

THE REIGN OF GOD: IMPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

ROLAND G. KUHL*

The theme of the reign of God is the most promising paradigm for guiding the task of Christian education.¹ Jürgen Moltmann affirms "Whoever becomes involved with Jesus, becomes involved with the Kingdom of God. It is inescapably so, because the concern of Jesus was and is the 'Kingdom of God'" (Moltmann 1993, 5). Christ manifested God's rule in every aspect of his life and ministry. Therefore, his sovereignty over creation and the power of darkness in bringing salvation—in the fullest sense of the term—is central for understanding the gospel. For this reason, the theme of the kingdom of God, more than any other, has been "... directly influential as the integrative motif for several theological proposals" (Grenz 1992, 11). Yet, as Doug Brewer notes, over the past fifteen years there has been

*Roland G. Kuhl is Director of Non-Credit and Modular Studies at Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois.

¹Christian educators are not agreed on a common paradigm for guiding the task of Christian education. R. W. Pazmiño originally stated that Christian education has a "preparadigmatic" character. This is a term used by T. Kuhn in *The Structures of Scientific Revolutions* to describe "... an area of study or academic discipline which has not developed a paradigm—a dominant and widely accepted understanding, framework or concept that serves to guide all thought and practice" (R. W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988] 13). Pazmiño argued that this may be more positive than negative: "The preparadigmatic stage of Christian education requires that each new generation of Christian educators reconsider the foundational questions. Without raising these questions, Christian educators are likely to perpetuate antiquated perceptions and practices that are not faithful to the gospel" (p. 14).

Pazmiño's point is well taken; every generation of Christian educators needs to reexamine the foundational questions. However, this does not preclude the development of a foundational paradigm. R. R. Drov Dahl countered Pazmiño, making the case for developing a paradigmatic Christian education with the suggestion of "meaning-making" as the paradigm (see R. R. Drov Dahl, "Toward a Paradigmatic Christian Education," *Christian Education Journal* XI [3] [1991] 7-16). In response to Drov Dahl, Pazmiño conceded the need for a paradigm for Christian education, and even in his most recent work, *Latin American Journey*, he presents the shape a paradigm must take to guide the Christian educational task (R. W. Pazmiño, *Latin American Journey: Insights for Christian Education in North America* [Cleveland: United Church, 1994] 102-3).

Though I agree with Drov Dahl that a paradigm is needed, I do not believe his suggestion is foundational enough to engender a paradigmatic Christian education. However, Pazmiño's guidelines for the shape of a relevant paradigm for Christian education correspond well with the motif of the reign of God.

little investigation in the relationship between the kingdom of God and Christian education (Brewer 1990, 42).² He advises that Christian educators ought to adopt the theme of God's reign as a central paradigm for articulating implications for Christian approaches to education (Brewer 1990, 50).

This proposal far from simplifies the task. As Brewer writes, "The concept of the kingdom of God presents today's Christian educator with both great *potential* and significant *problems*" (Brewer 1990, 51), because there is no unified understanding regarding the meaning of the reign of God; God's reign "... can be understood in very different ways" (Snyder 1993, 1).³ It seems this lack of a unified understanding inhibits many educators from examining the richness of the reign of God as a foundational paradigm. Yet, rather than being hindered by the multiplicity of interpretations, attempts need to be made to draw implications for Christian education from current understandings of God's reign. This article is such an attempt, focusing upon the "divine action versus human action" polarity, one of six identified by Snyder, in order to illustrate how the theme of God's reign, as a foundational paradigm, can guide the understanding and praxis of Christian education.

I. HUMAN AGENCY AND THE REIGN OF GOD IN BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

Howard A. Snyder, alluding to the hermeneutical tensions within kingdom theologies, argues that "theologies of the Kingdom which dissolve these tensions, opting wholly for one side or the other, are to that degree unbiblical. A biblically faithful and . . . useful theology . . . will in some way maintain and live with these polarities" (Snyder 1993, 1). Therefore, a responsible theology views

²Brewer notes that he found two articles and one book. G. Goldsworthy, "Kingdom of God as Educational Curriculum," *Journal of Christian Education* (April 1983) 39-50; B. Engelbrecht, "The Kingdom of God and Its Implications for all Education," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* (December 1980) 7-15; T. H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980).

