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OLD TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Abstract

Although the Old Testament offers neither a theory of nor a curriculum for religious education, it is possible to uncover the presuppositions about religion, society, and their interrelatedness that formed the horizon for such education in Israel. In the first place religious education was part of the process of integrating children into the life of a society which was more or less co-extensive with the religious community. This being the case, parents and other members of the extended family played a primary role in the transmission of the tradition. The primary vehicle was the story, which in a variety of ways served to link the religious and ethical teaching of the tradition to the everyday life of the community. Secondly, participation in culture celebrations set the scene for invigoration and purification of the parental teaching. The rituals not only promoted a sense of sharing; but also provided an intermediate level between the narrative world and the world of imaginative living. Lastly, education took place in the context of structures of authority. These structures were seen as embedded in a cosmic order clothed in mystery and grandeur. To challenge legitimate authority was both to be lacking in the 'fear of Yahwe' and to ally oneself with the destructive forces of primal chaos. It is likely that Israel's views on tradition, ritual celebration, and legitimate authority, far from being unique, would find numerous echoes in other traditional societies, including African societies. In fact, these views continue to pose questions that cannot be ignored by any theory of religious education.

To find links between traditional African social structures and practices and those attested in the Old Testament is so easy that one is tempted to assume from the start that Old Testament perspectives on religious education would be more closely aligned to African models than to Western ones. Nevertheless, caution is called for. When comparisons and contrasts go to the head, sober judgment goes to the dogs. To employ isolated elements of the lives of societies to set up ambitious comparative models, can serve to obscure both the structures of the societies as wholes and the ever-present changes that affect societies.

In the light of the above I need to make my purpose very clear:

1. I do not wish to equate Old Testament perspectives with 'African perspectives' as opposed to 'Western perspectives'. Aside from the fact that the generalizing labels are misleading, the patterns of correspondence and opposition are too complex and subtle to be expressed in such a simple formula.

2. I deal with perspectives, not principles. The Old Testament offers no formal paedagogics or didactics. The perspectives I wish to examine concern the largely unconscious and unstated presuppositions about society, religion, education and their interrelatedness that are so closely linked to the normal praxis of a society that they seldom become the focus of theoretical discussion. By and large, then, access to such perspectives is by inference, by the reading of certain passages across the grain (if not against the grain). It is not surprising that the perspectives uncovered are to a large extent not uniquely Israelite or Yahwistic.

3. This being the case, it would be folly to set up these perspectives as normative guidelines, as if they represent 'the Biblical teaching on religious education'.

4. I restrict myself to three perspectives that I believe to be of fundamental importance in understanding the social setting of religious education in Israel. Although I have chosen to open each perspective by means of a key word, my concern is not with isolated or even related ideas but with three broad visions, three pictures of a whole.

5. By this approach I hope to demonstrate that any view of religious education and any program for it depend on what we want society to be, what we believe religion to be and what role we assign to religion in society and on the opportunities and constraints inherent in our situation. The problems of restructuring religious education are not merely technical ones.

1. Tradition

My first thesis is that the teaching of parents and other members of the extended family formed the basis of religious education in Israel and that parental teaching received immediate and strong reinforcement in the life of the community. About the role of parents there is general concensus (cf Köhler 1956:73-85; Wolff 1974:178-180; Kaster 1962:30f; Culpepper 1982:22f; Hempel 1958:63f; De Vaux 1968:48f). A number of passages in the Old Testament refer to it, Deuteronomy 6:7 being the best known. The second part of my thesis is less often explicitly mentioned, but it seems to me to be a vital part of the dialectic of religious education in Israel (see Gerstenberger 1965:128f, 140f). On the one hand religious education in the family context formed an integral part of the preparation of the child for life in the community; on the other hand the ethos of the community tended to complement and reinforce home-based religious education as the child was gradually integrated into the social life of the community.

Obviously this is only possible in a society where social group and religious community are more or less co-extensive. Moreover, it implies a society in which religion

permeates the fabric of daily living to such an extent that, for instance, praying for rain and sowing, harvest and harvest festival, can hardly be conceived of in isolation from each other. As Maag (1980A:334) puts it:

> In the archaic world nothing is profane. Everything is sacral order.

Such a situation should be clearly distinguished from the ideal often advocated by churches, namely that one should carry one's religious convictions into all spheres of one's life or that one should 'live out' one's religion (Afr: *uitleef*). The very terminology pinpoints the profound difference in conceptual framework. In one case the individual is conceived of as having or possessing 'a religion' or 'religious convictions'. This religion must then be projected ónto or carried ínto a world and society seen as neutral or even hostile. In this way the world is made to conform to the religion of the individual - the world is baptized. In Israel (and doubtlessly in other traditional societies) the picture is reversed. The individual child needs religious education to carry him/her into a world and society that is already a religious one. The child is taught to live herself/himself ínto a religious milieu (Afr: *inleef*), thus conforming to the religious nature of the world and the society.

