

THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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Introduction

Christian education, at its best, will help persons to worship the one true God in all God's totality and splendour. Education for mission, or for whatever task God gives us in extending His kingdom, is ultimately to bring glory to Him.

Theology is arrived at in the process of Christian education, or formation. Christian education would not be "Christian" without theology. We cannot separate one from the other. Thus, the theological foundations of Christian education are significant, in that our knowledge about God, and His dealings with His creation, including human beings, are central to the way we go about teaching, learning, and living as Christians.

In this essay, we explore the doctrine of the Trinity, and its relationship to Christian education. In doing so, a brief survey of some more-recent Christian education texts will be carried out, to see their treatment of the subject. The biblical basis for Trinitarian foundations in education will be looked at. A social view of the Trinity is offered as the basis of a Trinitarian foundation in education. Interaction is shown to take place between the Trinity and the three essential elements of education: content, persons, and context, or community. All education is grounded in the authority of God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Recent Texts

Some of the more-recent texts were examined to see if Trinitarian doctrine was used as a basis for "a theology of Christian education", or even as a theological foundation for educational method. Texts examined include De

Wolf's *Teaching Our Faith in God*,¹ Richards' *A Theology of Christian Education*,² Miller's *Story and Context*,³ Gangel and Hendricks' *The Christian Educator's Handbook On Teaching*,⁴ Johnson's *Christian Spiritual Formation*,⁵ Seymour and Miller's *Theological Approaches to Christian Education*,⁶ Habermas and Issler's *Teaching for Reconciliation*,⁷ and Robert Pazmino's trilogy of Christian education texts.⁸

All of the writers mentioned have made significant contributions to Christian education. However, few found a basis, or theological foundation, in a doctrine of the Trinity. De Wolf's book is based on a Trinitarian approach to Christian education. He emphasises the doctrine of the Trinity, because he believes it acts as a "theological corrective", an outline, summarising the message of the Bible, and because it provides "some especially important clues for the philosophy and method of Christian education".⁹

Between De Wolf (1963) and Pazmino (1988), few have shown genuine interest in linking the doctrine of the Trinity with Christian education. Richards says that "we cannot have an adequate Christian education without attending to, and fostering, the development of the kind of relationships, which scripture describes as appropriate within Christ's body".¹⁰ Richards' emphasis on interpersonal relationships is important. However, it is not given a theological foundation that links it with the

¹ Harold L. De Wolf, *Teaching our Faith in God*, New York NY: Abingdon Press, 1963.

² Lawrence O. Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education*, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1975.

³ Donald E. Miller, *Story and Context*, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1987.

⁴ Kenneth O. Gangel, and Howard G. Hendricks, *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Teaching*, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1988.

⁵ Susanne Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom*, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1989.

⁶ Jack L. Seymour, and Donald E. Miller, *Theological Approaches to Christian Education*, Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1990.

⁷ Ronald Habermas, and Klaus Issler, *Teaching for Reconciliation*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1992.

⁸ Robert W. Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1988; *Principles and Practices of Christian Education*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1992; *By What Authority Do We Teach?*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1994.

⁹ De Wolf, *Teaching our Faith in God*, pp. 55-58.

¹⁰ Richards, *Theology of Christian Education*, p. 315.

doctrine of the Trinity, especially the interpersonal relationships within the Trinity, which flows out to creation and humanity.

Surprisingly, Habermas and Issler's book, which is about "Teaching for Reconciliation", also lacks any real development of Trinitarian theology, as a foundation for this approach to Christian education. One would expect some significant use of Trinitarian doctrine in this approach, as reconciliation is truly a Trinitarian affair, involving God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Robert Pazmino does use the doctrine of the Trinity as a theological foundation to Christian education. In his book, *Principles and Practices of Christian Education*, he links the doctrine of the Trinity to the educational trinity of content, persons, and context.¹¹ Again, in his book, *By What Authority Do We Teach?*, he suggests a Trinitarian understanding of Christian education, founded on the Trinity, by suggesting God the Father as educator, Jesus as exemplar, and the Holy Spirit as tutor.¹²