I have been able to find further sources relating the reign of God to Christian education besides Brewer's contribution and those mentioned by him. Three books contain discussion on the reign of God in relation to Christian education: T. H. Groome, *Sharing Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); S. Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989); Pazmiño, *Latin American Journey*; D. K. Glassford, *The Reformed Doctrine of the Kingdom of God as a Paradigm for Formulating and Evaluating Educational Programs*, a Dissertation, Marquette University, 1991. I did not, however, find any recent articles.

³H. A. Snyder presents six polarities in understanding kingdom theologies. These are: 1. Present *versus* future; 2. Individual *versus* social; 3. Spirit *versus* matter; 4. Gradual *versus* climactic; 5. Divine action *versus* human action; and 6. The church's relation to the kingdom ("Models of the Kingdom: Sorting out the Practical Meaning of God's Reign," in *Transformation* [1993] 1). His article is a fruitful source for developing further implications of kingdom for Christian education.

these polarities from a “both/and”—in which both sides of the polarity are held in tension—rather than an “either/or” perspective.

Yet, in relation to the divine/human action polarity, a balanced perspective has not always been adequately presented. Some evangelical scholars, not wanting to lose sight of the primacy of God’s action in bringing about the kingdom, have given limited expression to the human role. George Eldon Ladd, for example, writes that the kingdom in its present manifestation is primarily the result of divine intervention in human history, but that humanity’s involvement is largely limited to reaction or response. He expresses, regarding the kingdom of God,

Men can enter the Kingdom (Mt. 5:20; 7:21; Mk. 9:47; 10:23; etc.), but they are never said to erect it or build it. Men can receive the Kingdom (Mk. 10:15; Lk. 18:17), inherit it (Mt. 25:34), and possess it (Mt. 5:4), but they are never to establish it. . . . Men can do things for the sake of the Kingdom (Mt. 19:12; Lk. 18:29), but they are not said to act upon the Kingdom itself. (Ladd 1974, 103)

He concludes that “the divine act requires a human response even though it remains a divine act” (Ladd 1974, 104).

Donald G. Bloesch deals similarly with the issue of human agency in asking “. . . whether human beings have a positive role in the realization of the kingdom of God in history” (Bloesch 1991, 26). He advocates that the followers of Christ, who now live in an interim kingdom awaiting Christ’s second advent, are to have an impact on society, being instruments of God in which the kingdom permeates society as leaven (Bloesch 1991, 32-3). Though Bloesch seemingly has more room in his thought for human action, he agrees with Ladd that “as Christians we cannot bring in the kingdom.” He remarks,

We can witness to it. We can be instruments in its realization. . . . God may use human action to prepare the way for his own redeeming action. . . . [W]e can set up signs and parables of the kingdom. We can announce the coming of the kingdom. . . . [But] we cannot build the kingdom. (Bloesch 1991, 34)

Both Ladd and Bloesch are correct in asserting that the coming of the kingdom is God’s activity. However, their positions do not fully appreciate the “both/and” nature of the polarity. Indeed God is active in creating the kingdom, but human involvement is more than response, it is much more active and dynamic, involving *initiative* in response to God’s action. In Christ a new relationship has been established between believers and God. This new relationship involves cooperative activity with God, whereby believers are, as the apostle Paul puts it, “God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor 3:9; cf. also 2 Cor 6:1; 2 Thess 3:2). Therefore, the “divine action versus human action” polarity must be interpreted cooperatively. God acts and his people act in cooperation with one another.

But how is this cooperative activity to be described? Is redeemed humanity more than an instrument in God's hand in fulfilling his purposes? Has the Holy Spirit empowered believers to be active participants, co-laborers with Christ in accomplishing God's agenda? Snyder seems to think so. He uses the term *agent* to refer to redeemed humanity's active role—particularly the church—in relation to the kingdom.

