

# Jesus the Master Teacher

[Presented to the School Visitors' Workshop,  
August 1-3, 1978, DMLC, New Ulm, Minnesota]

by *Darvin Raddatz*

## Jesus the Master Teacher

On two occasions during the past three summers it has been my privilege to be named instructor for a DMLC ASP course titled "Portraits of Preaching and Teaching in the Gospels." The catalog describes the course as "sermons and conversations of Jesus explored for the themes and principles of Christian proclamation." Altogether nineteen veteran WELS teachers have guided this professional education illiterate through the course, charitably allowing him to think himself the instructor and patiently leading him to ever new insights into the teaching mastery of Jesus our Lord. On the basis of this experience it is not with fear that I face this awesome assembly; it is with the happy expectation that once again I shall be thrilled by the experience of learning while adopting the guise of teacher. I can only hope that in some small way the experience of learning will be mutual.

Before we plunge on, let me share with you a reservation I have about this topic. As I understand them, the purpose of the Gospels is to make men wise unto salvation, to lead them to repentance and to the consolation of faith in Christ Jesus. They are a window onto the dark world of God-man relationships. Through this window we may clearly see our sin and our Savior. Whatever else the Bible may reveal is incidental and seen only from the perspective of its relevance to God's mission in the world. The Scripture's purpose naturally sets a limit to its usefulness for other objectives. The Gospels' first century Hellenistic and Oriental provenance sets another natural limit on their applicability. In other words, as we study Jesus the Master Teacher we are going to have to be aware that we are looking at the broad field of 20<sup>th</sup> century pedagogy through an unnatural window. With this caution we can perhaps safely and profitably investigate the God-man as teacher. For even His teaching works are the works of the God whom we all adore and the consummate man to whose wholeness it is our goal to attain.

## Jesus Rated as a Teacher

I think none of us here will hesitate to ascribe to Jesus the highest ranking as an effective teacher for His time, place, and purpose. We are likely to feel a spiritual kinship with one of Jesus' more sophisticated students who said to Him, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God." And we find ourselves in surprised but substantial agreement with the temple police who marveled, "No man ever spoke as this man spoke."

Since the beginning of our era many scholars have admired the teaching artistry of Jesus but few have written much about it. One of those who has chosen to write about Jesus is William H. Russell. He wrote that Jesus "belongs in the classroom... even in the secular university for the sheer brilliance of his methods when such methods are considered only from the point of view of his instruction. Immense profit is to be had by teachers who analyze and practice what might be termed the pedagogical technique of Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

A second witness to the teaching skill of Jesus is George A. Buttrick. Evaluating one of Jesus' most remarkable teaching devices, the parable, he wrote:<sup>2</sup>

A favorite formula of the rabbinical teaching had been, "Whereunto shall I liken it?" Jesus would have failed of contact with His hearers had He been unwilling to speak to them in their own tongue and, to some extent, within the range of prevalent ideas .... But what teller of stories in east or west can vie with Jesus? Was ever a perception so instant, an imagination so rich, a discrimination so true?

My third witness is Less Magness who wrote:<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> William H. Russel, *Jesus the Divine Teacher* (New York: P.J. Kennedy and Sons, 1944) p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> George A. Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973) pp. xiii, xiv, and xviii.

Learning from Jesus brought about a great refreshment, a spiritual relaxing which we might even call recreation. Learning from Jesus also brought about a great stir, a soul shaking agitation which we could term excitement. Learning from Jesus' teaching was a complete experience resulting in now rest, now quest.

Both the wonder that satisfies and the wonder that incites are worthy goals for a teacher to set and achieve. Do you think the following writer regards Jesus as a good model to study? He wrote a long book on Jesus' techniques. Here is a small sample.<sup>4</sup>

...We conclude that the place of Jesus in educational history is central and greatest, on the basis of not personal loyalty but objective fact, because:

1. His followers today outnumber those of any other teacher.
2. The nations that profess his name, though following him afar off, lead the world's civilization.
3. He lived and taught the solution of man's greatest problem: the adjustment of the claims of the individual to those of society.
4. He taught the highest moral and spiritual truths...
5. He taught these truths simply, using effectively the pedagogic arts, so that "the common people heard him gladly."
6. He taught from the highest motives – love, sympathy, compassion, and the sense of divine mission.
7. He had the five essential qualifications of a world teacher – namely, a world view, knowledge of his subject matter, knowledge of his pupils, aptness at teaching, and a character worthy of imitation in all respects. He lived what he taught.

What we have just read was written by Dr. H. H. Horne, author of the respected study, *Jesus the Master Teacher*. We sometimes disagree with Dr. Horne's theology, but nobody has written a more penetrating study of Jesus as teacher. Dr. Horne's skill as an educator and his Biblical knowledge combine to make his book a classic in illuminating the teaching mastery of the Master.

### **Jesus Evaluated as Student and Inquirer**

Before studying Jesus the teacher it might be worth our while to inquire into Jesus the learner. Did He possess a searching spirit of inquiry? If so, what world-view or mind-set did His spirit of inquiry derive from? The question is of some importance. Is not a teacher's possessing a spirit of inquiry critical to his communicating to his students the excitement of learning?

Can you recall any evidences of Jesus' intellectual curiosity? How about the boy Jesus in the temple? Our researcher-reporter, St. Luke, tells us that "after three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." The young Jesus possessed a questioning mind, stimulated and fostered, or at least appreciated, by His teachers at the temple.