Biblical Analysis

Is there substance to a claim that there should be Trinitarian foundations for Christian education? An examination of Old Testament texts to do with teaching or learning reveals that "the Lord God" is the One who teaches,¹³ or is the One to learn from. The "law" is often referred to as a teacher (Ps 119:99). These reflect the centrality of the Hebrew concept of "one God". However, Judg 13 says that "*the angel of the Lord* teaches Manoah and his wife". Job says, "I thought, 'age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom'. But it is the *spirit* (Spirit) in a man, the *breath of the Almighty*, that gives him understanding" (Job 32:7-8). Even in the Old Testament, then, through the use of personification and anthropomorphism, there was an understanding that God's activity went beyond a transcendent, static state of affairs to a more immanent, dynamic involvement of His being within the very lives of those who sought Him.

It is not until the New Testament that the revelation and activity of God is described in a pervasive Trinitarian pattern. While both the Old and New

¹¹ Pazmino, *Principles and Practices*, pp. 23ff.

¹² Pazmino, *By What Authority*, pp. 21ff.

¹³ Ex 4:12, 15; 18:20; Lev 10:11; Deut 4:9; 11:19; Is 2:3; Mic 4:2.

Testaments affirm that there is only one God (Deut 6:4, Mark 12:29-30), a Trinitarian understanding of the reality of God is mapped out in the history of God's love for the world in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit.

New Testament texts to do with teaching, or learning, reflect the Trinitarian understanding of the reality of God. John 14:26 says "But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will *teach* you all things, and remind you of everything I have said to you". The Triune God is involved in the educational process.¹⁴ Paul reminds the Corinthian readers of the triune work of the one God in relation to the activation of gifts: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone".¹⁵ The "great commission", given by Jesus in Matt 28:19-20, is not only a statement about mission, if mission is seen as going out to convert people to Christ. Mission, in this passage, includes discipling, baptising, and teaching: all carried out within a Trinitarian context that is revealed in the history of salvation.¹⁶ Christian education has a theological foundation, which is Trinitarian.

The Doctrine of the Trinity

Tertullian invented the word "Trinity", when he described God as one substance (ουσία = ousia), or essence, in three persons (ὑπόστασις = hypostasis). *Hypostasis* is the Greek word Tertullian translated into Latin as *persona*. "It is quite possible that Tertullian wanted his readers to understand the idea of 'one substance, three persons' to mean that the one God played three distinct yet related, roles in the great drama of human redemption."¹⁷

Two different emphases, in the understanding of the Trinity, began to emerge. Tertullian, Augustine, and the Western tradition, sought to

¹⁴ Note also John 15:26.

¹⁵ 1 Cor 12:4-6.

¹⁶ This is the "economy" of salvation, in which the Father, Son, and Spirit are active (the economic Trinity). However, the ground of this activity is in the depths of the divine being (the immanent Trinity). See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, III*, 2nd edn, 1975, pp. 384-489.

¹⁷ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*, Oxford UK: Basil Blackwell, 1994, pp. 249-250.

discover the Trinity in the *unity* of God, interpreting the relation of the three persons in terms of their mutual fellowship.¹⁸ The Cappadocian Fathers and the Eastern tradition were more concerned with God's *relational "threeness"*. In emphasising the "distinct individuality of the three persons", they safeguarded "their unity, by stressing the fact that both the Son and the Spirit derived from the Father".¹⁹

The *modern view*²⁰ of the Trinity starts with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, living in eternal perichoresis, being one in the others, through the others, with the others, and for the others:

The unity of the Trinity means the union of the three Persons, by virtue of their perichoresis, and eternal communion. Since this union is eternal, and infinite, we can speak of one God. This interpretation runs the risk of being seen as tritheism. We follow this current: first, because it starts from the *datum* of faith-existence of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as distinct, and in communion; second, because it allows a better understanding of the universe and human society, as a process of communication, communion, and union, through the interpenetration of creatures with one another (perichoresis).²¹