[God's] action involves "a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things" in Jesus Christ. In this plan not only does God act, man also acts. The Kingdom of God is the work of God; yet within God's plan there is room for man's action. God's grace is that great. So the Church is never a life-less tool in God's hands. It is not merely object but also subject. It does the work of God; yet this continues to be, literally, the work of God. So the Church in relation to the Kingdom is not an event, it is an act. (Snyder 1977, 13)

Jürgen Moltmann also asks, "Is the Kingdom of God only a matter of God or also of humans? Can we 'do nothing' or can we also accomplish the messianic works?" (Moltmann 1993, 12). He responds in the affirmative naming this human activity as "Kingdom of God work."

In the community with Jesus, people have . . . experienced the Kingdom of God, not provisionally and ambiguously, but rather as clearly as a sick person who has been healed, a sinner who has been accepted, and a lost person who has been found. As a matter of Jesus, the Kingdom of God can really be experienced. And it can really be practiced by humans as well. . . . humans become "coworkers for the Kingdom of God" and do the same messianic works as Jesus himself: "Preach as you go, saying, 'The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" (Matt. 10:7-8). In the sense of Jesus, the Kingdom of God is therefore also a matter for us. (Moltmann 1993, 13)

If Snyder and Moltmann are correct, God's action in advancing his reign encompasses a more direct participation of redeemed humanity than some have expressed. If Christ is indeed active within the life of his community, then do not the actions, institutions, and policies of the community participate with God in fulfilling his purpose?

The biblical perspective engenders such an understanding. It holds in tension the polarities of God's action and human action in effecting the kingdom of God on earth. The stewardship covenant is important in this understanding. The reign of God has broken into human history entirely by God's action and God's action alone in Jesus Christ. Yet, the spread of his reign into the realm of Satan involves God's voluntary dependency upon his people to act and live in such a way that the influence of God's reign is brought to bear in every area of human life. This dependency of God upon his

creation is a continuing aspect of the creation covenant in which God decreed the stewardship of the earth to humanity. In Gen 1:26-30, God gave humanity the responsibility for exercising stewardship over the earth, to creatively care for and rule over all that is upon it. This stewardship was exercised in interdependence with God, yet required active human participation in effecting it. It was the advent of sin that broke this interdependence. Humanity began to believe they could act effectually independent of God.

It is through the covenant of stewardship that God has chosen to work on earth. God has chosen to work through his people; through the covenant of stewardship he gave them authority over creation. For God to circumvent human beings in accomplishing his purposes on earth would be to contradict his creative design.⁴ So, God has made himself dependent upon his people to bring about his reign through their witness and their action. Followers of Christ are to be active in revealing the rule of God, in demonstrating it, in establishing policies and institutions which permit its influence to be felt, in so living that, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, they further "incarnate" the kingdom in the world as responsible stewards.

Two biblical examples relate the cooperative and active human role within the stewardship covenant in "bringing about" the reign of God. The first passage, Matt 16:19, expresses the concept of binding and loosing within the context of the ministry of the church. Jesus gave authority to his church to bind and loose; a binding and loosing which will be recognized and heeded in heaven. Ladd states that ". . . authority to bind and loose involves the admission or exclusion of men (humanity) from the realm of the Kingdom of God" (Ladd 1974, 118). J. W. Shepard sees within the idea of binding and loosing the power given to every disciple of Christ. He states, "All are stewards (*oikonomoi*) of the teachings of Jesus and gospel of the Kingdom." He further argues that what is bound or loosed under the leading of the Holy Spirit receives the approval and sanction of heaven (Shepard 1939, 305-6).

⁴This is most clearly revealed in God's purpose of redemption. The question of how God would reestablish his rule on earth without usurping the authority he delegated to humanity was answered in Jesus Christ. Through God's act of becoming human, Jesus Christ reestablished a stewardship over the earth that would be exercised in cooperation with his Father. As a human, he refused to be tempted to perform signs apart from his relationship with God; rather he chose to fulfill his earthly calling through dependence upon God (cf. Matthew 4). As a human—who was also God—Jesus Christ reestablished God's reign on earth in order to triumph over the kingdom of darkness by the Cross to which the first man—Adam—had surrendered his authority.

