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Church and School: Compañeros in Biblical and Church History

Lynn Jost and Valerie G. Rempel

INTRODUCTION – VALERIE REMPEL

In *Anabaptist Ways of Knowing*, Sara Wenger Shenk cites Lawrence Cr-
Lemin, who suggests that “education fundamentally deals with the way a
culture mediates its substance and character and that its form consists of
an ecology of interrelated institutions” (70). For Christians, the primary
institutions that have mediated its culture—understood as a life centered
around the revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ—have been
the home, the faith community, and the school. Our task is to help us re-
flect together on the relationship between two of these institutions, the faith
community and the school.

*Scriptures themselves can be seen as a catechetical curriculum.
The Bible outlines a meta-narrative.*

We do this with an awareness of our own particularities. Our prima-
ry faith community is the Mennonite Brethren church in North America,
which stands as part of a particular tradition, the sixteenth-century Ana-
baptist tradition, but also as part of a nineteenth- and twentieth-century
evangelical tradition deeply shaped by Pietism and Revivalism. We are
also white, middle-class by virtue of education and values, and middle-

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aged. We are products of church-related schools and continue to be deeply embedded in the educational enterprise through our association with what was the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary and is now Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary (FPBS). We are also members of the same local Mennonite Brethren (MB) congregation in Fresno. This is neither an apology nor a recitation of our credentials but simply to acknowledge what Peter Erb has called “the pool in which we swim” (Erb, 102). If Lawrence Cremin is correct, that education is a way that a culture mediates its substance and character, it seems important to be aware of what that culture is and how it has been formed. Whether in North America or in the Congo we cannot afford to think that we are simply mediating a Christian culture that somehow manages to arrive without a vehicle. To quote Erb again, we are not only “*in a society but of a society*” (103).

Historically, Anabaptists have sought to recapture and even recreate the culture of the early church. Given the early and repeated history of persecution, it was perhaps inevitable that the notion of an alternative community deeply rooted in the story of Israel and its identity as the people of God, as well as the communities of faith described in the Acts of the Apostles, would form itself into a particular culture. This is to remind us that our educational efforts have mediated not some kind of “pure” biblical story but a biblical story shaped by an interpretative community, and accompanied by the values and practices of that community.

In our address this evening, Lynn’s task is to lay out the biblical story while mine is to help us think about how that story has been conveyed. Our goal is to begin a conversation. Through the generous support of ICOMB we have the luxury of face-to-face conversation. At the same time, we want to acknowledge that there are different voices, different theological perspectives, different cultural settings, and different educational settings. These will inform the shape and direction of our conversation throughout the week.

PART I – LYNN JOST

Biblical theology is centered confessionally in the statements: “Yahweh is King,” “Jesus is Lord.” The reign or kingdom of God is the sphere in which God’s will is done on earth and in heaven. Biblical theology is based on the biblical narrative in six acts:

1. God created heaven and earth.
2. Humans rebelled against God’s rule, resulting in alienation from God, self, others, and the world.
3. God redeemed and called a people to live in covenant, to know God, to act as a missional people, a kingdom of priests, so that

the world might experience God's blessing, that is, God's justice, mercy, peace, and holiness.

4. When God's people found themselves in exile as a result of disobeying the call, God Incarnate, Jesus, lived, died, and rose again as the Servant of God living out the vocation of God's people.
5. The church extends the mission of God, of Jesus, as described in the biblical book of Acts and, since then, in church history.
6. God's people look forward to the consummation, to the new creation, when a new heaven and a new earth will be ruled by God.

In our assignment to invite participants in this consultation to consider the relationship between faith communities and their schools, we will offer three vantage points from which to read the biblical narrative and church history. Our aim is to set up questions that will help this community strengthen the *compañerismo* of church and school.

First vantage point (thesis)

God is Creator; God's people are partners in building the kingdom.

Creation anchors this vantage point. Genesis 1 teaches, serves as a shaping catechism for the faith community, that God has ordered chaos and filled the vacuum of the *tohu v bohu* which characterized the earth in the beginning. As a crowning point of creation God blessed humans to live in God's image, to exercise a democratic dominion as partners in the ongoing creative act. Genesis 2 complements Genesis 1 by stipulating that the stewardship of the earth involves humans in guarding and serving the *humus*.

