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TEACHING THE BIBLE TO TEENAGERS

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Abstract

Teaching the Bible is in itself a serious challenge and in a sense a risky venture. Teaching teenagers in many ways complicates an already difficult task. The purpose of this article is to explore the self reliant spiritual functioning of the teacher as a vital and integral key in the process of teaching the Bible. The article poses that people play an important role in the coming of God to people. The Old Testament's view on teaching makes this obvious and clear. What kind of person is a teacher then supposed to be? In this regard the article explores self reliant spiritual functioning. The article also touches on the specific characteristics of teenagers and how these characteristics relate to the teaching of the Bible.

1. Introduction

It is far easier to state the problems of teaching the Bible to teenagers than to try and supply some insights into and guidelines for teaching this age group about the Bible. The task of teaching the Bible to teenagers is indeed complex and difficult.

Ongoing discovery of the Bible as a 'Book for Life' is very often hampered by the way the Bible is taught during childhood. Children often do not come to know the message of the Bible for themselves. Adults offer tailor-made answers to their probing questions and thus effectively end any further thinking or enquiring. Add to this the fact that it frequently happens that the 'wrong' answers to our questions are treated in such a way that the young, even unconsciously, decide not to ask again. So often children are not given the opportunity to play around in a safe and pastoral atmosphere with the stories of this Book, interpreting, according to their own capacity, what the message is all about (cf. Nel 1990:210-219). This problem is sometimes more serious in societies where Bible teaching has a high priority in the home, school and church. Many teenagers are actually '*Bybelmoeg of kerkvoos*' (Deist 1989:6).

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The purpose of this paper is not to try to solve the problems and demands of teaching the Bible to teenagers, but rather to explore, in a theoretical sense, some guiding principles as we move forward in our research into this challenging ministry of teaching. It is also not my intention to argue any point for or against the teaching of the Bible in school or to offer solutions to didactical questions. I work on the assumption that the opportunity exists to teach the Bible to teenagers.

2. Teaching as a theological concept

2.1 Ministry as intermediary to God's coming to people

A point of departure in Practical Theology is that whatever we do in ministry is to be done in service of the communication of the Gospel. God in his wonderful love communicates with people. 'Ministry, (pastoral role-fulfilment), mediates the coming of God in his word' (Firet 1986:14). 'At the heart of all ministry is not the activity of a human being,but the action of God who, by way of the official ministry as intermediary, comes to people in his word' (Firet 1986:15).[1]

The Bible offers a plethora of terms denoting God's coming to people through a human intermediary (Firet 1986:40). Throughout the years the following seven modes of his coming have been identified: *kerygma, marturia, leiturgia, didache, paraklesis, koinonia* and *diakonia*. In this paper we are concerned about *didache* as a mode of God's continuous coming to people, in this case teenagers, through a human intermediary, a teacher.

2.2 The mode of the *didache*

In Old Testament times life was seen as a 'way' (cf. Ps. 25; Proverbs 22:6). The way is the life of a person seen from the perspective of his or her destination. According to Drazin (1940:12) Jewish education was rather synonymous with life. It unfolded life, giving it direction and meaning.It was like an initiation into life. Even more it was an initiation, especially by the father of the child into the story of Yahweh and his people: it implicates him personally so that it becomes his story (Firet 1986:54).

This 'story' did not start when the child was born. It started with the exodus. The child was there when the exodus took place. God included this newborn when He delivered His people from slavery. *Didache* in its Old Testament sense was a way of dealing with the child in such a way that the child knew that God, when He chose Abraham and saved his people, also implied

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1. Firet points out that the Word of God is the form of his presence, the revelation of his Name, the revelation of the truth, and the actualization of salvation (1986:15-29).

children.He learns to say and to experience 'we' - the we of the covenant' (Firet 1986:54).[2]

Secondly, it was 'guidance' on the way. Yahweh guided his people by means of the *torah* but it was still He Himself who guided them. In this sense *torah* is not 'law' - it is rather

> God's instruction in his way, and therefore not a separate objectivum - the *torah* itself is, essentially, not law. To render *torah* by law is to take away from its idea this inner dynamic and vital character (Buber 1951:57).

The inner dynamic to which Buber is referring is the fact that God's own voice is always heard in the *torah*. It is his very own word of guidance, direction, instruction, and information through which He Himself comes to a person.

