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# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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For those working with youth within various agencies in our society, the matters proposed here as part of a new agenda will demand close attention in the form of further reflection, study, and reformulation. Above all, they call for re-directing our efforts with youth toward freedom. For too long adults working with youth have had the tendency "to view the nature of adolescence as endogenously programmed and the typical behavior of individual adolescents as determined by intrapsychic forces."<sup>51</sup> Refocused attention toward the social forces affecting young people, including a focusing of the attention of young people themselves on the way these forces work, will be a major step toward allowing youth opportunities for significant action toward emancipation, which might, one could hope, become a lifelong commitment to freedom.

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<sup>51</sup> John P. Hill, cited in Lipsitz, p. 7.



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**YOUTH EDUCATION AS PROBLEMATIZING  
POLITICAL FORMS**

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"To be young means to be all  
on edge,  
To be held waiting in a packed lounge  
for a personal call  
from long distance,  
For the low voice that defines  
one's future.  
The fears we know are not knowing . . . .  
It's getting late. Shall we ever  
be asked or are we simply  
not wanted at all?"

— W. H. Auden

A large proportion of youth education today derives its programmatic impetus from the various behavioral and social psychologies now available. The assumption is made that the more we get inside the young person's head, understand the genesis and journey of his/her thinking, the more effective will be our curriculum design and teaching techniques. This approach, however, is the source of false optimism, tends to be apolitical and ahistorical, and hides the complexity of the educational environment.

Religious education, in recent decades, has uncritically taken this turn to psychology in search of a panacea. The language and psychology of learning dictates the conceptual lens through which we view our work. This angle of vision is exceedingly narrow and inhibits fundamental rethinking of the educational task. The power and resources that lie behind curriculum organization and selection are disguised. The ideological roots of knowledge remain submerged, and our social forms unquestioned. Educa-

tional goals and objectives direct the young toward the image and norms of the adult world. The established is taken as real. A religious education, wed to these assumptions, is an exercise in social control and perpetuates the prejudice that the neophyte is the problem.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this essay is to (*re*)situate the religious education of youth back in the context(s) in which they reside. Any serious appraisal of youth education today must have as a major part of its program an uncovering of the social conditions and political forms that impact their lives. Education relates specifically to the relationships that pattern social life.<sup>2</sup> Its hallmark is the fostering of mutuality. However, many of our current educational patterns undercut their own educative goals. Their operational assumptions accept the present political forms as educationally suitable and irrevocably settled. Education, consequently, becomes a process of social adjustment and uncritical assimilation.

This essay attempts to conceptualize the appropriate ecological balance between youth and their environments that will allow maximum growth to occur. Youth need model (educative) communities to work on issues and developmental life tasks.<sup>3</sup> The question I wish to raise here is: Are the patterns of life we make accessible to the young tapping their innate ideals and structurally facilitating their emerging selves? This paper postulates that youth education is handicapped by current political forms and our inherited educational patterns.<sup>4</sup> The most severe curricular problems facing religious educators today are problems of total environment.<sup>5</sup> To do more of the same, therefore, with new slogans and greater intensity will not lead to a structural re-examination or re-imagining of our work.

This paper calls attention to the political and ideological nature of education. It is sympathetic to the philosophical pedagogy

of Paulo Freire<sup>6</sup> by bringing under suspicion the established structures of our life-world. It examines the assumptions, perspectives and use of power operative in educative environments charged with youth development. Three pivotal and privileged educative settings (family, church and school) are problematized as engaging in the reproduction of social control: stereotypic sex roles and personality patterns, ecclesial orthodoxy and selective ideological hegemony, respectively. This form and process of reproduction maintains the established, dulls the critical and restricts development of youth. The task here is to bring a hermeneutic of suspicion to unpack these social contexts and release critical consciousness. At the same time, my interest is to retrieve and propose emancipatory resources so as to shift current educational patterns and programs toward the empowerment of youth.