Jesus in being a human, reestablished this cooperation between God and humanity in exercising godly stewardship over the earth. Likewise, those who have been redeemed in Christ are empowered by the Spirit of Christ to carry out their ministry of stewardship over the earth in similar dependence upon God. Therefore, God in advancing his rule on earth works in cooperation with human action, because that is how God has chosen to work on earth—through his created humanity.

Yet, care must be taken not to interpret this as a usurping of God's sovereignty. Robert H. Gundry, recognizing that Christ's statement on binding and loosing extends to all believers, comments, "Thus God will not ratify at the last judgment what Peter does in the present age, but Peter does in the present age what God has already determined" (Gundry 1982, 335). Acting in obedience to God is what brings about the reign of God, not independent human actions. Binding and loosing is an act carried out in obedience to the Spirit. It is God's action that enacts the effects of binding and loosing, but binding and loosing is obedient activity initiated by believers. It is human action, acted out in the context of the church, by the authority God has given to his children.

The second passage, Matt 6:10, reveals the human activity of prayer in furthering the reign of God. The petition in the Lord's Prayer articulating "let your kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" involves asking for God's will to be manifested on earth; yet more is implied than asking. Robert A. Guelich notes that "Matthew shows particular interest in the relationship between the Kingdom and the will of the Father (6:10a, b; 7:21; 21:31; 26:42)" (Guelich 1982, 290). Petitioners pray for God's will to be effected here on earth as it is in effect in heaven. Since relationship with the Father is expressed in terms of obedience in doing the will of the Father, God's will is effected on earth as the disciples of Jesus do the will of God. This may be argued to be no more than mere response to God's activity, but it also reflects human initiative in making that response. To bring about God's will is to be about the manifestation of his reign, the active doing of his will. If human beings do not live out the will of God, God's reign cannot grow on earth. Guelich summarizes this relationship between God's action and human action in the praying of the Lord's Prayer.

By addressing this petition to God in the passive voice, one asks God himself to act by ultimately revealing himself in history both through his redemptive activity and through his own people. Consequently, to utter this petition is not to speak carelessly or thoughtlessly. One makes this petition as an expression of one's offering of oneself for God's service (cf. 5:16 and 6:19-24). (Guelich 1982, 310)

These two representative passages serve to illustrate the cooperative action between God and his people in effecting his reign on earth. Bringing about the reign of God is a cooperative activity which holds in tension God's initiative and human action, action which is empowered by the Holy Spirit who is "incarnated" through the community of Christ. So, in understanding God's rule being manifested on earth, the discussion must be represented in theological and anthropological language, expressing the interrelation of both divine action and human agency.

This perspective of cooperative activity is indeed biblical. It does not diminish the sovereign creative priority of God's intervention throughout human history in bringing in and creating the kingdom. Rather, it seeks to raise the consciousness of the redeemed community that it is also their action, in cooperation with God, that continues to bring about his rule. It is not a matter of it being either God's activity or human activity, but one in which human activity in advancing the kingdom is inextricably connected to God's action. Redeemed humanity is not able to do anything for the kingdom, except as they fulfill their ministry in obedience to Christ through the power of the Spirit.

II. EFFECTING GOD'S REIGN IN THE WORLD

Recognizing that human action, in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, is vital to accomplishing God's purposes on earth, in what activities are believers to engage which cooperate with God to bring about his reign in society? A response to this question calls for the community of faith to rekindle a vision for their participation in God's reign. Moltmann comments, "For Jesus, the Kingdom of God stood at the top of his agenda; for us, other things constantly intervene, mostly one's own interests" (Moltmann 1993, 14). Therefore, it is of necessity for the community of Christ to focus once again on the agenda of seeking first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness (Matt 6:33).

