

Title - What is the role of the teacher as a person in the task of Theological Education?

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A great teacher can be defined by two simple words. Best friend. Who better to trust than a best friend? Who better to love and be loved in return than a best friend? Who better to gain knowledge from, than a best friend? Finally, who better to remember throughout the days of your life, than a best friend? Let's all be teachers, shall we?

These are the words are in a UNESCO published a book entitled “What makes a Good Teacher?” (1996). Over 500 children from some 50 countries aged 8-12 contributed their opinions.¹

Education is a process of growth, the formation of humanity out of the raw material or individuality.² To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that our work is merely to share information but in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.³

Seeing what education is all about, what is the role of the teacher in this whole process of growth? What is its role? What are some of the things that are needed to be seen by the students in order to remember the teachers as best friends? First, the personality of the teacher should be pleasant and attractive. This is not in the physically way, I remember my friend telling me to behave in an elegant way with people all the time. I think we can use the same term here as well. To be a person that you can fell free and relaxed in their presence.

¹ *What makes a good teacher?* – www.unicef.com

² Hodgson, Peter C. - *God's Wisdom* (Toward a Theology of Education), Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 1999, p. 18

³ *Ibidem* 2, p. 4

Secondly, a teacher needs to have a genuine capacity for sympathy in the literal meaning of the word; a capacity to tune in the minds and feelings of other people, and in this case here in the minds and feelings of students.

Another thing that is essential for a teacher is to have a mind which always wants to learn more. Teaching is a job at which one will never be perfect; there is always to learn about. I remember here last year when I interpreted a teacher from Belgium in our Bible College, usually some of them give me the material they used for the teaching and even the exams for the next year when they will come again and teach. And this teacher told me something like “I don’t want to give you this material because by this time next year I will know much more and I will not use this it like this, because I am always in the process of learning more. “The thing I want to talk about here is that a teacher needs to be both intellectually and morally honest. It means he will be aware of his intellectual strengths and limitations and will have thought about decided upon the moral principles by which his like shall be guided.

To be a good teacher, it means that he/she must have been a good student and this means he will try its best to be the best and for this you also need a vocation to be called to do it. As a Christian I believe human beings are inherently religious beings because we live in, from, and for God. The defining feature of our humanity is not our ability to purchase or consume, but the gracious invitation to live in communion with the Triune God who befriends us in grace, Christ and sacraments⁴ The faculty member of theological schools finds himself working under many of the conditions which characterize the like of other university teacher. In addition to teaching a considerable number of classes, he carries on the good tradition of friendly relations between the students and the faculty. He becomes counselor and adviser on academic and personal problems. He is called on for speeches, discussions, and other activities within the school and he is frequently active in community projects and works outside the school. This is the general order of life in which he must find time to prepare his courses and to do his reading and writing.

⁴ Jones L. Gregory – *The Scope of our Art* – William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002, p. 124

Much of the professor's time for which the church makes request is related to his special field of study. His training in Bible, or theology, or pastoral care is used at points of need in the churches and their programs. This means that he must not only keep up in his field but also develop some special skills in communicating and adapting his work to the interests and needs of various groups. The teacher to be able to meet all the requirements needs many hours spent in solitary reading and study. He must find time at work beyond the immediate demands of his teaching in order that the teaching may become more nearly what it ought to be.

What is a teacher supposed to do with the gifts and talents entrusted? It is a commission more than a choice, a ministry as much as a profession. Paul J. Wadell⁵ suggests five practices and virtues that are needed for a good teacher.

1. A teacher must cultivate *the virtue of reverent and truthful vision*. Ignatius of Loyola used to say that we are to find "God in all things". God is really present everywhere we are, and this means that God is present in the lives of the students as well. A teacher has to see beyond the surface, that there is a promise and goodness in every student, because the God who fashioned them lives in them. Such vision on students is not a natural aptitude but a precious moral skill that is the result of patience, determination and hope.
2. A teacher must become expert in *the virtue of hospitality*. The students are seen as "stranger" because they are persons whose experiences, perceptions, attitudes, tastes, inclinations and interests are different than ours. Sometimes they just come in and their magic cannot work unless we risk letting them to know, and let them into our lives. Teachers usually want to share the truth they have with the students; but the students have their truth as well, and perhaps the greatest respect is to take their truth seriously. Showing hospitability to the students attending to their insights, experiences, fears and joys, and humor – we can realize how they can bless and enrich our lives.
3. Teaching is a ministry when it is embraced as an act of *stewardship*. We are creatures blessed with intelligence, moral awareness, and free will, God entrusts