Family, church and school are not the only social forces impacting the lives of young people.<sup>7</sup> They are, however, closely inter-related — personally, pedagogically and politically.<sup>8</sup> Their influence is primordial and pervasive. I will focus on each in turn and probe the direction of its influence. William B. Kennedy writes:

Education for critical consciousness calls for development of educational configurations and processes by which people can break through the inertial power of socialization, take advantage of the free space provided by the turmoil, and mobilize their efforts toward more radical change of inadequate and oppressive systems.<sup>9</sup>

This essay is a response to the above call with reference to youth education.

### *The Family and Youth Formation*

The family today has become a buzzword and a rallying point for reactionaries. On the other hand, it is perceived as a barrier and in a state of narcissistic retreat by left-wing radicals. The former idealizes the family. The latter rejects it. Neither see its possibili-

<sup>1</sup> See Dwayne Huebner, "Education in the Church," *Andover Newton Quarterly*, 12 (January 1972): 122-129.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1916).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Poerschke, "Adolescents in the Family and Subculture," in *Knowing and Helping Youth* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1977): 31-42, ed. G. Temp Sparkman.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to William B. Kennedy for the phrase "inherited educational patterns." See "Learning In With, and For the Church: The Theological Education of the People of God," *USQR*, vol. xxxvi, Supplementary Issue, 1981: 27-38, and "A Radical Challenge to Inherited Educational Patterns," *Religious Education* 5 (1979): 491-495.

<sup>5</sup> Gloria Durka, "Research Reflections and Recommendations," in *Catechesis: Realities and Visions* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1977), eds. Berard Marthaler and Marianne Sawicki, p. 173.

<sup>6</sup> See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1970); *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury, 1973); *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge, Mass.: *Harvard Educational Review*, 1970); *Pedagogy in Process* (New York: Seabury, 1978) and "The People Speak Their Word: Learning to Read and Write in Sao Tome and Principe," in *Harvard Educational Review*, 51, 1, February, 1981: 27-30.

<sup>7</sup> Maria Harris, "Young People in U.S. Culture," in *Portrait of Youth Ministry* (Ramsey, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1981): 32-51.

<sup>8</sup> See Lawrence Cremin, *Public Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1976): 27-53.

<sup>9</sup> William B. Kennedy, "Learning In, With and For the Church," p. 27.

ties and limitations in focus.<sup>10</sup> Two things, however, remain clear in the current confused debate on family matters. First, the family continues to be the paramount institution for care, nurture and education of the young. Second, there is a crucial need to shift traditional family structures if efforts to expand possibilities for the young are to succeed.

Religious education lives and moves in the tension between affirmation and negation. It calls attention to the goodness and importance of things even as it fights and resists their specific limits. This is our task here as we examine the family and its role in youth development.

The principle project of youth is to grow up gracefully, project their own identity and creatively proceed on their developmental passage toward adulthood. For that, they must have a consistent family context that presents competent models of human maturity. The parental task is to direct the neophyte to those (living) paradigms which provide the most compelling sense of what we can and should be. The question is: What paradigms are available? What direction do the models point? What form do they take?

There are no models in mythology or modernity to adequately conceptualize our inter-personal, inter-sexual and inter-generational concerns today. There are few models for *anything* that is going on in our culture. We are in a period of free fall into the future and groping to make our own way. Intuitively, we sense the old models are not working, and the new have not yet appeared. This is the story of the contemporary family. The issue is not whether it will continue to exist, but what kind of family should exist and what kind of influence should it exert. What presuppositions should undergird it? What forms should sustain its life? These questions are educational, religious and political. They converge in the context of family life and play a central role in the formation of those who share its bonds.

