actuality of the group.' This catechetical effort is an inducement to accept and to make their own, the faith, loyalty, piety and cognitive perspective of the mainstream of the church

as presently understood and practiced."¹² In a word, it is denominational "education in the faith."

Gifts. There is a fundamental truth in the catechetical form of religious education. It functions as a vital reminder that there is a place for passing on the past in religious education. Its focus is conditioned by the awareness that "when the ancients become inaccessible the modern becomes unintelligible."¹³

The catechist's role of guardian of tradition, retriever of ancient wisdom and sustainer of religious sensibilities is of critical educational importance to people's lives today. "It seems to me," writes Henry C. Simmons, "that in the normal course of events we all, at least as young children, need that kind of religious education. We need to learn to live with the language, symbols, and culture of a community which is safe, which is secure, and which presents itself as the only possible way of conceptualizing the world."¹⁴ Catechesis, then, shows a deep devotion to cumulative tradition, ritual, and the sacramental, contemplation, life-long development, and the particularity of one's people. These can be vital resources in education today. They can help transform the meaning of education, resist its rationalistic bias and its exclusive housing in schools.

At its best, catechesis affirms rootedness in one's own religious tradition, fosters denominational identity and nurtures religious development. It holds the possibility of being an enriching category¹⁵ and *one* genuine manifestation of religious education.

Limits. Paradoxically, some of the strengths of catechesis are also its weakness. The strength of particularity can become enclosed in the parochial. Its language reveals and represents an inner world of Roman Catholicism. This semantic world tends to conceal awareness of a larger world of religious diversity and lack a public character to build bridges of communication with it. It is an intimate, self-isolating language that fosters conventional religious identity,¹⁶ and its stress on institutional self-iden-

¹² Padraic O'Hare, "Ministry and Education: An Interim Impression of U.S. Catholic Patterns," *PACE* 13 (April 1983), 5. See also Mary Charles Bryce, "Sharing the Light of Faith: Catechetical Threshold for the U.S. Church," *Lumen Vitae*, 34, 4 (1979), 393-407.

¹³ Eva Braun, *Paradoxes of Education in a Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979), 88.

¹⁴ Henry C. Simmons.

¹⁵ See Michael Warren, "Catechesis as an Enriching Category for Religious Education," *Religious Education* 76, 2 (1981), 115-127.

¹⁶ On the distinction between conventional and post-conventional religious identity, see Charles Davis, "Our New Religious Identity," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 9, 1 (1980), 25-39.

tity may not be sufficient to sustain Roman Catholics in the world in which we now live.

There also remains a lingering suspicion with regard to the principles, process and purposes of catechesis. Do they honor and are they compatible with openness, inquiry, freedom and the critical spirit? In other words, can catechesis confront modernity? Or is it an example of the way new rhetoric can camouflage old attitudes? Kenneth Barker writes, "Catechesis can become simply the preservation of a taken-for-granted culture. It can degenerate into a delivery system which channels established beliefs and values without stimulating critical thinking with regard to their validity. It can lull the members of the community into a sense of false security, assuring them of safety and not challenging them to change. It can hand on a received heritage without questioning its authority."¹⁷

There can be a provincialism, then, in the catechetical tradition. It can nurture a hothouse flower of a culture, existing in its own hermetically sealed environment. This setting can foster an unreflective attitude toward church form, an undialectical hermeneutic of one's tradition, a naivete with regard to its enculturation and a blindness to the larger public context of the tradition. It can turn the mind of a denomination upon itself as a standard for itself.

Finally, this ecclesial enculturation tradition ignores the educational connection. It has deliberately severed itself from an educational framework and influence. Education, however, could be an invaluable asset to catechesis/Christian nurture/religious socialization. It could offer it a context in which to (1) examine itself — with a hermeneutic of suspicion, and (2) a framework to see itself as only *one* possible tradition of religious education.