In a third sense teaching in the Old Testament can be seen as 'instruction in the Way of Wisdom' (Firet 1986:55ff). Wisdom can be seen as man's reflection of what God has said and is saying in the *torah*. The *chokma* addresses itself to the many life situations in which people do not know how to act according to the *torah*. In these daily situations people need insight into problems and a perspective on specific situations. The very heart of the wisdom literature is the 'fear of the Lord' (Proverbs 1:7; 8:13; 9:10; Ps. 111:10; Job 28:28). In this sense the dominant truth of the Old Testament educational thinking is the bonding with Yahweh (Jentsch 1951:96). According to Jentsch (1951:136), it was only in Rabbinic times that the *torah*, now viewed as law, very nearly took the place of Yahweh and *das Theozentrische wird vom Nomozentrischen abgelöst.* In the place of a *von Gott bestimmten Erziehungsdenkens steht eine von Menschen gemachte Orthodoxie oder eine gesetzliche Religionspädagogik* (cf. Smart, s.a.:13-17).

It is probable that in the New Testament times there was a combination of the Old Testament idea and the educational approaches of the Greeks and Romans. The latter were far more anthropocentric by nature. In the New Testament the Old Testament tradition of cultivating and disciplining and the Greek tradition of building up and almost unfolding the new person merge. In essence *didache* concerns the fact that it is God who speaks through the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. It concerns the truth about Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Kurios (cf. Ephesians; Kittel 1964:135-165).

There is an obvious link between teaching and discipling in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). They are inseparably linked, so much so, that we can speak of 'discipling-by-teaching' (Firet 1986:65). Teaching remains initiation into the 'way', guidance on the 'way' and following Him wisely and

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2. Cf. Exodus 10:1ff, 12:24ff, 13:8ff, 13:14ff; Deut. 4:9, 6:20ff.

with discernment.[3] Paul's prayer for the Christians in Philippi (Phil. 1:9-11. NIV.) illustrates this beautifully.

In summarizing, I wish to quote Firet (1986:68) on the essence of the mode of *didache*:

> In the Old Testament the heart of the *didache* is *chanukka*: the father inducts his child into the way he or she must go - into the story and the way of his or her people. *Didache* is also *torah* - the voice which instructs - and *chokma*, instruction in the paths of uprightness (Prov. 4:11).

In the New Testament this is all taken up in the instruction that guides a person in the way of discipleship and life in the messianic community. In thinking of the mode one could picture a horizontal line: salvation appears on the road we travel day by day, step by step, through the complexities of life... The Lord calls: 'Follow me!'

2.3 The essentials of communication

Communication consists of someone who speaks, someone who listens and thirdly something being said, or a sender, a receiver and a message. These are the basic essentials. However, there are more and equally valid essentials, such as how the sender is saying what has to be said, how the receiver is listening to what is being said, and what has to be said. Communication theory (cf. Pieterse 1985:92ff) applies to teaching as well. Teaching is basically an art of communication. In teaching we therefore must take heed that we know and obey the basic essentials of communication.

2.4 A few keys to teaching as communication

2.4.1 Learning the art of speaking and listening

Words are but one of the elements of speaking. Other elements include emotion, sincerity and authenticity. It is believed that emotion is only for 7% conveyed through words, 38% through voice tone and 55% through facial expression (cf. Pieterse 1985:98). Speaking in teaching is a very complex communicative act. Even more so is listening. In the listening process people normally distinguish five elements: receiving (hearing), paying attention, attaching meaning to what you hear, reaction, and retention (Thompson 1983:41-43; Pieterse 1985:100-101). Communication is not to be taken for granted. Teachers must learn to communicate and master the art of speaking and listening in order to speak in such a way that they earn the right to be listened to.

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3. It is of great interest that Paul refers to his own 'leer en lewe' (NAV) as tas hodos mou in 1 Cor. 4:17 - and this in connection with his own didaskein 'everywhere in every church'.