More compelling evidence of the far-ranging inquisitiveness of Jesus' mind may be gained from His discourses and conversation. The parables, taken by themselves, reveal that Jesus nurtured a marvelous intellectual curiosity sensitive to all that lay about Him.<sup>5</sup>

[In the parables] we see the baking of bread and the patching of garments; we see even the emergency of a friend borrowing a loaf at midnight for his sudden guests. Rich homes are drawn with a pencil equally shrewd – barns bursting with fatness, laborers not daring to eat until their master has broken his fast, and the unseemly scramble for the chief seats at the feasts of the mighty. The glaring contrasts of our earth are drawn in dramatic line – "chosen" Jews and despised Samaritans, sumptuous Dives and abject Lazarus, householders and thieves, compassionate parenthood and the rascally steward who feathered his nest against the well-merited retribution.

---

<sup>3</sup> "Teaching and Learning in the Gospels," *Religious Education*, Nov. 1975, p. 634.

<sup>4</sup> Herman H. Horne, *Jesus the Master Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1968) pp. 202, 203.

<sup>5</sup> Buttrick, p. xviiiif.

The whole gamut of human life is sounded – farmers at the plough, fishermen at their nets, a wedding procession moving through the dark with dancing torches, builders rearing towers, kings marching to their wars, and a widow pleading her cause in the persistence of despair before a heartless judge.

Let us try another way to test the carpenter's Son for a spirit of inquiry. Do Jesus' battles with His intellectual critics reveal an inquiring mind? Did they require investigation of Pharisaic teachings and life styles? Of Sadducee doctrines? Of Old Testament Scriptures? Was Jesus also a perceptive and eager student of human nature? Was He willing and able to speak earnestly with men and women who were of a different social background? And when we read that Jesus knew what His enemies were thinking, must we of necessity credit this insight to His divine majesty? Or may we suppose that He had inquired carefully enough into His opponents' mind-set to anticipate their thinking? Would Jesus have read the Jewish equivalent of *Newsweek*? Was Jesus alert to current events and did He think creatively about them? Remember the Tower of Siloam incident and the massacre at sacrifice. Had Jesus closed His mind to the fields of business and commerce? Had he gained insight into the interpersonal dimension of moneylending? The political legitimacy of taxation? Absentee landlordism? Had Jesus put His mind to those pedestrian pursuits, farming and orchard-keeping? Did He know how to challenge people? And was He ready to accept challenges? Had He pondered the responsibilities of leadership and discipleship? Had He thought about the moral and political freedom of man? Had He observed thoughtfully the wonders and the commonplaces of nature? Perhaps you can think of even more vital areas of life and thought into which Jesus plunged. Dr. Horne wrote, "From the great sweep of his illustrations from every department of creation it is clear that Jesus had a wide circle of interests; His thinking was comprehensive and not limited in range."<sup>6</sup>

And yet I would like to suggest that it is not so much the quantity as the quality of Jesus' references to His Father's world that demonstrates Jesus' spirit of inquiry most favorably. Jesus' references to man and his world are always sensitive without being sentimental. They penetrate to the very essence of a thing but are never ponderously profound. He has listened for the harmonies and the dissonances of His Father's world and, unlike many an overeager preacher against worldly corruption, He has *heard* the harmonious tones that are still being sounded. And He has given voice to them. We get the impression that when Jesus talks about a thing, He not only understands it to the core but understands it as sympathetically as righteousness permits and love compels. I detect in Him nothing of that bored and superior cynicism about life which sometimes spoils the most urgently inquiring intellects and makes them unfit to communicate their spirit of inquiry.

Our discussion has now brought us close to what I regard as the wellspring of Jesus' eager spirit of inquiry. Jesus had an overall attitude toward the world, toward man, and toward life that permitted and stimulated lively inquiry. He sees all the world as His Father's world: The birds, the wheat, the soil were His Father's good creation. Man was His Father's noblest creature. He perceived His Father working continually in and through His creation. Jesus had not given up this world to its self-appointed prince, Satan. Satan was the great Intruder; the world was still His Father's. He therefore delighted in the Father's creation and saw His Father mirrored by it. He was fascinated by the men who were formed by His Father's hand. He was full of questions to ask them. And even in fallen man He loved to find the image of His Father. Wherever Jesus looked He was able to see the Father: in a flower, a seed, or a fish net; in a shepherd, a poor Hausfrau, or a rich landholder; at the bar of Justice, in the harvest field, or at a marriage. Jesus' parables, conversations, and discourses reveal Him as a man who affirmed life in its exciting variety and mysterious unity under a Father who had created all things for man and who would once again redeem man and recreate him for his pristine purpose of glorifying the Father in and through all things.

Jesus' view of the world is that of the Old Testament. Jesus and the Scripture are not otherworldly so much as they are this worldly. Arthur F. Holmes put it this way.<sup>7</sup>

We read in Scripture of the agriculture and art and technology that men developed, of the cities they built and the nations of which they were part. We read of social justice and compassion provided for in

---

<sup>6</sup> Horne, p. 87

<sup>7</sup> Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968) pp. 27, 28.

the Jewish law, preached by the prophets; and practiced at times by the kings. We read of the virtue of conscientious work, the joys of song and of love and friendship. We read the Old Testament poetic books whose artistic form is that of their culture. In the New Testament we meet one who incarnated Himself in the mundane, in the social and religious and political structures of the time. He spent thirty of his thirty-two years in “secular” pursuits, in the family at Nazareth and at the carpenter’s bench. From the parables he told we sense his delight in nature and in Jewish culture. He says that all of life is a stewardship, sacred before God. We meet the apostles who talk of the Lordship of Christ in everything, and in their missionary work use cultural vehicles, even Greek philosophical concepts, to communicate the Gospel.

