

Meditations in Scripture and *The Great Didactic* of Comenius

EQUIPPING THE PEOPLE OF GOD



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The Fellowship of Ailbe

Equipping the People of God
Meditations in Scripture and The Great Didactic by Comenius
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Introduction

Welcome to *Equipping the People of God*, four weeks of readings and meditations that can enhance and enlarge our vision of the work of Christian education.

Pastor to Pastor studies combine the resources of Scripture and great Church leaders from the past in a format agreeable to personal or group study. We are happy to offer these resources at no charge to pastors and church leaders, to help you in better grounding the work of ministry in the Word of God and the great tradition and heritage of Christian Church leadership.

Pastor to Pastor studies can be used by church leaders as a supplement to their devotional reading or as a resource for leadership training. Daily “Next Steps” and weekly Questions for Reflection or Discussion can help in bringing new perspectives and developing new skills for the task of leading and building the local church.

Equipping the People of God brings together readings from Scripture and *The Great Didactic*, by John Amos Comenius (1592-1670). Comenius, a Moravian, was one of the leading Christian thinkers of his day. His work on education far outstrips anything in its day, and includes insights and counsel that can help us to improve the work of Christian education in our churches.

The entries in this *Pastor to Pastor* study are arranged for a month of readings, one reading per day followed by a series of Questions for Reflection or Discussion at the end of the week.

We hope you will find this study helpful and encouraging as you continue the Lord’s work in building His Church, His Body, His Bride.

T. M. Moore

Week 1, Day 1

Preparation for Life

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God... 2 Peter 3.11, 12

The Great Didactic¹

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“As, then, it is certain that our sojourn in our mother’s womb is a preparation for the life in the body, so certain is it that our sojourn in the body is a preparation for the life which shall follow this one, and shall endure forever. Happy is he who leaves his mother’s womb with limbs well formed! Happier a thousand times is the man who shall bear his soul hence in purity and cleanliness.”

Comenius was the greatest thinker of his day when it came to the task of educating children for the Kingdom of God. But his words are so sound that they apply to the work of Christian education – and making disciples – for all levels of that important endeavor. We are the most “Christian educated” generation of the followers of Christ the world has ever known. But where is the fruit of it? Perhaps it’s time we made a serious assessment of the work we’re doing in educating the flocks of God? Is our work devoted to nurturing “purity and cleanliness” in the souls of God’s people?

What are the overarching goals of the Christian education ministry of your church? How do you assess progress toward realizing those goals?

Week 1, Day 2

Education for Dominion

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands... Psalm 8.5, 6

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“To be lord of all creatures consists in subjecting everything to his own use by contriving that its legitimate end be suitably fulfilled... From this it follows that man is naturally required to be: (1) acquainted with all things; (2) endowed with power over all things and over himself; (3) to refer himself and all things to God, the source of all.”

The present “dominion” scare notwithstanding, this is a perfectly Biblical word and idea, and we ought not back away from it simply because certain members of the secular media don’t like it. We are created and redeemed to exercise dominion over the earth by reconciling all things back to God, so that they might flourish and be fruitful unto His glory and the benefit of the world. This is the backdrop against which our work of Christian education must proceed.

Do the Christian education ministries in your church have this mindset? Are they working for the threefold ends that Comenius outlined in this quote?

¹All quotations from John Amos Comenius, *The Great Didactic*, M. W. Keating, tr. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1910, 1967).

Week 1, Day 3

Act like Men

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 1 Corinthians 16.13

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“The seeds of knowledge, of virtue, and of piety are, as we have seen, naturally implanted in us; but the actual knowledge, virtue, and piety are not so given. These must be acquired by prayer, by education, and by action...Let none believe, therefore, that any can really be a man, unless he have learned to act like one, that is, have been trained in those elements which constitute a man.”