The Revisionist Tradition

In the revisionist tradition, I identify religious educators engaged in the work of critical hermeneutics, traditioning and transformation, and educational emancipation. This tradition tends to gather under the cumbersome term "Christian religious education" and represents a deeper (and distancing) stage in religious education development. The term indicates the search for a new model — beyond ecclesial enculturation. Current representative examples include Thomas Groome and Mary C. Boys (on the Catholic side) and Mary Elizabeth Moore and Jack L. Seymour

¹⁷ Barker, p. 227.

(on the Protestant side). I recognize that there are some significant differences within this group. Yet I believe they share the same "family resemblance."¹⁸

I name this tradition revisionist because of its conceptual framework, process and purpose. It is a Dialectical Border Model in terms of its internal critical inquiry of tradition(s) and its external reflectiveness on the public world.

Conceptual Framework. Christian religious education takes as its frame of reference the intersection of religious tradition and contemporary human experience. It is an interdisciplinary venture foundationally informed by both theology and educational theory. Its proponents claim theology and education enter a reciprocal relationship — both informing and transforming each other. This claim, however, may not stand up as Christian religious education becomes, in effect, a practical theology.

In the revisionist tradition, Christian religious educators navigate within and between the broader contexts of the Christian community and the current social environment. Conceptually, a critically correlational method structures the framework for this tradition and sets forth the outlines for its educational process.¹⁹

Christian religious education is the work of the church, i.e., educational ministry. However, it flies in the face of a purely confessional mentality. Its starting point is "right in the middle, at the intersection"²⁰ of church and culture. So, while the enterprise functions at the center of the ecclesial community, it does so with a hermeneutic of suspicion.

Process. Christian religious educators dare to be Christian and

¹⁸ Representative literature in this revisionist tradition include Thomas Groome, "Shared Christian Praxis: A Possible Theory/Method of Religious Education," *Lumen Vitae* 31, 2 (1976), 186-208; "The Critical Principle in Christian Education and the Task of Prophecy," *Religious Education* 72, 3 (1977), 262-272; "Christian Education: A Task of Present Dialectical Hermeneutics," *The Living Light* 14 (Fall 1977), 408-423; *Christian Religious Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); Mary C. Boys, "Religious Education: Access to Traditions and Transformation," in *Tradition and Transformation* (Birmingham: R.E.P., 1979), ed. Padraic O'Hare, pp. 9-34; "The Standpoint of Religious Education," *Religious Education* 76, 2 (1981), 128-141; Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Education for Continuity and Change: A New Model for Christian Religious Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982); Jack L. Seymour and Carol A. Wehrheim, "Faith Seeking Understanding: Interpretation as a Task of Christian Education," in Seymour and Miller, pp. 123-143; Malcolm Warford, *The Necessary Illusion: Church Culture and Educational Change* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1976); Gloria Durka, "Christian Nurture and Critical Openness," *Lumen Vitae* 36, 3 (1981), 263-286; "Toward a Critical Theory of Teaching," *Religious Education* 74, 1 (1979), 39-48; and Berard Marthaler, "Towards a Revisionist Model of Catechetics (Reflections on David Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order*)," *Living Light* 13 (Fall 1976), 458, 468-469.

¹⁹ This is particularly true of the educational methodologies employed by Thomas Groome and Mary Elizabeth Moore.

²⁰ Moore, *Education for Continuity and Change*, p. 110.

modern. They believe in the life of the mind in connection with the life of the spirit. The educational process involves the application of modern critical reason to the beliefs, symbols, values, texts and lived-life of the Christian tradition. In effect, Christian religious education is the Christian tradition become self-conscious.

Religious educators in the revisionist tradition view their work with a double emphasis. They attempt to hold on to two educational poles: conservation and liberation,²¹ continuity and change,²² tradition and transformation,²³ devotion and inquiry.²⁴ They refuse to settle fully on an enculturation model, but rather promote a critical, dialectical and intentional response to the historical and conditioning forces in the church community and its cultural environment. As Mary Elizabeth Moore notes, "Education functions in the community to transmit tradition . . . to enable people to interpret the meaning of their experience and to open the possibility of transforming the individual, the faith community and the world. The functions, then, are both to conserve and to transform."²⁵

This dialectical method embodied in the revisionist tradition engages persons in dialogue with the Christian tradition (past, present and future).²⁶ This, in turn, opens possibilities both for the recreation of the tradition and the persons within the tradition. The Christian heritage is enlarged and the lived-life of the community reconstructed. What is significant here is: the reconstruction of the heritage takes place in and through an *educational process*.