Our Lord Jesus was no dualist to regard the material as evil and the spiritual as good, no monk to withdraw from society in favor of lonely spiritual exercises, no anti-intellectualist to fear the learning of the world or to fear learning about the world. In Jesus the earthy man and the spiritual man are compatibly blended. While He declared, “He that loseth his life shall save it,” He also performed miracles to restore people to this life and to their stewardship here. While He testified, “My kingdom is not of this world,” He also said, “The meek... shall inherit the earth.” In Jesus there is no philosophical disdain of the physical and no ecclesiastical disdain for the secular. All life in the world is of interest to Him.

In summary, then, Jesus views this whole world as His Father’s and as the world in which the Father has assigned to redeemed man a comprehensive stewardship of the Father. This view, I believe, supports Jesus’ own spirit of inquiry and redeems us for that same freedom for inquiry. It confirms that the act of learning is an act of the man in Christ and is therefore an acceptable worship and ministry of God.

If my argument has somehow seemed to suggest that a spirit of inquiry does not exist among those who reject Jesus’ world-view and the Scriptural viewpoint, then I perhaps have proved too much. I have not forgotten those evil and primeval inquirers, Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain. I only intend to suggest that such inquiry is as spurious as that which moved Adam to find out what would happen if he should listen to a snake and to his wife rather than to God. Such inquisitiveness our students may well do without. We want for our students Jesus’ own kind of inquiry: the inquiry of a faithful son who delights in his Father’s world and his Father’s works and who is anxious to fulfill the worldly stewardship committed to Him.

### **The Church’s Struggle to Maintain Jesus’ Spirit of Inquiry**

If we would be honest, we cannot call the learning interest of paganism false without admitting that the teachers of Christendom also have failed to sustain a genuine spirit of eager and willing learning within the church. Living in the world, Christendom has embraced pagan world views, which, by their otherworldliness, are inimical to a free spirit of inquiry.

From the beginning the church has had to struggle to maintain a world-view congenial to a spirit of inquiry. The church of the Middle Ages labored under the influence of neo-Platonism. According to this view<sup>8</sup>

Man did not find fulfillment in creation but in the spirit which is a higher reality. This attitude led to a depreciation of nature and humanity with a strong emphasis on the reality of the spirit and the attainment of a spiritual reality through a lack of interest in “this-worldliness” for the sake of the “otherworldliness.” Naturally this resulted in an obvious lack of interest in the science of the natural world as well as in the concern for politics, philosophy, and art.

The reformation brought a renewed appreciation for the whole of creation.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Marvin K. Mayers, Lawrence Richards, and Robert Webber, *Reshaping Evangelical Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972) p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Mayers, p. 15.

This creationist view of life resulted in the concept of a unified field of reality which saw life whole and argued that all of man's endeavors within life were religious in nature. That is, man either directed all of his activities toward God or toward himself. This religious view of life gave rise in turn to the Reformation view of vocation which taught that, for the Christian, all work was religious activity. This view set the Christian free to do art, Politics, philosophy, economics, and science religiously.

Another strand of thought was spun out of the Reformation and it tended again to stifle genuine investigation. The radical reformers "denied life and insisted that Christianity called man into a life of personal discipleship which looked mainly to the preaching of the Gospel and withdrawal from society." The chief function of the baptized was to preach the Gospel and suffer for the sake of Christ. Can such a world-view support a real eagerness for far-ranging study of the Father's world?

Pietism, although a welcome reaction to rationalism, nevertheless produced a world view hostile to the spirit of inquiry.<sup>10</sup>

... It was not forward-looking – it had no message for the man of science who was "this-worldly" rather than "other-worldly" as it demanded. Its lack of sympathy with art and science and secular culture in general made it a Christianity which appealed to the illiterate and untrained. Pietism was a denial of the doctrine of creation so beautifully set forth by the reformers. ...The result, therefore, in many quarters was disastrous. The divorce between faith and life began to appear. Faith ran alongside life instead of permeating all of life. It set the pattern for a separatism whose concern for the cure and care of the soul was often accompanied by a lack of care and concern for the body and the world.

The evangelical revivals and fundamentalism, in whose shallows American Lutheranism has been bobbing precariously, have suffered shipwreck by a similar world-view which has removed their adherents "from an active role in the arts, science, and culture in general." Maybe the Bible Belt students we teach are also under the influence of another fundamentalist train which can inhibit inquiry. I think this mind-set was most poignantly expressed by an ex-preacher who had liberated himself from his intellectual paralysis. In "The Grapes of Wrath" the unfortunate Okie, Casey, reflects, "I can't be no preacher again. Preachers gotta know. I don't know. I gotta ask." Fundamentalism too often confuses its discipleship of the ultimate truth with the notion that it securely possesses all truth and all knowledge.

If our painfully simplistic historical survey of world-views has seemed excursive, let me quickly contest that charge by asserting that a man's religiously-held world views are likely to be crucial to his capacity for instilling an eagerness for learning. Secondly, if we have been swimming in murky waters, – I hope so much at least has been proved by my survey – then we are not going to come out of the waters clinically clean. I hope you are easier to convince of that than my children. When they emerge from the pea-soup fluids of Lake Shetek, they vigorously deny that it might be socially advantageous and hygienically profitable for them to take a shower and to scrub with soap. But would any of us seriously want to deny that we can be in the contemporary church-world without feeling its influences? To what extent are we teachers the heirs of the radical Reformation, pietism, revivalism, and fundamentalism? Are our Christian day schools alive to the work of God in the world in all its variety and challenge? Or do they perceive the legitimate work of God as limited to preaching and teaching the Gospel?