The goal of Christian education should be to train people for wholeness in Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God is working to transform us into the image of the Lord (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Can we settle for anything less than this as the goal of our efforts? Sometimes it seems like the goal is just to hold another class, or study another book of the Bible. When we take as our goal the shaping of Christian men and women for Christ-like living, and bend all our efforts toward that outcome, then our educational efforts will begin to make a difference.

What criteria does your church use to determine which Christian education activities it ought to sponsor?

Week 1, Day 4

A Reasonable Program

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD...” Isaiah 1.18

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“For those who are in any position of authority, for kings, princes, magistrates, pastors of churches, and doctors, it is as necessary to be imbued with wisdom as it is for a guide to have eyes, an interpreter to have speech, a trumpet to be filled with sound, or a sword to have an edge...For a rational creature should be led, not by shouts, imprisonment, and blows, but by reason. Any other method is an insult to God, in whose image all men are made, and fills human affairs with violence and unrest.”

Do our programs of Christian education make sense? That is, do they work together in a rational way to contribute to mutually-agreed-upon outcomes? Do the courses and classes themselves make sense – thoughtfully planned, reasonably presented, and carefully assessed? We have the mind of Christ. We should use His mind to bring divine reason to bear on the work we do in making disciples. Anything we do in the church simply because we’ve always done it will always give us the same results – which are, typically, no results. If we want Christian men and women who live as disciples, we’ll need more planning and reason to go into the effort.

What “reason” or “reasons” guide the work of Christian education in your church?

Week 1, Day 5

For the Fruit

“By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” John 15:8

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“From what has been said it is evident that the circumstances of men and of trees are similar. For, as a fruit tree is able to grow from its own stock and of its own accord, while a wild tree will not bring forth sweet fruits until it be planted, watered, and pruned by a skilled gardener, so does a man grow of his own accord into human semblance but is unable to develop into a rational, wise, virtuous, and pious creature, unless virtue and piety are first grafted in him.”

We need to know what “fruit” Jesus intends us to bear. Then we need to know how to “cultivate” the people of God so that they will bring forth that fruit consistently over time. Christian education is not successful in a church simply because lots of people participate. It is only successful as lots of those who participate bear lasting fruit for the Lord. If our efforts aren’t resulting in such fruit, it may be time to change our efforts.

Ask some of you teachers to explain what particular kind of spiritual fruit they are trying to cultivate in those they teach.

Week 1, Day 6

To Inculcate an Outlook

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“If this universal instruction of youth be brought about by the proper means, none of these will lack the material for thinking, choosing, following, and doing good things. All will know how the actions and endeavours of life should be regulated, within what limits we must progress, and how each man can protect his own position. Not only this, but all will regale themselves, even in the midst of their work and toil, by meditation on the words and works of God, and, by the constant reading of the Bible and other good books, will avoid that idleness which is so dangerous to flesh and blood. To sum up, they will learn to see, to praise, and to recognize God everywhere, and, in this way, to go through this life of care with enjoyment, and to look for the life to come with increased desire and hope.”

Hmmm. Sound like any youth program you know? Dare we believe as much for our young people? For all church members? Comenius insisted, throughout *The Great Didactic*, that the time of childhood and youth was the most important time for winning people to the Lord and setting them on the path of sanctification. His program was rigorous and focused on turning out Christian men and women. May we be as serious as he was, at all levels of the Christian education program, to make disciples of Jesus through our labors.

What is one thing you could begin to do differently today that might improve the work of Christian education in your church?

Week 1, Day 7

If

"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." John 13.17

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

"If we wish to serve God, our neighbours, and ourselves, it is necessary for us to possess, with respect to God, piety; with respect to our neighbours, virtue; and with respect to ourselves, knowledge. These principles, however, are intimately connected, and a man, for his own advantage, should not only be learned, but also virtuous and pious; for that of his neighbor, not only virtuous, but also learned and pious; and for the glory of God, not only pious, but also learned and virtuous."