The modern view of the Trinity is a better starting point to understand Trinitarian doctrine, as a foundation for Christian education, because it is a more-dynamic understanding of God that heightens the value of persons, while underlining the importance of community and relationships, as formative agents in the education. "God is not a solitary monad, but free, self-communicating love. God is not the supreme will-to-power over others, but the supreme will-to-community, in which power and love are

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ There are also two other classic currents of thought that seek to deepen an understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity: Greek and Latin. We do not have space to explore these. See Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, Paul Burns, tran., Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1988, p. 234, for a good summary.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

shared”.²² The importance of a dynamic Trinitarian understanding of God has application to epistemology, and, thus, to education:

we could say that the basis of our epistemology is a concrete relation, a kind of knowledge by acquaintance. In place of the information processing model, we have quite the opposite: a claim that, primarily in worship, but in other relations as well, the Christian community is brought to the Father by the Spirit, through the Son.²³

If we are to continue to bring out the significance of the modern doctrine of the Trinity for Christian education, we need to ask, “What is Christian education?” Susanne Johnson’s summary is a good one:

Christian education is ministry that helps the church immerse believers in the many forms of spiritual discipline (worship), reflect upon their meaning (praxis), and integrate them into their lives, as skills or aspects of Christian character (instruction).²⁴

Essentially, Christian education is a relational activity, carried out with the three essential educational elements of content, persons, and the context of community or society. When these are understood in relation to God’s entire Trinitarian revelation, they become a guide to the thought and practice of Christian education, affirming God as the dynamic centre of life and of education.²⁵ As such, God is seen to interact as Father – the source of all truth and content; as Son – being an example of true personhood, learning and teaching, redeeming and transforming humans, through their faith in Him; as Holy Spirit, in being the formative agent, building and sustaining community, the context of Christian education.²⁶

²² Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991, p. 63.

²³ Colin Gunton, “Knowledge and Culture”, in *The Gospel and Contemporary Culture*, Hugh Montefiore, ed., London UK: A. R. Mowbray, 1992, p. 97 (pp. 84-102).

²⁴ Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, pp. 138-139.

²⁵ Pazmino, *Principles and Practices*, p. 23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

God as Father – the Source of all Truth and Content in Christian Education

All knowledge and wisdom comes ultimately from the Father, as the creator and sustainer of all things. This is the case with creation, and all general revelation, as it is with God, as revealed to us in Christ and the Spirit, in special revelation. God, as Father, is responsible for sending the Word to the world in the incarnate Christ. This Word becomes the objective content of the message that Christians are empowered by the Spirit to learn, obey, and teach, taking it to the world, in order to extend the kingdom of God.

As creator, God is responsible for creating human beings in the image of God. As such, human beings were created to be sons and daughters of God, who, by the work of the Spirit, are able to be in relationship with God, calling God “Father”(Rom 8:15-17). An emphasis on autonomy ignores a dependency on God, and an interdependency with other persons, and the created world. God as Father has “initiated efforts to be in communion with persons”,²⁷ through His sending of the Son into the world, and of the Spirit through the Son. What we do in Christian education should equip persons to respond to God. The realities of sin need to be dealt with. Evangelism is very much a part of Christian education. Just as the Father has sent the Son, and, through the Son, the Spirit into the world, so He sends us.

God, the Creator or Father, has also placed humans in a created world, as an arena for “personal creativity, social cooperation, and harmony”.²⁸ As part of the creation mandate given to humanity, we are to care for nature as God’s stewards. Christian education needs to reflect this concern for the intrapersonal dimension of persons in society.

God, the Creator or Father, is the source of all truth and content. As such, He is also the source of our authority as educators. Without potential for relationship, there would be no authority. God’s authority has been passed on to us through Christ, who has asked us to make disciples, baptise, and teach, in the name of the *Father*, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19-20). It

²⁷ Pazmino, *Foundational Skills*, p. 60.