⁵ Paul J. Wadell – *Teaching as a Ministry of Hope*, p. 130 in the book edited by Jones L. Gregory – *The Scope of our Art* – William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002

the goodness of creation to us with the expectation that we will not destroy the handiwork of God but nurture it. Stewardship means the creation that comes to us from God as a beautiful gift should be presented back to God as a beautiful gift; in short, the earth should not be the worse for having known us. Neither should our students. If teaching is a form of stewardship, we should see our students as gifts God entrusts to us. They are not ours to possess, manipulate, or control; rather, they are God's and God gives them to us with the expectation that we will continue God's work in them by caring for them respecting them, and above all nurturing the image of God in them. This makes teaching a sacred trust and a solemn responsibility; it makes teaching a noble vocation.

4. The teacher needs also *courage*. Courage helps us dealing with fears and difficulties, with the inevitable discouragements and hardships of life and with all the things that make us lose hope. It is the virtue that teaches us how to endure in hope despite whatever difficulties and disappointments might face us. Our first response to the inevitable hardships, setbacks, even desolation in teaching should not be to surrender but to attack. If the students are lethargic and disengaged we should challenge that not endure it.
5. *Friendship* is the other thing a teacher needs to have. If teaching is to be a ministry of hope and joy it requires the companionship of friends who care about what we care about and care about us caring for us. There is no way to survive the journey of teaching without companionship of friends, including friendship of God.

According to Niebuhr a teacher should be also a pastor to the students, or a counselor. Pastoral care of the students leads to fairly strong bonds between some students and their teachers.⁶ I have found the same idea at J. Earl Thomson⁷, who says that pastoral care begins with the suffering and hope of the students, and that our mission as theological educators is to help them discover meaning in their suffering and reasons to hope. If we fail to do this we are not doing more than increase their vulnerability to

⁶ Niebuhr, H. Richard – *The Advancement of Theological Education*, Harper & Brothers – New York, 1957, p.194

⁷ Thomson, Earl J. – *Theological Education as Pastoral Care* – *Theological Education*, vol. 33:2 Spring 1997 p. 29-38

despair, apathy, and shame, the major threats to their emotional and spiritual competence. We have to take their experiences, their stories, losses and sufferings with sacred seriousness.

To a teacher is entrusted so much autonomy because they are the ones that contribute to the school and its intellectual life in responsible ways. A productive and fulfilling career combines the love for teaching and learning in a subject with the professional's commitments and discipline in teaching, research, administration and institutional leadership.⁸ Taking these two aspects of a teacher as pastoral care person for the students and the person that is responsible for the intellectual life of the students it means the teacher must be open enough so that the students can see in the teacher a person that he/she can open up and in the same time be very high in knowledge so that they can have the feeling that the teacher has an idea of what he is talking about. A good teacher is master of his subject and is able to give this subject and its problems such clarity and shape that the student can find his way into the material and grow in his mastery of it. The good teacher is constantly seeking a right balance between the clarity of presentation and communication, but such balance comes in part from his capacity to lose himself in the subject and not or give too much self-conscious attention to the process of communication. Good teaching in bible colleges brings the student to see a particular subject in the context of the Christian faith so that he discovers his personal commitment to be bound up with what he is "studying"

The teacher deals with his subject so that its relationship to the whole of theology and to the life of church is made plain. He makes historical applications and finds illustrations which connect with the student's experience. A few strategically placed illustrations may stimulate the student to build his own bridges to present problems and make it impossible for him to think of any field of study as a closed room with no windows which look out upon the wider historical landscape. Whatever the teaching style, the personal commitment of the instructor will be somewhere revealed. The real proof of the teacher's dedication to the ultimate concerns of the Christian community

⁸ Williams, Raymond, - "*The Teaching Career and Life*" in *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 7:4, October 2004

is seen when the student gives his primary attention not to the professor but to the object of Christian commitment, God and his Word in Christ.