Biblical wisdom literature gives the basic catechetical structure to the creation vantage point. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Creation is orderly, an order which can be recognized by the perceptive human. Creative order is reinforced by the cultus. Tabernacle, sacrificial system, clean/unclean, and temple follow the natural design. Biblical narratives reinforce this wisdom perspective both in the deuteronomistic notion that obedience results in blessing and disobedience in exile and in such stories as those of Joseph, Daniel, and Esther that express means of living within the reality of empire.

The Apocalypse anticipates the recovery of this shalom of order when God will again exercise free sovereignty.

A variety of genres is used to connect the faith community to "the fear of the Lord":

- Narrative traditions use stories to reflect on the deliverer God and the covenant with God's people.
- Families, clans, and tribes use catechetical variety including life lessons, proverbs, and stories.

- Leaders invite people to covenant loyalty (e.g., Moses, Joshua, Samuel).

PART I – VALERIE

For the early church, education continued to be centered in the community—the family, certainly, but also the new family—the church. What was the curriculum? Peter Erb makes the point that the New Testament itself is the product of what was taught (Erb, 106). In it, we have the collected stories of Jesus first communicated orally but then preserved in the Gospels, the prayers, the hymns, early sermonic and interpretive material. This is the basic catechism of the early church.

The church's teachers were shaped by a Jewish heritage in which the teacher gathered students who learned by imitating the teacher, not only his life but also his way of studying the law. For the early church, Jesus became the most immediate model. His was a peripatetic school—on the move as people learned and worked together. John E. Toews summarizes the responsibilities of the teacher as:

- teaching young converts;
- transmitting the tradition (Jewish scripture, the Jesus tradition, the “confession, faith and ethical norms” of the new and distinctly Christian communities being formed);
- interpreting the tradition;
- teaching and modeling morals—the new ethics of the Jesus way (Toews, 54–58).

Two major educational efforts were undertaken during the early Christian era. The first, the *catechumenate*, was a form of adult education beginning in the second century and continuing until about 450. Many early converts were Jewish and did not need as much instruction. Presumably they had already been shaped by their acquaintance with what we would now call the Hebrew Bible. Catechumens with pagan roots were subject to more intensive teaching, both Scripture and emerging doctrine. (This applied to both male and female converts, with women taught by deaconesses.) This early teaching was preparation for baptism and membership and moved very quickly to an extended probation period of two to three years leading to baptism and membership. This allowed church leaders to test commitment in the face of persecution and adherence to the Jesus way. These church-based educational efforts continue today. Most of our congregations would have some version of Sunday school for children, perhaps even adults. Baptismal classes continue as a way of teaching young converts and transmitting the tradition.

The second major educational effort can be seen in the first programs of “advanced” or “higher” education. These were the catechetical schools.

The first was begun in Alexandria, around 179, and others quickly followed in major cities such as Antioch and Jerusalem. The catechetical schools were significantly influenced by Greek thought and culture, in part because of new converts who were conversant with philosophy. It also represented a more scientific approach to the Christian faith in that there were secular subjects taught in relationship to Christian theology. These schools paved the way for and also shaped the theological enterprise. Clement and Origen were both associated with catechetical schools where they did exegetical work, formulated more systematic theologies, and produced theological writings. Eventually, some of these schools became the first seminaries.

Early catechisms were *telling* the story. They emerged within the church. Given the presence of so many false teachers/prophets, it was important to ensure that everyone was being shaped by an authoritative story. Gradually, the Christian story became engaged with the secular world of ideas. Early teachers were also *guarding* the story. They were both preserving and transmitting knowledge.

- Whose role is that today?
- Who determines what is foreign or outside of the Christian tradition?
- Who determines what is foreign or outside the confessional tradition of any Christian body?