Purpose. Christian religious education seeks to lead people out to personally, critically and freely appropriate their heritage by unmasking its assumptions and historical condition. It aims to engage persons in intelligent participation in the living Christian community and "to make accessible tradition and transformation."²⁷ Among its primary goals are: (1) reflective knowledge and understanding of the tradition; (2) the recreation of personal

²¹ Groome, *Christian Religious Education*.

²² Moore, *Education for Continuity and Change*.

²³ Boys, "Religious Education: Access to Tradition and Transformation."

²⁴ Padraic O'Hare, "Education for Devotion and Inquiry: Reflections on a Questionable Assumption," *Religious Education* 75, 5 (1981).

²⁵ Moore, *Education for Continuity and Change*, p. 134.

²⁶ Thomas Groome names this method "shared praxis" and Mary Elizabeth Moore "traditioning."

²⁷ The terms are Mary C. Boys'.

beliefs, values and actions; and (3) the transformation of our social and public world. Its constitutive interests, therefore, are emancipatory.²⁸

Gifts. There is a fundamental truth in the Christian religious education form of religious education. It functions as a vital reminder that there is a place for the best of critical reason in religious education in the Christian tradition. Religious traditions need critique to stay in grace. This Protestant principle saves us from dogmatism, fanaticism, traditionalism and idolatry. George Albert Coe wrote, "Nothing, in fact, could be more religious than finding and putting into operation a method for the continuous self-criticism (which means self-testing and judging) of religion and of religious institutions."²⁹

Christian religious educators hold in tension conservation (of tradition) and liberation (of the world). This work is of critical educational importance to our lives. It creates an opening for the reinterpretation and reappropriation of the Christian story and symbols. The tradition itself is enriched; and its guiding metaphors direct it toward the work of freedom.

At its best, then, Christian religious education weds tradition and modernity, continuity and change, community and critique. It re-roots us in the Christian tradition — but with a critical distance.

Limits. The revisionist tradition ushers in a new posture toward religious affiliation — critical affirmation. This new stance, however, does not shift the conceptual framework or content. Substantially, the ecclesial enculturation paradigm remains, but in a *revised* form.

Is Christian religious education not a (critical) educational *method* designed to pass on a (critical) theology? Is it not simply an experiential educational strategy to transmit contemporary theologies? While this approach deepens the reflective process, religious education is confined to being a delivery system for the prevailing theology. Theology holds a place of primacy over curriculum content, criteria and concepts. In effect, Christian religious education becomes a form of practical theology or theological praxis, and education becomes a critical tool or

²⁸ See, for example, Thomas Groome, "Christian Education for Freedom: A 'Shared Praxis' Approach," in *Foundations of Religious Education*, ed. Padraic O'Hare (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), pp. 8-39, and Allen J. Moore, "Liberation and the Future of Christian Education," in *Contemporary Approaches to Christian Education*, ed. Jack L. Seymour and Donald E. Miller (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), pp. 103-122.

²⁹ George Albert Coe, *What Is Christian Education?* (New York: Scribner's, 1929), 241.

method to make its content accessible to the ecclesial community.³⁰

I hasten to stress that Christians do need the solid substance and best of contemporary theology to acquire a perspective on the length, breadth, and depth of their religious tradition. They need teaching and study in their own tradition that is intellectually stimulating and critically reconstructive. Theology is a rich source and offers access to the wealth of the Christian heritage. It ought, therefore, to be a vital *part of* the content of our religious education curriculum.