2.4.2 Conveying more than propositions

Teaching the Bible is often seen as handing over carefully considered doctrines of the Bible. In the face of the problems of the teaching of the Bible to children (cf. Nel 1990:210-219) churches and educational systems often choose to interpret the Bible on behalf of the children and to offer them 'the correct interpretation' as clearly as possible and as early as possible. What is very often conveyed in this manner is not the Bible itself but an interpretation of the Bible. The meaning of a certain story is thus moulded like jelly and served. It is this approach to teaching the Bible, according to many scholars, that leads to the destruction of the urge to go on discovering the message of this Book. According to Fowler (1981:173) it is precisely this approach that usually leads to sacralizing the authoritative interpretation from the outside during adolescence. Thus progress to the next stage of faith is not only slowed down or destroyed, but theology also becomes ideology. The possibility and the capability to practise theology internally is, in this way, being kept from the adolescent. According to Fowler, this is also one of the psychological reasons why so many people are influenced by the 'authoritative approach' discernible in many electronic churches.

Another consequence of this approach is the fact that the adolescent 'knows exactly' what the Bible is all about, so much so that any new attempt to get him or her to become acquainted with the Bible itself may fail even before it is initiated. By the time adolescents are in high school some are openly bored with what is said in class - not so much because the story in itself is boring but the adventure of discovering new meaning has been spoiled by fixation on a specific interpretation too soon. What is there to discover for a child who has never been allowed to miss a 'pre-mixed meal' of interpreted stories in the home, the Sunday school class and at school (cf. Gobbel & Gobbel 1986:1-16; Dingemans 1986:13ff; Van den Bank 1987:341-355)? Such children suffer from 'mental indigestion' as a result and become tired of the same 'dishes' - in other words of listening to the same interpretations. Bible teaching thus becomes the teaching of propositions. It misses the freshness of discovering for oneself that, and how, the story of Yahweh and his people becomes the story of Yahweh and me. It takes away the exciting discovery that: 'I am part of that story. It is my story, because I am part of the faith community'.

2.4.3 Taking part in personality formation (Firet 1986:144)

Teaching the Bible always takes into account that God himself is involved in the 'way' of a specific human being. Seen in this light, we may accept that teachers are purposefully being 'used' by God in the personality development and formation of adolescents. By the time that we teach the Bible to adolescents they have been on the way for quite some time. Their original system, formed by a complex of genetic and congenital dispositions, is a given. The *auseinandersetzung* between the person and his or her world is

already happening. By this is meant the ongoing discourse between a person and his/her world. Every single human being has a social context and is contextually influenced. Educators and teachers participate in this discourse by entering into the discourse as a second voice, a contrapuntal relationship.

> The first melody in the process of personality formation is the contextual influence which plays upon the original personality system (Firet 1986:178).

We can, and may, never ignore or eliminate contextual influence. It is vital that not one single growing person be abandoned or left alone to his or her contextual influence.

Every developing individual is in an ongoing, almost dialectical, discourse with his world. This is often called 'humanization', meaning that:

> the person-as-spirit realizes himself in receptive and responsive openness and encounter with what comes up out of himself and his world, and in a responsible assimilation of this material. Not only does he become human in this dialectic; rather, in this dialectic he is active in becoming human (Firet 1986:178).

Nurturing (education and teaching) in this process provides the 'countermelody'. It functions as *punctum contra punctum* and has its own independent role while it is, at the same time, attuned to it.

Teachers in close co-operation with any other 'nurturer', and especially parents, are thus playing a role in the personality formation of the adolescent. In order to do so effectively, it is vital that teenagers be viewed as fully and equally human. Firet's conviction in this regard is of the utmost importance. He claims that nurturing is structurally 'determined by the *equihuman dimension*; the growth-promoting relationship (*relatio auctifica*) realizes itself in recognizing the humanness of the person being nurtured - i.e., his equality in dignity as a human being' (1986:178). His point is that the child, and specifically the teenager, is not only a fellow-human, he or she is equally human. The Dutch word *evenmenselijk* is almost without an equivalent English term. The word implies a pre-ethical presumption of equality between persons not usually thought of as equals, explains the translator of the American issue.[4] When this is not the attitude and insight of the teacher, teaching may take place, but learning does not. What is to be emphasized is what Erikson (1958:15) in another context calls 'facing-a-face' rather than 'facing-a-problem'. Richards (1978:137ff) shows that this is a major stumbling block in the relationships between adults and teenagers. Teenagers perceive themselves as being treated as inferior and being spoken down to. In strong paternalistic and authoritarian societies this problem is aggravated.

