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**MODELS OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION:
A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Introduction

Religious instruction has been accomplished through a variety of teaching and learning methodologies. Some of the methods used have produced positive results in the lives of children, young people, and adult learners. Recognizing the positive features of some of these methodologies, this paper uses models from the Scriptures to develop four paradigms for religious instruction.

This study was conducted with the presupposition that the Scriptures are the inspired word of God and that they contain basic principles for the development of models of religious instruction. Thus, this paper uses the concept of a model in order to grasp the variety of dimensions of certain biblical events and experiences.

What is the purpose to use models in religious instruction? Although models have been used in the physical and sociological sciences, it is possible also to construct models from biblical data and using biblical presuppositions. For instance, in the instructions given to build the Sanctuary, the Lord shows Moses the pattern of the Tabernacle (Exo 25:8-9), that is, the structural design or model that was built later (Acts 7:44; Heb 8:5). "And see that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain" (Exo 25:40). This tabernacle was built as "vivid representation of the various aspects of Christ's ministry on behalf of fallen man."¹ A description of this design and its services represent the ministry of Christ first as sacrifice and later as a priest showing the way God will solve the problem of sin. All dimensions of this pattern now are fulfilled in the reality of the ministry of Christ.

In the same way, Paul uses the same criterion when he expressed the metaphor of the human body to be applied to the church as the body of Christ. "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:27). Viewing the church as a body shows the organic interaction of its members (1 Cor 12:18-24), their need to care for one another (1 Cor 12:25), and their variety of gifts empowered by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:28-30) for the building of the church.

Therefore, from these biblical examples, it is possible to grasp the idea of models of religious instruction. As Avery Dulles suggests a model "is a schematic construction that enables one to make statements potentially applicable to an indefinite number of individuals."² In this study the author will seek "to harmonize the models by showing that rightly understood, they complement one another."³ In the final analysis of this topic a more detailed synthesis shows a pattern for religious instruction that should be considered by Christian educators. It is

¹"Exodus," *S D A Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1953), 1:636.

² Avery Dulles, *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 47.

³ *Ibid.*, 50.

important to mention that this study is limited to religious instruction concepts found in the Scriptures.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to show the biblical models of religious instruction as they are disclosed by the Scriptures through events and experiences found both Old and New Testaments. The main aim of this study is to identify as far as possible the nature and methodologies involved in the description of those events and experiences.

This study surveys the following models: the life of Abraham, the writings of Moses, the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ, and the writings of the apostle Paul. Why were these particular biblical models chosen? From the historical perspective, the characters chosen offer the most noticeable action of God in history that stresses the origin and progression of the people of God. Thus, Abraham, the Father of the faith, is the key ancestor of the Hebrew people, the people of the covenant, and by faith the father of Christians alike. Moses was the leader called and appointed by the Lord to guide His people from the bondage to freedom, from Egypt to the promise land, because of God faithfulness and love for His covenant people. Jesus Christ is chosen because of His ministry as the Messiah, the great Master, who taught the good news of the kingdom of God and the climax of the revelation of God to humanity. Finally, the ministry of Paul is explored since he was called to become the apostle to the gentiles and because he continued with the establishing of the universal church in early Christianity.

Finally, the models were organized in categories but their order there is not a priority in their specification. The categories were established to follow a system to view the dimensions as a whole. This study focuses on religious instruction and tangentially considers elaborate biblical doctrine and exegetical historical events.

Model of Religious Instruction In the Experience of Abraham

The first model of religious instruction is based on the life and experiences of the patriarch Abraham, called the “friend of God” (James 2:23). The call of Abraham is one of the most remarkable events in the history of the Hebrew people. Throughout his pilgrimage in the land of Palestine (Gen 11:27-12:3) various difficulties arose that affected his spiritual life due to the negative decisions he made (Gen 12:13; 20:2). It is important to note that despite these shortcomings, God continued being faithful to the covenant established with him so he could become the “father of many nations” (Gen 17:5). In the dramatic test of his faith (and obedience), according to the promise (Gen 17:15-21), the Lord reaffirmed, “through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me” (Gen 22:18).¹

The declaration of the Lord that Abraham would be “father of many nations” (Gen 17:5) implies the idea of his role as husband and father, that is, the conceptual elements of a religious leader that guides the spiritual life of his home. For instance, in the encounter with the three

¹ All scriptural references used in this paper are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise indicated.

visitors, the Lord said to Abraham “for I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just”(Gen 18:19). In this context, Abram functioned as a religious leader responsible for the religious instruction of his home and relatives.

Building of Altars

What was really the foundation of this patriarchal model? The book of Genesis portrayed this model as the worship pattern through the building of sacrificial altars. On the occasions when the word “altar” is mentioned, the structure built with the purpose of a sacrifice or offering is meant.¹ The purpose was not only the formal expression of the sacrifice but also a way to approach the Lord through this form of worship. According to Robert Haak “altars were constructed at places which were considered to have a sacred character, points where contact between the human and the divine could occur.”² As was mentioned in the Genesis record, Abraham and his family, relatives, and assistants left Haran together. Therefore, the practice of sacrificial altars involved his family, as well as those who were close to him, such as his workers and helpers.³

