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# The Volitional Domain

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FROM A variety of sources we are confronted with the fact of neglect in this area of learning. A great deal of education is being criticised for not being practice-oriented: at the best we are merely stuffing heads with a bunch of facts, with useless knowledge at the worst. Seminaries are no exception to this criticism. Many is the time we have heard people commenting as they came out of church: 'The preacher surely stirred us, but what are we supposed to do now?' indicating that not much of any practical use was said about how we are to apply or use the lessons we have heard from the Bible. A common complaint about Sunday school type lessons is that they tell a story well, perhaps may even get the emotions aroused, but then end up with a very simplistic and general kind of moral, rather than aiming at some specific action. Again, a criticism directed at much of what comes under the heading of Christian teaching involves the idea of hearing the same old 'shalts' and 'shalt nots' again and again.

I believe that one of the basic objectives of seminary training of any sort, should be to produce what I call 'practical prophets'. These are Christian leaders who see and feel the injustices of their own era (as the Bible prophets did) and bring God's judgement and warning to bear on them. This is not to be done in some abstract and generalised fashion but rather in terms of specifics, a step-by-step knowledge setting out the steps the Christian can and should be taking to set right those injustices on his doorstep. As indicated in my book *Teaching and Learning in the Christian Church*, this neglect of the volitional domain, or if you prefer it, the action of the prophetic domain, is unusual, for this seems to be the logical and Biblical goal of all our teaching and efforts at making disciples. This is the practical side of knowledge and the result of desired attitudes, values, and beliefs. p. 135

In line with the taxonomies of the cognitive and affective domains, I have taken five levels for the volitional domain, which correspond roughly to those used in the other two domains. It can most easily be pictured as a sort of ideal maturation in actions as a child grows from early childhood to a mature adulthood. At first, the child is aware of demands made on him for some sort of action. As he is socialised in his family he gradually becomes aware that there are choices possible in actions. From there he gradually progresses to responses which involve more and more a weighing of acts and responses. There will be movement from behaviour because of external authority, to behaviour because of internal compulsion. As a person moves upward through these development levels, there will be a move to organise behaviour into some sort of pattern or system. Finally, in a truly mature person there will be the development which allows and enables the person to meet new situations and fit such into the system of organised and internalised behaviours

of self, which will be appropriate to the situation and also congruent with one's basic organised system.

A taxonomy using these five levels and stated in a more formal way is set up as follows:

1. *An awareness of the necessity for action.*

This is the lowest level and comes to one through external sources of authority. The lack of even this level is often found in formal studies. Its most usual form is in the moralising approach which seems to reduce action to the level of 'bossing round little children in the home'. This is better than nothing, but it should be recognised as the lowest level, and hardly consistent with the new life in Christ.

2. *Recognising the possibility of choice.*

This level is seen in the child learning to say 'no' to commands and requests from parents. It is the beginning of a conscious rebellion in which one recognises the possibility that there is more than one way of behaving. For a Christian, this is when one becomes aware of the possibility of sin and the fact that one can make a conscious choice for and against the will of God. This could be described as a transitional level when one begins to realise that choices are not always good/bad dichotomies: that there is a [p. 136](#) choice of many possible answers in terms of behaviour in a given situation.

3. *Weighing the possible actions and possible consequences of action.*

This level begins to move a person into an inner-directed action pattern as opposed to an outer- (or other-) directed behaviour pattern. In the spiritual realm we are concerned, not so much with following or refusing to follow external orders under threats or promises, as with an inner-directed life following from internalised motivations of higher and higher orders. This transition begins when a person can (and more and more does) look carefully at possible courses of action and weighs their consequences, which are then deliberately and consciously acted upon. It would seem that by the time of commitment the person is pretty well on this level of behaviour.

4. *Organisation of behaviour into a consistent whole.*

This is a more difficult level to attain. It follows along with the taxonomies of the cognitive and affective domains, and parallels them. It means that life is no longer compartmentalised—that what happens on weekdays is part of the whole of life including Sundays. This is the level at which we begin moving out from under the charge of hypocrisy and begin living a consistent life.

5. *Incorporation of new situations into one's inner-directed organisation of behaviour.*

This is the culminating stage at which one becomes most truly inner-directed. Up to this point, one can almost be 'programmed' to respond properly in given situations, even to the level of having one's life consistently organised as a whole. Now, however, the person is on his own. He is no longer a rule-following animal, he is more fully becoming an inner-directed and maturing child of God, a disciple. One is well enough trained in the 'Way' so that any new situation can be faced and worked through with a minimum of problems. All the previous elements of the volitional domain culminate in the person who is now confident and able to meet a new situation, in such a way that one is true to one's own organisation of behaviour as well as being relevant and effective in the new situation.

It may seem to have been a long digression to have looked at this simplified taxonomy of the volitional domain, but I believe that [p. 137](#) whether we want to use this in life-situations, to teach and move people to action, or to programme the various subjects in TEE, the first step is to understand this taxonomy. Not only this, but to recognise that we must teach (or programme) in all three domains. It is a truism which we can discover for ourselves, that if we teach on a high level in the cognitive domain, then we must also teach on the same level in the other two domains. The use of the three domains in our

programming needs to be balanced, both in terms of the three domains and also in terms of the level at which we teach.

A second step in programming the volitional domain is to formulate objectives for the appropriate levels. It is especially difficult to do so in TEE courses! We do not normally ask ourselves what for the O.T. prophets is the basic question: 'What action does this lead to?' We tend rather to divorce academic subjects from the volitional (or action) domain. To sit down deliberately and force oneself to write volitional objectives is a necessity—but you will soon realise how difficult it is! For one thing, the objectives soon begin to look alike, and tend to be very general.

Having written these specific objectives, the third step is to write your programme. I have discovered that unless we teach the volitional domain deliberately and get our students to practise what we are teaching, no progress is made in the area of behaviour. In this third stage we need to be as concrete and practical as possible in giving students practice in 'real-life' situations, if we are at all concerned with training 'practical prophets'.

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## Book Reviews

### **DEUTERONOMY: AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY**

by J. A. THOMPSON.

(London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974. Pp. 320, £ 1.95 paperback.)

Abstract of a review by G. J. WENHAM, *The Evangelical Quarterly*, January–March 1976 (Vol. 48, No. 1).

THIS is the latest volume in the Tyndale Old Testament commentary series. Thompson demonstrates a refreshing independence of spirit as he handles the critical issues connected with this book. In his Introduction he surveys all the main critical theories that have been advanced in the last 50 years, outlines the arguments in their favour, and pin-points their weaknesses. His Introduction is followed by a full and thorough exegesis of the text. Here he shows himself fully abreast of the latest linguistic, legal, and archaeological material that sheds light on the meaning of the text. Though it is weak in its theological treatment, it is one of the best commentaries on Deuteronomy to have appeared this century. Dr. Thompson is Principal of the Baptist College, Auckland, New Zealand.

### **THE GREEK NEW TESTAMENT**

ed. by KURT ALAND, MATTHEW BLACK and others, in co-operation with the Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Munster West, third edition.

(London: United Bible Societies, 1975. Pp. 980, no price listed.)

Abstract of booknote by LARRY W. HURTADO, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, March 1977 (Vol. 20, No. 1).