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4. I am not going to explain how Firet sees the 'inequality' between a teacher and a child. He explains it in full detail by employing a term from Van den Berg namely 'asymmetry' - a term that refers to 'a disparity which exists on the basis of a fundamental and essential equality' (Firet 1986:162ff).

Being religious does not necessarily break the bondage of the authoritarian personality - it may even strengthen it (cf. Firet 1986:150-156; Ziebertz 1991:39vv). Being viewed and often treated as 'still less human' has a tremendous influence on the becoming of a person. It influences motivation for life in its totality (Bolton & Smith 1983:77ff). It may even be one of the most valid causes for the youth's almost fanatic insistence on democratizing every single institution. A recently published report by the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1992) on community programmes 'for young people living in high-risk environments' repeatedly emphasizes the necessity of 'participation in decisions of the organization' (1992:11; cf. Nipkow 1990:107ff).

The key to teaching, as communication, is to take part in the personality formation of the adolescent and to facilitate his or her becoming. To achieve this teachers will also have to change. Firet (1986:164) is, in my opinion, correct in stating that

> the growth promoter who does not enter the relationship as equal, does not enter the relationship; he does not come close to the other; he cannot even maintain distance: he is simply not there.

This prerequisite for equihumanness, together with the fact that the teenager himself or herself is a person with an unique responsibility and has to be seen and treated as such, are rightly so-called pre-agogic categories. Three of these categories are distinguished: ▪ The teacher is equihuman to the teenager; at the same time ▪ the teenager is equihuman to the teacher, and ▪ the teenager is a person called and entitled to accountability.[5] The aim of personality development is to help people become, in an ongoing manner, what they should be, as people of God. Nurturing thus focuses on the quintessence of becoming and being fully human. It is directed 'towards this person's ability to function independently as a psychospiritual being in his own world' (Firet 1986:182). Independent in this statement is to be understood as 'self-reliance' - which does not exclude a degree of dependence (Firet 1986:186; Wijngaarden 1961:425).

It is clear that teaching the Bible to teenagers should benefit the becoming of the person God wants him or her to be in his or her world. This is the aim of the process of change (*agogy*). And this should include a continuous change to function with greater self-reliance as psychospiritual beings in their worlds. Part of this is the ability of people to change to what is called an objective realism (*saaklikheid*). Such an approach requires an openness to people for whom they are, to 'discover' themselves while being discovered. A non-objective approach refers to a closing off of ourselves to others, denying them the opportunity to function as 'significant others' in our lives, and to

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5. Compare with regard to accountability and self-pity a very important essay of Lance Morrow in Time, April 12 1993:60.

> deprive that other of the opportunity to be what it is in itself - and, before we have heard the question of that other, pronounce our domineering word (Firet 1986:210).

On the one hand, being such a person is absolutely necessary for being a worthwhile participant (the second voice) in the life of the person with whom we are in the relationship that is aimed at the becoming of that person. On the other hand, objective realism is part of the goal of any agogical situation - a situation where God's re-creative initiative is related to the concrete existence of a human being. Objective realism concretizes itself in what is termed unhindered receptivity *(zuivere receptiviteit)*, pure discernment *(zuivere discressie)*, and creativity (Firet 1986:212-230).

In this regard the insight of Fowler is of the utmost importance. Not only does it help us to grasp certain qualities that a community must possess if its members are to function as full partners in a dialogical teaching setting (Osmer 1990:214), but it also helps us set and describe a 'modal level' for the community. This refers to the average expected level of development that a community projects. Normally, Fowler's fifth stage is set as 'modal level', namely *conjunctive faith* (Fowler 1981:184ff). Osmer's (1990:214) interpretation of this stage is justified: this stage of faith is characterized by a *committed* or *principled openness*. Persons at this stage can assume the individuation of the previous stage (individuative-reflective faith MN) and now are willing to acknowledge the limitations of their own faith perspective. They are deeply conscious of their need for dialogue with other perspectives of truth that can expand and correct their own. It is precisely this style of faith that is necessary for genuine participation by a congregation and its members in the teaching office. The point that is made above is that teachers of the Bible must have the fifth stage as their modal level. It is also the modal level to be set for the community at large - even though not for teenagers as such.