Following the previous practice of Noah (Gen 8:20-21), Abraham conducted the same religious sacrifices. In his journey throughout the land of Canaan, he built altars in Shechem (Gen 12:6, 7), Bethel (Gen 12:8), and returned to the same posts to continue with worshiping and giving offerings (Gen 13:3,4). Thus, the book of Genesis portrays Abraham as the patriarch that built altars. As Ellen White pointed out, “wherever he pitched his tent, close beside it was set up his altar, calling all within his encampment to the morning and evening sacrifice.”⁴ In those places of worship there seems to be a specific formula after the building of the altar. For example, in Bethel “he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord” (Gen 12:8) as a sign of worship and of inauguration of the cult at that place containing elements of theophany and promise.⁵

Through this model, Abraham could transmit the religious values that recognize God as worthy of worship and reverence. So, these moments of worship allow a response to the faith of those who participate. This model implies the importance of the home as a learning institution that witnesses that God is worthy of worship as Creator and Redeemer.⁶ As Ellen White asserts

¹Bonn C. Dohmen, “Mizbah,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (1997), 8:211-12.

²Robert D. Haak, “Altar,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), 1:162.

³See Ellen G. White, *Patriarch and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 136-141.

⁴*Ibid.*, 122.

⁵Dohmen, 8:215.

⁶White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 122-123.

Abraham “did not shut away his influence from his neighbors. His life and character, in their marked contrast with those of the worshipers of idols, exerted a telling influence in favor of the true faith.”¹

A dramatic dimension of this model is found in the command to sacrifice Isaac, his son of the promise (Gen 22:1-19). This experience has additional connotations such as obedience from both Abraham and Isaac, and a test of genuine faith based on the provision established by the Redeemer that would come (Gen 26:5; Gal 3:8; John 8:56). It is very important to note that it is Isaac who learnt by his own experience the deep meaning of sacrifice since he is the one who helped his father Abraham to build the altar (Gen 26: 24-25). This event indicates the role of the father and the children in family worship. As John Youngberg suggests the purpose of the family altar is primordial, especially during the time of worship. According to him, this family altar is necessary to the family covenant with God and among its integrants. An altar is a place of sacrifice in which a person can ask the merits of the blood of the Lamb of God who can take away the sins of the believer (John 1:29). So this is a place and opportunity to receive forgiveness, protection and victory. This is also a place for instruction in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance of those who participate, for those who will in turn transmit their religious heritage and family values from generation to generation.² Therefore, following this model, religious instruction portrays worship experience as an important dimension in the development of the spiritual life of the students.

Religious Faith

An additional and important dimension of the patriarchal model is found in the faith of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). His calling was a clear evidence of the manner in which God intervenes in history so that Israel in the future could settle down in the land of Canaan. His life and the lives of his family show the journey of faith as he walked close to the Lord according to His promises. When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, the Lord said to him: “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless” (Gen 17:1).

One of the decisive experiences of Abraham in his journey of faith was the assurance that indeed he would be the ancestor of all nations (Gen 17:4-8). Although Abraham and Sarah were childless for such a long time after God’s promise, God would be faithful in fulfilling His promise. Abraham may have been thinking of Eliezer as the fulfillment of such promise, but the Lord clearly indicates: “this man shall not be your heir; no one but your own issue shall be your heir” (Gen 15:4). In order to build his faith in the promise, the Lord uses the cognitive analogy of the observation of the stars, “Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them, then he said to him, so shall your descendents be” (Gen 15:5). Finally Abraham understood and thought in the reality of the inheritance promise “because he considered Him faithful who had promised” (Heb 11:11). As a demonstration and reaction of this assurance Abraham “believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6).

¹Ibid., 129.

²John & Millie Youngberg, *Heart Tuning, a Guide to Better Family Worship* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1995), 26, 27.

Notice that in this experience there are two important dimensions of his faith. There is a cognitive component in the promise mentioned regarding his inheritance and an existential assurance of a personal God in which Abraham was faithful. In that context, Abraham became the “ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them” (Rom 4:11). The religious instructor needs to exercise this type of faith, a faith that is developed and affirmed by the word of the Lord (Rom 10:17), because “without faith it is impossible to please” Him (Heb 11:6).

Activities for Implementing

This model has two important components: worship and faith development. The application in religious instruction is manifested through worship experiences. The type of worship according to this model follows a more family-oriented instruction. Teachers responsible for Bible instruction should have a parental attitude as they gather students in their classrooms or other settings to worship in a warm, family atmosphere. In addition, “an understanding of developmental psychology can be a powerful tool to assist parents and teachers as they seek to guide the religious development of children and adolescents.”¹ The practical features of this model may include: Dynamic singing sessions, reading Bible promises for faith development, prayer groups, group singing, Bible stories, witnessing to those close to students and friends, witnessing to neighborhoods, field trips for worship, and teaching the attitude of faith expressed in obedience.

Model of Religious Instruction In the Experience of Moses

Besides the patriarchal model of Abraham, it is possible to develop another model of religious instruction from the experiences of Moses based in the book of Deuteronomy. In his three discourses Moses admonishes his people of the consequences of obedience and disobedience. As clearly indicated, this obedience is always in the context of the covenant and the salvific experience of the Exodus, with the urgent necessity to walk according to the will of God. The essence of the covenant is expressed by these words: “So now Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being” (Deut 10:12-13).

How would Moses transmit these promises? The answer is through the covenant renovation. The basis of the nation’s relationship to God flowed from His love for them and from their appropriate response of obedience. Obedience to God’s law is a byproduct of a love relationship. Since love is the essence of that relationship, law then is the natural result of that alliance.