PART II – LYNN

Second vantage point (antithesis)

Human rebellion disrupted a clear expression of the first vantage point. The resulting alienation results in a distortion of the creation mandate to exercise dominion and to guard and serve the soil. Instead of living in the egalitarian shalom envisioned in Genesis and renewed in the Torah (expressed not only in the Book of the Covenant in Exodus 19–24 but also in the Deuteronomic Code with a covenant mandate to love God and neighbor) human systems exercised power selfishly. The resulting imperial hegemony was evident not only in Pharaoh's brickyard in Egypt and Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon but also in Israel's kingdoms, in the rule of Saul, Solomon, and Ahab.

The school of the prophets emerged during the monarchy. Prophets warned of the consequences of imperial hegemony. When David *grasped* imperial power, Nathan declared to him, "You are the man." Elijah said of Ahab, when he became an imperial land grabber, "You are the troubler of Israel." Jeremiah reminded Shallum (Jehoiakim) that to know Yahweh is to do justice and righteousness, not to exercise imperial prerogatives which oppress the marginalized.

Israel's insistence on imitating empire results in exile.

The biblical analysis of the imperial reign of Solomon highlights

- power via wisdom
 - sustained critical reflection on lived experience in order to discern the hidden shape of reality in daily life
 - family/tribal wisdom → wisdom of the school and court to manage and master others
 - international reputation and competition; "success"
- wealth via wisdom
 - international commercial trade in arms and luxury items
 - taxation
 - cheap labor
 - royal military bureaucracy
- wisdom vis-à-vis Torah obedience
 - the uncompromising "if" of covenant
 - 1 Kings 3:14
 - 1 Kings 6:12–13
 - 1 Kings 9:6
 - indictment and sentence
 - royal compromise violates Torah
 - land loss
 - choosing death
 - covenantal faith
 - public power

PART II – VALERIE

With the conversion of Constantine and the legalization (and even privileging) of Christianity, the church entered into a new relationship with the culture around it. Increasingly shaped by imperial ideas and practices, the alternative community that was centered on faithful discipleship to Jesus became Christendom, with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto.

The earliest monastics were men and women who fled the city in an effort to distance themselves from what they perceived as the compromises of the imperial church. In the desert they could focus on prayer and the study of Scripture. They frequently gathered around a teacher and gradually formed communities governed by a rule. The community helped to form and sustain a Christian identity and allowed them access to the central rite of the church, i.e., communion.

From the beginning, early monastics were involved in education, both their own and that of the children they took in. Monastic communities were formed for both men and women and were deeply shaped by the practices of faith. It was an embodied faith shaped by the cycle of prayers, work,

worship, study, etc. It was also a shared life, a common life. Significantly, monasteries preserved knowledge and the texts through copying. They developed the library resources that eventually fueled the Renaissance.

More formal schools developed within the structures of the church. The churches served by bishops were called cathedrals and it was here that cathedral or episcopal schools were developed to train priests. By the fourth and fifth centuries, instruction was given over to a specialized clergy called the *scholasticus*. Many of them had been teachers in other settings and, by the ninth century, helped shape an ever-broadening curriculum that engaged the liberal arts in addition to the study of Scripture and theology. These were the forerunners of the great universities.

Cathedral and episcopal schools tended to exert more influence than the monastic schools. They were located in cities and trained not only clerics but also the next generation of teachers. Many of them gave birth to the great universities of Europe. In order to govern them, bishops appointed chancellors to supervise teachers. Over time, teachers and students began seeking greater autonomy. They formed guilds according to the model of the day. Eventually the *guild* became the *universitas* and that term became exclusive to “unions of faculties and students” (Gangel, 109).

From the twelfth century and following, the university became the premier educational institution. As Marvin Taylor points out, this reflected the changing world—the increasing importance of cities, a rising middle class, and (one of the few positive results of the Crusades) the encounter with the intellectual riches of the East (Taylor, 15). The curriculum was varied. Theology continued as the “Queen of the Sciences,” though scholars point out that the new ideas and the recovery or rediscovery of classical Greek thought created significant challenges as these were brought into conversation with established Christian doctrine. Specialization began to occur (Gangel, 110). Schools became known for theology, law, or the liberal arts and could no longer be described as “narrowly religious” (Taylor, 15). Increasingly, students were studying for the professions.