There are two points at which the teacher's personal vocation and dedication become especially clear. One is his fidelity to the demands imposed upon his mind and spirit by the subject at hand. The teaching which accomplishes the most is that through which the student sees the demands imposed upon his mind at work on a problem, grappling with its difficulties and seeking more light. Such is *the theological teacher to clarify, explore, and interpret the meaning of faith*. It is this which lays upon him a discipline and a demand for self-giving. The other manifestation of Christian concern will come in his regard for, and relations with, students and colleagues. In a theological school the demands of love and justice may be so often spoken about that they become routine symbols but in the end they remain the decisive requirement upon all participants in the leaning community.

Greatness in teaching is a gift for which to be thankful, not a skill which can be completely analyzed or acquired. *The greatness can be measured by the spaciousness of the spiritual intellectual room in which the student is brought to move*. He sees his problems as involving questions which challenge and threaten men everywhere. He can discover within dogma and ritual the depth of the personal meeting of God and man. He must teach his point of view with respect for his heritage and for the demands of the logic and truth of his subject and at the same time set the students' mind free. Such teaching requires specific attention:

1. The theological teacher must continually be pushing students to examine the ultimate presupposition with which they think and with which they judge themselves and their fellows. No purely technical mastery of logic or method will suffice. In theology we are dealing with issues which involve conviction and faith. Much of the stimulus in theological education comes from the ability of teachers to open up live options for the students, and to communicate the experience of sharing in a theological discussion in which major issues are at stake and concerning which absolute answers are not for now.

Some teachers do this best by outlining their own position and arguing for them. In this case good teaching requires that it be made plain to the student what are the consequences in taking that position, what consequences may follow, and also it requires that alternative point of views to be presented. Other teachers' discussion on the various points of view and encourage students to come to their own judgments without too much specific persuasion from the instructor. Most teaching is a combination of these two strategies. In both case the student learns that he is dealing with ideas which have their growing edges and which involve real decisions.

2. A good teaching is that a close relationship is kept between the formal structure of thought and concrete human problems.

In meeting the issue of relevance the teacher must move back and forth from the structure of the Christian faith to concrete experience

3. The good teacher gives attention to the relation of this subject to the vocational commitment students have made or are considering for Christian ministry. Above all the students need to see within beyond the specific forms of ministry the demands of the Gospel which is the source of all ministries.
4. The theological teacher has as his ultimate topic the bearing of human experience on our knowledge of God and the bearing of the Christian Gospel upon our human response to him who is the source of our being. Our teaching and learning is, like the rest of life, in the hands of God more than in ours.⁹

The teacher is called to become a witness, to become one whose existence testifies both to the involvement of God in our learning, and to the transformative nature of education. In seeking to aid in the development of another, therefore the character of the teacher is itself portrayed and revealed.¹⁰

We need to ask what special opportunities are open to us through the subject which we teach, the need to identify apologetic possibilities in our areas of teaching. We also need to identify role models; that is, scholars who have managed to bring together

⁹ Ibidem 6 p. 140

¹⁰ Rae, Murray A. – Learning the Truth in a Christian University: Advice from Soren Kirkegaard --- *The Idea of Christian University* (Essays on Theology and Higher Education) – Paternoster Press, London, 2004, p. 110

faith and learning in their own professional careers, and whose wisdom and example can be an inspiration to others. By this, I do not mean that we blindly and woodenly imitate them. Rather, they come to be seen as an encouragement and inspiration. We seem to have lost sight of some of the great themes of an earlier period in evangelical history, in which what we would now call "mentoring" was seen as being of immense importance. Yet this is something that we can recover. Those who have given much thought to bringing together faith and scholarship have both the privilege and responsibility of helping those at an earlier stage in their careers who are seeking to do the same.

Paul used the analogy of the human body in making the point that every member of the body of Christ has a role to play. We must not allow ourselves to value one member more than another, when all are required for the healthy functioning of the body. Whether we are committed to teaching at the cutting edge of our field, we need to keep this broader perspective in mind. We all need each other; together, we can do things for God which we could not possibly manage on our own. And we need to be reminded once more of our total dependence upon the grace of God, in case we begin to get big ideas about our own importance!¹¹

Conclusion: The Christian teacher needs to have a *love motivation* in everything he is doing, and for that he needs to have first a genuine experience of God's love. Love does not originate in our hearts but it is catalyzed by God's love, which is God's unconditional love as a gift from him. The realization and acceptance of his wonderful demonstration of agape love by God for us is the basis on which our experience of an intimate relationship with God can begin.