If religious education, however, is to emerge as an academically respectable field and profession *in its own right*, it needs to be more than a subdivision of theology or confined to its framework or content. Two reasons could be offered: (1) a vast treasure of religious material and experience lies beyond the realm of theology. This content could be of inestimable value to the development of our religious lives. In other words, there ought to be room for *more* religious content (beyond the specifically theological) in our educational curriculum; (2) In the contemporary religious context, the theological enterprise itself needs a broad ecumenical, educational and developmental framework. This would allow Christian religious educators to explore their own tradition, challenge its claims vis-a-vis other traditions and, thereby, evoke a free response. Christian religious educators cannot assume that religious questions and commitments are already resolved in the lives of their people. They need an open and pluralistic context to explore with tolerance the vital religious issues confronting them in the modern world.

Finally, Christian religious education fails to push the critical process to some of its logical conclusions. The critique loses much of its bite as fundamental Christian assumptions on revelation are not put at risk, current ecclesial patterns of power go unchallenged and many of its sacred images have lost their power to shape the imagination of contemporary Christians. In a word, tension, if not conflict, seems to exist between the purpose, process and pattern of the enterprise.

³⁰ On the relationship of theology to religious education, see John Gilbert, "Theological Pluralism and Religious Education," *Religious Education*, 6 (1975); Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education*, pp. 227-230; Ian Knox, *Above or Within? The Supernatural in Religious Education* (Birmingham, R.E.P., 1975): 245-257; James Michael Lee, *The Shape of Religious Instruction* (Birmingham, R.E.P., 1971), 245-257; Gabriel Moran, "From Obstacle to Modest Contributor: Theology in Religious Education," in *Religious Education and Theology*, ed. Norma Thompson (Birmingham: R.E.P., 1982), pp. 42-70. Norma Thompson, "Current Issues in Religious Education," *Religious Education* 73, 6 (1978): 611-626.

Christian religious education, then, needs an educational *framework* to be true to itself and its emancipatory interests. This would allow it to discover itself as *one* genuine expression of religious education within a rich and complex field.

The Reconceptualist Tradition

The reconceptualist tradition represents an attempt to retrieve and reconstruct the richest meaning of the term religious education. This emerging tradition is a paradigmatic shift, a conceptual reordering that integrates the religious and educational in life. The task here is to get back to the true and surplus meaning of the words, and to name and recognize the multiple forms of religious education in our midst.

The reconceptualist traditions is a Border Crossing Model. Its vision transcends the local ecclesial community — without negating it. It opens up or crosses over into a large public context with new content and a redesigned curriculum. Gabriel Moran and Maria Harris are among its leading proponents today.³¹

Conceptual Framework. A reconceptualized religious education takes *education* as its overarching frame of reference. It self-consciously works out of an educational rather than ministerial framework. Imaginally, there is "a passing over"³² beyond the parish and the parochial into the larger social and public context of education. Education becomes the arena for dealing with the critical religious issues and concerns of life. It is the setting in which diverse religious traditions (Catholic, Protestant, Jew, etc.) can converse on educational matters. Religion and education intersect in this interactive framework of critical and appreciative intelligence.

Conceptually, this field of religious education houses the many forms of religion as they interplay (or intersect) with the various forms of education in multiple settings. We can hardly yet imagine the richness and complexity of this emerging paradigm. Education provides a clearing or a point at which to begin conversation across all religious lines — between individuals and in-

³¹ See Maria Harris, "Education: The Overall Framework," *The D.R.E. Book* (New York: Paulist Press, 1976), 114-134; Gabriel Moran, "The Intersection of Religion and Education," *Religious Education* 69, 5 (1974), 531-541; "Two Languages of Religious Education," *The Living Light* 14 (Spring 1977), 7-15; "Where Now, What Next," in *Foundations of Religious Education*, ed. Padraic O'Hare (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 93-110 and *Interplay: A Theology of Religion and Education* (Winona: St. Mary's Press, 1981), "A Theory of Religious Education Development," *Religious Education Development*, pp. 183-207.

³² The phraseology is John Dunne's. See *A Search for God in Time and Memory* (New York: Macmillan, 1967) and *The Way of All the Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

stitutions, different religious traditions and the religious and nonreligious in life. Education also supplies the metaphors and models of action for the enterprise. If this reconceptualist tradition is to come of age, a sense of *history* and a sense of *imagination* will be required to do justice to this merger of the religious and educational in the contemporary world.