Stanley Hauerwas presents a model of the church that seeks the kingdom of God. The church, as the embodiment of the kingdom, lives out its witness as a "community of character" in the midst of society. The community of Christ is to exhibit such kingdom-oriented values that in essence the church becomes a "contrast model" in relationship to the world. The church is to embody the counter-cultural ethic of God's reign within society, but it also is to be as a "mirror" to society—so that its actions cause society to see itself, to see its sinful reflection, in relation to the demands of the lordship of Christ. The purpose of being a "mirror" for society is to have a transforming influence upon society's structures, politics, and ethics. Hauerwas explains the kingdom role of the church:

The way the church must always respond to the challenge of our [politics] is to be herself. This does not involve a rejection of the world, or a withdrawal from the world; rather it is a reminder that the church must serve the world on her own terms. We must be faithful in our own way, even if the world understands such faithfulness as disloyalty. But the first task of the church is not to . . . suggest strategies for social betterment. The first task of the church is to exhibit in our common life the kind of community possible when trust [i.e. trusting our lives under God's reign], and not fear, rules our lives. (Hauerwas 1981, 85)

Therefore, the church as the community of Jesus Christ is to live out the embodiment of God's rule. This is done by living out his reign within the present context of human society with a certain hope of its future consummation in Christ's second advent. It is in the living out that the church is both counter-cultural—contrasting the social order of the world with the new ethics of God's reign—and transformative as the people of God radically live out kingdom lifestyles within their contexts. This living out is a response to Christ's call, as Ladd puts it, but it also involves human initiative in advancing the reign of God as his stewards, co-laboring with God to accomplish his purposes on earth. Indeed, human agency is a necessary aspect of God's plan of accomplishing his kingdom purpose because God intends his children to live out their lives as salt and light in the world, that their good deeds may be seen by all so that the world might give praise to the Father (Matt 5:16).

III. IMPLICATIONS OF HUMAN AGENCY IN ADVANCING GOD'S REIGN FOR CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

In guiding the task of Christian education by the paradigm of God's reign, implications for the understanding and praxis of Christian education must integrate theological understandings with curricular questions. From the foregoing discussion, four theological conclusions for human and educational activity are presented—by no means exhaustive—which foster the advancement of God's reign on earth.

1. Enacting the will of God is central to understanding the Christian mission. We are called to act.
2. This mission is not relegated to one aspect of life, but seeks God's will to permeate every aspect of life.
3. This mission involves human activity that a) cooperates with God by acting in obedience to him; and b) cooperates with others by acting together as the community of Christ—the church.
4. The outworking of this calling manifests itself in a counter-cultural ethic that has a transforming influence within human society.

Integrated with these theological conclusions are curricular questions, which seek to place these conclusions within an educational context. Curricular questions, originally formulated by D. Campbell Wyckoff through his work in curriculum theory,⁵ offer

⁵See D. C. Wyckoff, *Theory and Design of Christian Education Curriculum* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 83-4. Wyckoff's questions seem to provide the

a helpful taxonomy. The questions he raised seek to gain an understanding of the principles guiding the Christian educational task. Here, three primary curricular questions are raised which seek implications for education in relation to the foundational paradigm of God's reign.

1. What is the purpose of Christian education, its why?
2. What is its scope; what is to be taught and learned?
3. What is its process, its method; how is it to take place?

The implications proposed represent thinking in progress. Though clearer articulation is still required, these proposals seek to offer a challenge to Christian education in understanding its purpose, scope, and methodology.

A. Implications for Christian Education's Purpose

First, *Christian education must foster purposeful human action manifesting God's reign.* A vision committed to enacting God's will requires Christian education to have an action-oriented purpose. Christian education must purpose to educate and equip the people of God to be actors of God's will—obedience to God's will to be demonstrated in intentional action—not just understanders of God's will.