²⁸ Todd H. Speidell, “A Trinitarian Ontology of Persons in Society”, in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47 (1994), p. 298.

is God, as Father, that activates the different varieties of gifts, services, and activities, in which His people are involved (1 Cor 12:4-6).

The word of God is central, as the objective authoritative content of Christian education. However, as truth and knowledge are obtainable from creation (Rom 1:19-20), Christian education should not neglect what can be learned from the natural, created order. Educators can facilitate responsive communion with God, by valuing persons, as God's image-bearers, and by promoting dependency on God, and interdependency with other persons and the created world. Models of Christian educational method and philosophy need to include the above as goals or objectives. Conscious dependence is needed on God as Father. He is the One, from whom ultimate authority comes, and He is also the One, who activates all our human attempts at serving and glorifying Him.

God the Son, the Example of True Personhood

The use of the word "person" has become synonymous with "individual" today. However, the word "individual" bears the concept of separateness, thus distorting the modern perception of the meaning of "person". "Person" should be, and is, used in this paper to emphasise "the capacity and need of the individual to find expression in relationship".²⁹

While the emphasis in this section is on the Son, it needs to be remembered that "the Father is, and, indeed, must be, the principle of the unity of being in the Trinity. The Son and the Spirit receive their divine being from Him. Each is, therefore, fully divine, and indwells the others in mutual relationships".³⁰ Thompson calls this "being in communion", and draws the concept together by suggesting:

that the three persons are ontologically one in their being and relationships, and, as such, constitute the divine unity. Moreover,

²⁹ Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, Leicester UK: IVP, 1993, p. 238. Bray calls for a preservation of this meaning of "person" today. He devotes several pages to this discussion.

³⁰ John Thompson, "Modern Trinitarian Perspectives", in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1991), p. 143.

each shares in the divine being, in the distinctive work of the others, and, in these ways, also exhibit God's unity.³¹

Thus, though we are dividing up the work of God into that of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are talking of the work of one God, whose very being is grounded in personal relationship.

The Son appeared as a person: one who was able to live life fully as a person. The Son was no less a true person, in giving up His personal privileges,³² and He was no less God, in His humility (Phil 2:1-5). As an example of true personhood, the Son redeems and transforms all those who come to Him through faith, regardless of ethnic, social, or lifestyle background. Christ's person and work "has a particular connection with the second element of education, namely, persons".³³

The church can be a:

model for society, when it reflects . . . the perichoresis of God's being: the giving and receiving of free communion between Father, Son, and Spirit."³⁴ Jesus prays for all believers to indwell the mutual love and knowledge and fellowship of Father and Son, as the ground for their unity, and as a witness to the world (John 17:20ff).³⁵

Christian educators need to work out ways, in which their content, persons, and context facilitate the church towards being the perichoretic model that Speidell suggests it should be. If Christian education promotes individualism, concentrating on "self-help" methods and "self-improvement", it is in danger of denying humanity to those who cannot get on so well on their own. On the other hand, if Christian education overemphasises uniformity, there is a danger in denying the differences necessary for genuine community.

Christian educators should be genuinely concerned for persons, both for others, and for themselves as teachers. Christian education is to be an

³¹ Ibid., p. 144.

³² Though he did not give up His divine attributes.

³³ Pazmino, *Principles and Practices*, p. 24.

³⁴ Speidell, "Trinitarian Ontology", p. 283.

³⁵ Ibid.

interpersonal transaction. “Whereas conservative Christians have stood for the truth, they have not always exemplified Christian love, in concern for a diversity of persons.”³⁶ Issues of race, gender, justice, and peace are not high on the Christian educator’s agenda. However, Jesus was concerned about these issues. Jesus says we are to love our enemies (Matt 5:43-48). We are not to judge (Matt 7:1-6). Jesus welcomes little children (Mark 10:13-16). Jesus allows a sinful woman to anoint Him (Luke 7:36-49). Jesus’ acceptance of all, especially the oppressed, is seen in His teaching on social relationships (Luke 14:1-14). Jesus’ shows willingness to speak to, and receive, water from a Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26). There are many more examples.