2.4.4 Modelling: personality communicates

The honest, open, sincere person communicates (cf. Pieterse 1985:98). Being and becoming such a person is thus of crucial importance for teaching as an art of communication. Dealing with this aspect would require a separate paper. It is sufficient to say that example is more powerful than precept. A basic question regarding teaching is not so much, at least not initially 'what shall I do?', but 'what kind of person should I be?'. Modelling is so basic to nurturing (cf. Hall 1960:74ff) that in more than one sense to a child the process of becoming is a process of *becoming what the teacher is.*

This is a frightening concept, especially when coupled with something else that is more of a half-truth. When the teaching of the Bible is seen as a way of changing teenagers into the image of a specific ideal of the community, disaster is looming. This, in conjunction with a neo-humanism, puts everything in service of personality-formation of a very specific nature,

whether it be 'Christian, democratic, Bolshevist, moral, etc' (Firet 1986; cf. Smart, s.a.:92ff, 154ff; Hammelsbeck 1958:48). The Bible is in such a case being used for the purpose of the teacher - however lofty that purpose may be. What was meant to be served then must serve the purpose of the teacher.[6] This sometimes is linked to a very pietistic and legalistic approach to life and to Christian education (Nel 1991a:631-643; Firet 1977:143). In this approach modelling means that the person of the teacher almost becomes the goal of the teaching. The Gospel then becomes a 'law' by which children and teenagers are trained (modelled) to become like the rest of the 'clan'. On the 'Christian' showground, this new trainee knows exactly how to 'show off' with the right and expected behaviour. Away from it all, they usually break away and do as the others do and often they run around in a 'lawless' way. After years of this kind of training many (in some societies most) leave the showgrounds - some never to come back. Others do come back, and some of them only to take part in the 'dressing' of the next generation.

When Christian educators are acting as if they are self-reliant, spiritual functioning beings, with artificial objective realism, the abovementioned is to be expected. Children in most cases revert to the lifestyles that have been set as examples to them (Kohnstamm 1948:277; Behr et al. 1986:69ff; Sonnekus & Ferreira 1979:181ff, 195ff).

Modelling embodies more than imitation or identification - a concept introduced by Freud (cf. Hall 1960:74ff; Firet 1986:174ff) - no matter how important these two particular concepts are for our understanding of how people learn to believe (cf. Dingemans 1986:120ff; Dienst 1978:56-76). Modelling also involves more than using the Bible to mould people to our own or our clan's image. It is an honest following of Christ - a reckoning with God in our deepest moments of failure and our greatest moments of success. It is being authentic in what we are in Him and in all we do. It is helping teenagers to identify with Christ - communicating to them how we honestly, sometimes with success and sometimes in despair, follow Him (cf. Te Winkel s.a.:114-117). Authentic, sincere teachers communicate - teachers who follow the One they teach about; who know the One they want others to know; those for whom the Bible should not be used for sundry educational purposes but to teach the message of God's coming to his people, through the mode of *didache*. Firet (1986:245, 246) puts it this way:

> The question is not primarily that of his perceived competence, trustworthiness, and selflessness, however important it may be... The issue of the credibility of the pastor (and teacher MN) is at bottom the question of the recognizability in the pastor (and teacher MN), of the man of God in process of becoming.

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6. The Dutch here reads better than the translation: Enige bediening 'die opvoedend willen zijn lopen ook gevaar 'de zaak', d.i. het woord waarin God aan het woord wil komen, ontrouw te worden, nl. doordat zij het woord niet dienen, maar gebruiken' (Firet 1977:141).

3. Teaching teenagers

A teenager cannot be taken apart and examined as separate parts - as you would do with an automobile. Any human being is more than the sum of his parts (Seely in Zuck & Benson 1979:116ff). I merely attempt to stress the most important and significant 'hallmarks', the 'major themes of adolescence' (cf. Hanks 1991:43) - early, middle and late adolescence. I have also decided not to describe the well-known physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual traits separately. This has been done excellently by many other authors (cf. Irving & Zuck 1968:75-150; Hanks 1991:44-48; Richards 1983:89ff; Zuck & Benson 1979:116-162).