The concept of *praxis*—reflective action, is useful for understanding such an action-oriented purpose. Paulo Freire speaks of praxis as involving the dimensions of reflection and action in an effective education. It is as people are empowered to name their world, not to ignore it, to act, not to remain passive, that transformation of the world can take place (Freire 1993, 69). Robert W. Pazmiño, reflecting on the concept of praxis in Latin America writes,

Orthopraxis, right action or practice, has been emphasized over *orthodoxy*, right thought. Truth is viewed as a verb in this emphasis on the praxiological element in the message of Christ. José Miquez Bonino has emphasized this perspective in asserting that the goal of truth is not just intelligence but faithful obedience to the will of God. (Pazmiño 1994, 11)

Though praxis cannot be uncritically accepted, Christian education, having an action-oriented purpose, guided by the paradigm of God's

outline for Groome's *Christian Religious Education* (cf. p. xiv), however Groome only utilizes four questions presented by Wyckoff and adds two of his own focusing on the questions of "when" and "who." M. C. Boys in *Educating in Faith: Maps and Visions* ([San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989] 74) attributes the six categorical questions to Wyckoff, however her description of them shows more similarity to Groome's formulation than to Wyckoff's.

reign, has a place for a praxis which reflects upon the will of God in order to actualize the living of God's will in the world.

This praxis purpose extends the mission of Christian education beyond the focus of making Scripture known. Though it is vital that a biblical understanding of God's will be conveyed, the chief mission of Christian education is to foster intentional and deliberate action that exhibits the will of God. A praxis purpose seeks to equip the people of God to live in Christ (cf. Gal 2:20), to do the ministry of Jesus Christ (cf. John 14:12, Matt 28:20) in order to demonstrate the presence of God's reign. Therefore, Christian education's action-oriented purpose is to form people to live in obedience to Christ, to be actors of the Father's will, in order to "incarnate" the Spirit in the world.

Second, *Christian education's purpose extends beyond the purview of religion to include all of creation.* The reign of God sets the domain of Christian education's purpose in all of life. The focus of Christian education is to equip people to regain a sense of stewardship and to live life responsibly in harmony with God's will and dependence on God in creation. There is no room for the disintegration of faith from life.

In "presenting everyone complete in Christ" (cf. Col 1:28), Christian education must seek to equip the people of God to think and live Christianly and kingdomly, to think and live in terms of the covenant of stewardship; the sphere of Christian living is not confined to religion; it is manifested within the larger context of creation. This bears upon every aspect of life—one's relationships, work, finances, politics, and society.

Christian education's purpose, within the context of creation, focuses on enabling God's people to develop a Christian world view to guide their thinking and activity in the world. It purposes that persons live as subjects of God's reign in daily settings, so that their lives present a "contrast model" of what God's reign looks like in the midst of the world. In this there is no dichotomization between sacred and secular because being faithful stewards draws them into being actors of God's will in all of creation.

Third, *Christian education's purpose is more corporate than it is individualistic.* The task of Christian education is often confined to the discipling of individuals, yet, in participating with God in advancing his reign, there is a dependence upon God and upon the community of faith. The reign of God is embodied within the life of the church, though the reign of God is not limited to the church. Living within the reign of God involves cooperative action, because it is the body of Christ serving together which continues the ministry of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12:12ff). Thomas H. Groome notes the corporate responsibility of the church in fulfilling such a purpose.

To be a credible sign of the Kingdom, it will have to embody within its own structures the values it preaches. Further, it will have to harness its ministry and whole way of being in the world toward

helping to create social/political/economic structures that are capable of promoting values of the Kingdom. (Groome 1980, 47)

Therefore, Christian education seeks to educate the community of faith in its corporate understanding and in its expression of its faith in the world—to speak and act out the will of God corporately as a community of salt and light, as a community submitted to the reign of God in the world. Christian education seeks to inculcate within the people of God not only an individual identification with God's reign, but also a corporate identification. This requires Christian education to enlarge its focus to engage in corporate discipleship—to equip members to take responsibility for one another's discipleship in living out God's reign.