Thus, our walk of obedience to Christ as Christian teachers is an expression of our love for God, not a requirement to earn God's love (John 14:21, 1 John 5:2-4). May we be motivated by the love of God in each and everything that we do.

The Christian teacher who is motivated by the love of God leading to a passionate love for God will possess many of the following attributes:

¹¹ Alister McGrath – *The Christian Scholar in the 21st Century* - <http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri0002/mcgrath.html>

1. Seeks to see Christ more clearly, love Him more dearly, and follow Him more nearly, day by day.
2. Controlled by the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14).
3. Seeks God's grace in cultivating godly "habits of the heart," in particular a passionate affection for God.
4. Understands that the ultimate in "enlightened self-interest" is to be found in the sublime experience of God's love (Hebrews 11:6).
5. Understands God's grace and unconditional love and acceptance of us through Christ's death on the cross (Romans 5:8).

Several attributes characterize the Christian teacher in his or her *personal life*; he should pursue, with excellence, great and lofty goals to glorify God, not to glorify him or herself.

1. Sees every area of life as being subject to the sovereignty of God. In the context of Matthew 6:33, his or her relationship with God is the focal point of life and every other area of life is an outgrowth of this relationship.
2. Understands Christ's command to represent Him to others and Christ's commission to make disciples. Sees his or her significance established in a relationship with Christ rather than through professional or other accomplishments.
3. Lives his or her life in such a way that the allocation of time reflects these godly priorities. It is vital to understand that the power source of our spiritual walk is God, not ourselves. The Christian life is not a list of dos and don'ts we struggle to obey; rather, it is the life of God flowing in and through us.

A number of character attributes distinguish the Christian teacher in his or her *personal spiritual walk*, including:

1. Experiences a close, personal walk with Christ. The Christian teacher loves the Lord with all of his or her heart, soul, and mind; the relationship with God is the central focus of life. His or her priorities are clearly discerned from the use of time, finances and other life resources.
2. Involved in regular, quality quiet time and effective, fervent prayer life. The mature believer enjoys an invigorating devotional life in which he or she is seeking the Lord through His Word, applying Scripture personally, talking with God about life issues, and

experiencing the energizing power of God's Holy Spirit.

A *worldview* may be defined as an intellectual construction that solves all the problems of our existence uniformly on the basis of one overriding hypothesis. Everyone has a worldview regardless of whether or not he or she has spent conscious time and effort in determining what that worldview is. The Christian worldview includes at least the following basic premises, found in such scriptural passages as Genesis 1:1-31, Job 38:1-40:2, Colossians 1:16, Romans 1:16-32, John 1:1-18, and John 20:30-31:

- The universe and everything in it was created by a sovereign, omnipotent Creator who presently maintains His creation.
- Human beings were created in the image of the Creator, and thus possess intellect, emotions and will.
- With respect to will, humans were imbued with free will—that is, the freedom to make moral choices independently of any external control.
- The Creator has revealed His character and nature in His creation, in the Holy Scriptures and through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He allows Himself to be known by individuals who seek Him.
- Meaning and purpose in life for people are to be found only through a relationship with the Creator made possible by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Every Christian teacher would do well to carefully think through his or her academic discipline and answer these questions and a host of similar ones. The difference between *the Christian who happens to be a teacher and the teacher who happens to be a Christian* can be measured by how well one has thought through these issues and formulated meaningful answers.

Many character attributes distinguish the Christian professor in the worldview area, including:

1. Realizes there is a rational God who has created a rational universe, and that He has told mankind to humbly yet boldly investigate, study and manage that universe. The Christian teacher is filled with active curiosity, wonder, awe and excitement about God's creation and the opportunity to explore it. He or she is zealous for truth and recognizes that reality should not be distorted by human misconceptions or false philosophies within

an academic discipline.

2. Actively seeks God's perspective on academic issues within his or her profession.

Mature believers seek ways to sharpen and equip themselves to extend God's kingdom by using the specialized knowledge and research skills they have as professors.

A good teacher is someone who teaches not only with mind, but also with heart!!!

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