In the Old Testament the concept of a society as a religious community is clearly present in the Deuteronomic ideal of the covenant community. Whether this ideal ever corresponded to a reality in the social order, is a moot point today. For a variety of reasons I cannot accept the view that what we know as the religion of the Old Testament is more or less completely a product of the post-exilic era (cf Smith 1987:20-22); recently Garbini (1988:54-65) and Lemche (1990:197-257). In what follows, I work on the assumption that the idealized picture of Deuteronomy was reflected in the social life of the rural communities in the Israelite heartland over a period stretching from the early monarchy well into the post-exilic era, albeit in a very limited way.

It is this community that lived by tradition, perpetuated itself by tradition and grew as it shaped tradition. In this community tradition was a living reality that shaped people's lives. In this sense one should not say that their traditions were life-related, but rather that their lives were tradition-orientated.

At the same time tradition provided the tool for integrating new members into the community. Lastly, the traditions did not remain static. Traditions have a direct function for the people who transmit them, thus they can be changed and reinterpreted to meet new needs (Knight, quoted in Harrelson 1979:15). In Israel traditions originally bound to a specific group, locality or event expanded to include 'all Israel' (Harrelson 1979:13). In the passage of traditions *dôr lĕdôr* traditions were constantly related anew to the life of the community.

That the traditions were transmitted mainly in the form of oral, prose narratives is now commonly accepted and the view championed by Gunkel (1901:38) and still held by von Rad (1975:109), that the earlier traditions were in poetic form, can be dismissed. Even if it is futile to attempt to recover the oral traditions passed from generation to generation from behind the written sources, it is surely possible to get glimpses of what parental religious instruction entailed.

(i) Basic ethical precepts must have been transmitted, perhaps in the simple 'apodictic' form still found in the seventh, eighth and ninth commandments. Genesis 18:19 mentions the responsibility of the paterfamilias for the moral instruction of the members of his family. I do not claim that any specific corpus in the Old Testament represents this moral teaching or that such teaching stands at the origin of 'apodictic law' (cf Gerstenberger 1965: *passim*; see the critical assessment of Gerstenberger's theory in Richter 1966:116f,144ff,188-192). The point is simply that the form of parental moral instruction is by its nature not casuistic: simple, short and authoritatively worded sentences are to be expected.

(ii) Parental religious instruction was bound to include the traditional wisdom of the community, the rules of social conduct necessary for social adjustment (cf Köhler 1956:77f; Kaster 1962:29f), the lessons of experience and the time-honoured sayings of the fathers. Gerstenberger (1965:142) points out that in this context the distinction between law and wisdom cannot be clearly drawn. Again, it is not easy to identify such teaching with specific parts of the Old Testament, say in Proverbs. On the other hand, Hermisson's claim that Proverbs represents only the wisdom of the schools (Hermisson 1968), is an exaggerated one (see the severe criticism of Whybray 1974 and Golka 1973, and more balanced, Crenshaw 1985). Nor are McKane's arguments to prove that Israelite wisdom was originally purely secular and that a religious veneer was applied to it at a later stage (McKane 197O:11-22) compelling, as Wilson (1987) has demonstrated (cf Murphy 1987:451-456). Some time ago already Hempel (1958) analysed the material in Proverbs from the point of view of its roots in parental instruction. He points out that the material reflects the pathos and humour of the parent-child relationship (Brueggemann 1985 uses the words 'passion' and 'perspective' in a similar context). Learning how to live is a matter of life or death, yet it requires a sense of the absurd and a light touch to master the art. It is sad to see this tradition fall into the hands of scholars who lack the humility to see the pathos and the imagination to see the humour.

(iii) The broadest stream of tradition reached children through stories. At the risk of incurring the wrath of the form critics, I would claim that precision about the genres of the stories is a matter of lesser importance. At any rate, the stories of ancient Israel have proved something of an embarassment to religious education: they seem so trivial and not even very proper. In Genesis alone we find stories of fratricide, incest, homosexual rape, lying, cheating, stealing, pride, envy and whatever else. Some of the stories are spicy and entertaining; can they be Educational?

Fortunately these stories are now being assessed more favourably, both in Old Testament studies and in systematic theology. It is now realised that it is not enough to say that these stories served 'the transmission of the historical heritage of Israel' (Kaster 1962:29), or to explain the prominence of narrative in the Old Testament by saying: 'History is the thought-form of Old Testament faith' (Seeligmann quoted by Smend 1977:56). In fact, the 'unique historical consciousness of Israel' that so delighted von Rad and mesmerized the Pannenberg-school, may well be a red herring. A more profitable course is to look at the nature and function of the story.

> Theologies demand acceptance; stories cry out for participation, the acting out of a community (Buck 1977:357).

Stories do serve to convey something - in that sense they are given - but the 'something' cannot be reduced to a simple 'message' - in that sense they are always remade in the traditioning process. This is what Brueggemann (1985:173) wishes to stress when he says that the stories, though open-ended, are not negotiable (cf Buck 1977:358; Hauerwas 1985:187). Tradition, Knight says (1977:1), promotes solidarity with the past and the present of the group. When the medium of the tradition is the story, however, this solidary is not rigid and uncritical. It includes as much of the future as of the past, thus Harrelson (1977:24) correctly says that a

> ... core tradition (is) a shared story in terms of which the people's origins, present life *and future possibilities* are unveiled (my emphasis).