B. Implications for Christian Education's Scope

The scope of Christian education is concerned with what is taught and learned. The paradigm of God's reign calls for a content which is also action-focused. First, *Christian education seeks to teach the learning of obedience, kingdomly action, a process of living within God's reign*. Even though biblical content fulfills a vital and necessary role in living within God's reign—for God's will needs to be understood, what needs also to be taught is a framework or process in which the biblical content can be grasped and enacted. This involves reorienting Christians to engage in learning the process of how to live lives that enact God's will throughout life—to learn obedience. When Christ commanded his disciples to "teach them to obey" (Matt 28:20), the teaching responsibility encompassed the process of obedience, not only the commands which required obedience. Therefore, the process of obedience is the "content" or scope of Christian education.

Groome, describing his shared Christian praxis approach, represents a good example of teaching a process-oriented or action-focused content. In articulating the methodology of the movements of shared Christian praxis he not only outlines the steps of his methodology, but they are also presented as content for educating the readers for their engagement in shared Christian praxis (cf. Groome 1991, 153-293). Shared Christian praxis not only involves participants in a process, it also educates them in learning a process that enables them to be actors of God's reign.

The concern of "how" may be considered by some to be the sphere of application or of educational method. However, if God's will is to be enacted in people's lives, Christians need to learn *how* to do God's will, just as a craftsperson is taught to learn to do their craft. Therefore, there is much value in recognizing that "how" also describes as content a process which is to be learned.

Second, Christian education which teaches obedience views Scripture dynamically, in that it describes God's acts as being

continuous and present, inviting the participation of God's people. Scripture is conducive to an action-oriented content. Scripture is not merely the historical record of God's activity, it is much more dynamic and present, and useful for equipping people to cooperate with God in bringing about his reign (cf. 2 Tim 3:16, 17). This, by no means, implies that God's revelation is changing, or that it is not yet complete, rather it means that God's Word is a present and active word.

The purpose of Scripture is not primarily to describe the past actions of God, as it is to express how God acts in and with his people in manifesting his reign. The focus is not on how God acted, but on his actions. He is an acting God, whether it is in our past, our present, or our future. This does not deny the historical reality of Scripture. It is a true historical record of God's dealings in human history. However, Scripture is not primarily *about* human history, or *about* God's actions in human history; it *describes* God's action in relation to his people.

Therefore, Scripture is to be used to show an acting God in relation to his people, rather than merely displaying his past actions as mere historical events. Such an approach to Scripture recognizes that its content is dynamic, it is an action-focused content, calling for action in relation to the reign of God. Christian education, then, which focuses on teaching people to enact the will of God approaches Scripture as a present, living word, requiring our reflection and obedient action, in order to participate with God in his action for the sake of his reign in the present. Christian education must seek to convey the content of Scripture in accordance with such a dynamic focus.

Groome presents a helpful metaphor—Christian Story and Vision—for understanding such a dynamic view of Scripture, though his use of the metaphor has limitations for evangelicals. Groome talks about Story as relating how God has been active in the lives of his people and how they have responded to his actions and invitations (Groome 1980, 192). Vision points out that "God's intention and promise for creation is the Kingdom" inviting from us a present response in order to continue the unfolding of the reign of God (Groome 1980, 193; cf. also further discussion in Groome 1991, 113-5, 138-43). The purpose of Story and Vision is to understand that God still acts in the present as he did in the past, that he will act in the future. Though evangelicals may not agree with Groome's understanding of revelation, his metaphor portrays the use of Scripture in a present and dynamic way which teaches the people of God how to be actors of God's will.

This necessitates that the record of Jesus' life in Scripture be examined, not only in relation to *what* he said and did—as static content, but to examine the context of his whole life to discover *how* he integrated his living with the will of his Father; *how* he was obedient; *how* he acted in relation to others in light of his kingdom

mission. This "how" focuses on the way Jesus incorporated the principles of God's sovereign reign into his daily living.

Third, *Christian education that teaches persons how to enact the will of God can find particular relevance in the parables of Jesus*. The parables of the kingdom represent a counter-cultural ethic, which when understood and acted upon leads the community of faith to present a "contrast model" as a "community of character" in the midst of society. Jesus meant the content of the parables not just to be cognitively understood, but rather to challenge the hearers to recognize the presence of God's reign and to lead them into action demonstrating its presence. Donald A. Hagner suggests that parables have a performative function in the lives of learners.