The operative word here is the conditional particle, "if." *If* we want to glorify God, *if* we want to serve our neighbors, *if* we want to realize our purpose as individuals before the Lord, and *if* we truly know the things we are learning, then we will become knowledgeable, virtuous, and pious. But *if* all we want is a little social time mixed with some Bible teaching and prayer for our missionaries, then we're not really doing anybody much good.

Pastors have to address the "if" question when it comes to the Christian education ministries of their church. How would you phrase that question, and to whom would you propose it?

For reflection or discussion

1. What are the goals of the Christian education ministry in your church? Are all those who participate in that ministry aware of those goals?
2. How much do knowledge, virtue, and piety factor into the work of Christian education in your church? How do you assess progress in learning among those who participate?
3. How do you define Christian learning?
4. How do you define Christian teaching?
5. What do you hope to learn from these meditations on the work of equipping the people of God?

Prayer:

Week 2, Day 1

The Highest Pleasure

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16.11

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“Delight in God is the highest point to which pleasure can attain in this life, and is found when a man, feeling that God is eternally gracious to him, exults in His fatherly and immutable favour to such a degree that his heart melts with the love of God.”

Are we training people to delight in God above all else? Sometimes Christian education can seem like a tour of the candy store, or passing out band-aids and aspirin. We don't set lofty goals for our learners; we simply expect them to come back next time. But we will not help people to become real followers of Christ until delighting in the Lord is the highest aspiration of their lives. Our task is to inculcate that longing.

How would you explain to a member of your congregation what it means to delight in the Lord?

Week 2, Day 2

Unlimited Potential

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3.20, 21

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“It is an undoubted fact that any man can attain any height that he may desire by means of steps that are properly disposed, sufficient in number, solid, and safe.”

Now here is some sound advice for Christian educators. First, nurture in learners an expansive and compelling vision of the life of faith. Teach them to think and ask BIG. Second, lay out a course of study and learning that provides a track for progress which excites the learners and which they can clearly understand. Third, make sure each tie in that track is firm, and that it holds the rails and will carry them to each new stage in their progress and growth. Set clear objectives for each course in the program, and work hard to help learners achieve those objectives. Finally, provide encouragement and support at each step of the process.

Teachers need help in developing a sound curriculum and strong courses. What help is offered for them by the leadership in your congregation?

Week 2, Day 2

The Art of Teaching

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom... Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands! Psalm 90.12, 16, 17

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“The art of teaching, therefore, demands nothing more than skillful arrangement of time, of the subjects taught, and of the method.”

Is that all? Yes, indeed. The key word here is “skillful.” Skillful relates to wisdom, which is “skill in living” according to the divine economy and purpose. When we are managing our time, our course, and our approach to teaching and learning according to the wisdom of God, we set up an environment in which the Spirit of God is likely to do the work only He alone can do in transforming our learners into the image of Jesus Christ. Teachers should be required to memorize Psalm 90.12, 16, 17. They’ll do better work if they will.

What would you suggest for a new teacher as criteria for discerning the wisdom of God in the areas suggested by Comenius?

Week 2, Day 4

Scatter the Seeds

“A sower went out to sow...” Matthew 13.3

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“The Saviour here shows that it is God who operates in everything, and that nothing remains for man but to receive the seeds of instruction with a devout heart; the processes of growth and of ripening will then continue of themselves, unperceived by him. The duty of the teachers of the young, therefore, is none other than to skillfully scatter the seeds of instruction in their minds, and to carefully water God’s plants. Increase and growth will come from above.”

We cannot fulfill the work of Christian education in a classroom only. Christian formation is an ongoing work and requires teachers to scatter the seed of the Word continually and then to work with their charges “as they are rising up, lying down, walking in the way” and so on in order to water and nurture the seed of truth which has been sown. Teaching is ongoing work, and we’re all responsible to do our part for one another (Col. 3.16). The more we extend Christian instruction beyond the classroom into all of life, and engage all the members of Christ’s Body in teaching and nurturing one another, the more real growth we will see.

Do the members of your church understand their responsibility as teachers and disciple-makers of one another?

Week 2, Day 5

Got It?