Process. A reconceptualized religious education is a way of being religious in "a new key," i.e., in a context of education. We are challenged to face up to religious issues in an educationally appropriate way. This entails exploring "the meaning of one's own religious life in relation to both those who share that life and those who do not."³³ The process is not a cold exercise in comparative religions stressing objectivity, hard facts, further knowledge or interesting comparisons. Neither is it merely a phenomenology or a philosophy of religion. Genuine *intra-* and *inter-*religious dialogue is sought through a process of self-reflection, sympathetic understanding, open encounter and mutual exchange.³⁴ An analogical³⁵ and educational imagination³⁶ plays a central role in a re-claiming and transcending of one's own religious standpoint.³⁷ The process is one of "disciplined intersubjectivity."³⁸ It does not start with prior confessional assumptions nor is it tied to denominational self-interests. Proselytizing, evangelizing and dogmatizing are contrary to its spirit and purpose. Rather, the commitment is to uninhibited interaction and inquiry in which understanding is sought.

Religious education in a reconceptualized mode is the way we go about understanding our own religious tradition, convictions and our God over against the religious identity of "the other," the stranger.³⁹ John Dunne's method of "passing over" to other persons, cultures and religions and "coming back" is an invaluable

³³ Moran, "From Obstacle to Modest Contributor: Theology in Religious Education," pp. 51-52.

³⁴ See Raimundo Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) and "Toward an Ecumenical Ecumenism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19, 4 (Fall 1982), 781-786.

³⁵ See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). Tracy's methodology for conversing with a person or classic is a striking example of what is needed here.

³⁶ See Elliott Eisner, *The Educational Imagination* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

³⁷ On the technique for interreligious dialogue and the role of the religious imagination in the process see Paul Knitter, "Religious Imagination and Interreligious Dialogue," in *The Pedagogy of God's Image: Essays on Symbol and the Religious Imagination*, ed. Robert Masson (Chico, CA.: Scholars Press, 1982), pp. 97-112.

³⁸ Philip Phenix, "Religion in Public Education: Principles and Issues," in *Religion in Public Education*, ed. David E. Engel (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), pp. 57-74.

³⁹ Knitter, "Religious Imagination and Interreligious Dialogue."

educational technique at our service here. "What one does in passing over," claims Dunne, "is try to enter sympathetically into the feelings of another person, become receptive to the images which give expression to his feelings, attain insight into those images, and then come back enriched by this insight to an understanding of one's own life which can guide one into the future."⁴⁰ This educational process allows: (1) aspects of our own standpoint and story to surface; (2) is the means by which we gain access to a universal religious experience and the different worlds of other religions; (3) makes available space for authentic dialogue with them; and (4) leads to the shifting and enrichment of our own standpoint and story. The educational stance, then, is one of rootedness and openness, i.e., critical appreciation of one's own tradition and empathetic understanding of the religious ways of others.

As we set out on this educational adventure, we need a vehicle or a way of speaking that allows for *public* conversation and convergence. A reconceptualized religious education advocates a mediating educational language.⁴¹ It seeks to create categories that will allow for beginning conversation across barriers. This public discourse attempts to be precise and comprehensive and works toward reducing intolerance in our own speech patterns. In other words, it offers the possibility for communicative competence on religious and educational matters.⁴²

Purpose. Religious education wants to make us at home in this world but discontent with its limits. It is a way of learning to live intelligently and religiously in the modern world. This world of religious diversity is an intellectual and spiritual fact for contemporary life.⁴³ The aim of religious education is to allow a tradition to become *self-conscious* and *cosmopolitan*. It seeks to foster greater appreciation of one's own religious life and less misunderstanding of other people's. Gabriel Moran states it succinctly and perceptively: "Religious education has, or ought to have, a two-fold goal: (1) understanding one's own religious tradition, so that one can live by the richest resources of that tradition; and (2) understanding to whatever degree possible the religious life of other people."⁴⁴ Its purpose, then, is to explore religious

⁴⁰ Dunne, *The Way of All the Earth*, p. 53.