¹Donna J. Habenicht, “Developmental Psychology and Religious Growth: Patterns of Understanding,” Paper presented at the 27th International Seminar on Integration of Faith and Learning, Mission College, Muak Lek, Thailand, December 3-15,2000, 9.

As Christensen asserts “one of the great lessons we can learn from the experience of ancient Israel in the religious life is that memory serves to lead to the continuing experience of the presence and activity of God. It is forgetfulness that opens the door to tragic failure on the part of the community of faith.”¹ In this context Moses begins his instructions remembering the history of salvation of his people (Deut 1:6- 4:49) and continues mentioning the instructions and teachings of the covenant (Deut 5:1-26:49). Clearly, Moses shows the tragic consequences of disobedience to the covenant with Yahweh (Deut 29:1-29) with the assurance that these teachings will be repeated through the following generations (Deut 31:9-13, 24-29).

Ellen White maintains the pedagogical function of the book of Deuteronomy when she suggests “parents were to read the law to their children, teaching it to them line upon line, precept upon precept.”² It is precisely in this concept of paternity, an attachment between father and his son, that God relates with Israel. For example, the Lord instructed Moses: Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord: Israel is my firstborn son’ (Exo 4:22). In other words, this is the way God relates with his people. It includes elements of closeness, emotions, and care as the natural father relates with his son (cf. Isa 63:16; 49:15; Jer 31:20; Hosea 11:1,8).

In this second model of religious instruction, the book of Deuteronomy shows again the institution of the family as the fundamental concept of interaction and human relations in the process of teaching the Torah and other forms religious instruction.

Modeling

The first component of this model is perceived in the message of Moses when he mentions the need of love toward God (Deut 6:5) and the repetition of God’s words in a continuous experience in the Hebrew family (Deut 6:6-7). Here the word “heart” denotes the motives, the emotions, the will, and the thinking. It is in this context that Moses used the words “in your heart” to express the cognitive elements and the existential relation between the word of God as truth and God Himself as a person.

In this model, if parents and teachers are going to influence those in their care in the study of the Scriptures, then they need to have an interest in their study. What religious instructors accomplish goes together with their examples and influences. To focus on modeling is not focusing only on imitation but also on deep observation to determine the sincerity of the model. As Lawrence Richards suggests the discipling method of God is modeling instead of indoctrination.³ Modeling goes beyond simple imitation. It includes identification in trying to establish the same image of this modeling as well as internalization in which the content of the behavior is adopted and intrinsically healthy.

¹Duane L. Christensen, “Deuteronomy 1-11,” *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1991), 6A: 81.

²Ellen G. White, “Ellen G. White Comments--Deuteronomy,” *S D A Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1953), 1:1117.

³Lawrence O. Richard, *Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Ministry Resources Library, 1975), 81.

Following this principle it is possible to suggest, that principles and values of a Christian character could be learned from a quality observation (cf. Matt 10:25). Therefore, parents and teachers have a moral responsibility toward their children and students to provide them a living model of learning through their lives.

Celebration

The second dimension of this model includes the observance and celebration of the Sabbath as it is given by God Himself at Sinai and repeated by Moses in Deut 5:12. Its observance represents the sign of the people of God, the sign of special people chosen by God, and the remembrance of their salvation (Deut 5:15) not only from Egypt but also from sin (Deut 15:15; 16:12; 24:18, 22). Truth is supposed to be remembered permanently since to forget would mean to perish (Deut 8:19).

An analysis of the event of the giving of the manna (Exo 16:1-36) in relation to the observance of the Sabbath shows the expression of celebration for the blessings received. Thus, the idea of celebration has meaning through the joy of participation in the obedience of the commandments and statutes of the Lord. “And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you together with your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites who reside in your towns” (Deut 12:12; cf. 12:18, 16:11, 14).

Commitment to Teach

From the beginning of his discourse, Moses reminded the people to “make them known to your children and your children’s children how you once stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when the Lord said to me, ‘assemble the people for me, and I will let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me as long as they live on the earth, and may teach their children so’” (Deut 4:9-10). The intensity of Moses’ declaration is the purpose of God for the following generations in which teaching is the focus. “Now this is the commandment – the statutes and the ordinances – that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy” (Deut 6:1). The aim is that God’s instructions should be taught to their children and their children’s children so they “may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments” (Deut 6:2).

But why are they to fear the Lord? An analysis of the word quickly reveals that fear is often presented within the Scriptures in a positive light, at least in relation to God. “The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov 1:7; 9:10). “The fear of Yahweh leads to life; and the one who has it rests satisfied; and will not be visited by harm” (Prov 19:23).¹ Sadly the Scriptures show the consequences of wrong moral decisions in the lives of the Israelites (cf. 1 Cor 10:11).

Now, the center of this religious instruction is faith in the existence of Yahweh, “for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists” (Heb 11:6), or as it is expressed in the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone” (Deut 6:4). Indeed, this concept has not only ontological and epistemological perspectives, but also elements of personal worship

¹Christensen, 6A:207.

and service as is expressed in Deut 6:4-9, having as a primordial motivation the love of God for His covenant people.

Finally, this total commitment to teach and obey the law of God is clearly expressed by the insistent repetition to recite, to talk and to write. "Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" (Deut 6:7; cf. Deut 11:18-21).