“Do you understand what I have done to you?” John 13.12

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“If, therefore, the educator of the young give special attention to the roots of knowledge, the understanding, these will soon impart their vitality to the stem, that is, to the memory, and finally blossoms and fruits, that is to say, a facile use of language and practical capacity will be produced.”

How do we get believers to talk (“language”) and act (“capacity”) like Christians? We have to teach them. And we have to teach in such a way as to ensure that they “get it.” Jesus was always checking to make sure His disciples “got it” before going on to the next activity. In school kids are forever taking tests and doing other things to demonstrate that they “got” the lesson they were taught. But in the Church we don’t do much assessment. We don’t hold people accountable for real learning. We put it out there and say, in effect, “Here you go. Do with it what you will.” This is not responsible disciple-making.

What are some ways you might bring meaningful assessment into the Christian education program of your church?

Week 2, Day 6

Whole and Parts

“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” Acts 20.26, 27

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“From this it follows that it is a mistake to teach the several branches of science in detail before a general outline of the whole realm of knowledge has been placed before the student, and that no one should be instructed in such a way as to become proficient in any one branch of knowledge without thoroughly understanding its relation to all the rest.”

Too many people learn Scripture and Bible truths piecemeal. They do not have a good understanding of the overall narrative of Scripture, the system of doctrine contained therein, or an outline of the Christian worldview. How much less are they able to set their “Christian” knowledge into the larger context of everything else there is to know? No wonder Christians aren’t very good at demonstrating the relevance of Christ’s Lordship to every area of life! We need sound teaching, whole and parts.

Why does it make sense to teach this way? How can we help Christian learners understand the relationship of Christian knowledge to all knowledge?

Week 2, Day 7

Education on a Spiral

“To whom will he teach knowledge, and to whom will he explain the message?... For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.” Isaiah 28.9, 10

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“It is an evident absurdity, therefore, if teachers, for their own sake and that of their pupils, do not graduate the subjects which they teach in such a way that, not only one stage may lead on directly to the next, but also that each shall be completed in a given space of time.”

Comenius is calling for a *curriculum* here – a logical and developing course which builds on itself as it goes. We never leave behind the things we’ve already learned, but we relearn and expand what we’ve come to know by the new things we acquire at each stage. Christian education should be envisioned as occurring on a spiral, in which the same circuit is traced over and over, but always more expansively and with a view to broader applications and implications. This takes planning and coordination, but it’s what makes disciples.

What kind of planning and coordination is followed in the Christian education program of your church?

For reflection or discussion

1. Does your church follow a discipleship curriculum? If you could design such a curriculum, what would it include?
2. What is a Christian worldview? Do church members need to be equipped to think with the mind of Christ about all of life?
3. Is it possible to make disciples without meaningful assessment? How might such assessment proceed in a local church?
4. Comenius taught that learning should be borne out in life. What are the implications of this for everyday Christian living? Are the Christian education ministries of your church designed for this?
5. What would you consider to be “the whole” within which all “the parts” of your church’s Christian education should be conducted?

Prayer:

Week 3, Day 1

The Drudgery of Learning

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2.15

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“The method of instruction should lighten the drudgery of learning, that there may be nothing to hinder the scholars or deter them from making progress with their studies.”

Comenius was not naïve about studies, schooling, learning, and the like. He knew that most people regarded this as hard work, even drudgery. People are not likely to “do their best” to grow in the Lord and bear fruit from Him unless we who teach them find ways of overcoming the drudgery of learning. Jesus made learning interesting, visionary, personal, even risky. His example, together with Comenius’ reminder, should be instructive for us.

What evidence do you see – in your own life or in those you serve – that people regard learning as a drudgery?

Week 3, Day 2

Point to the Applications

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Philippians 4.9

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“The task of the pupil will be made easier, if the master, when he teaches him anything, show him at the same time its practical application in everyday life.”