⁴¹ Moran, "Two Languages of Religious Education."

⁴² Scott, "Communicative Competence and Religious Education."

⁴³ See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Religious Diversity*, ed. Willard G. Oxtoby (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

⁴⁴ Moran, *Interplay*, p. 37.

expressions, religious structures and traditions so that we might understand ourselves and others. This posture may put our own standpoint at risk. It offers, however, the possibility of reconstructing our heritage and contributing to its development.

In the final analysis, a reconceptualized religious education seeks educational space where public dialogue can ensue between religious traditions and between the religious and non-religious on the pressing religious questions of our time. Its ultimate goal is to assist people to think, feel, imagine, act and grow religiously in an intelligent manner.

Gifts. A reconceptualized religious education refuses to allow religious education to be reduced to church matters and maintenance. It represents a fundamental conceptual break with current educational trends and traditions in the Christian church. It seeks to retrieve two of the key words in human speech, and disclose their pervasive implications for our lives. Developmentally, we can consider it the most mature form of religious education.

There is a fundamental truth in the reconceptualized form of religious education. It functions as a vital reminder that "there is no way to know who we are except in some kind of contrast with things we are not."⁴⁵ We need others — persons, cultures, religions — to aid us to know and be ourselves. This educational process enables us to step out of our own parochial mindset, ideology and identity and pass over to other standpoints, values and truths. This journey sets us on a corporate search for truth, value and identity.⁴⁶ It will lead to the reconstruction of our religious imagination⁴⁷ and the expansion of the horizon of our tradition.⁴⁸

Education provides the context for this crossfertilization. It offers a starting point to begin conversation across religious and non-religious lines and a foundation for authentic dialogue. It demonstrates: (1) the *need* for a disciplined study and understanding of one's own tradition; and (2) the *necessity* for inter-religious dialogue with other religious groups. This form of religious education can transform religious traditions, increase tolerance and nurture mutual understanding. This makes it of inestimable value in a world of religious conflicts and global strife.

⁴⁵ Robert Bellah, "Commentary and Proposed Agenda: The Normative Framework for Pluralism in America," *Soundings* 61 (Fall 1978), 362.

⁴⁶ Davis, "Our New Religious Identity."

⁴⁷ Knitter, "Religious Imagination and Interreligious Dialogues."

⁴⁸ Dunn, *The Way of All the Earth*.

At its best, then, a reconceptualized religious education provides a meaning of religious education in which the Christian church and other religious bodies can participate. It resists the domestication of the religious to church-talk or the educational to school-talk. From the side of education, it challenges the reduction and rationalization of education in schooling. From the side of the religious, it challenges religious traditions with the power of educational critique. Its creative contribution, therefore, is to offer a context that opens public discourse on religious questions and makes accessible religious encounter.

Limits. Critics of the reconceptualistic tradition raise questions and pose as problematic the following elements in its position: First, the reconceptualist tradition, for the most part, remains on the drawing board. It is largely undeveloped in practice and no consensus has yet emerged for it to acquire the allegiance of professional religious educators. Second, the reconceptualist position is in danger of remaining ideational and lacking historical grounding. It has yet to be embodied in a fully developed curriculum or programmatic form. Questions remain as to the structure and nature of an accredited degree in religious education in light of its new scope, form and purpose. And third, catechists and Christian religious educators find it difficult to identify with the reconceptualist tradition. Their convictional knowing and commitments foster loyalty to the particularity of their own traditions. The paradigmatic shift required seems unnecessary or, at least, to risk too much. It could lead to the deconstruction of firmly held tenets in their religious traditions.

The reconceptualist tradition, however, is in its infancy stage. Its advent has signaled the dawning of a new stage in religious education development. It is a tradition born out of the roots of our historical past and emerging out of fresh images for a future. The current deficiencies in educational theory and our narrow concept of the religious, however, are obstacles to the emergence and maturation of this tradition. Only a return to the sources will overcome these obstacles. The task, in fact, is twofold: (1) to retrieve the root meaning of the religious and education in life, and (2) rediscover their multiple forms in our midst.