Fishbane (1977) has illuminated the tension inherent in the process of passing a tradition from one generation to another in his analysis of Dt 6:20-25. The child asks the parent what the meaning of the commandments is for the parent, excluding herself/himself. The parent explains using language that includes the child. Fishbane (81) concludes

> ... what is immediate and subjective to the fathers, is mediate and objective to the sons.

The retelling of the story makes it possible for the two generations to become 'spiritual contemporaries' (82). The Exodus story is thus

> ... a life teaching through which an objective past recurrently gave way to a subjectivized event in the present (121f).

Heschel (1959:211f) puts it even more briefly: tradition was Israel's way of 'seeing the past in the present tense'.

The child that steps into the world through the gateway of the story, does not step into a void, but into a heritage. He or she shares in the curse incurred by Adam and Eve and in the promise given to Abraham and Sarah. He or she steps into life as an Israelite, a child bearing the name of the one who wrestled with God and came away with a limp and a blessing. The blessings and curses involved are not distant theories of eschatology on the one hand and of original sin on the other. The blessing is present underfoot; the curse on the sweating brow. Thus tradition serves a process of enculturation; it fosters group identity and a sense of belonging. At the same time it enables the child to reach a personal identity, for in the stories she/he is confronted with a pattern of choices and meanings that have to be appropriated, positively or negatively, by each individual (cf Smend 1979:61). In terms of semiotics one might say that the story tradition becomes a language, enabling members of the community both to express themselves and to communicate among themselves.

The use of aetiological notices can shed light on the way in which the stories making up the tradition were linked to the living world of the traditioning community. The original theory of aetiological narratives developed by Gunkel (Gunkel 1901:25-36; significantly, Gunkel himself later had doubts about his theory: see Rogerson

1987:15-18 and especially 179 n4), and ably defended by Mowinckel (1964:78-86), needs to be fundamentally revised in the light of the findings of Long (1968) and Childs (1974; cf Smend 1979:58). Both of the latter present strong evidence to deny that the aetiological notes were the formative cores around which the stories grew. In the light of this it is worth reconsidering the suggestion made by Albright (1957:71f) that the aetiologies served a didactic purpose (without embracing the Albright-school's views on the historical value of the stories). Since the aetiological notices link the past with some features of the present, they provide an opportunity for children to ask questions (or for parents to prompt questions) leading to stories that range far beyond the simple answers to the specific questions. Both Köhler (1956:79f) and Wolff (1974:179) envisage the actual process of education in this way, one which effectively integrates education into the daily routine. The daughter preparing the meat for the meal with her mother learns of Jacob's wrestling match; the son out in the fields with his father after the rain learns of the saving of Noah.

Brueggemann (1985) has examined the results of this type of education; I wish to present a view of the experience itself. Picture a child growing up among people whose lives and customs reflect a sacred tradition, where the very world with its ruins and rainbows witnesses to Yahwe's actions in the past and his promises for the future. Here there can be no question of a private dialogue with God being made public in religious education. Instead, religious education aims at the recognition and acceptance of the public facts that these people are God's people and that this world is God's world. Here 'God-talk' is no foreign body in everyday discourse. The dialogue with God makes up the discourse which is the life of the people. Two caveats should be appended here. In the first place this world was not, as far as Israel was concerned, a god- and demon-ridden world of conflict. Here I must agree with numerous scholars who see in Israel's monotheism a decisive departure from the mythological world view of her neighbours. The rainbow, while not yet being a mere optical effect, is no longer a divine or demonic presence, but a sign of the one God and his grace to the world. In a sense the Old Testament stands midway between the archaic world view and the modern one. In the second place the temptation to label Israelite education purely practical as opposed to 'theoretical' is to be avoided. Israelite practice had its theory as well. The education was indeed life-related, but only because the people lived this type of life.

2. Ritual

My second thesis is that cultic celebrations, especially the major festivals, played a vital part in religious education in Israel and that participations in the rituals served both to invigorate and to purify the traditions. The teaching role of the 'professionals', the cultic officials, is both logically and chronologically secondary to that of the parents. The teachings of the fathers are supplemented by those of the priests and Levites, who are themselves called fathers. The view of Wellhausen, that priests were leaders in the community because they were teachers and not because they offered sacrifices, is still valid. Joachim Wach (quoted in Sheehan 1977:40) con-

siders it a general rule in all religions that 'the priesthood is the formalization of the role of the father' (cf De Vaux 1968:49; Hempel 1958:65).

> The modern critical Protestant interpreters ... have no real understanding of the cult either in Biblical religion or in religion in general. More or less consciously they all share that contempt for ordered ecclesiastical worship which was common to pietism, revivalist movements, rationalism and liberalism (Mowinckel 1972:30).