When Christian parents send their children to a Christian day school or college, they have a right to expect that their children will be taught Christ crucified. Do they have a right to expect more? How do you react to this statement of a Wheaton College professor of philosophy?<sup>11</sup>

For the evangelical in education, therefore, Christian commitment does not restrict intellectual opportunity and endeavor, but rather fires and inspires him to purposeful learning. Christian education

---

<sup>10</sup> Mayers, p. 40, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Holmes, p. 26f.

should not blindfold the student's eyes to all the world has to offer, but it should open them to truth wherever it may be found, truth that is ultimately unified in and derived from God. It should be a liberating experience that enlarges horizons, deepens insight, sharpens the mind, exposes new areas of inquiry and sensitizes our ability to appreciate the good and the beautiful as well as the true.

But perhaps you will like better the wisdom of a fourth grade boy who wrote, "America is becoming a rich source of family life...According to what I have for my report, our American population is thickening more than a million a year. This means that play like it is 2000 AD there are more than 50 million families and so how much of this is for sure?" I don't know what the lad was thinking, but I surely do like his spirit of inquiry.

### **Jesus' Understanding of His Teaching Role**

If Jesus' world view generates the will to learn and investigate, His understanding of His teaching role adequately supports it and is worth our attention. As we discuss the methodology of Jesus, I suspect we shall find ourselves taking occasional looks into a mirror to see how well we compare. Now I have long passed the age when looking into a mirror could afford me much pleasure. And I suspect the same is true of most of us. As unpleasant as it may be for us to look into a mirror, to do so generally brings about action and passably beneficial results. I cannot pass a full length mirror without being moved wistfully to tuck in my tummy and wish it would go away. I have even been known deftly to corral three stray hairs and use them imaginatively and affectionately to cover a four inch bald spot. Will our review of Jesus' methodology lead us to do more than wishful thinking? Will it help us to identify personal weaknesses and to adopt corrective measures?

What basic teaching understandings do you find in Jesus? My list follows. Would you add anything to it?

1. Jesus conformed His teaching to the learner's nature and situation.
2. Jesus deliberately sought to provoke thinking more than to convey information.
3. Jesus addressed Himself to the whole person of the learner.
4. Jesus taught about life and living in the world; his teaching was life-related.

Jesus was vitally interested in the life situation of His learners and conformed His teaching to take advantage of their situation. He knew where His students were and that is where He began teaching them. To get an idea of why I have made this a matter of some importance, let me shift our attention from our first century Master to a 20<sup>th</sup> century cat.<sup>12</sup>

A cat's auditory nerve was wired to an electric apparatus so that nerve impulses transmitted from the ear to the brain could be heard in a loud speaker. A metronome was kept going in the room, and its clicks, as transmitted by the cat's auditory nerve and amplified by the apparatus, were clearly audible, but when a mouse in a jar was brought into the room, the cat not only lost interest in the metronome, as one would expect but its impulses in its auditory nerve became feebler or stopped altogether.

The story is interesting for two reasons. First, in a cat-mouse story it is seldom that the bully cat enlists our sympathy. If I have learned anything at all from my education courses, it is this that any cat, rat, or cockroach in the hands of a researcher in educational psychology deserves our most considerate sympathy. Secondly, our cat story establishes scientifically what my suffering wife has long known from experience: It is completely possible and likely that a cat which has become interested in a mouse, or a husband who has become engrossed in the televised fury of the Vikings, will automatically tune out anything that does not have so much intrinsic life-interest. So the teacher who is not paying attention to and taking advantage of a student's total life situation is likely to bruise his ego on the stone wall of student apathy.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Michael J. A. Howe, *Understanding School Learning* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1972) p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> Dale E. Griffin, *Well, What is Teaching* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970) p. 66.

In His teaching activity Jesus began where people were and not where He thought they ought to be. Put another way, Jesus answered the questions which people were actually asking.

How could the woman at Jacob's well tune out a man who was meeting her on her own level and speaking to what she regarded as worthy topics of conversation? Her thirst, her "marriages," and her interest in the Jew-Samaritan conflict were made take-off points for instruction. Numerous instances of the same sensitive regard for His hearers' actual interests occurred in Jesus' contacts with Jewry's suffering sick and with Palestine's spiritual cripples, the Pharisees. He devised ways of leading these people from natural interests to issues which they themselves could regard as critical. His healing of Capernaum's demoniac, the paralytic who came through the roof, a woman ill for 12 years, His raising of a dead girl, and His feeding of the 5000 are recorded by St. Luke in just six chapters as instances of this behavior. Obviously Jesus performed miracles to help men confront an issue squarely or in a new way. Can we do this in our classrooms without performing a miracle? Perhaps if we did it in our classrooms, our students would regard it a miracle.

It is not only Jesus' miracles and the ensuing conversation which illustrate Jesus' will to teach to the questions that His hearers were inwardly asking. The same is true of His discourses. We recall Him sitting in a boat teaching the multitudes on the shore. Did He begin: "Our sermon for today is on The Real Nature of God's Rule: Part One... Part Two... and Part Three."? Or did He begin by asking, "What was our lesson about last Sunday"? Or did He begin where the people were at emotionally and intellectually? Seated not far from fertile fields and addressing the workers of those fields, He talked about farming: The Parables of the Sower, the Weeds, the Mustard Seed, and the Hidden Treasure. He talked about the housewife's world: The Parable of the Yeast. He had something for the merchant: The Parable of the Pears. He told a story for the fishermen: The Parable of the Net. He began where people were and enticed them intellectually where they had not yet been. The Sermon on the Mount illustrates the same careful concern for the nature and concerns of the audience. He talked there about the burning issues of the day, about actual concerns and problems of His audience: happiness, radiant living, murder by anger, adultery by looking, bold swearing, religious display, and greed. He didn't denounce abortion in the old folks' home; and He didn't talk about gracious retirement living to young adulterers. Would you say that Jesus' teaching lacked content because He was concerned to start where His students were? If so, was the sacrifice worth making?