Few, if any of us, would get through the first years of life without the security of familial care. As we wrestle with successive developmental tasks, the family becomes the testing ground to check and balance our experiment with truth. However, it is becoming increasingly self-evident that the traditional familial form is structurally sterile and politically problematic. A growing body

<sup>10</sup> On the possibility and limits of moral development in the family see John Elias, "The Christian Family as Moral Educator: Possibilities and Limitations," in *Family Ministry* (Chicago: DePaul University, 1988), pp. 1-10. See also Jeanne Marie Smith

of literature, from diverse disciplines, is pulling back the veil on family life and revealing the impact of its pattern and parenting on the personality of the young. Writings in critical theory and feminist psychoanalytic theory emphasize the way our inherited familial patterns shape personality along gender lines and perpetuate hierarchical gender relations.<sup>11</sup> The typical patriarchal family is seen as reproducing social control in the form of stereotypic sexroles and gender-divided personality structures. The effect on the young is a restrictive identity and closure to personal and public possibilities of engagement. The work of Nancy Chodorow is particularly seminal here and warrants closer inspection.

Chodorow explains, from a psychoanalytic and feminist perspective, how gender differences and the experience of personality difference, are socially and psychologically created.<sup>12</sup> Gender differences do not exist as things in themselves, i.e. biological givens: they are created relationally and cannot be understood apart from their relational construction. At the core of the problem, argues Chodorow, is the reproduction of mothering, i.e. the fact that women, not men, do primary parenting. The current politics of domestic arrangements and the sexual division of labor in the home creates an ideological structure of (different) expectations in women and men concerning responsibilities and capacities. A cycle is set in motion that perpetuates the replication in each generation of the *motive* to mother in women and the relative lack of this motive in men. Daughters grow up identifying with mothers and internalize similar expectations, capacities and desires. By contrast, sons are socialized away from nurturant sensibilities and their parenting interests are systematically curtailed and repressed. The result is a continued reconstitution of the current family pattern: sexual inequality, hierarchical power, rigid differentiated roles and limited sources of identity.<sup>13</sup>

Chodorow's work is deep in its implications. She is concerned,

<sup>11</sup> Representative examples include Mark Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family* (New York: Seabury, 1978); Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1978) and Eli Zaretsky, *Capitalism, the Family and Personal Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* and "Feminism and Difference: Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective," in *Socialist Review* 46 (vol. 9, No. 4) July-August, 1979: 51-69. A similar case is made by Dorothy Dinnerstein in *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, See also Miriam Johnson, "Fathers, Mothers, and Sex-Typing," *Sociological Inquiry*, 45, 1, (1975): 15-26 and Heidi I. Hartmann, "The Family as the Locus of Gender, Class, and Political Struggle: The Example of Housework," *Signs*, 6, 3, (Spring 1981): 366-394.

in fact, with the social reproduction of "masculinity" and "femininity." She turns Freud on his head: it is men who lack. Girls, she says, grow up with a sense of continuity and a relational connection to the world.<sup>14</sup> Their personalities are more permeable and less individuated than men. The male's sense of self, on the other hand, is defined in terms of the denial of relationship. It is based on distinction, separation and difference — on *not* being feminine. This causes conflictual tendencies in boys and men as they deny the feminine identification within themselves. This becomes problematic in their search for identity, their quest for intimacy and their management of life's crises. Chodorow traces the roots of the problem to the reproduction of mothering set in female-dominated parenting. There, she claims, lies the origin of the contradictions in the *structure* of the contemporary family.

Chodorow's argument leads her to suggest shared parenting as a way of undoing patriarchal patterns.<sup>15</sup> Shared parenting sets the stage for a new generation of men and women and challenges a universal structure in the organization of gender. She writes,

Any strategy for change, whose goal includes liberation from the constraints of an unequal social organization of gender must take account of the need for a fundamental reorganization of parenting, so that primary parenting is shared between men and women.<sup>16</sup>

This opens the possibility for the redesigning of familial environments, the reconstitution of more equal relationships, the initiation of new socialization experiences and the breakdown in gender-differentiated character structures in children.