Although this was written some years ago, it applies to such an extent today that one is tempted only to remove the qualifying words 'critical' and 'Protestant'. Cult and ritual was and is a *skandalon* to rationalist theologians, to revelation-in-history theologians and to exponents of 'practical religion' (a welcome exception in the latter category is Westerhoff who claims (1979:24) 'Insofar as we have neglected ritual, we have starved and discouraged social action'). The opposite view has been defended, often with as much one-sidedness, by Scandanavian scholars and some British scholars. Kapelrud (1977:102) writes

> The cult was the fertile soil in which ideas were born - and lived ... it was a living core in the relation between Yahweh and his people.

This may be overstating the case as far as the generative role of the cult is concerned. Elsewhere Kapelrud talks about the 'creative work' of the 'cultic traditionists' as 're-forming ancient material' (104). What is of importance is that neither popular tradition nor cultic tradition functioned as completely independent sources, a point to which we will return later. When sociological analysis is applied without sensitivity to culturally determined experience, it becomes possible to view popular, rural religion and central, court-orientated cultic religion as two separate entities - invariably to the detriment of the latter.

> The liturgy was a powerful medium of religious instruction (De Vaux 1968:50; cf Culpepper 1982:22).

How did the liturgy and the cultic personel function in religious education? Soggin (1960) has postulated, on the basis of Ex 12:26, 13:14, Dt 6:20, Job 4:6 and 4:21, the existence of an old cultic catechism in the form of a liturgy.

Sheehan (1977) has argued that Pg, because it contains few obligations, may have been a liturgy for children who are not yet ready to accept adult responsibilities (26). Both these theories are speculative, but Sheehan does provide insights about the role of ritual in education. In ritual 'time destruction' takes place, so that past, present and future merge into the 'now' (37). The 'heightened history' (39) presented in the cult makes it possible for children to relive the nation's history (37). He quotes Dorothy Eggan's conclusion about the function of a Hopi children's liturgy (36).

> In it patterns of Hopi philosophy and behaviour were absorbed in *an emotionally charged atmosphere* which tended to *fuse reality and fantasy* and to make the resulting patterns more rewarding for ego-synthesis (original author's emphasis).

Starting from another angle, Budd (1973) examines the teaching roles of priests according to the Old Testament. He concludes that especially the priestly task of giving Torah gave rise to a broader teaching role (7). Cody (1969:116), on the other hand, limits the priestly teaching role to the teaching of customary law. What is clear is that the word Torah soon had a wide application. In this respect the first six verses of Ps 78 are of special interest. The very first words (*ha'âzînâ 'ammî tôratî*) mark the psalm as Torah addressed to the assembled people. This time however, the Torah is nothing but Israel's history. This history, moreover, is a *māšāl* and a *ḥîdâ* , something that stands in need of interpretation by the audience (cf Ez 17:2). The context of interpretation lends pregnant sense to the active forms of *yd'* (verses 3,6): the Torah must be heard and appropriated by each generation. Although the psalm stresses the passing of tradition from fathers to children, the setting is cultic, with the priest acting as 'father' to the assembly (cf Ju 17:10).

To distinguish between passages that functioned in family context and those that functioned in cultic context, may not always be possible. It is not even clear that the cult included any liturgies that had children as a target audience (*pace* Soggin and Sheehan). In any case, whatever form religious education took in the cultic sphere, it cannot be seen as the equivalent of modern Sunday school classes or cathechisms. The latter are quite devoid of the element of ritual participation. In the Sunday school the child learns about biblical history, in the rituals the child is immersed in the events of that history, the child becomes 'simultaneous' (*gleichzeitig*) with what is celebrated, to borrow the terminology of Bentzen (1948:10). In addition, the rituals take place in a joyous framework markedly absent in much ecclesiastical religious education. To the challenge of the stories is added the celebrations of the rituals (cf Buck 1977:366-368).

It is also possible to discern other functions of the priestly instruction in its relationship to the local, community-bound traditions. In brief, the cult acted as both the melting pot and the crucible for the traditions. In cultic circles the traditions were collected, fused, edited and embroidered upon. At the same time and with greater consequences for the process of education, the cult served to purify and select the traditions, to give them an acceptable form. In a sense this is an extension of the priestly task of given Torah, of distinguishing between the legitimate and the illegitimate, the clean and the unclean. The prophetic criticism of the cult, necessary as it was, should not blind us to the role the cult played in this regard (see Weiser 1975:25f). It is precisely because this purifying, preserving role belonged here, that the degeneration of the cult had such fatal consequences for the religious life of Israel (Hosea!). Nor is it correct to see the cult as a solely conservative force. The cult did have the task of preserving the essential *traditum* amid the changes in the traditions, to defend thé tradition against the proliferating traditions (see Harrelson 1977:16f). Yet this very task called for flexibility and creative reworking, so that Kapelrud (1977:123) can aptly talk of a 'fluid orthodoxy' in the cult.