“Practice makes permanent,” as Earl Radmacher used to say. Learning is proved by the way we live, not just by the things we know. We should always point our learners to the practical implications and applications of what we’re teaching them, so that they can experience truth lived out in their daily lives. The adventure of learning becomes real in direct proportion to the amount of life change we encourage and experience. But learners need us to point the way and to hold them accountable, through prayer and by encouragement, for what we expect them to learn.

Can you think of a situation in which a truth applied in your own life made a life-changing difference in your walk with the Lord?

Week 3, Day 3

Good Advice for Teachers, Too

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
Ephesians 6.4

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“Every study should be commenced in such a manner as to awake a real liking for it on the part of the scholars, and this should be done by proving to them how excellent, useful, pleasant, and otherwise desirable it is.”

People who regard learning as a drudgery need to be convinced that the effort to learn and grow will be worthwhile. Part of our job is to make that plain to them. Whether in our preaching or teaching, it is important that we demonstrate the excellence, usefulness, pleasantness, and desirability of the doctrine or instruction we are bringing. Such preaching and teaching goes beyond mere reasoning or exposition; it requires that we pray earnestly and prepare well to engage the people of God by every possible means.

Look at the lesson/sermon you’re preparing right now: in what ways could you factor in more of those four features of what you hope to teach?

Week 3, Day 4

The Big Picture

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field...” Matthew 13.24

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“It follows, therefore, that the desire to learn should be thoroughly awakened in the pupils, and that the general conception of the subject should be thoroughly got into their heads. Until this has been carefully done a more detailed exposition of the art or language should not be attempted.”

Learning is a bit like working a jigsaw puzzle. Here are all these colorful and oddly-shaped pieces. What fun! Look, some of them even link together – sort of. Hmmm. What does this piece have to do with that one? I don’t like those pieces that remind me of a fat man; I only want the slender ones. Turn the box over, however, and show folks the picture of the puzzle. Gradually, every individual piece takes on new meaning, and the challenge of assembling the puzzle is greatly simplified. The same is true with teaching Scripture, Christian doctrine, or the practice of following Jesus: show them the big picture, and keep it before them, so they’ll be able to understand where the individual pieces fit.

Would you say that, in your preaching and teaching, you give people the “big picture” in the three areas mentioned above? Why or why not?

Week 3, Day 5

Like a Tree

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. Psalm 1.3

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“But a man who is thoroughly educated resembles a tree which grows from its own roots and is nourished by its own sap, and which, on that account, increases in size (and from day to day with more vigour), and puts forth leaves, blossoms, and fruits.”

We must work hard to ensure that the roots of those we teach are planted in rich, healthy soil. God’s people are prone to extend their tendrils into pop culture and other forms of contemporary shallowness. We need to work hard to show them the excellence, usefulness, pleasantness, and desirability of the good soil of the Word of God, so that they will seek it out. Then they will begin to flow healthy spiritual sap throughout their lives, and bear fruit that does not wither for the Lord.

What reasons for becoming rooted in Scripture do you regularly hold out for the people in your charge?

Week 3, Day 6

Engage the Whole Person

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions; your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad... Psalm 45.6-8

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“From this a golden rule for teachers may be derived. Everything should, as far as is possible, be placed before the senses. Everything visible should be brought before the organ of sight, everything audible before that of hearing. Odours should be placed before the sense of smell, and things that are testable and tangible before the sense of taste and touch respectively.”

Look at the passage from Psalm 45 above. How many senses are invoked? What different textures can you feel? What overall image does this description of the enthroned Christ (Heb. 1.8, 9) suggest? What can you hear? Smell? The actual senses may only be engaged through the mind and the heart, but they are piqued anyway and combine to create a powerful and memorable image of the splendor of our King. When we preach or teach we need to remember that learning is a whole-life experience, and not just an activity of the mind.

Would you say that your preaching and teaching is designed to appeal to the whole learner? Why or why not?

Week 3, Day 7

Get Wisdom, Get Jesus

The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom... Proverbs 4.7

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“It is the study of wisdom which elevates us and makes us steadfast and noble-minded – the study to which we have given the name of morality and of piety, and by means of which we are exalted above all other creatures, and draw nigh to God Himself.”