3.1 Culture

Teenagers are greatly influenced by the culture of the society in which they grow up. This is probably the most important aspect of their contextual influence. Becoming, to them is a critical encounter and discourse with their social environment and culture. Sara Little (1968:34) said, after studying Socrates

> that whatever is problematic about adolescents must be viewed against the background of the culture of a given time and nation... Adolescence as distinct human behaviour emerges when a society is no longer stable.

Adolescence is an invention of society. Society and the dominant culture within a society are major influences on teenagers (Hoffmann 1980:9-28; Strommen et al. 1972; Strommen 1979; Myers 1987:5ff; Myers 1991:3-22; 65ff; 133ff). They are to a large degree what society makes them. On the one hand, whoever ignores the society of teenagers ignores the teenager. On the other hand, whatever the context of teenagers, every occasion to educate, teach, and nurture is an opportunity to change a risk into an opportunity (Carnegie Corporation 1992:15, 25ff). Where teenagers live in so-called high-risk areas, the influence of culture and society are predominantly negative and the risks are consequently large - but so are the opportunities (cf. Carnegie Corporation 1992:9-14).

The cultural heritage of teenagers provides a rich source of building blocks for identity development... In seeking to understand adolescents' behaviour, keep in mind their socio-economic level and their cultural heritage' (Olson 1987:58).

3.2 Seven goals of adolescents

After a lifetime in research, mainly on adolescence, Merton Strommen and his wife published *Five cries of Parents* (1985). They state the seven main goals that teenagers wish to accomplish - even though these goals are not clearly formulated or stated. They use (1985:33-34) the following acronym to clarify what they mean:

A: *Achievement*: the satisfaction of arriving at excellence in some area of endeavour.

F: *Friends*: the broadening of one's social base by having learnt to make friends and maintain them.

F: *Feelings*: the self-understanding gained through having learnt to share one's feelings with another person.

I:*Identity*: the sense of knowing 'who I am', of being recognized as a significant person.

R: *Responsibility*: the confidence of knowing 'I can stand alone and make responsible decisions'.

M: *Maturity*: transformation from a child into an adult.

S: *Sexuality*: acceptance of responsibility for one's new role as a sexual being.

Anyone addressing a group of teenagers can be sure that each and everyone of them is busy in some way or other, with these tasks. Little's summary (1968:43-47) ties in with this distinction and is still relevant:

> Four recurring themes run through expressions of the teen years, usually unverbalized and unconscious hopes or needs, expressing themselves in varied forms, to greater or lesser degrees of clarity and intensity: *I want to be me, I want to make a difference, I want to be a part, and I want to love and be loved.*

This is what is normally meant by finding your personal identity ('who am I'), your social identity ('how and to whom do I relate') and your ideological identity ('what should I believe') (Williams in Zuck & Benson 1979:147-151).

3.3 Knowing their potential

Knowledge of the abovementioned developmental tasks or goals of teenagers is very important. They must be linked to more in depth knowledge of teenagers' cognitive, moral and spiritual sensitivities, abilities and potential. It is not possible to deal with these in any detail in one article. Excellent interpretations of the work of Piaget (cognitive development), Kohlberg (moral development) and several other scholars, were done by Richards (1983:89-174). Fowler writes (1981:41-88) a 'fictional conversation with Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson on the different phases of adolescence'. People like Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (1986) interpreted and evaluated Fowler in a book they edited called *Faith development and Fowler*. The point to be made is that teaching the Bible to teenagers can never bypass, and in a sense is impossible without, thorough knowledge of teenagers, their thought patterns, their emotional sensitivity and volatility, their moral development, resentments and struggle, and their spiritual openness. Not only is this a

moral obligation towards them, not only is this exactly the implications of the abovementioned equihuman 'claim', but this is also an essential ingredient of good communication: we must know the recipient. Everything must be done to understand the context, the make-up, the shortcomings and the potential of teenagers - even more so when we teach interculturally (cf. Kraft 1983).