The implications for youth education in the family are fundamental. By sharing parenting, we are experimenting with the growth and development of the young. The domestic economy is recreated and collaborative models of male-female relations are imaged. The neophyte benefits from access to a richer, more complex, flexible and diverse inter-personal setting. Diane Ehrensaft suggests that they grow up with a greater sense of trust in the world, an expanded notion of sexuality, a new model of mutuality and consensus (rather than directives and compliance), and new understandings of sexual patterns between the sexes.<sup>17</sup> This

<sup>14</sup> Nancy Chodorow, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 211-219.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>17</sup> Diane Ehrensaft, "When Women and Men Mother," *Socialist Review*, 49, (Vol. 10, No. 1) January-February 1980): 37-73.

shift in traditional family structures offers a mature and imaginative way of reordering our lives and signals a major attitudinal change with educational and religious dimensions.

Religious education has always recognized the central role of the family in religious nurture.<sup>18</sup> There has been traditionally, however, a "naive consciousness" toward the family setting. It has been an unexamined context with uncritical socialization. Religious educators today have two major tasks to perform for young people: First, *to problematize* the current family form — to assist them to understand it rather than to immediately accept, to seek alternatives rather than to adjust, to remove the barriers rather than perceive them as destiny; Second, *to propose* forms so as to enable them to better live their lives — to re-think, re-arrange and reshape their human relations after a more competent model of adulthood.<sup>19</sup>

Feminism is a rich resource to assist religious educators in this two-prong project.<sup>20</sup> Its critical side helps to surface the problem, while its creative opens emancipatory possibilities for new ways of being in world. The personal is political. And, the inter-personal is closely interlocked with the religious and educational. It is ancient teaching that the bonds of the family are sacramental.<sup>21</sup> And, it is contemporary theory that the pattern of parental relations is a major determining factor in the basic religious socialization, orientation and imagination of the young.<sup>22</sup> The family is a laboratory of learning. It is also the home of a practical sacrament. When we work to reconstruct its form and enrich the quality of its life, we are establishing the framework for fostering the religious sensibilities of youth.

<sup>18</sup> The classic representative example is Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); first published 1847.

<sup>19</sup> See Gabriel Moran's typology of adulthood in *Education Toward Adulthood* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979): 17-36.

<sup>20</sup> See Betty Friedan, "Feminism Takes a New Turn," *New York Times Magazine*, (Nov. 18, 1979): 40f and "Feminism's Next Turn," *New York Times Magazine*, (July 5, 1981): 12f; Beverly W. Harrison, "The New Consciousness of Women: A Socio-Political Resource," *Cross Currents* (Winter 1975): 445-462 and "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love: Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers," *USQR*, vol. xxxvi, Supplementary Issue 1981: 41-58.

<sup>21</sup> Theodore Roszak, "Home: In Search of a Practical Sacrament," *Person/Planet* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1979): 139-176.

<sup>22</sup> See William McCready, "Marriage as an Institution of Socialization," *Chicago Studies*, 18, 3, (Fall 1979): 297-310; Andrew Greeley, *The Religious Imagination* (New York, 1981) and Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1979).

### *The Church and Youth Education*

Family and church complement each other in their common interests in youth development. They reinforce shared values and, frequently, direct the young into the given and established. Traditionally, the church has been driven by the motor of evangelization and an eagerness to induct the young into its belief system. Its constitutive interest has been the maintenance of tradition and the reproduction of ecclesial orthodoxy. Youth ministry in the churches has been captive to these concerns with its combination of controlled orthodoxy and emotional appeal.