As for educative impact of the cult and its rituals, the following deserve notice:

(i) The participants in the cult enter an emotionally-charged world, in which they themselves become emotionally involved, albeit vicariously. This sets the scene for

the process that Aristotle called catharsis, in which the individual can shed negative or harmful feelings and incorporate positive and helpful feelings (Schimpf 1972:71-74). The child (and the adult) is able to pour out her/his feelings of guilt, fear, etc, and to breathe in faith, trust, hope, etc. To put it concretely, the shepherd boy who prays Ps 22 in the cultic celebration, has to face all his fears and feelings of loneliness: he feels himself surrounded by fierce beasts (verses 12,13,16) until his heart melts like wax (verse 14). Yet this same boy is able to face the lion that threatens his flock alone and unafraid.

(ii) At the communal level the rituals promote a sense of sharing, of belonging, of being part of a larger whole. To appropriate what it means to be Israel and to be appropriated by this people with its unique relationship with Yahwe, includes so much that is noble and so much that is low and despicable that that there is little danger of a community enervated by despair or one puffed up in arrogance. The range is so wide that participation need not mean conformism.

(iii) The drama of the cult can hardly be appreciated without a sense of fantasy. Full participation both called for and stimulated imagination (cf Brueggemann 1985:172). This element is, of course, present in the stories as well. One might say that the rituals complement the stories in this respect by providing an intermediate level between the narrative world and the world of imaginative living.

(iv) Perhaps most important to remember is that an atmosphere of joy permeated the rituals. Rituals focussing on suffering and guilt were not absent, but the framework was optimistic - Yahweh rules and his rule guarantees the future. Cultic participation was thus a celebration of life, enabling the child to accept life with joy and optimism.

At this point it is worth looking at other possible agents and instruments of education.

De Vaux (1968:50) calls the prophets Israel's best teachers, yet it is not possible to demonstrate any general teaching office held by the prophets (*pace* Culpepper 1982:24). Without claiming that all or even the majority of the prophets held positions in the cult, I see prophetic teaching in close proximity to the cult. The prophets preached at the cultic assemblies where they could reach a large audience, forming, as it were, a fringe attraction.

To what extent the Levites served as teachers in the local communities in pre-Deuteronomic times remains unclear, despite 2 Chr 17:7-9. The latter passage looks suspiciously like a retrojection of post-exilic conditions. Von Rad 1973:149, (Gunneweg 1965:221 follows von Rad in this) seems to overstate the case for the Levites as teachers and preservers of tradition in pre-Deuteronomic times (see Nicholson 1967:84-87; Weinfeld 1972:298-306). Schulz (1987, especially 87-93) offers a better substantiated view of the role of the Levites, one in which teaching plays a subsidiary role.

The question of the role of schools and written material cannot be discussed in detail. Both Lemaire (1981, 1984) and Millard (1985) believe that literacy was widespread; the former believes that written study material was in common use.

Warner (1980), Haran (1988) and Puech (1988) all contend that literacy was limited to a small upper level of the population. If Frank Cross' reading of Lachish Letter III (Cross 1985) is correct, it would indicate a situation somewhere between the two extremes. This would not make it very likely that written material and formal schooling played a significant role in religious education before the later post-exilic era.

How must we visualize the contribution of the cult to religious education? We must see children growing up in a small community, where life demands hard work and offers few luxuries and little entertainment. The cosy, small circle can become stifling. Then, in autumn, the families set out for Jerusalem (or some other sanctuary) for the pilgrimage festival. They meet new people and old friends. They camp out and participate in the dramatic rituals. They hear the temple choirs and, quite mundanely, see the sights of the 'big city' (Ps 48:12,13). In the background is the joy of a harvesting season just completed; in the foreground the expectation of the early rains of the new season. It is not surprising that the event can be described in terms of a holiday, for that was what it was. Teaching, serious and authoritative teaching, takes place as well, but under such circumstances learning itself is celebration.

3. Authority

My final thesis, that Israelite education took place in the context of structures of authority, needs little defence as far as the evidence in the Old Testament is concerned. Israel was not a child-centred society; the authority of parents, priests and other teachers over children was simply part of the basic ethos of the community (obviously this does not mean it was never challenged). The verbal forms of *ysr* (to discipline) are often used to indicate education, which clearly included physical punishment (Pr 22:15; 19:15 and elsewhere). Moreover, behind the authority of the various teachers stood the supreme authority of Yahwe. Religious education, far from being a free discussion about God, was training in the *yir'at Yahwe*. The latter phrase, to be sure, is not very well rendered by the English 'the fear of Yahwe'; nevertheless, better alternatives such as 'reverence and submissive recognition' (Wanke 1974:201) leave the implication of sovereign authority intact. Fear of God is, according to Pfeiffer (quoted in Fuhs 1990:297), the earliest term for religion in biblical Hebrew and in Semitic languages in general. At the same time the idea of Yahwe as ultimate teacher is well attested in the Old Testament (Dt 8:5; Is 54:13 and elsewhere. Cf Kaster 1962:33). The well-known sentence 'The fear of Yahwe is the beginning of wisdom' (Pr 1:9 and elsewhere), even if it represents a late formulation, is thus fundamental Israel's view of education.