There was also a new student pool. War is good for some economies. In this period, it helped spur commercial enterprises and urban growth that helped produce a middle-class and that, in turn, made for more students. The entire enterprise was becoming more sophisticated and this was reflected in both teachers and students.

The great universities were guarded by the church and its clerics, and produced the great works of medieval theology (e.g., the work of Anselm, Abelard, Duns Scotus, and Aquinas). But they adopted the model of the guild and became increasingly self-governed. The move toward self-governance can also be read as a move away from the church.

Do we recognize similarities in the movement of our Bible schools to accredited universities?

It is important to remember that education has often been the means by which someone moves into the middle or even upper classes, and that schools rely on the middle classes to provide students. In some instances, advanced education can produce a form of sophistication that may form an intellectual class.

- How do we understand the benefits of this linkage between education and upward mobility?
- What are the problems this poses?

PART III – LYNN

Third vantage point (synthesis)

In exile Israel collects the Scriptures and develops a canonical community. The Psalms, which contemplate Torah (God's instruction) and celebrate Yahweh's kingship, are compiled during and after exile. Isaiah 40–66 and Jeremiah 30–31 offer comfort and hope of a new beginning, a new exodus, a renewed covenant.

The third way, neither empire nor exiled, describes the new community which constitutes the new covenant.

Through word and deed Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God which runs counter to the empire, now a Roman political, economic, social, religious world order. Jesus offers redemption from the alienation of sin by the power of the cross. Jesus shapes a new covenant community that is celebrated around the sign of his body and blood. Jesus invites the exiled community to be "in Christ," to know God through himself and through the unity brought by the Holy Spirit. Jesus brings peace, abundant life. The New Testament writers use the metaphors of the Old Testament to reissue the invitation to the community of aliens and exiles who find identity as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.

When asked about restoring the kingdom to Israel, Jesus responds that the new community works under God's authority, empowered by the Spirit to give witness to King Jesus. Eschewing imperial values, the church lives out the values expressed by God when God freed Israel from bondage in Egypt.

Jesus is the author and pioneer who demonstrates and empowers his people to follow in his steps:

- Christ gives new life to those who were dead in disobedience, strangers, without hope, without God.
- Christ reconciles enemies into a new community that he equips to make known the mystery of God.

- Christ teaches his followers to make disciples, teaching everything that he commanded.
- Christ offers abundant life, peace, a new Jerusalem of light and life.

The third vantage point anticipates and describes a missional people. This missionary community is one that cooperates with God in reversing exile and recreating kingdom. It lives as the school of Jesus. Gifted leaders equip God's people for works of service. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, the Great Commandment, and the Great Commission make up the basic catechism, the curriculum of the school of discipleship following the Teacher. Paul and other New Testament apostles teach Christ's followers to know Christ, to share in his suffering, and to experience the power of his resurrection. The good news is passed from generation to generation as faithful people teach others. This is the primary perspective of the third vantage point, but the Scriptures also give witness to conflict.

Two "cases" of conflict are cited here as a way of preparing for further conversation about the role of the school in helping the church deal with issues of controversy and difference.

First, conflict growing out of the exercise of power in ways that promote the interests of some at the expense of the interests of others is documented within the biblical text. Acts 15 records a church meeting in which those holding competing interests met to find a way through the conflict. The writings of Peter, James, John, Jude, and Paul make explicit reference to issues of conflict in most, if not all, of their epistles. More recently, scholars have suggested that orthodox Christianity represents the victory of the most powerful group within proto-Christianity. These scholars suggest that the decision to regard deuterocanonical texts as heterodox is anachronistic.

Second, the Old Testament wisdom tradition illustrates the canonical capacity to allow different voices freedom of expression. Much as the school does for the church throughout history, the biblical tradition of wisdom gives voice to a counter-testimony. For example, the book of Proverbs makes the claim that the world is orderly and under the Creator's control. With the Deuteronomist, the wisdom writer of Proverbs concludes that obedience leads to security. Ecclesiastes counters this conclusion with the argument that "fate is indifferent to obedience and disobedience" (Brueggemann, 204).