Recent expressions of youth ministry focus on spiritual recreation, service projects and peer-group friendships. The value of these activities need recognition. However, their educational limits also need to be acknowledged. Their *ministerial* focus tends to deflect attention from serious and systematic intellectual grappling with religious convictions.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, they can be an excuse for adults to impose their past (religious) legacy as unalterable truths.<sup>24</sup>

George Albert Coe wrote, "We should never turn an adolescent over to an uneducated evangelism."<sup>25</sup> These words and warning need repeating today in light of what is currently on the agenda. Church education of youth suffers from an appalling lack of intellectual muscle. It demonstrates little critical sense in that its process and programs are directed toward a naive religious socialization. Maria Harris sagely notes,

Youth Ministers should stop apologizing for engagement in serious intellectual search as part of that role. If any one characteristic stands out in the religious education of the young today, I fear it is this: a failure to take the human thirst, hunger and passion to *know* seriously; an insulting of the young by not demanding discipline, rigor, and hard work from them as they search for wisdom.<sup>26</sup>

The time is ripe to re-claim, re-constitute and re-image our way of being with youth based on the principles and process of education.

Religious education, at its best, works in the tension between

<sup>23</sup> See Michael Warren, "Youth Catechesis in the '80's," *Origins*, 9, 43, April 1980: 690-697.

<sup>24</sup> Gloria Durka, "Teaching and Learning Processes: Implications for the Catechesis of Youth," *Catechesis: Realities and Visions* (Washington, D.C.: USCC, 1977), eds. Berard Marthaler and Marianne Sawicki, p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> George Albert Coe, *A Social Theory of Religious Education* (New York: Arno Press, 1969): 182.

faith and doubt. It holds both elements together as poles of the same reality. The problematic is that the young are caught today in the built-in ecclesial *contradiction* between freedom and dogmatism. The religious educator's task is to enable them to live creatively in the *paradox* of commitment and openness, rootedness and quest, faith and doubt. To shift youth education programming toward incorporating this dialectic necessitates two distinct but interrelated approaches:

- 1) problematizing our current church form and
- 2) perceiving the critical and creative role of doubt in the religious and educational maturation of the young.

Basic to the religious development of youth is a framework and pattern of power that supports an educational process which emphasizes freedom and personal self-direction. A climate of developmental expectation is required, and a structural design with space to explore, discern, compare and critically reflect.<sup>27</sup> Can the churches operate with such a context? Our inherited ecclesial pattern indicates some deep-rooted obstacles. Institutionally, the churches continue to function at a conventional developmental level — holding tight to traditions and rules, and euphemizing domineering authority as divinely commissioned hierarchy. The ethos "is incompatible with critical self-reflection and autonomous responsibility, as well as with serious intellectual and moral inquiry."<sup>28</sup> Churches have a problem of institutional form, and their structures stifle the religious development of the young.

Religious educators need to find a more educational and democratic way of being with the emerging generation.<sup>29</sup> Their sensitivity to the use of power and their operational assumptions are critical issues in need of attention. Redesigning the church as an institution of freedom requires relinquishing its dogmatic basis and releasing criticism and self-criticism in open dialogue. "There is no way to solve the problem of the church school," wrote G. A. Coe, "without solving at the same time the problem of the church."<sup>30</sup> If such a structural realignment is not promoted, religious education will be a mere function of the parish and a tool of uncritical faith-enculturation.

The litmus test of a viable and emancipatory church form is its

<sup>27</sup> James Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981): 296.

<sup>28</sup> James Fowler, "Perspectives on the Family from the Standpoint of Faith Development Theory," *Perkins School of Theology Journal*, 33, 1, Fall 1979: 17.

<sup>29</sup> Dwayne Huebner, op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> George Albert Coe, *What is Christian Education?* (New York: Charles Scribner's

ability to incorporate and legitimate doubt as a central dynamic of religious affiliation and faith. I do not mean here thoughtless skepticism or the negation of belief, but rather a form of protest which stays within the sphere of faith.<sup>31</sup> Paul Tillich outlines this indigenous Protestant principle.<sup>32</sup> Tillich saw doubt as the very consequence of the risk of faith and the two as poles of the same reality. The dynamics of faith, he claimed, always includes doubt, not as an unwelcome threat but as a needed instigation to personal growth. Richard Creel re-iterates this view:

A mature faith does not fear radical doubt. Indeed, it grows out of it or over against it. Doubt is a *structural feature* of a healthy, mature religious faith, for we do not want to commit ourselves absolutely to that which is less than the absolute.<sup>33</sup>

Rather than a foe, then, doubt is a friend to religious understanding and commitment.