What does require defence today is the use of the word 'authority' in a positive sense. I doubt whether this word can even be properly understood in our society with its sad history of authoritarianism. Not surprisingly, authority is seen today as a product of naked power; it depends on the ability to enforce your will on others. Removed from the framework of transcendental legitimating principles áll authority is, indeed, arbitrary and morally indefensible.

In the Ancient Near East authority was embedded in the cosmic order. The idea of an ordered cosmos prevailed everywhere, although the details were worked out differently in each community (Schmid 1968:23-68; Maag 1980A: *passim*) Schmid (1968:66-69, 166-176) has convincingly argued that in Israel *ṣĕdāqâ* (righteousness) was the ordering principle, corresponding to the Sumerian *me* and the Egyptian *'ma'at*. Authority was derived from the ordering principle. To go against legitimate authority was not simply to pit power against power; it was to upset the cosmic order. The delicate balance of the cosmic order is clear in the Egyptian records, where *ma'at* is represented by a feather in hieroglyphics. Just as the order stood for all that is good, chaos stood for evil in all its forms. To challenge the order is to ally yourself with the demonic forces of chaos that constantly threaten to destroy all social life. Thus every individual has a responsibility to uphold the just order. In the Egyptian 'trial of the dead' the heart of the deceased is weighed against the *ma'at*. In the majority of cases the upsetting of the order by an individual or group can be rectified by means of a generally accepted reconciling process, thus restoring the balance of the cosmos.

In all traditional societies, however, certain deeds are seen as putting their perpetrators 'beyond the pale'. No reconciliation is possible, therefore punishment does not seek to rectify the disturbed order, only to remove the disturbing factor from the ordered society. The evil-doer is 'cut off' from the society (the Old Testament term; cf the stoning outside the gates) either by the death penalty, which in such cases often involves mutilation and a neglect of normal burial practices, or by banishment. In this way the person is denied all participation in the order of human social life and consigned to the demonic sphere of chaos (on all this see Maag 1980a:337-339;1980b).

To return to education: the cosmic order places both parent and child in a situation of responsibility and assigns to the parent the authority seen as the proper one for this relationship. The authority of the parent (teacher, priest) may not be challenged without challenging the cosmic order as a whole, but neither may it be exceeded or neglected by the parent. The case of Eli and his sons demonstrate the Old Testament view on the waiving of parental authority. The decision to exercise or accept authority is not a matter of personal choice; it involves one's responsibility towards ordered social life.

It would be easy to write off the whole elaborate theory of a cosmic order as a tool developed to justify existing power structures. On the one hand, it often did function in the way; on the other, it was a two-edged tool, for *ṣĕdāqâ* in Israel and *ma'at* in Egypt could and did function as a critique of existing conditions (see Wilson 1968:94-101, 116-120, for Egyptian examples). For the following reasons I do not believe that a facile sociological explanation gives the complete picture:

(i) It explains away the experience of mystery that it engendered in people. The cosmic order had a sublime quality, a grandeur, a holiness, that inspired wonder and awe. Plath (1962:123) rightly says that the *yir'at Yahwe* always had God as totality as object. Is this mystery simply mystification? If it were so, where does it leave us in

the field of education and elsewhere? It seems to me that we have already reached the stage where, as Heschel says, we are educated for power alone.

> There is no education for the sublime. We teach children how to measure, how to weigh. We fail to teach them how to revere, how to sense wonder and awe ... If the world is only power to us and we are all absorbed in the gold rush, the only God we may come upon is the golden calf (1959:36).

Once we have placed God in the dock, we may acquit Him and democratically vote Him full authority, but this God will never inspire awe in us. Only if religion includes awe or reverence (*yir'â*) can it also include love (*'ăhābâ*) of God and cleaving to (*dbq*) God (cf Fuhs 1990:303,307). Awe as 'acceptance of God's rule' and 'acknowledgment of God's all-embracing claim' (Plath 1962:127) is not fear. On the contrary, having lost awe, we have inherited fear.

(ii) Our own praxis and especially our language testify against us. Whenever we do not personally feel threatened by authority, we recognise it with joy and express our recognition freely. Of a *prima donna* we know no higher praise than to say that she sings with authority, of the *prima ballerina* that she dances with authority. This recognition of authority cannot be adequately substantiated by logical arguments, for it is a primary experience. Of Jesus it was said with amazement that he taught with authority, unlike those who actually held the authority to teach.