PART III – VALERIE

The sixteenth-century reformers—Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli—are products of the medieval world. Their revolt against the church was not a revolt against education *per se*, but against an education devoid of the

Bible. Given their emphasis on the written and preached word, and their insistence that the Bible be available in the vernacular so that the laity had access to the Word of God, it should not surprise us that education for the masses became part of their concern.

We should remember, however, that neither Luther nor Calvin envisioned a true separation of church and state. For both of them, it made sense for the civil community to be involved in education. Indeed, it was the duty of princes or church councils to educate for godliness. Furthermore, Luther was concerned about the role of the family. Parents were to train their children and, with his urging, Protestant women traded monastic life for domesticity.

Zwingli, however, pursued a different course. Zwingli established a theological institute, his *Prophezei*, which was participatory and nonauthoritarian (Gangel, 144). It trained a great number of ministers in a learning community in which teachers and students studied together. This was a model of church and school in intimate relationship that had not really been seen for centuries. It looked back to the rabbinical model and the school of Jesus, trained ministers, and ultimately helped spur the Reformation in Switzerland.

A century later, Philipp Jakob Spener and his fellow pietists sought to reform Lutheran orthodoxy in much the way Luther had tried to reform the Roman Catholic church. Spener emphasized a heart religion and argued for practical, pastoral training for ministers. There was to be less attention to theologically obscure sermons and more attention to pastoral care and edifying sermons. The University of Halle became the training ground for a new generation of ministers, teachers, and missionaries. Its focus was oriented much more toward formation. For example, Hebrew and Greek were substituted for Latin since it was thought more important to study Scripture than the great theologians.

The Bible college movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries owes much to the educational philosophy of Pietism. It focused on biblical languages as preparation for Bible study and on practical training for mission and evangelism. The movement strongly emphasized holy living or character formation as well. As a part of their mission effort, Protestant churches took this model around the world. Today there are Bible institutes, Bible colleges, church-related liberal arts colleges and universities, and seminaries around the world.

If asked, each of us would, I think, claim to be representing a community of learners seeking to be shaped by the biblical story that Lynn has laid out for us. Still, in a variety of ways we struggle with what it means to live in the empire but not be of the empire. A variety of questions come to mind.

- In an increasingly polarized landscape (at least in North America), how do church and school continue to see themselves as inter-related? Who holds educational institutions accountable? How do educators speak prophetically to the church?
- In what ways do we accommodate or even imitate the empire? For example, is accreditation striving for excellence or status? Thomas Yoder Neufeld has observed that “the ethos of a school is, of course, only partly shaped by its teachers. We teach *within* an institution. But we also teach *through* and *as* an institution, however ‘invisibly’” (138–139). The point he is making is that by our professionalization and attention to promotion and advancement, we are “teaching” our students.
- How do we understand the increasing movement of our students into the professions and away from vocational ministries? Is this “salt and light” for the world or secularization?
- Given the increasing cost of education, who has access to our schools? How do we form learning communities in which both teaching staff and student body are diverse in ethnicity, gender, and class?
- How do people of privilege (teachers, administrators) call students who come from less privileged backgrounds to sacrificial living? I can *choose* to go to the barrio. Is it right to ask someone to stay there?
- How do we work at faith formation (historically done in community, face to face, teacher and learner) in an increasingly technological world? Is it possible to form global communities of learners via distance education?

CONCLUSION – LYNN

Scriptures themselves can be seen as a catechetical curriculum. The Bible outlines a meta-narrative. It offers a critique of *empire*, of the will to power that neglects the community and marginalizes the needy. Jesus, God in the flesh, restores creation shalom through his life, death, and resurrection. Jesus reconciles the alienation that humanity suffers in relationship with God, self, others, and the world itself. Jesus calls those saved from sin and guilt to membership in the covenant community of his disciples. In the discipling community, Jesus’ followers learn to live as a living sacrifice, to know Christ, to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The abundant life is a foretaste of the in-breaking kingdom of God to be realized at the consummation. The “school” helps the “church” experience this reality by helping us focus on our identity as Christians and our mission as the people of God

by inviting comprehensive and in-depth reflection about relationship with God in Christ through the Spirit, with believers in community, and with the world which is being incorporated into the kingdom of God. ✨

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