Can religious educators honestly cope with less than certitude and the fact that many of our answers will be situational and filled with ambiguity? Can our posture be one of collaborative searching rather than dogmatic imposition? Traditionally, we have found this a difficult road to travel. At the root of the problem is the temptation and lust for certitude besetting religious institutions.<sup>34</sup> Historically, they have offered certainty on all the important questions of life, world and ultimate reality, and called for an unwavering acceptance. This false absolutism<sup>35</sup> precludes the creation of personal meaning and shortcircuits the adolescent's religious quest and struggle.

Robert Baird, in a concise and lucidly written essay,<sup>36</sup> elaborates on the creative role of doubt in religion. His remarks have particular relevance for educators. Baird lays out a four-fold argument in defense of the creative role of doubt:

- 1) Creative doubt is a means of constructively acknowledging human limitations. We are not God. We are not certain. We just may be mistaken.

<sup>31</sup> Emil Fackenheim notes the honoring of this principle in Judaism, see *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970): 76.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959): 16-22.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Creel, *Religion and Doubt* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1977): 58.

<sup>34</sup> See Charles Davis, "The Lust for Certitude," *The Temptations of Religion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973): 11-22.

<sup>35</sup> See John Dewey's indictment of religion in *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934).

<sup>36</sup> Robert Baird, "The Creative Role of Doubt in Religion," *Journal of Religion and Health* 19:3 (Fall 1980): 172-179.

- 2) Creative doubt plays a role in keeping one's fundamental beliefs from becoming dead dogmas. It keeps them alive, vital and evaluated, and allows us to appropriate them as our own.
- 3) Creative doubt serves as a check against the idolatrous worship of one's own religion and religious expressions. By continually challenging the adequacy of religious symbols, it allows them to point beyond themselves.
- 4) Finally, the creative role of doubt refuses to abandon the burden of freedom and responsibility for personal quest. To be human is to be unsure and to have the courage to be with doubt as one's companion.

The adolescent, developmentally, is caught in a very vulnerable position. It is an interim period of psycho-social moratorium.<sup>37</sup> The given and assumed reality is problematized. Childish myths are broken down and broken through. He or she leaves home symbolically. The dawning of adolescence marks the onset of struggle and search, enquiry and examination, rebellion and reconciliation, doubt and distinction, anxiety and autonomy. They have no choice but to experiment with the boundaries of the world bequeathed to them and to tentatively construct their own identity. These tasks are the ingredients of their maturing process and establish the basis of their capacity to love and to work, to believe and to doubt faithfully.

Religiously, adolescence is a period of probing commitment, searching faith and diffused values. He or she is not invested, but is rather immersed in a crisis of faith that is both necessary and valuable for religious development. Doubt acts as an ideological suspicion on the handed-on tradition. And, paradoxically, this calling into question may be one of the surest roads to a deepening of religious convictions later on.

Religious educators need patience, respect and esteem for the young as they live in the dialectic between faith and doubt. Many need not only answers to their religious questions but assistance in asking the questions.<sup>38</sup> The church should provide a home of sup-

<sup>37</sup> Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968); *Childhood and Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963); *Insight and Responsibility* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1964): 109-158 and "Youth: Fidelity and Diversity," *The Challenge of Youth* (New York: Anchor, 1965).