What are the matters with which our youth are vitally concerned? Good times? Sports success? Good looks? Cheerleading? Their emergence as worthwhile adults? Their acceptance by peers? Their acceptance by God? Would Jesus have used these life-concerns as starting points? Jesus, it seems to me, often deliberately sought to provoke active thinking in His hearers. He preferred to be suggestive rather than exhaustive. It was not enough that His pupils should mechanically ingest, they must also be agitated to digest what He taught. Dr. Merrill, quoted by Dr. Horne, wrote:<sup>14</sup>

His aim as the Great Teacher of men was, and ever is, not to relieve the reason and conscience of mankind, not to lighten the burden of thought and study, but rather to increase that burden, to make men more conscientious, more eager, more active in mind and moral sense.

Even if Dr. Merrill has a different theological perspective from ours, I think we can agree that there is an element of truth in what he writes. Jesus understood His educational task as a responsibility to lead men to think, to search, to evaluate, to reach conclusions for themselves.

In all of this Jesus sounds very modern. Here is a passage from a modern author writing on Motivation for Learning. As we read, we may ask ourselves if by this man's standard, Jesus would have been able to teach effectively in a 20<sup>th</sup> century classroom.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Horne, p. 51.

<sup>15</sup> Stanford C. Erickson, *Motivation for Learning* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974) p. 163.

Studies of college-level learning indicate that when lectures are arranged around questions which pique students' interest, that is, about what is not known rather than around mere recitations of fact, learning is improved and interest in further learning about a topic is increased (Berlyne, 1960). In particular, questions which arouse students' curiosity about novel aspects of things already familiar to them may have significant influence on the development of curiosity. Lectures which pose problems are likely to be more effective than those which present neatly encapsulated principles and facts. Such tactics draw students actively into the substance of the lecture, and research clearly shows that they learn better when they participate in the learning process than when they passively accept the output of a "distant" speaker.

There is astonishing correspondence between this description of effective college teaching and Jesus' handling of Nicodemus, His mountain top offering of new insights into the Old Law, and His frequent bouts with the Pharisees. Even when Jesus speaks at length, we cannot describe Him as a rehearser of facts, a conveyer of information. Nor can we recall Him establishing abiding principles with inexorable, lockstep logic. He does not kill curiosity by overinforming; He does not destroy learning incentive by providing ready-made conclusions. He permits His students to enjoy the challenge of thinking, agreeing, and disagreeing. Jesus does not see the teacher imaged in the sausage stuffer whose wisdom and information inform a passive gut. He sees the teacher as a beekeeper who sets his tiny but talented partners in the midst of enticing flowers and provides the proper conditions for them to perform the creative task for which God has equipped them. Would you say Jesus' teaching lacked content because He sought to promote thoughtful, reflective inquiry? If so, was the sacrifice worth making?

Jesus did not appeal solely to the cognitive domain of the human personality which we have so far been talking about. He addressed Himself to the whole person, He sought to involve the whole man in the learning role; the thinking man, the feeling man, and the doing man.

Dale Griffin shows how Jesus appealed to men's feelings: <sup>16</sup>

The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus could have given him an immediate and complete answer, but He didn't: Rather, He told the parable of the Good Samaritan. Thus Jesus obtained the emotional involvement of His questioner in the plight of the man "who fell among thieves." The hearer's sympathy was aroused for the victim. He must have "burned" when he heard the callous indifference to human suffering displayed by the men of religion! With relief and gratitude he listened to Jesus' portrayal of kindness by the Good Samaritan. Having gained the sympathy of the rich man for the victim of the thieves, Jesus then posed His question: "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"

With his own mouth and with inner conviction the rich man answered, "The one who showed mercy on him."

Think of how Jesus employed this strategy also in other parables: The Waiting Father, the Lost Coin, the Lost Sheep, The Unmerciful Servant, The Great Banquet, and the Rich Man and Lazarus. Can you think of any others?

Even when Jesus was not telling parables, He was still addressing His message to the whole man. What part of man's personality is Jesus addressing Himself to in Luke 12:4-7?

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them

---

<sup>16</sup> Griffin, p. 68.

is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows.

Jesus addressed Himself also to the feeling of wonder. One of the Greek words for miracle implies wonder. Did Jesus ever perform miracles simply to amaze? Jesus' miracles had a teaching function. Think again of Jesus' healing of the paralytic and his question: "What is easier to say, 'Get up and walk' or 'Your sins are forgiven'?" Did He incite inquiry through wonder? Did Jesus also use enigmatic sayings to inspire wonder and subsequent learning? How about John 1:51: "I tell you the truth, you shall all see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man"? Or John 3:3: "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"? Or John 4:32: "I have food to eat that you know nothing about"? At least two of these sayings provoked further inquiry. Can you think of any others?

By His own love Jesus appealed to the emotion of love. He reached out tenderly to little children and they responded. He accepted the love of a sinful woman. Did this open the door to future ministry of her? He loved the disciples and said so. Were the disciples eager to learn about the mission of the One who loved them?

Jesus appealed to the feeling of gratitude. Many of the healing miracles fall into this category. Did Jesus ever appeal to man's natural sympathy? Is this part of the charm of the parable of the Persistent Widow? Did Jesus ask for the sympathy of His disciples because of His own impending death?