(iii) Lastly, the awe of the gods was invoked to enforce norms of conduct that did not necessarily serve the interests of the individual or of the community. This is best seen in the treatment of strangers and outsiders. The very term 'fear of the gods' (or: of God) is often used in connection with the protection of strangers. In the Greek world Zeus in his role as Zeus Xenios was the protector of travellers, beggars and suppliants (Kitto 1964:196f). To show hospitality to strangers is not in the interest of the community; to kill and rob them would be profitable and would leave the community itself undisturbed. Yet to do so would be unthinkable in a decent human community. Weinfeld (1972:274f) sees the *yir'at Elōhîm* operating as 'elementary human conscience' in cases where fear of punishment is not at issue. Odysseus is quite safe among the Phaeacians who 'fear the gods' (Odyssey VI:205-210) although, to be sure, they 'do not love strangers' (VII:31-32). Only a Cyclops, an inhuman monster, shows no such reverence for the gods (IX:269-278). Traces of this may be found in the Old Testament as well (Gn 20:11; 42:18). The (Egyptian!) midwives defy Pharaoh's order to kill the Hebrew babies, because they fear God (Ex 1:17). In the Holiness Code the fear of Yahwe is invoked to bolster certain commandments: not to curse a deaf person or place a stumbling block before a blind one (Lev 19:14), to reverence the aged (Lv 19:32), not to oppress the financially disadvantaged (Lv 25:17),not ask Israelites interest on loans (Lv 25:36) and not to treat Israelite slaves harshly (Lv 25:43). In all these cases the law either protects the helpless or forbids a potentially profitable action or does both (Plath 1962:73-76; cf Wanke 1974:202, Weinfeld 1972:276). The idea of respect for the divine order goes beyond calculation of profit and loss. It is not a mechanism for survival but the positing of values that cannot be abandoned if it is to be worth surviving.

To form an adequate view of the role of authority in Israelite education presents difficulties. Can we recover the sense of 'radical amazement' we need to do so (Heschel 1959:45)? We certainly will not see legitimate authority in the right light without a vision of a just order. I doubt whether we will see the just order correctly without the vision of the psalmist:

> Yahwe, your caring loyalty (*ḥèsèd*) reaches to the heavens,
> Your firm faithfulness (*'ĕmûnâ*) to the clouds
> Your righteous order (*ṣĕdāqâ*) is like the majestic mountains
> Your just decrees (*mišpāṭîm*) are the vast primaeval deep (Ps 36:6,7).

Conclusions

Why all this?

> What is our own interest in Israel's traditions - only to repristinate ancient ideas or to face our own heritage, to examine common concerns and thereby strive for self-understanding? (Knight 1977:6)

Santayana's dictum 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemmed to fulfil it' is well-known and misleading. The French historian Jules Michalet (1973:7) was more to the point:

> He who limits himself to the present will not understand the present.

For indeed, what the present is, is not self-evident. We live at this intersection with yesterday's wounds and tomorrow's fears, paying last month's debts and spending next month's pay, thinking thoughts going back beyond Plato and dreaming dreams of the '*olam habba*'. At any rate, we cannot return to the past. To attempt to reconstruct religious education on an Old Testament model would be criminal folly.

Nevertheless, I have used words from the past - tradition, ritual, authority - instead of fashionable alternatives - progressive, life related, democratic. My choice is not likely to find popularity except in a restricted circle - among people I fear and distrust most of all. I suspect that by tradition they mean dusty dungeons and well-worn shackles (Blake's 'mind forged manacles'), by ritual nothing but human sacrifice, that is, the sacrifice of humanity, and by authority whips and jack-boots. What I have tried to show is that these words can have a very different meaning, but only within the whole of a different context, one we cannot conceptualize without an element of fantasy.

All the same, a brief dip into the literature has convinced me that the issues are alive still in the theory of religious education, even if they are not always dealt with in a satisfactory way.

Alice Schimpf's dissertation *An Analysis of the Functions of Narrative Forms in Biblical Literature and their Relationship to Religious Education* (1972) does not fulfil the promise of its title. The level of analysis is often superficial, even naive, as the following 'conclusion' (106) bears out:

> Since stories still appeal to persons living in the 20th century, the Biblical account can speak to this day and age.

Far more illuminating is Padovano's comparison of the role of authority and tradition in religion and in art (1979). The same goes for Westerhof's analysis of the role of myth and ritual in spiritual life (1979). Westerhof sees ritual as a social drama which makes use of symbolic action. This symbolic action embodies our images, dreams, visions and hopes and forms an indispensible foundation for social action (24). He strongly advocates a renewed concern for 'revelation, ritual, and myth' in catechesis (26).

Even more commendable is Mary Moore's *Education for Continuity and Change* (1983). Moore is alive to the issues I have touched upon. Her model aims to overcome the dichotomies between historical tradition and contemporary experience on the one hand (27-55) and education for knowledge with understanding and education for transformation on the other hand (132-134). Her emphasis on hope and awe (144-145) deserves attention. To quote only one crucial passage:

> The old life-experience-to-Bible or Bible-to-life-experience debate is antiquated. Neither the Bible nor present life experience should be the starting point for Christian religious education. The starting point is the intersection, and at this intersection are not only the Bible and the present life experience of individuals but parents, church folk, the historical church tradition, the fears and hopes for the future of the world, the culture in which the church exists, the issue of the global village, and God. That intersection is a big place, it is an awesome place, and none of us can think of it without some fear (111).