Teaching

Moses' discourse includes the command to teach the commandments of God to the next and future generations. This command involved the idea of knowing God, as well as, the idea of a personal communion with Him. "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" (Deut 6:6-7). This instruction is fundamental for the transmission of religious heritage. Notice also that the emphasis is on teaching the children, since they are to continue reciting the salvific acts of God in history, and the commandments and statutes of God from generation to generation. Four important elements are mentioned in this dimension: recite, talk, bind and write. Each involves teaching that goes beyond an intellectual exercise. What is the content of such teachings? They are the commandments of the Lord (Deut 6:6) that includes the Ten Commandments (Deut 5:1-21) and the additional principles, and statues found in the Pentateuch. This is not an insinuation to legalism but to a faithful teaching of the law of God as an act of faith (cf. Psalms 119:66).

The components of the teachings of the Torah show the salvific effect of salvation and God's restoration. The Torah has power to "revive the soul," "make wise the simple," "rejoice the heart," and "enlighten the eyes" (Psalms 19:7-8). These are all expressions that indicate acceptance of the commandments and that there is a relationship with the Giver of the Torah. These dimensions contain the elements that affect the totality of life, that is, the intellect, the will, and the emotions (cf. Psalms 119:14-16, 11:66). If we examine closely the Deuteronomy passages, they suggest that these teachings should be addressed in the totality of the religious consciousness of children, young people, and adults. This religious education is accomplished by the whole life and in all places.

Internalization

According to Deuteronomy, the truths are to be kept in the "heart," that is in the mind of His covenant people. Moses declares the permanent reminder for this internalization when he states "Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorpost of your house and on your gates" (Deut 6:8-9). It seems that the intention of Moses' instructions were not that these elements be applied in the literal sense, but as intrinsic elements that portray the life in relation to God.

It is the prophet Jeremiah who upholds this type of internalization when he declares: "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33). In other words, the internalization of the law is the living expression that characterized the manifested attitude of obedience to parents and to God.

Therefore, it is essential that the transmission of this religious teaching have the elements of internalization in order to fulfill the Divine requirements. The idea of “keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart” suggests the emotional dimension of the cognitive retention of the truths explained.

Moral Decisions

The instructions of the law of God, repeated by Moses, emphasize an intelligent obedience of the ethical biblical principles for the happiness of Israel in the Promised Land. As expressed by Moses, this commandment is to be observed permanently, from generation to generation. What is the purpose? The purpose is “when your children ask you in time to come what is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord has commanded you? Then you shall say to your children... the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as it now the case” (Deut 6:20-26).

The children of Israel would make moral decisions in the context of the covenant of love, using the freedom of choice presented to them by Moses (Deut 30:19). Religious instruction is immersed in the experience of making moral decisions that can result either in blessings or adverse consequences (cf. Jos 24:15).

Discipline

In this model it is necessary to include discipline as an integral part of religious instruction. “Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so your God disciplines you” (Deut 8:5). It is a commitment to follow God’s instructions. “Remember today that it was not your children (who have not known or seen the discipline of the Lord your God), but it is you who must acknowledge his greatness, his mighty hand and his outstretched arm” (Deut 11:2).

The Hebrew word *musar* is translated as correction or punishment; the same word is translated in Greek *paideia*, which means instruction or training. Therefore, in this biblical context, discipline may suggest the guidance and nurturing of parents toward their children (cf. Eph 6:4). In the context of religious education, however, discipline is anchored in the covenant relationship with Israel, that is a redemptive discipline (cf. Heb 12:7-11; Jer 31:3), with the purpose of attaining reformation. As White suggested, “the object of discipline is the training of the child for self-government. He should be taught self-reliance and self-control. Therefore as soon as he is capable of understanding, his reason should be enlisted on the side of obedience.”¹

Activities for Implementing

In this second model, there are seven dimensions to be considered by religious teachers in religious instruction: modeling, teaching, internalization, discipline, service, celebration, and the capacity of making moral choices. The emphasis of this model is on the proper balance of love and obedience and the necessity for a transmission of principles and values from generation to generation. This second model gives a variety of religious instructions and activities such as: memorization of the biblical texts, reading and repetition of portions of Scripture, teaching in a

¹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1952), 287.

familiar environment, drama by participation of children, community service, Bible stories, moral decisions, and worship celebrations.

Model of Religious Instruction In the Experience of Jesus

In this section, I am proposing a model that has a source in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Since this model could have a variety of dimensions and perspectives, I am concentrating in those features that point out specifically to religious instruction. The dimensions of this model refer basically to His teaching ministry, although some content of His messages is discussed briefly.

The Messiah as Teacher

The Gospels show that Jesus was often addressed as "Teacher." Far different from other teachers in Judea, Jesus' teaching focused on shaping the hearers' perceptions of God and God's kingdom. The importance of Jesus as a teacher and the content of His teachings are important for the development of our model of religious instruction. Jesus Christ's model certainly made an impact in the life of the early believers of the Christian church. For example, "when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as the teacher of the law"(Matt 7:28,29). Throughout the Gospels, during the public life of Jesus, we can see that teaching was the essential aspect of His activity (Mark 12:14, Matt 4:23; John 6:59).