How much and how wisely do we use the emotional nature of our students and enlist its help in the process of learning? Perhaps we are too much the heirs of the Greek tradition to be naturally disposed to strategies which engage the affective domain of our students' personalities.<sup>17</sup>

To "know thyself"...was a thoroughly cognitive inquiry, and Greek sophistry was controlled intellectual manipulation. A college faculty also distrusts anti-intellectual modes of persuasion and thinks of itself as a body of rational men, and they like to project this image to their students. True, students are curious and they want to learn, but as young adults many of their interests are self-related and often with only cursory attention to discipline-based knowledge.

So how shall I teach Western Civilization in a way that makes use of my students affective self to stimulate inquiry? This will take some creative thought and effort on my part. You will not think me boastful, however, if I confess that in the past my teaching has produced strong emotional reactions in some of my students. I recall one student several years ago who left my classroom to go directly to her psychiatrist for a soothe-session. But there are better kinds of emotional involvement which I would like to secure.

As we mentioned earlier, Jesus sought to stimulate discovery by inviting His hearers to activity as well as to feeling. We recall Jesus many times saying, "Follow me." And every Passion season we hear His memorable call: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done to you." Jesus solicited imitation.

My second son is a helpless imitator. Last summer he spent two hours with a boy who was older, bigger, and wiser (understood in its pejorative sense) just enough to become our son's instant hero. The lad fluttered his eyelashes, spoke with a twang, cocked his head at what I suppose was a jaunty angle, used the latest slang, and ruminated his gum with what my son must have regarded as exceptional grace. For three interminable days thereafter we suffered the company of a twangy, slangy, head-cocked, lash-fluttering, and swivel-jawed son. The power of eleven years of home training and even the power of the genes had withdrawn into ignominious retreat before the powerful tendency for imitation. Jesus used this tendency. Can we?

Jesus understood learning as intimately connected with doing. John 7:17 is the clearest statement of this understanding. Jesus declares, "If a man chooses to do God's will, he will find out (he will know) whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." Doing results in experiential knowing. This forces the conclusion that doing can be a form of learning, and a particularly fruitful form of learning. One of its choicest fruits is that it stimulates further inquiry. Stanford Briksen writes:<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Eriksen, p. 63.

<sup>18</sup> Eriksen p. 167.

Students learn a great deal from the real world extensions of lecture, laboratory, and textbook knowledge, but this involvement often brings complications – confusion and frustration from feeling unable to participate in a meaningful way with concrete problems. Nevertheless, the in-depth experience of observing, working, and learning within the environment of a mental hospital, for example, has no substitute in the text, in the film, in simulation, or in a case-book treatise... The teacher of almost any “outreach” type course must be prepared to meet counterproposals from his students as they redefine issues of “relevance.”

In other words, doing stimulates thinking. How do we incorporate this strategy into our curriculum? Should we do it more?

It may be that for the moment our memory fails to recall how busy Jesus kept his learners. The following list of specifically assigned activities was compiled by paging through the Gospel of Matthew: Come, follow me. Go show yourself to the priest. Get up, take your mat and go home. Ask. Go back and report. Stretch out your hand. You give them something to eat. Come (on the water). Send her away. Be on your guard. Bring the boy here. Go to the lake and throw out your line. Let the little children come to me. Go, sell your possessions. Go to the village... Untie them and bring them. Show me the coin. Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbor. Take and eat. Drink from it. Watch and pray. Put your sword back. Go and tell. Go and make disciples.

Besides these direct commands, there are many other activities to which Jesus exhorted His learners in some general terms. But the most obvious professional learning activity into which the future apostles were pressed I have not yet mentioned. While the disciples still had much to learn, while they were yet novices, Jesus sent them out to heal and to preach. You recall what an exciting learning experience this was for them. Were they ready for it? Do you think it prepared them for further learning?

How did Jesus answer the man who asked, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus offers no all encompassing rule or series of rules. He does not become involved in abstract speculation. He provides no easy solution. He leads the questioner to think about a life situation as complex as life usually is.

Jesus designed a lesson from life about life and by it provoked thoughtful questions about social responsibility. Here are a few questions which occur to me: Can there be obligations which supersede the call of mercy? Does the personal risk incurred in helping ever justify the refusal of help? What is illegitimate about the question: “Who is my neighbor?” Is it illegitimate because it is born out of a desire to be right rather than good? As we can see, there is nothing simplistic in Jesus’ response. It acknowledges the ambiguity of life and suggests that this ambiguity is quietly overcome by the spontaneity of love. See how abstract I have become? But Jesus made this abstract wondering vital for me by setting me in the midst of a difficult life situation. I could relate to it easily because I have passed by many a hitchhiker on the argument: “It’s illegal to hitchhike,” or “It’s imprudent for a family man to endanger himself by giving a ride to a hitchhiker.”

Let’s turn our attention to the Beatitudes. They have been called “otherworldly” because they present an ethic which apparently contradicts the realities of this world. But neither they, nor the sermon from which they are drawn, bespeak a disembodied mentality or spirituality. They deal with man as he lives in the flesh and in the world. We may argue that they are drastic and simplistic. That is a charge we could not make against Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. After about 250 pages of painstaking analysis Aristotle writes, “Let us make a beginning of our discussion.” He has found something else which must needs be examined from all possible sides. Shall we call Aristotle exhausting? Exhaustive might be a better word; but in that case Jesus is not simplistic but suggestive.<sup>19</sup>

How many sermons that you remember have made you think hard about your ethical predicament as you live in the flesh and in the world? How often do they stir you to evaluate whether you will do the Kingdom more service by reading a book or taking a walk with your children? Do our devotions, as Helmut Thielicke

---

<sup>19</sup> Richard, McKeon (ed.) *Introduction to Aristotle* (New York: Modern Library, 1947) p. 543.

charges, tend to be docetic, addressed to not quite real men in a not quite real world? Is our message churchy rather than earthy? Do we offer simple solutions instead of eye-opening, mind-expanding avenues for arriving at thoughtful, personal conclusions? Do we avoid preaching or teaching to the current issues?