Every reader brings a totality of background and experience that is bound to affect the interpretation of the text. To recognize this, however, is not to capitulate to the conclusion that the text has no meaning in itself. . . . Involvement of the reader in the interpretation of the parables is especially desirable since they were and are meant to be performative . . . as well as informative. That is, they are intended to have an impact on the reader at the level of his or her existence and not simply to convey information: the parables interpret us as much as we interpret the parables. (Hagner 1993, 365)

In that the parables have a performative function, their usage is vital in teaching persons how to act out God's will.

C. Implications for Christian Education's Method

Method concerns itself with the process in which Christian education carries out its purposes in relation to the content to be taught and learned. Methods of Christian education must do more than lead the church to understand the will of God, they must also lead participants to kingdom-oriented action which demonstrates the lordship of Christ in the midst of life.

First, Christian education must utilize educational processes which involve making decisions for involvement in kingdom-oriented action. Since Christian education under the paradigm of God's reign purposes to equip persons to be actors of God's will, educational methods must include components which foster action. Since involvement in action requires making a decision to act, it is necessary that educational methods contain a decisional component. Intentional action cannot happen without the making of decisions.

Insights derived from the methodologies of transformative learning (Mezirow), experiential learning (Kolb), adult learning (Knowles), critical thinking (Brookfield), and praxis (Freire, Groome) all contain such decisional components. Groome, in his methodology of shared Christian praxis, describes the process of decision-making in movement 5.

Movement 5 offers participants an explicit opportunity for making decisions about how to live Christian faith in the world. . . . Whatever the form or level of response invited, the practical intent of the dialogue in movement 5 is to enable participants—by God’s grace working through their own discernment and volition—to make historical choices about the praxis of Christian faith in the world. As long as they maintain continuity with the central truth claims and values of Christian Story, reflect the faith of the broader/learning community—the church—and are creative of the Vision of God’s reign, they are likely to be appropriate decisions for lived Christian faith. (Groomer 1991, 148)

Without decision-making participants do not have opportunity to yield their volition to the will of God in order to act for the advancement of God’s reign.

Second, *Christian education must use methods which involve dialogue*. Christian education methods, subject to the reign of God, do not primarily focus on individualistic learning, but are enacted in the context of community for the reign of God is manifested through the community of faith. Therefore, processes which involve community must be dialogical in nature. Dialogue involves entering into discussion with other members of the community in order to come to understanding, in order to develop strategies of action, in order to encourage one another to action.

Freire notes that in dialogue “[s]ubjects meet in cooperation to transform the world” (Freire 1993, 148). David A. Kolb, advocating experiential learning, expresses that experiences are shared and interpreted through dialogue (Kolb 1983, 2). The activity of shared dialogue necessitates that Christian educational method involve the community of faith in guiding followers of Christ to understand and to live out the will of God in their lives. It is through dialogue that the people of God develop a theological world view to guide their thinking and acting for the sake of the kingdom in the midst of society.

IV. CONCLUSION

As stated, these implications represent thinking in progress, seeking to discover the richness that the paradigm of God’s reign offers for guiding the task of Christian education. Hopefully, others will engage in dialogue concerning the reign of God as a viable paradigm for guiding Christian education’s task, in order to foster an educational process that enables followers of Christ to be actors of the will of God and demonstrate the presence of his reign.

The implications presented here seek to challenge Christian educators to be more intentional and action oriented in equipping believers to be actors of God’s will. As people in covenant with God, we have a responsibility to exercise our stewardship in such a way

that God's reign is manifested and advanced in our lives, in the lives of others, and within society.

The implications that the paradigm of the reign of God has for Christian education have not even begun to be uncovered. Future areas of consideration need to include other curricular questions such as the context of Christian education—where; the participants in Christian education—who; and “when” Christian education happens; as well as considering other theological tensions in understanding the reign of God. As we grasp this central motif in the life of Jesus Christ we shall be rewarded with a renewed vision for Christian education's mission.

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