Outside the sphere of theory, the issues concerning tradition, ritual and authority are also by no means dead, certainly not in Africa. In each case I will indicate why I believe the questions will live on.

Tradition and the questions it poses stands in the background when we talk about identity crises in the modern world, when people reach back to find their roots, when future shock overwhelms us. The question will remain, for we live, think, communicate, and grow within traditions whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. Ritual may be moribund in established churches, but in the growing charismatic and independant churches it flourishes. It cannot be otherwise.

A community shall not live by reason alone. The debate about authority generally avoids the use of the word, but where-ever the call for justice and human rights is heard, the word authority is mutely present. We can, to besure, avoid posing the question of legitimate authority, but only by surrendering ourselves to fiercer gods. In all of these cases the drone of educational theory will not drown out the cries of the soul.

I believe that the Old Testament can help us to formulate more sharply the questions at present drifting around in an amorphous state. Perhaps this does make make me a voice from the past. If I had any reason to believe that those who tell me with grave faces and solemn voices to weigh up time-honoured traditions with ruthless reasonability and to be prepared to sacrifice cherished ideas of the past,

would be as brutally logical about fashionable slogans and would be prepared to add the latest brood of sacred cows to the altar, I would take them as seriously as they take themselves. As matters stand, it is the past that needs a voice. So, under cover of my abysmal ignorance on the matter, I offer my seven provocative theses on religious education.

(i) Educating children who are not rooted in a religious tradition in general religiousness is a farce. Hauerwas (1985) rejects the 'religious education' both for its vagueness and because it 'may involve reductionist assumptions about Christian convictions' (181). That one does not need to share Hauerwas's concern for Christian convictions to see how weak the case for religion-in-general (as opposed to any religion) is, can be seen in Susan Sontag's scathing attack on what she calls 'piety without content'(1969). She dismisses the attempt of 'religious fellow-travellers' to set up 'religion' in place of the religions they have abandoned as one 'that ought to be rejected by every sensitive believer and by every honest atheist' (255).

> One cannot be religious in general any more than one can speak language in general (254).

This simile can easily be adapted to fit education in 'religion': it is like teaching children who cannot yet speak linguistics. Religious education in a specific tradition is partisan. Its bias is spelled out, controlled and open to view in the tradition itself. In education in general religiousness there are no controls, making it the ideal tool for indoctrination.

(ii) There is no such thing as religious education that is *per se* life-related. It always depends on a theory about what life is or ought to be. Our experiences stand in as much need of hermeneutics as does the Bible. In fact, we may as well talk about the dogmatics that informs our educational theory and be honest about it.

(iii) Eliminating ritual from religion and religious education has not made either religion or people more rational. It has simply handed this tool over to the politicians, pop-singers and sport-stars. Seen in one way the rituals of the Old Testament are useless, irrational and silly. Seen in exactly the same way modern political meetings are useless, irrational and silly.

(iv) All education, especially religious education, assumes a structure of authority. To suggest otherwise is a more or less pious fraud or a springboard for manipulation. If we abandon the question of legitimate (and circumscribed) authority, we may end up with brute power ruling the roost. Those enamoured of the euphemisms of educational newspeak should consider how many of our soft-soap words derive from the hard-nosed world of business.

> Without such passion (for justice) and perspective (of mystery, awe and amazement), we are left with the worst form of pragmatism, technical reason, and utilitarianism which uncritically practice self-interest of a brutal kind (Brueggemann 1985:180).

(v) Education for self-sufficiency works beautifully for some, not for all, not even for the majority. If you have a heart like Charles Bronson's face, it would suit you. If you can walk through the valley of the shadow of death without fear because you are the

meanest bastard in the valley - fine. If not, God help you - nobody else will. And, if this is what we have made of the world, God have mercy on us - we'll need it.

(vi) Restructuring religious education is not a matter of curriculum, teaching methods, handbooks etc. It is a matter of restructuring our society, of building a new world. Only somebody drunk with hubris would attempt such a thing with deadly seriousness. It can only be ventured with tears and laughter, as an act of self-sacrifice or a colossal, holy joke. If, on the other hand, we are only trying to steer our little boat safely along with the currents and to avoid the treacherous shoals, we might well be serious. To laugh or cry about self-interest is in bad taste.

(vii) Listening, so vitally important in the Old Testament (Wolff 1974:74f), remains fundamental to education. The danger does not lie in lending out your ears, but in closing them too soon. Christians who are afraid to listen to what other religions and African traditions have to offer, will find no warrant for this attitude in the Old Testament. In Israel's confrontation with the religions of Canaan much was adopted unchanged, much was accepted after modification, little was rejected outright (Schmidt 1975:176-180). What counts is not what route our listening takes; it is where it ends. It should not end before we have recovered our sense of awe, as Job did after his long detour into rebellion.

> I have taught without insight, things too marvellous for me that I could not grasp.
> Please, listen while I speak;
> I will ask and you will instruct me.
> From hearsay I have heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you (Job 42:3-5).

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