How are we addressing these societal concerns within the church in our Sunday School classes and youth groups? A more searching question is: how do Christian educators address these issues, when they arise in their midst? Teachers are called to seriously consider those whom they teach, being sensitive to “the felt and real needs of students, to their learning styles, and to appropriate responses at teachable moments in their lives”.³⁷ Christian educators should see themselves as persons in relationship with other persons bringing about growth in relationship, both with one another and with God (1 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 4:12b, 16).

Jesus, the Example for Christian Education

Firstly, Jesus was one who could teach with authority (Matt 7:28-29),³⁸ because His words and authority were from the Father.³⁹ He taught only what the Father instructed Him to teach. As educators faithfully study and then teach the scriptures, they communicate the words of the Lord to others. Christian educators are part of a divine chain of communication from God the Father, to God the Son, through God the Spirit, to the teacher (by revealed truths in the Bible), and to the students.⁴⁰ Jesus possessed an innate knowledge of what others were thinking.⁴¹ Educators can study their

³⁶ Pazmino, *Principles and Practices*, p. 136.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See also Luke 4:16-21, 22, 32; Mark 1:27; 6:2; 10:24; 11:19; 19:48; Matt 7:28; 19:25; 22:22.

³⁹ Matt 28:18; John 5:27; 17:2.

⁴⁰ John 17:8.

⁴¹ John 1:47-48; 2:24-25; 4:18.

students, seeking to know the characteristics of the age group they teach, and seeking to know them as persons, their backgrounds, characteristics, interests, problems, strengths, and weaknesses. Jesus made unique claims about Himself and His teaching,⁴² giving many commands to groups and persons – imperatives to follow Him, His example, and His teachings.⁴³ Christian educators can lead others to this One, whose claims are demanding and absolute, and to the scriptures, which faithfully record them. They can encourage students to know and obey the commands of Christ.

Jesus fully represented the Godhead in His earthly ministry, and exercised an authority that uniquely disclosed God. In this plenipotentiary role, Jesus was able to fulfil the purposes of God for the salvation of humankind and all creation. Therefore, in His teaching, a distinct authority was incarnated that called for the response of His hearers.⁴⁴

Jesus said, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me” (Matt 11:29). There is much that we can learn from the example of Jesus. While we do not have the space to analyse all the qualities that marked Jesus as an outstanding teacher,⁴⁵ we will look at some of them.

We observe Jesus as a balanced, mature person. As the Son of God, He was, indeed, spiritually mature. Luke 20:40 says that, as a growing child, Jesus “grew and became strong, He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him”. Here we see physical, mental, and spiritual development. As He grew into His teens, He “grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men” (Luke 2:52). Here, we see continued development, with the emphasis on relationships. Jesus grew as a person, as One in relationship with others, and the scriptures suggest He was more and more highly esteemed and loved by those who knew Him. If teachers learn from Jesus’ example, they will strive, through the empowering Spirit

⁴² Mark 8:38; John 5:24; 15:7. Note also the “I am” claims in John 6; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 9; 11:25.

⁴³ Mark 1:25; 3:12; Luke 18:40; John 13:34; 14:15, 21; 15:10, 12, 14, 17.

⁴⁴ Pazmino, *By What Authority Do We Teach?*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ Some of these characteristics are: maturity, mastery, humility, consistency, spontaneity, variety, empathy, intimacy, sensitivity, and relevance.

of God, to have balanced personalities – to be growing mentally, spiritually, and socially.

Jesus was noted as a great teacher. However, He did not follow a set curriculum that meant He had to set aside a special time each day for His learners. Though He knew what He wanted to communicate, and He often gave lengthy discourses, many times His lessons came as “teachable moments”, as unplanned, spontaneous occasions, when the teaching was determined by the situations that came up.⁴⁶ LeBar makes the observation that “just about half the teaching incidents in the gospels were initiated by the learners themselves. . . . How much easier it is to teach, when our pupils begin a lesson! When they begin, we may be assured of their interest, attention, and personal involvement.”⁴⁷ Just as Jesus was flexible, treating individuals as persons, by being open, and listening to questions and issues that arose, so teachers, today, can learn to be more flexible. The use of informal teaching sessions, and a willingness to discuss personal inquiries out of class settings, would be a start in modelling Jesus’ spontaneous teaching style.