Come with me to an assembly of the John Birch Society. Watch me stand up and cry, “Jesus Christ is Lord; let men repent of their sins and follow Him.” What will people do? Applaud me? Ignore me as a religious nut? Now you get up and cry, “In the name of Jesus Christ I call upon all John Birchers to repent of their hypocrisy and confess that they are sinning by supporting a society which advocates the violent overthrow of our government. How can you be Birchers and Christians? How can you serve two masters?” Now run for your life. I do not suggest that the last sensational and volative outburst really represents the provocative teaching style of Christ, but I hope it provides an adequate frame for the question: What is the difference between teaching truth and teaching truisms? Did Christ on the Mount grasp the difference as He taught the old commandments of God? I believe He did.

Does the classroom teacher have the same responsibility as the sermonizer? Is it possible for me to teach Western Civilization in a way which helps young people to explore and, just as importantly, to feel that they are exploring issues crucial to their life or, at least, issues penetrating to the very nature of life in the world? Is it possible for me to teach Western Civilization in a way which makes young people feel, “This isn’t saying anything to me”? How can I help my students to perceive my subject matter as a window and even a door to the mainstream of real life? How can I devise teaching strategies by which my subject matter becomes genuinely complementary to my purpose of helping students to think effectively about their life in the world? To me that seems an important question. Is it?

Let me try to put all I have said in one sentence. Jesus stimulated a spirit of inquiry in His hearers by involving them cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally – totally – in a learning experience made to seem genuinely relevant to the whole life experience of His hearers. How then can we in our conventional, academic environment devise teaching styles consistent with this understanding of effective teaching? Stanford Ericksen’s *Motivation for Learning* is a very good place to start the reading that will produce effective thinking about classroom and subject matter management. Carl R. Rogers’ *Freedom to Learn* will also probably prove provocative, no matter how we understand the word provocative. But it is possible that we can learn even from Jesus certain techniques that are practicable in a formal education atmosphere.

### **Jesus’ Teaching Techniques**

Jesus employed teaching techniques perfectly complementary to His teaching material and to His understanding of the teacher’s responsibility. Since Jesus sought to start where the pupil was, He had to find out where the pupil was and then, later, how far He had taken him. This implied getting responses from the student and letting student readiness guide the teaching process.<sup>20</sup>

If Christ had considered content only, His words would comprise His teaching. But overt interaction with the pupils is the rule rather than the exception. Because He started where the pupil was and let the pupil’s response and readiness guide the process, the gospel record is full of the sayings and doings of other people as well as His own words and deeds. What He did was determined by what His learners did.

How often do you recall Jesus lecturing? Was His lecturing the more effective because His learners anticipated getting an opportunity to speak to the lecturer? If Jesus’ classroom was marked by lively teacher-learner interaction, was ignorance being given too much time? Were His classroom conversations exchanges of ignorance? Did these conversations exercise and develop the learners’ powers of analysis? When a student is demonstrating a controlled spirit of inquiry in the classroom, does his example help foment inquiry

---

<sup>20</sup> Lois E. Lebar, *Education That Is Christian* (Fleming H. Rowell Co., 1958) p. 82.

in his peers? If Jesus had done all the talking as teacher, would the Gospels be more instructive than they are now? More capable of provoking inquiry? Of stimulating interest?

Along with His conversational style Jesus used a problem approach to teaching. Here is a selected list of problems utilized by Jesus according to the Gospel of St. Luke, the first 3 chapters:

<u>Persons</u>	<u>Problems</u>
Teachers of law	Who can forgive sin?
Teachers of law	Jesus' association with sinners
"They"	Why did Jesus' disciples not fast?
The Pharisees	Sabbath observance
John's disciples	Are you the one who was to come?
Peter	Who do the crowds say I am?
Disciples	Who is greatest?
Law expert	What must I do to inherit eternal life?
A Pharisee	Failure to observe ceremonial washings
Some people	Interpretation of disasters

We could also cite many sensed but unspoken problems to which Jesus turned His teaching attention. Did you notice from our listing that many of the teaching incidents were student initiated? What kind of classroom atmosphere is needed to bring out problems? A vigorously intellectual atmosphere? A trustful, compassionate atmosphere? Are we as responsive to problems as Jesus? Do our students sense in us a concern to keep up with a content-oriented schedule rather than a student-development oriented schedule? Sensing this, do they spare us their inquiries into problems? At what point did Jesus become weary of a problem bringing people?

Jesus' use of questions is one of the most significant factors in establishing Jesus' reputation as a master teacher. What kind of questions did Jesus ask? Here is a representative sampling of the more than one hundred different questions of Jesus which have been recorded:

Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?  
Which is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" or to say "Get up and walk"?  
Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil?  
What did you go out into the desert to see?  
Where is your faith? What is your name?  
Who touched me?  
How long should I put up with you?  
Were not all ten cleansed?  
John's baptism – was it from heaven?  
Whose portrait and inscription are on it?  
Judas, are you betraying the son of man with a kiss?

Did you detect any leading questions in the list? Is the leading question useful? Does it prompt inquiry?