As a recognized Rabbi by many, He was consulted on questions of conduct and doctrine. The gospels recorded that He was asked about the legality of divorce (and gave distinctive teaching in reply)(Mark 10:1-2), about a particular case of adultery (John 8:4), family quarrel (Luke 12:13-15), and the legality of Jewish tribute to Caesar (Matt 22:15-22). Among theological questions, He was asked to give His opinion about the most important commandment (Matt 22:34-37), and to answer a Sadducee objection to the doctrine of resurrection (Matt 22:23-33).

After His resurrection, He continued with His teaching ministry. When He appeared to the two, on the way to Emmaus, Luke describes that Christ's teaching emphasizes the Torah. "And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). After His resurrection, the gospel of Matthew clearly indicates the final appeal, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt 28:20). In short, Jesus Christ functioned as the Messiah Teacher as acknowledged by His followers and few religious leaders of Israel (Mark 12:14).

The Setting of His Teachings

As we look through the Gospels we find that much of Jesus' teaching took place in familiar surroundings. He used the setting already established in Judaism of His time. For instance, He taught in the synagogues in Sabbath (Matt 4:33), in "all the cities and villages" (Matt 9:35; Luke 4:15,31), on Sabbath days (Luke 6:6; 13:10; John 6:59), in the temple (Matt 21:23; John 18:19-21), beside the sea (Mark 2:13), and from a boat (Luke 5:3). Thus, "teaching

was an essential aspect of His activity" in every place He went.¹ In this context, teaching was not only performed in the established institutions at that time, but also where the people were. This fact shows the extensive influence of the biblical teacher in the areas where one works. The teacher encompasses more than class instruction in the biblical sense; it includes the whole life situation.

Although Jesus frequently taught in the formal setting of the synagogue, "most of his time was spent as a traveling teacher whose students followed Him wherever He went."² Thus, Jesus' speech is not in the form of lectures or prepared speeches; it is a spontaneous, fresh address to men in their present concrete situations (Matt 9:11). So, Christ is found in the gospels in an informal setting, as itinerant teacher and at the same time as the shepherd of Israel (Matt 9:35, 36).

Jesus' Teaching Ministry

Discipleship

A disciple is a follower of Jesus (Mark 1:16-20; cf. John 1:35-51) and His teachings (Matt 7:24-28; 28:19,20). As recorded in the Gospels, the disciples were called to be with Him and to continue His mission (Mark 3:13-14). Obviously, following Him created an impact on their lives. As they followed Him, they learnt by observing His teaching, preaching, and healing ministries (Mark 3:7-10). We can clearly see that this example of Jesus is learning by modeling.

Notice that the disciples were called (Matt 10:1) and sent with the specific purpose to proclaim the good news that "the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt 10:7). It is interesting to note that they learned by doing and by following the example of His Master (Matt 5:6-5).

The nature of the discipleship is also perceived through Christ's teaching regarding a life of humility and service (Matt 10:38-39). Therefore, when modern disciples are called, this call "alters the whole attitude towards him and motivate us for the work he has given us."³ Thus, this discipleship is a call to Jesus, by Jesus, and to obedience of the whole life (Matt 7:21; Mark 8:34). Certainly, this is a supreme concept for religious instruction. In the application of this principle, teacher and students should develop deep personal relationships, sharing together the Christian life in any setting and circumstances. And notice that this is not an optional ministry. There is no doubt why this concept is stressed in the great commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19-20).

¹Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (New York: Desclee Company, 1967), 520.

²Joseph A. Grassi, *The Teacher in the Primitive Church and the Teacher Today* (Santa Clara, California: University of Santa Clara Press, 1973), 21.

³David Watson, *Discipleship* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), 21.

Personal Association

The second and greatest aspect of the disciples' training was a personal association with Him learning through example and imitation. As Price suggests, "Jesus looked at their future possibilities and not merely their present qualifications."¹ Jesus also looks ahead at the task of developing character, knowing that it requires time to shape ideals, form attitudes, and develop habits. "Jesus stressed the personal touch... With only a little more than three years in which to do His work He spent much of His time in dealing with individuals."² In the encounter with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), in the dialogue with the woman of Samaria (John 4:4-42) it is possible to grasp this personal association as the primary element for religious instruction such as attention, interest, needs, conviction, acceptance, and witnessing. Religious instructors need to apply this important dimension in their teaching ministry. In the ministry of Jesus Christ, personal association shows that teaching and shepherding are intrinsically united.

Modeling

The principal way that Jesus taught the people was by his own life, which was a conscious model for imitation. Jesus set an example of dependence on His heavenly Father. "Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise" (John 5:19). He was an example in prayer as declared by the gospel of Mark. "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed" (Mark 1:35). Thus, Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. One of his disciples came to him and asked "Lord teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples" (Luke 11:1), and He gave them a descriptive model of prayer to His heavenly Father (Luke 11:2-4 cf. Matt 6:8-13).

He patterns humility and service for His disciples. After he had washed the disciples' feet Jesus expressed, "For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). This attitude symbolizes a humble spirit in love toward one another. Jesus stressed the process of modeling when He declared, "very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do, and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

It is encouraging that the apostles follow His example in humility, service, and suffering. For instance, the apostle Peter declares, "for this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21). And in the same fashion He counsels to the elders regarding their shepherding ministry "be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:3). In the same way Paul expressed to follow Christ's example of humility. "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:1-4). Equally to Peter, Paul suggested to Titus, his co-worker, "show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured" (Titus 2:7,8). The final goal of religious life is to follow Christ's model as Paul synthesized, "be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).