4. Guidelines for the *praxis*

I use *praxis* here in a technical, practical theological sense, that is as communicative acts (*kommunikatiewe geloofshandelinge*) in service of the Gospel (cf. Pieterse 1991:43-45; Nel 1991b:22-37; Louw: 1992:124). It concerns the *praxis* of God as reflected in the *praxis* of his people. This sets the framework for the *praxis* of teaching the Bible to teenagers. I am no prophet but am convinced that in future, in new circumstances the, emphasis will shift from a *praxis* where everything is expected from a particular form or system of education to increasingly expecting the outcome of teaching and education from the activities of Christian teachers in a secular institution (cf. Ter Haar 1990:98). God's *praxis* is multidimensional and our *praxis* must cease to be one-dimensional - we will have to imitate the One about whom we teach and 'focus our service upon the personal, biological, psychological and socio-economic needs of people' (Byfield 1987:27). As stated in my introduction, I shall not discuss the question whether the Bible is to be taught in school, or to everybody in school, irrespective of his or her creed. I work on the assumption that somehow or other the Bible is being taught to teenagers. In summarizing, then, what are some guidelines for doing so?

4.1 The great 'I am' and the great 'who am I'

The testimony of the Bible to the great 'I am' is more than a comfort to struggling teachers. We 'must believe that God is and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him' (Hebr. 11:6). This is faith in operation and testifies to our own stage of faith development.[7]

What is important is to try and help teenagers, who are searching their own 'who am I', to discover for themselves the one and only 'I am'. Faith development is, in the final analysis, the development of a living relationship between the one in search of his or her own identity and the great 'I am'. Part of this identity search then is coming to grips with the reality that the way of Yahweh with his people is His way with me (cf. 2.2 above). Another dimension of this is the open-endedness of this search for identity. The purpose of faith development is not to move people from one stage to the next as if this were an end in itself. Even though Fowler has been accused of this, it is not his intention (Fowler 1987:81, 95; cf. Osmer 1990:289).

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7. For the almost sad fact that many teenagers and adults never grow beyond Stage 3 (synthetic-conventional faith) see Fowler (1981:151ff).

Teaching teenagers the Bible in this sense is more or less what Richards (1978:32-35) means by saying that ministry with youth must stress direct experience and must build on the 'lived moment' (an expression he borrows from Snyder 1969:33). Teenagers are performance-oriented and helping them understand God's continuous 'performances' of grace, love, mercy and punishment will help them to get to know the great 'I am' as He really is. This moves away from a philosophical approach to teaching the Bible as though the Bible contains a set of objective truths about God, so that when someone knows these truths about him, he or she automatically knows and understands God. This is simply not true and we will have to go back to 'basics' to know the great 'I am' - who is so full of surprises and so amazingly more than we expect him to be.

4.2 Creating a pastoral situation

The relationship within which real change and growth (*agogy*) can happen is basically pastoral. It is a relationship that communicates the important pre-agogical categories as discussed above (Firet 1986:232ff). It is predominantly a relationship that 'communicates belonging' (Richards 1983:172). This can be called the basic framework within which teenagers learn. It has to be carefully created and to be sustained on a daily basis.

> Both Scripture and the research on learning stress the importance of affectional relationships and the development of a sense of security that comes with trust in others (Richards 1983:172; cf. Olson 1987:45ff).

There is no artificial way of creating this pastoral situation. Openness on the side of the teacher, genuine authenticity and sincerity are among the most important characteristics that will create this relationship of trust and caring. Only within this creative relationship will real change in attitude take place. When teenagers are actively involved in such a relationship their mental or spiritual functioning changes for the good, towards a self-reliant functioning as receptive, discerning and creative persons (Firet 1986:203ff).

4.3 The underlying goal: personality formation

This not only implies personal attention to individual teenagers, but also views teaching as being instrumental in assisting the becoming of a specific person. It is guiding teenagers to become the persons God intended them to be. In the encounter, the discourse between teenagers and their context, the teacher as the 'second voice', moves between them and their search for guidance, answers, values and norms, et cetera from God. Richards (1983:173) calls this 'provide instruction-as-interpretation-of-life'. They are struggling - often without realizing - with their developmental tasks. Becoming is not easy in a secular, pluralist and even atheist society (cf. Verkuyl 1978:56ff; Nel 1991c:193-205). Teenagers need teachers who link

their teaching to real-life experiences and who are able to relate the stories and the message of the Bible to real-life situations.