Implications for Church Religious Education

Randolph Crump Miller writes, "No church ever teaches in a completely open-minded manner, and its educational theory has been mixed with indoctrination so that the desired result is pre-

determined."⁴⁹ Miller's observations are accurate of the past and much of the present. However, a reconstructed religious education calls for a reversal of this form of church education in every respect.

In light of the foregoing discussions, then, I will briefly conclude with some implications of a reconceptualist religious education for education in church:

1. A reconceptualized religious education offers the church an educational context to examine its life and its work. Its role is to bring educational critique to the existing church — its programs, pattern of power, linguistic forms and operating assumptions. A reformational process ensues.

2. A reconceptualized religious education prevents closure in the life of the church. Its process provokes thinking, examines forms and challenges all claims to finality. This may result in a methodological reversal in the manner of transmission of the Christian tradition.

3. A reconceptualized religious education sets the church and its educational work in the context of encounter with diverse religious and non-religious worlds. Wilfred Cantwell Smith argues that the cognitive claims of the Christian tradition must also be true for those of other religions if they are genuinely to be true for Christians. "No statement about Christian faith," he claims, "is valid to which in principle a non-Christian could not agree."⁵⁰ This epistemological principle challenges the churches to structure their educational work on more universal foundations and to legitimate their claims vis-a-vis other religious groups. This process of education may result in taming some of our cherished claims and abandoning others. It could lead to a reconstruction of our religious identity and a re-creation of our religious imagination.

4. In a reconceptualist form of religious education, old issues take on new life in an ecumenical context. Religious groups are directed to *explore*, *challenge*, and *develop* their belief and doctrines. The educational posture calls for critical appreciation, i.e., the affirmation, reconstruction and transcending of the Christian tradition. This educational process increases tolerance, lessens arrogance and fosters mutual understanding. It also provides a set-

⁴⁹ Randolph Crump Miller, *The Theory of Christian Education Practice* (Birmingham: R.E.P., 1980), p. 279.

⁵⁰ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Toward a World Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), p. 126.

ting where doctrinal conflicts can be transformed into creative tensions.

5. A reconceptualized religious education builds a suspension bridge between the work of the church and the great public issues of our day. Questions of justice and peace, equality and ecology, public policy and interpersonal relations are critical issues for both church and society. Nothing from ordinary experience, then, is beyond consideration in its curriculum. It offers a mediating language to link the rich wisdom and prophetic vision of the church to these pressing social and public concerns in the modern world.

6. Finally, a reconceptualized religious education sees the total life of the church community as the only adequate educator. Each parish not only has an educational program but *ought to be* an educational program. That is, it ought to develop the reflective consciousness of the total community, be an environment for life-long growth in learning and keep open the search for truth within a critical and pluralistic milieu.

In the short run, this form of religious education may be a threat to the church. In the long run, however, it will give the church credibility and legitimacy before the public world.

Kieran Scott is Associate Professor and Chair of the Theology Department at St. Bonaventure University. This article was accepted for publication on the basis of blind peer review.

BRIEFLY NOTED

UP FROM APATHY. By Richard A. Hoehn. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983, 176 pages. \$9.95. To overcome apathy takes an experience akin to conversion, gradual or sudden. This book is about moments of transformation, about new insights into the social or political situation, about taking steps to turn the world (small or large) in new directions. It is a book recounting many personal experiences, brief excerpts from case studies, human encounters full of meaning that may be an inspiration to the reader. Read it — and change. — R.C.M.

INSIGHT-IMAGINATION: The Emancipation of Thought and the Modern World. By Douglas Sloan. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983, 272 pages. N.P. This careful study of modern science, with the danger that it can be reduced to scientism, to a quantitative measurement of reality, leads the author to look carefully at the use of will, emotion, insight, and imagination as tools for seeking meaning in the world. Making use of Owen Barfield, David Bohm, Charles Birch, Jean Piaget, and others, Sloan leads the reader to consider the riches of insight and imagination for a wholeness view of the world. — R.C.M.