Another quality that highlighted Jesus’ teaching ministry was the quality of intimacy. He was close to His disciples, spending extended periods of time with them alone. This was one of the reasons that Jesus had called them to follow Him, “that they might be with Him” (Mark 3:14). Interestingly, after Jesus had ascended to heaven, and His followers began their ministry as apostles, the Jewish leaders noted the courage of Peter and John, realising “that these men had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). What characterised Jesus’ teaching was the amount of interaction He had with those He taught, both in formal and informal situations. The quality of intimacy should mark Christian education just as it was a mark of Jesus’ teaching.

⁴⁶ There are many situations like this. For example: The question by Peter on the extent of forgiveness (Matt 18:21) was followed by the teaching of Jesus, given in the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:22-35). Matt 19:16, followed by 19:28-30; Matt 20:20-21, followed by 20:24-28; etc.

⁴⁷ Lois E. LeBar, *Education That is Christian*, Westwood NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1958, p. 81.

Pazmino suggests that Jesus is the exemplar, or mentor, the model, or master teacher, “who, in His person, exemplifies all that a teacher should be in his relationships with his disciples or students”.⁴⁸ Jesus’ teaching was so effective, because of His perichoretic relationship with the Father and the Spirit, which overflowed into His relationships with humanity. When our personalities, as Christian educators, reflect the Lord of life (God as Father), and the Word of Christ dwells in us richly, in all wisdom, and the Spirit of God is working through us, people will come to us, as they did to Jesus, and we shall find teaching most thrilling and fruitful.⁴⁹

God the Holy Spirit, who Builds and Sustains the Context of Christian Education

God, as the Spirit, can be seen as sustainer, the formative agent in the birthing of the Christian community, the church, at Pentecost.⁵⁰ The Spirit continues to bring life and transformation to faith communities, and the restraining of that which opposes spiritual growth. Thus, the Holy Spirit can be connected with the third necessary educational element: the context of the community or society.

There is a danger of conveying an inadequate view of the relationship of the Spirit with God the Son. Pneumatology can tend to be subordinated to Christology. When anyone of the persons is less than the others, or simply a relation on the others, “it tends to blur the distinctive character of the Spirit”, and questions the viability of the Trinity, if the third person of the Trinity is more obscure than the other two.⁵¹ Thompson suggests this difficulty can be overcome if:

we look at the economy of salvation, and move from there to the immanent Trinity. In the economy, the Holy Spirit is the One who brings a community, the church, into being. In this way, He acts as Lord, and is known as the personal presence of God with and in us.

⁴⁸ Pazmino, *By What Authority Do We Teach?*, p. 21.

⁴⁹ Lois E. LeBar, and James E. Pluddemann, *Education that is Christian*, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1989, p. 92.

⁵⁰ Pazmino, *Principles and Practices*, p. 24.

⁵¹ Thompson, “Modern Trinitarian Perspectives”, p. 152.

In this way, the Holy Spirit has a distinct personal existence, being the union, communion, and goal of all three persons of the Trinity.⁵²

It is this work of the Holy Spirit that enables participation in the faith community to be a means of grace. “The ecclesia is built up by all the other means of grace we practice, such as the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist, searching the scriptures, prayer, meditation, confession, repentance, works of mercy, and other spiritual disciplines.”⁵³ This grace is available, because of the work of Christ (not our works), and is extended to us by the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, all that Christian education seeks to do, as it places itself under the authority of God, will be given life and relevance by the Holy Spirit.