Jesus Christ is the embodiment of divine wisdom (Col. 2.3). We are seeking wisdom when we are seeking to become like Christ – soul and life. “Sir, we would see Jesus.” That’s the statement on a small plaque fixed to the preaching desk in the chapel of Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson. It is an excellent reminder that what the people of God need above all else is wisdom, and the way to wisdom is through and in Jesus Christ. Christian education, whether preaching or teaching, must never fail to focus on Jesus.

Would you say that Jesus is prominent in all your instruction?

For reflection or discussion

1. What does it mean to teach to “the whole person”? How can we tell that the whole person is being educated for Christian living?
2. What are some things we can do to make learning more interesting and fruitful for our learners?
3. Reflect again on questions 1 and 2. How did Jesus do this?
4. In the space below, jot down as many different kinds of Christian “fruit” as we should expect from our work of equipping the people of God. How much of that fruit do your teachers consciously sow into the lives of those they teach?
5. How can teachers learn and grow together so that they can help students become better equipped for serving the Lord?

Prayer:

Week 4, Day 1

The Gift of Piety

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom...Colossians 3.16

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“Piety is the gift of God, and is given us from on high by our counselor and guide, the Holy Spirit. But, since the Holy Spirit usually employs natural agencies, and has chosen parents, teachers, and ministers who should faithfully plant and water the grafts of Paradise (1 Cor. iii.6-8), it is right that these should appreciate the extent of their duties.”

Sometimes it seems like the goal of Christian education in local churches is to have a Christian education program. About all we take seriously is whether the classes are scheduled, there are enough teachers and materials to go around, and everybody seems to be having a good time. But piety – expressed as love for God and neighbor – is the end and goal of Christian education (1 Tim. 1.5). Unless everyone in the project – parents, teachers, and pastor – is on the same page, our labors won’t produce much in the way of abiding fruit for the Lord.

How confident are you that all the people involved in your church’s Christian education effort understand their goal as inculcating and nurturing piety in their learners?

Week 4, Day 2

Outward and Inward Worship

“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4.24

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“The outward worship of God consists in conversing about Him, in preaching and hearing His Word, in adoring Him on bended knee, in singing His praises in hymns, and in attending to the Sacraments and other services of the Church, public and private. The inward worship of God consists of continual meditation on the divine presence, of fearing and loving God, of abnegation and resignation of self, and of the ready will to do or to suffer all that God desires. These two forms of worship must be joined together...”

Piety is expressed, first of all and continually, in worship. Worship is to be a way of life for the believer, for as we grow in Christ and are increasingly mindful of Him, we cannot help but respond to His presence and provision with ongoing thanks and praise. Public worship is merely the amplification before the watching world of what every believer experiences and practices during the normal course of his daily life. Christian education should be designed, first of all, to train us, soul and body, for worship.

What are some of the practices that promote inward and outward worship? Is your Christian education program teaching these?

Week 4, Day 3

Instruction with Discipline

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Hebrews 5.13, 14

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“...the object of discipline should be to confirm those who are being trained up for God and for the Church, in that disposition which God demands in His sons, the pupils in the school of Christ, so that they may rejoice with trembling (Psalm ii.11), and looking to their own salvation may rejoice always in the Lord (Phil. ii.4 and 19), that is to say, that they may love and reverence their masters, and not merely allow themselves to be led in the right direction, but actually tend towards it of their own accord.”

By “discipline” Comenius was not thinking of punishment, although he had a place for that in his didactic. He meant we should hold learners accountable, train them in routines and exercises, and work diligently by every instructional means to help learners make real progress in piety. It’s not enough merely to *teach* in the work of Christian education. Unless we *discipline* our students to *learn*, we cannot have much expectation that our labors will bear fruit for the Lord. Don’t be afraid to make your learners work!