<sup>38</sup> James DiGiacomo, "Evangelizing the Youth," *America*, Oct. 3, 1979: 188. See also John Westerhoff, "Sharing The Adolescent Quest," *Bringing Up Children in the Christian Faith* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1980): 55-67 and Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980). Groome's "praxis approach" would be particularly valuable in this context.

port where a healthy dose of ideological suspicion is validated and encouraged. Mary C. Boys writes,

Respect for another's faith struggle, ought to be the hallmark of a religious community, and the responsibility to wrestle, question, dream and agonize ought to be shared and sustained in that community. Religious education will thereby become what happens in the dialectic between grace and doubt.<sup>39</sup>

Youth education needs to honor this creative role of doubt and to nurture the adolescent's capacity to move beyond conventional faith structures.

### *The School and the Accessibility of Traditions*

Family, church and school act as a triadic bond impacting the education of youth. Their influence can be mutually supporting or conflicting. The school is a powerful and privileged educative arena for the majority of the young. Three distinct but interrelated aspects in the school context require consideration: (1) the school as an institution, (2) the knowledge forms, and (3) the educator. Each plays a critical role in directing youth development, and each needs to be understood in the context in which they all reside. For our purpose here, however, I will pick up one of these aspects, namely, the forms of knowledge, and probe their (political) impact on youth education.

In Western industrial societies, schools are important distributors of cultural capital, and play a critical role in giving legitimacy to categories and forms of knowledge.<sup>40</sup> They make accessible to the young *selective* traditions that embody the past in the present. The process of schooling aims to conserve this social heritage so as to open up a future. A current branch of curriculum enquiry, known as critical sociology of curriculum,<sup>41</sup> draws our attention to the politics of curriculum design, the content of tradition and the

<sup>39</sup> Mary C. Boys, "Contending With God: Elie Wiesel and the Meaning of Faith," *National Institute of Campus Ministry Journal*, (Spring, 1978), pp. 84-85.

<sup>40</sup> See Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); Michael Apple and Philip Wexler, "Cultural Capital and Educational Transmission," *Educational Theory*, 33, (Winter 1978); Madeline MacDonald, *The Curriculum and Cultural Reproduction* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1977) and Dwayne Huebner, "Curriculum as the Accessibility of Knowledge" (unpublished paper presented at Curriculum Theory Study Group, Minneapolis, 2 March 1970, mimeographed). My commentary is restricted to the situation in public schools in the United States.

<sup>41</sup> Representative examples include Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*; Michael Young, ed., *Knowledge and Curriculum* (London: Collier-MacMillan, 1971); Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes and Control Vol. 3: Towards a Theory of Educational Transmission* (2nd edn: London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977) and William Pinar, ed., *Curriculum Theory: The Pedagogical Tradition* (Boulder, CO: McGraw-Hill, 1975).

social control of knowledge. Schools do not exist in a vacuum, and the traditions made available are not neutral. The classroom is a place in which the claims of various political, social, and economic interests are negotiated. It is both a symbol and a product of deadly serious cultural bargaining.<sup>42</sup>

The educator must choose. He or she selects from among the collective traditions. This very choice of school knowledge implies notions of power and control, and, though it may not be done consciously, is based on ideological and axiological presuppositions which provide guidance for the educator's everyday thought and practice. A critical set of questions to ask are: What traditions are made accessible? Which are presented as primary? Whose meanings are collected and distributed? Whose reality 'stalks' the classrooms of our schools? Whose interests are served? Will they legitimate the present social order or call it into question? Will it socialize the young into the 'given' adult world or enable them to deal critically and creatively with it?<sup>43</sup>

Questions such as these help to problematize our curriculum design and uncover the hidden assumptions in the selected traditions. They surface the prevailing ideology and unveil some missing and neglected elements. Some recent critics have answered these questions by indicting the schools for their uncritical reproduction of selective cultural capital. Huston Smith, a balanced and brilliant scholar, severely critiques the hegemony a restricted kind of scientific knowing has on school curricula.<sup>44</sup> He writes,

Education, is being pressed increasingly into the service of the kind of knowing that facilitates control — this utilitarian epistemology has constricted our view of the way things are, including what it means to be fully human.<sup>45</sup>

Smith's critique contains none of the hollow rings of *The Moral Majority*. He is concerned, however, to make our public schools more public — by allowing more of the world in. Our primordial (or religious) tradition,<sup>46</sup> he notes, has been excluded knowledge and forgotten truth. As educators, we have become traitors to the

<sup>42</sup> Neil Postman, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity* (New York: Delacorte, 1979): 8.