¹John M. Price, *Jesus the Teacher* (Nashville, Tennessee: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1946), 46, 47.

²*Ibid.*, 50.

Finally, religious instructors need to guide their students to follow and look at Jesus as the model to receive peace for their souls by “looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2). He invites those who believe “take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt 11:29). These are expressions, which convey a very strong sense of imitation in the Rabbinic language of discipleship (Mark 1:17; Mark 2:14; 6:1; 8:34; 1:20; John 13:15).

Sabbath Celebration

Jesus’ ministry begins in Nazareth attending the Synagogue that he used to visit (Luke 4:16-21). As the gospels testified, He taught in the synagogue on Sabbath. “And on Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished” (Mark 6:1-6a). He also attended and taught in the synagogue at Capernaum (Mark 1:21) and again they were “astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the Scribes” (Mark 1:22). Throughout the gospels He carried on an extensive teaching ministry on Sabbath. As Matthew describes, “he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people” (Matt 4:23).

It is very important to note that Jesus emphasizes a new dimension of the observance of the Sabbath. The Sabbath exists to help humanity to become whole and healthy. He said to the man who was ill for thirty-eight years: “Stand up, take your mat and walk” and at once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath” (John 5:3-11). “Christ would teach His disciples and His enemies that the service of God is first of all. The object of God’s work in this world is the redemption of man; therefore that which is necessary to be done on the Sabbath in the accomplishment of this work is in accord with the Sabbath law.”¹ In the words of Jesus “How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matt 12:12), reaffirming that “the institutions that God has established are for the benefit of mankind.”² Religious instruction should promote Sabbath celebration, service, and sharing among students and teachers.

Teaching by Parables

Jesus taught about His origin (John 7:28-29), His mission (John 7:37-39), and sacrifice as the servant of Yahweh (Mark 10:45). As clearly the officer testified “No man ever spoke like this man!” (John 7:48). Distinctive in His teaching ministry was the use of illustrations and parables. Thus, the gospels manifested that He taught many things to the crowds in parables (Mark 4:2). The use of familiar stories helped Him to show the truth about His kingdom (Mark 4:11). He interpreted the parables in such a way that there was spiritual meaning in the stories

¹Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 260.

²Ibid., 263.

and life experience presented (Mark 4:13-20). As Arland J. Hultgren asserts, “His parables are the primary medium of revelation, and the cross is the primary means of redemption.”¹

The primary meaning of the word *parabole* is “comparison.” “By means of parables Jesus—and others before and after him—carried on instruction by making comparisons between eternal, transcendental realities and that which was familiar to the common human experience of his day.”² In Jesus’ parables there is a direct address, an application, understood because of ideas and concepts gained through experience. Thus, Jesus used parables to illustrate Divine forgiveness (Luke 18:9-14). Jesus emphasized that God’s saving grace was offered “today,” not just at death or in the last judgment (Luke 19:9). In the parable of the “lost son” Jesus assures that God loves the sinner and is willing to receive him (Luke 15:11-32). He taught the parable of “the wedding banquet” (Matt 22:1-14) to point out that in the last judgement the people are saved because they are properly dressed with the wedding dress—the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Finally, he carefully illustrates God’s grace in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt 20:1-16). The fundamental truth of the gospel of Christ is that salvation is offered to all people by God’s grace alone.

Internalization

In the dialogue with Nicodemus, the gospel of John shows the priority of restoration in the spiritual life through the new birth. It is Nicodemus who acknowledged Jesus. “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him” (John 3:2). Indeed Nicodemus recognized the influence of Jesus as more as the ordinary Rabbi.

In this context, Jesus introduces one of the most important elements of religious life. It is not only the form of the religion but also the internalization of God’s word in the life of the believers (Jer 31:33, 34). Twice Jesus insisted this important demonstration of spiritual life. “Truly, truly, I say to you unless one is borne of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). This experience is not an alternative option in the religious life, it is a must experience that happens in an unnoticed way (John 3:8). Therefore, the religious instructor should set as a basic goal the transformational life of students.

Moral Decisions

Jesus continued upholding the principles revealed to Moses but the spiritual dimension was missing by the interpreters of the Torah in those days. Besides His disciples, “great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan” (Matt 4:25). As the Messiah Teacher, He taught a great number of people gathered to listen to His teachings regarding the law and the kingdom of God. “And he opened his mouth and taught them” (Matt 5:2) about His kingdom and the happiness of life through humility, mercy, justice,

¹ Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

peace, and love (Matt 5:3-12). The Lord insisted on the influence of those who follow Him to become the “salt of the earth,” and “the light of the world” (Matt 5:13-16).

He upholds the law and the prophets since He did not come to abolish them, but He came to fulfill them (Matt 5:17). He taught the spiritual moral principles found in the Pentateuch and particularly in the Ten Commandments, that people need to know the letter of the law but also the spiritual dimensions of it. Thus, Jesus taught about murder and wrath (Matt 5:21-26), on adultery and divorce (Matt 5:27-32), on oaths (Matt 5:33-37), on retaliation (Matt 5:38-42), on love of one’s enemies (Matt 5:43-48), on prayer (Matt 6:5-6), on fasting (Matt 6:16-18), on treasures (Matt 6:19-21), on anxiety (Matt 6:25-34), and on judging (Matt 7:1-5). All these teachings were presented from a new spiritual perspective. The result of His teachings was remarkable because “when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt 7:28-29).