To achieve this it is important to involve teenagers in their own teaching. The process should include participation (Richards 1983:172) and encourage questioning. Gangel (1981:36) states that 'the methodology 'must be interaction-centered'. Thus the teacher and the rest of the class become involved in the discourse between the individual and his or her context. And every time this happens, the individual is assisted in the formation of his or her personality. When it does not happen or when the process is ended because of a break in communication or trust, the danger exists that the context alone is playing the tune, and then the individual may become another 'product' of society and the dominant culture.

Teaching, as the humanization of any person, has its starting point in dealing with a particular person as a human being.

> A human being is never - not even a child - only an object which can be taught, commanded, spoken *to*; he or she is always an equal who is and has to be himself or herself an agent, and as such has to be spoken *with* (Firet 1986:161).

In our pluralistic society dialogue becomes a very important part of teaching (Thompson 1988:303ff) and helping teenagers in the process of becoming, *distinguishing*, who they want to be and what they want to believe, and allowing them to exercise their choice. The time for authoritarian 'shaping and making' is over. The time for time-consuming, mind-testing and often emotionally demanding dialogue and conversation is here to stay.

4.4 Become what you would like the other to become

In the light of the abovementioned, this guiding principle is obvious. Or perhaps it is not? Are we becoming self-reliant, spiritual, functioning human beings with a committed or principled openness (Osmer 1990)? Are we growing in the understanding of whom the great *'I am'* is? And are we growing in insight of the incomprehensible greatness of his love for, and patience with, this world? And in understanding the reasons why He is merciful? Is God becoming more and more God and are we becoming more and more human, samples of a new humanity? There is no way that this can happen before the eyes of sensitive and attentive teenagers without them noticing and becoming involved. This is one of the meanings of modelling. Richards (1975:84-85) summarizes what in his opinion will enhance the impact of modelling. I use this summary here in order to argue a case for becoming a model, over and against a ready-made model. The summary is as follows:

- There needs to be frequent, long-term contact with the model(s).
- There needs to be a warm, loving relationship with the model(s).

- There needs to be exposure to the inner states of the model(s).
- The model(s) need to be observed in a variety of life settings and situations.
- The model(s) need to exhibit consistency and clarity in behaviours, values, etc.
- There needs to be a correspondence between behaviour of the model(s) and the beliefs (ideal standards) of the community.
- There needs to be explanation of the lifestyle of the model(s) conceptually, with instruction accompanying shared experiences (cf. Richards 1983:172).

All this comes to show the love of God for us, living this life in a positive Christ-like attitude and teaching what we have to teach as humble servants - in service of the communication of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Of course this approach (theory) demands a change of method. But above all, it demands a change of heart. We live in a pluralistic world, we have to answer questions that we were not aware of and had not asked ourselves. We have to consider religions that we formerly rejected outright, often quite aggressively. We have to teach teenagers how to be Christians true to the Gospel, but without offending those to whom we want to communicate the uniqueness of the Christ of the Scriptures.

5. Conclusion

Teaching is itself a challenge. Teaching the Bible is even more so. Teaching the Bible to teenagers is a risky challenge. It is also an opportunity. Because they have critical minds, teenagers are spiritually open to discussion. Because of their *needs and wants* (Olson 1987:64-90) they are searching. Because of their, sometimes unconscious, desire to complete the developmental tasks of adolescence they are teachable. Given the right setting, the facilitative pastoral relationship, and the authenticity of a becoming man or woman as teacher, they even like being taught. They rise above themselves and become wonderful people to work with. Teaching teenagers may even be the most rewarding work. It is still believed that most people make their most important and life-changing decisions during these years.

I believe we need a new approach to teaching the Bible. This approach concerns a new appreciation for the Bible and what it is all about[8], a new evaluation of the mode of *didache* itself and a serious attempt to get to know teenagers for whom they are and to accept them as equal human beings. The fact that we have to teach the Bible in an increasingly pluralistic world must be taken into consideration. This has tremendous consequences for the

8. Because of lack of space I have not tried to cover this in any detail. In another article (Nel 1990:210-219), I try to explore in more detail the problems concerning the Bible as 'teaching material'. Also compare the dissertation of Kuiper (1980).

approach, attitude and method of teaching (cf. Hammond et al. 1990). In a sense we are thus back to early phases of Christianity. We have to earn the right to be heard. We hope this, together with other factors, will bring about a Christian community with far more sincerity and authenticity. And how invaluable is such a community to the Christian teacher and to the teaching of the Bible!

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