The authority of the Holy Spirit in teaching can be looked at in relation to the authoritative Word of God. The Word of God is creative, living, and written. “The living Word is a person, and the living Word’s ministry is in relation to the persons engaged in authoritative teaching.”⁵⁴ The Holy Spirit brings the Word of God to the church, the community of God’s people, through His inspiration of the scriptures, and then His illumination of the Word, within the context of the learner. The experience of those, who hear and receive this Word, is one of joy (Luke 8:13; Mark 4:16). This is a joy given by the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 1:6).

The Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher or tutor,⁵⁵ the counsellor, who sustains the life of the Christian community, and the wider society, in ways that fulfil God’s purposes. Human teachers (Eph 4:11-12) are in addition to the Spirit, not a substitute for Him. As the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), He is the Source of truth, the Revealer of truth, and the Applier of truth (17:17).⁵⁶ As such, Christian education needs divine enabling, in order to be effective. The Holy Spirit extends the work of the Triune God, who is forever relational, by making the Word of God effectual in students’ lives (John 10:25; 12:47-48; Acts 7:57-59). It is not

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Johnson, “Education in the Image of God”, p. 136.

⁵⁴ Pazmino, *By What Authority Do We Teach?*, p. 27.

⁵⁵ Pazmino’s expression, p. 21.

⁵⁶ Roy B. Zuck, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Teaching”, in *The Christian Educator’s Handbook*, Wheaton IL: Victor Books, 1988, p. 35.

enough to pour knowledge into people's heads, if the goal of Christian education is to know God and to glorify Him.

As the Word of God regenerates lives (Ps 19:7; Rom 10:17; James 1:18), the Holy Spirit removes spiritual blindness, and gives eternal life (John 3:5-7; Tit 3:5). Both the Word of God and the Spirit of God bring about spiritual transformation in the teaching/learning process. "Christian educators are called to be responsive to the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and to recognise that the Spirit guides persons 'into all Truth' " (John 16:13).⁵⁷

As we see the triune God at work, in the context of Christian education, namely the community, we must note that:

The church, as a community of persons, who reflect the tension and balance of the tripersonal God, must avoid mathematical and impersonal models of community that opt for either unity or diversity. Modalistic ideas of God parallel an overemphasis on unity: integrated churches (or schools) that often fail to appreciate the particularity of one's background (unity as uniformity). . . . Tritheistic notions of God parallel an overemphasis on diversity.⁵⁸

Speidell goes on to suggest that the church has an opportunity to become mediating communities, where unity exists within diversity,⁵⁹ thus, persons are able to live fully as Christians, without relegating their Christian faith to the private domain of life.

As part of the church's mission, Christian education can reflect the triune God in society by:

questioning depersonalising models of human relations that simply opt for unity or diversity, individualism or collectivism, integration or separation. In pointing the world toward more personal relations in society, the church may reflect the very being of the triune God.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Pazmino, *Principles and Practices*, p. 26.

⁵⁸ Speidell, "Trinitarian Ontology", p. 293.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 298-299.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

In all of this, God's personal relationship with the educator, through His Spirit, and His empowering of the ministry of Christian education, is essential for effectiveness.

Concluding Comments

All three persons of the Trinity must be seen as working cooperatively, and in concert, in the task of Christian education (1 Cor 12:4-6). A Trinitarian approach to education affirms that it is important to teach God's revelation to persons, in the context of their community and society, thus bringing about transformation.

With a Trinitarian foundation, Christian education is seen to be a relational, interpersonal affair that seeks to bring glory to God the Father, through Christ the Son, by the Holy Spirit. As such, Christian education is seen as part of the mission, to which Christ has assigned all Christians. God, in Christ, seeks to reconcile us to Himself, and us to each other, through the power of His Spirit. The potential for reconciliation has been effected, because the triune God exists in relationship, ever seeking to increase the scope of His interpersonal relationships to include persons, who reflect the wholeness of His own being.

“Christian education is ministry that helps persons form their self-awareness as beings created in the image of God. Such participation is not individualistic or private. It is communal”.⁶¹

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⁶¹ Johnson, “Education in the Image of God”, p. 137.

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