Mission

His teaching was in accordance with His mission. "And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31). In Caesarea Philippi, Peter declared about Him, “you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). Following this declaration Jesus foretells His death and resurrection (Matt 16:21). He came as the suffering servant Messiah because, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Thus, Jesus came with a mission and He entrusted the mission to His apostles and disciples so they would continue with the mission He started. When He appeared to His disciples He mentioned, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47). Teaching is part of the great commission as seen in Jesus Christ’s instruction to his disciples after His resurrection: "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt 28:20).

Activities for Implementing

One of the most important dimensions of this model is that religious teachers should have a clear mission of teaching ministry. This model is an important portrait of what a Christian teacher should be. The mission of a teacher is to have a sense of restoration and an atmosphere of compassion for students. This concept of teaching is also based in the mandate of the Lord when He declares: “teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19).

How can a Christian teacher carry out religious instruction? The religious instruction should be given where the students are, that is, whether the setting is formal or informal. This instructional concept is similar to Moses’ model by which learning occurs in the totality of life situations and all the time. If this is the case then religious instruction may take place at different hours of the day and in different locations of the school either inside or outside of it.

Additional activities that should be explored are: Religious Field Trips, Fellowship Gathering, Cell Groups, Discussion Groups, Community Service, Sabbath worship,

Participation, learning by doing, Witnessing, Spontaneous talking, Home visitation, camping, Question/answer session, Reading the Scriptures, Home visitation, Camping, and Hiking.

Model of Religious Instruction in The Experience of the Apostle Paul

The model of religious instruction in the experience of Paul is recorded in his epistles to the early church. Following the instructions of the Lord, the apostles "were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection" (Acts 4:2; cf. 5:21,42). We find both Paul and Barnabas teaching for a whole year in Antioch (Acts 11:26; cf. 15:35).

Apostles and prophets are engaged in teaching almost constantly (Act 18:11; 19:9-10; Col 1:28; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11). Yet the whole responsibility of instructing the body of Christ did not fall upon the apostles and prophets alone but also on "many others" (Acts 15:35).¹

Only twice (1 Tim 2:7 and 2 Tim 1:2), Paul speaks of himself as a teacher, only once (Acts 13:1) he is definitely called a teacher by another [Luke]. In 1 Cor 4:17, Col 1:28, and in Acts 20:20 he speaks of himself as teaching. In Acts 15:35, 18:2, 21:21,28, and 27:31 he is described by others as teaching.

The apostle Paul at Corinth "stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11; cf. 1 Cor 4:17). In Rome Paul "lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered" (Acts 28:31). Finally, Paul addressed the elders of Ephesus that he was teaching "in public, and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:20,21; cf. Eph 4:11,21).

In the second epistle to the Thessalonians Paul instructed the brethren to "stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thess 2:15). Instruction was always uppermost in the mind of Paul (1 Cor 14:19). "He considered an intellectual grasp of the truths of the faith a vital prerequisite to acceptable Christian living and service."² "As apostle, as herald, as evangelist, and as prophet, he could constantly be teaching."³

"The most obvious purpose that guided Paul in his teaching was making known that God had revealed himself in Jesus (Col 1:25ff; 2 Cor 5:19)."⁴ Once Paul had made known the

¹Robert L. Thomas, *Understanding Spiritual Gifts* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1978), 81.

²Ibid.

³W. Edward Chadwick, *The Pastoral Teaching of St. Paul* (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1907), 149.

⁴Kent L. Johnson, *Paul the Teacher* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 39.

revelation of the Gospel to the new believers and they had a response of faith, he became concerned for another dimension of his teaching ministry--the growth and maturity of those he taught (1 Thess 4:1; 4:10-5:11; 2 Thess 1:3; Phil 1:9; Col 1:6). As the congregation grew, Paul saw it becoming a base for his continuing missionary work (2 Cor 10:15-16). As a result, the apostle Paul "had some expectations from his teaching (Phil 2:12-13; Rom 16:25ff; Rom 14:15)."¹ The model of the experience of Paul shows that religious instruction is accomplished under the mission and organization of the Church. Therefore, religious instruction is inherently connected with church mission.

The Teaching Ministry and the Gift of the Holy Spirit

Paul considered the function of teaching to be a gift (Rom 12:6f) and associated it with the revelation of the risen Christ, which is taught by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:13) to those who are able to understand it. Thus, with the development of offices in the early Christian congregations, the role of teachers became a primary function (Acts 13:1; Eph 4:11; 2 Tim 1:11; James 3:1).²

Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul declared that God has appointed in the church teachers. It is important to note that in 1 Cor 12:27, 28, Paul refers to the church as the body of Christ, the universal church where God had endowed every believer with certain gifts with a specific function. Note the same functions of the prophets and teachers in Acts 13:1.

In an analysis of Eph 4:11, the two terms "pastors" and "teachers" share the same definite article in the Greek, indicating that they denote one and the same class of men.³ As Murphy suggests, "while not all teachers are pastors, all pastors are to be teachers."⁴

The gifts in Eph 4:11 are used for building the church. "To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). "The four offices of apostles, prophets, evangelist and pastor-teacher exist for but one function: that of equipping the common Christians to do the task which are assigned to them."⁵ Thus, the work of these gifted believers was not in the position of an office, but a service that functioned in training and instructing. Paul serves this function through the gifts given to him. Indeed he was apostle, prophet, evangelist, and teacher.