What are the primary disciplines your church is seeking to nurture in learners through your Christian education program?

Week 4, Day 4

The Context of Our Heritage

As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight. Psalm 16.3

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“An acquaintance with history is the most important element in a man’s education, and is, as it were, the eye of his whole life.”

The neglect of history – especially Church history – is a mistake Christian educators must begin at once to redress. We are the heirs of a great heritage of teaching, writing, living, and culture which can guide us in understanding the nature and practice of piety. But if we neglect this, we make ourselves vulnerable more to the spirit of the age than the age-spanning Spirit of God. It is no virtue to be ignorant of Christian history. Remember that we are but the latest link in a chain thousands of years long. We owe a great debt to our forebears, and we must pass that debt – and its glorious treasure of blessings – to the generations that will succeed us.

What are some ways you might begin to bring more of Christian history and the Christian cultural heritage into the Christian education ministry of your church?

Week 4, Day 5

For God's Glory

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10.31

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“...since our desire is to increase the sum of Christian wisdom, and to sow the seeds of piety, of learning, and of morality in the hearts of all who are dedicated to God, we may hope for the fulfillment of the divine prophecy: ‘The earth shall be full of the knowledge of God, as the waters cover the sea’ (Isaiah xi.9).”

Piety is but a means to glorify God in every area of life. As Christians grow in piety, in Christ-like love for God and neighbor, they bear living witness to the resurrection of Christ and the reality of God. They manifest love that overcomes every obstacle and touches even the most unlovable with the grace and goodness of the Lord. Thus people know that God is real, that He exists and cares for them, and that His love can change the world. We study and teach to promote piety in order that the knowledge of God may be increased.

Do the learners in your church understand that they are called and are being equipped to make known the knowledge of God and His glory?

Week 4, Day 6

Strengthen and Rebuild

“Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God.” Revelation 3.2

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“We must therefore seek and find some way by which, with God’s assistance, motive power may be supplied to the machine that is already sufficiently well constructed, or at any rate can be constructed on the foundations which exist, if the obstacles and hindrances that have hitherto been present be wisely and firmly removed.”

Comenius was calling for reform. No one was satisfied with the way people were being educated in the faith in his day, and he offered a comprehensive plan for disciple-making which was, alas, so far-thinking that no one was able to make it work. But his ideas are still sound, and many of his insights have been validated by modern educational theory and practice. We can learn a lot from this great saint. Perhaps the most important point to take away from him is that we must not fear to think boldly and to reform thoroughly.

What would it take to strengthen and rebuild the educational ministry of your church so that people were truly being equipped for piety?

Week 4, Day 7

All Together Now

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way in him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4.15, 16

The Great Didactic

John Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

“May we all, with one accord, be moved to promote such a worthy object in every possible manner by advising, warning, exhorting, reforming, and in every way furthering the work for God and for posterity. And let no one think that he is not called upon to act in the matter. For though a man may be naturally unsuited to be a schoolmaster, or may be fully engaged by his duties as a clergyman, a politician, or a physician, he makes a great mistake if he think that he is on that account exempt from the common task of school-reform.”

Every member of the Body of Christ has something to contribute to improving the work of Christian education – the work of making disciples – in the local church. All are called to study, learn, and teach (2 Tim. 2.15; Col. 3.16; Heb. 5.12) and to encourage one another in love and good works (Heb. 10.24). But the pastor must lead. The pastor must cast the vision, affirm the workers and set them on a course of growth and building, and point the way to a more fruitful school of discipleship in the church’s work of Christian education.

What is the next thing you need to do to begin reforming the Christian education ministry of your church?

For reflection or discussion

1. What are the primary obstacles standing in the way of your church improving its work of Christian education?
2. What do you consider to be the most important disciplines every Christian should learn?
3. What are some ways that “piety” comes to expression in the cultural life of a believer?
4. How might you begin to cast a larger vision for the work of Christian education in your church?
5. What’s the most important idea you’ve learned from these meditations? How do you plan to incorporate that into your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.