<sup>43</sup> Some of these questions are raised perceptively by Dwayne Huebner in "The Thingness of Educational Content" (a paper delivered at the conference "Reconceptualizing Curriculum Theory," Oct. 18, 1974, Cincinnati, Ohio).

<sup>44</sup> Huston Smith, "Excluded Knowledge: A Critique of the Modern Western Mind Set," *Teachers College Record*, 80, 3, Feb. 1979: 419-445.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

<sup>46</sup> See Huston Smith, *Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).



grand adventure of life. We have flattened out the world and blocked the emergence of the religious imagination in the young.

Religious educators have a responsibility to stand against the dominance of this scientific rationality in schools. They must provide a vision of something different and a concept of something better.<sup>47</sup> Schools serve as a community's memory bank and are meant to embody the mores of its clientele. A critical portion, then, of the religious educator's work, during the last two decades of this century, will be to reclaim in schools the dangerous memory of the *other* dimension,<sup>48</sup> and to undergird the curriculum with an ecology of public morality. Constitutionally, this is feasible. Educationally, it is desirable. What we lack is a tolerant and mediating language to link our indigenous religious concerns to this public education forum. To work toward an appropriate language form is to open access to a larger world for our youth.

This essay points to the political nature of youth education. Specifically, it notes the political dimension of the interpersonal, authority patterns and curriculum content. Educational and religious issues intersect at the center of each. The current order in family, church and school are problematized as engaging in the reproduction of social control. Alternative ways are proposed to reorder our lives and to open access to the young to the forgotten riches of our cultural heritage. The religious educator, then, is an *educator* with a two-fold task: (1) to motivate the young to "read" the context of their lives and problematize the given reality, and (2) to propose visions and models of human maturity so as to lure the emerging generation toward the not-yet.

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<sup>47</sup> Neil Postman, *Teaching as a Conserving Activity*, p. 184.

<sup>48</sup> See Louis Dupre, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).

## CONVERSION AS A FOUNDATION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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During the last year, the editors of *Christian Century* have solicited contributions to a series entitled, "How My Mind Has Changed."<sup>1</sup> Such a series encourages us to reflect on what has transpired in our lives in the past decade. It is an awesome task, for, while some elements are immediately apparent, such as change of locale, career, family and lifestyle, we have still to sift through many levels of our being so as to reach into the mystery and pain of certain precious moments that have been crucial in bringing us to the present.

Some people may be able to identify these critical points with alacrity, since major upheavals have turned them topsy-turvy, or knocked them from their horse.<sup>2</sup> For many others, however, some of the most significant passages have happened as imperceptibly as a seed growing. But whether these changes have been dramatic or mundane, sudden or gradual, ultimately bears little importance; what matters is *that* we have changed, and, even more significantly, *how* we have changed.

My focus here is on the kind of change we call conversion and what this means for education. Ultimately, however, my goal extends beyond attempting to illuminate further the concept of conversion; there exists already a substantial and burgeoning body of literature, much of which I will simply note as I proceed. My particular interest lies in developing a hypothesis I proposed

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<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Century* "How My Mind Has Changed" series is being published; see James M. Wall, ed., *Theologians in Transition* (New York: Crossroads, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> But see Krister Stendahl (*Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), pp. 7-22), who argues that Paul's experience on the road to Damascus should be regarded as a *call to mission* rather than as a *conversion*.