In other words, through the writings of the apostle Paul, I can perceive the continuation of the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Word of God as a result of the

¹Ibid., 42.

²C.N. Jefford, "Teach." *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1988), 4:745.

³B.C. Wintle, "Patterns of Ministry in the Later Pauline Letters," *The Indian Journal of Theology* 32 (1983):70.

⁴Edward F. Murphy, *Spiritual Gifts and the Great Commission* (South Pasadena, California: Mandate Press, 1975), 292.

⁵Ibid., 179.

direct instructions of the Lord. Teaching is one of the components by which church mission and edification is achieved. The Holy Spirit enables the apostles, evangelists, and elders to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Finally, the teaching ministry in Paul's letters was to instruct the believers to be mature in Christian life and doctrine.

Activities for Implementing

Paul's model features additional dimensions to the model previously presented. A new component is added to the way the biblical teacher should function. In a way, it is a continuation of the teaching ministry of Jesus but, on the other hand, it is the result of the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This model portrays a teacher who has an encounter with God and at the same time lives a sanctified life. The church chooses a teacher because of the Christian qualities that are visible in his/her character. The goal of the teacher in this model is to reveal Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Another very important dimension in this model is the unity of the teaching and shepherding ministries. Religious instructors are not only transmitting religious knowledge but also nurturing the lives of their students with love and compassion. Finally, teachers following this model are spiritual leaders who make plans for the spiritual life of their students and include instruction for equipping them to be witnesses for Christ and in harmony with the church mission. Additional religious instructional activities include spiritual gifts inventories, writing of letters to friends, field trips, Sabbath worships, equipping, and revivals weeks.

Conclusion

The biblical models that are introduced in this paper suggests that religious instruction is foundational in the life of the people of God and centers on the family (Deut 6:6-9; Prov 1:8). Therefore, Bible instruction exposed in the Christian curricula and taught by dedicated teachers should involve the full participation of the community of students and teachers as if they were a family.

When these four models (see Table 1) are combined in a parallel fashion, it is possible to observe that each of these models complement each other harmoniously and describe a bigger picture of what religious education is all about. One major pattern is revealed from the synthesis of the models identified and shows that the reality of religious instruction is a responsibility of the family, the church, and the school. Thus, religious instruction is accomplished through the cooperative experiences that are initiated in the home and continue throughout life in the church and in the school. These three institutions need to harmonize in such a way that together they pursue the transmission of biblical principles and values. This pattern also portrays the organic and systemic relationships and human attachment—family, father and son relationship, discipleship, the church as the body of Christ, the essential components of a healthy Christian life. These three institutions bond together to share a common purpose, that is, to express religious instruction from biblical perspectives.

Religious instruction that takes the model of the teaching of Jesus will produce students who admire and love religious instruction, as was the reaction of Jesus' listeners (Matt 7:28-29).

Following Christ's model produces an impact in the lives of the students that is reflected in a joyful experience and a desire for witnessing as a result of an encounter with Him.

Religious instruction in the early church was vital to the development and growth of the Christian community. The model of the teaching ministry of the apostle Paul shows that the Holy Spirit gives the gift of teaching.

Finally, when these four models are combined, we discover the whole picture of a variety of components that became a mosaic of possibilities for religious instruction. Using this more integrative perspective we can view religious instruction in the following fashion:

1. Religious instruction should foster moments of worship and celebration with the active participation of religious instructors and students.
2. Religious instruction should develop the concepts of religious faith, love, and obedience among the students. It is evaluated not only by the cognitive performance of religious instruction but also by the influence of the whole life.
3. Modeling is one of the components that is stressed in both Moses and Jesus, therefore, religious instruction should be consistent with the life and worldview of the teachers and students. Following the example of Jesus, the religious instructor should stress the concept of discipleship.
4. Religious instruction can be carried on a variety of settings, circumstances, places and times. Religious instruction in a school setting, and particularly in the class schedule, is only one of the multi-dimensional features expressed in these models for the transmission of the religious heritage.
5. Redemptive discipline in religious instruction should be applied as a result of a wise balance of love and discipline. Religious instruction should foster the character of the students.
6. Religious instruction should be taught with a clear mission for the salvation of the students and should be manifested in an atmosphere of love, care and compassion. Religious instruction is the fulfillment of church mission.
7. Religious instruction is a foundational ministry empowered and given by the Holy Spirit for the restoration of student lives.

MODELS OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

God and His people	Covenant		New Covenant	
MODEL	ABRAHAM	MOSES	JESUS	PAUL
Promise-Fulfillment	Promise-Altar	Promise-Sanctuary	Messiah-Teacher	Lord Christ
Pattern	Family Type Father-son relationship	Family Type Father-son relationship	Discipleship Master-Disciples Personal Association	Church-Christians Body of Christ Brotherhood relationship
MODEL: DIMENSIONS		Modeling	Modeling	
	Worship Family Altar	Celebration Sabbath	Celebration Sabbath	
	Gen 22:12	Faith-Obedience Commitment to Teach		
	Teaching "the way of the Lord" Gen 18:19	Teaching	Teaching- Shepherding Great Commission	Teaching-Spiritual Gift
	Gen 15:6	Internalization	Internalization New Birth John 3	
		Moral Decisions Ten Commandments	Moral Decisions Sermon of the Mount	
		Discipline		
			Mission	

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