You may have noted that Jesus asked questions with the following purposes: to make men think about their values; to stimulate men to think about their response to Him; to gain information; to heighten expectation; to express disgust while arousing thought about the reason of His disgust; to permit a learner the joy of expressing what he had learned or felt; to give emphasis; to allow the learners to arrive at unforced conclusions; to entrap enemies; and to chide. After his study of Jesus' questions Horne asked, "From this study do you get the impression that the atmosphere of Jesus was lethargic or charged with intellectual inquiry? How may we

become better questioners?"<sup>21</sup> How do you think Jesus developed His skill as a question asker? How can we develop our skill at asking questions? Should our questions do more than test knowledge or comprehension? Should they invite analysis, synthesis, and evaluation? Should they be directed to the effective domain as well as the cognitive? Would that not be good imitation of Jesus? Perhaps we can develop our questioning skills by working through Francis Humkins' *Involving Students in Questioning*.

The title of the above book implies that good teaching involves students in the question asking process. How did Jesus respond to questions asked by His students? Did His answers stifle inquiry or promote it? Perhaps an incident from each of the first three chapters of John will give us an insight into Jesus' method. John 1:38 and 39 tells of Jesus' first disciples. They asked Jesus, "Where are you staying?" Was the question a particularly good one? To me it seems banal. Did Jesus treat it with dignity? He did. Do you think His warm response led the fledgling disciples to develop more meaningful questions later? Do timid and tentative questioners need encouragement?

John 2:18-23 tells of the Cleansing of the Temple. The Jews demand, "What miraculous sign can you show to prove your authority to do all this?" The question is an ill-disguised challenge. Have you ever been confronted with a question-challenge? How did you react emotionally? How did Jesus react emotionally? Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." Did He answer the question? Did He expect the Jews immediately to understand His reply? Or to remember the incident and think about it? Did He use His response to divert them from their original question? Did He try to humiliate them?

John 3:1-12 is the story of Nicodemus' nocturnal visit of Jesus. Judaic instruction in the law as a divine demand upon man has imprisoned him in a narrow thought system closed to the surprises of God as the giver of grace. Nicodemus asks, "How can a man be born when he is old?" Jesus responds with high level instruction befitting a student who is a member of the Sanhedrin. Again Nicodemus queries, "How can this be?" The divine Master does not cover His impatience. He says, "You are a teacher of Israel, and you do not understand these things?" The man needs to be jolted. He needs to begin to question the whole system of which he is a product. Then since this officer of the church is accustomed to erudite conversation, Jesus can develop a logical argument proceeding from the known to the unknown. But He has designed His lesson to fit the inquirer. Jesus' flexibility in ordering His content to fit the need of the learner is marvelous. Think of the contrast between Jesus' handling of Nicodemus and His handling of the Samaritan woman in the very next chapter of John's Gospel. Even if the differences are obvious, however, they also are superficial. The likeness of the two incidents illustrates the essential point: Jesus taught to His pupil's needs and nature. Can we be more pupil-conscious teachers without sacrificing content goals?

Another characteristic element of Jesus' teaching is His use of symbols, imagery, and parabolic statements. Who has forgotten Jesus' story of the shrewd manager who knew how to react to crisis? In imminent danger of losing his job he used his time and the available resources to excellent advantage. But who has not marveled at Jesus' daring in illustrating spiritual wisdom by an image from gross wickedness? And who has not puzzled about how he shall apply the parable to himself? The artistry of the parable stimulates inquiry. Jesus' many allegories, as recorded by John, serve the same purpose. Who has not pondered thoughtfully the message of the Rich Man and Lazarus? Who has not mulled the implications of the Vine and the Branches story? Jesus also used symbolism frequently. He called Himself the Good Shepherd and the Door. Besides verbal symbolism, he employed what I shall call practical symbolism: He washed His disciples' feet. He was a living simile: "As a lamb before the shearers is dumb, so He did not cry out." His metaphors are among the world's best remembered sayings: "You are the salt of the earth." "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." Jesus placed the language and the literary arts in the service of instruction. Does He thereby risk misunderstanding? What makes the risk worth taking? The increased impact of artistic expression? Its productivity in stimulating inquiry? Should we be more concerned about the esthetic quality of our teaching?

---

<sup>21</sup> Horne, p. 50f.

Further inquiry into the techniques which our Savior used to facilitate learning and to stimulate inquiry can be pursued by all of us independently in Dr. Horne's *Jesus the Master Teacher*. To pursue these fascinating devices here would only serve to diffuse this brief study beyond the point of practicality.

### **Conclusion**

In fact if this paper lasts much longer, it will appeal not to your esthetic but to your ascetic sensibilities. And while Christ could probably use both kinds of appeal effectively, I had better not take that risk. Let me express only a final word of combined caution and encouragement.

To go before and wait is better than dexterously to manipulate. Our youthful pupils are already being manipulated by many alien powers: restless, driving pride; raging lusts; enervating fears; thrones, dominions, and powers. Teaching is not a clever manipulating of our students toward a desired goal; it is loving, respecting, trusting, leading, calling, and waiting. The first triad are Spirit-giving dispositions. For them we pray. The last three are Christ-taught, Gospel-refined arts. Let us follow Christ in practicing them. In His techniques to some extent, in His teaching understanding to an even greater extent, and in His free spirit of inquiry to the fullest extent, let us follow Him. He waits.

### **Bibliography**

Buttrick, George A. *The Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973.

Eriksen, Stanford C. *Motivation for Learning*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974.

Finkel, Asher. *The Pharisees and the Teacher of Nazareth*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974.

Griffin, Dale E. (ed.). *The Subject is Persons: Psychological Perspectives in Christian Education*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970.

Griffen, Dale E. *Well, What is Teaching: Perspectives on the Teaching-Learning Process*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970.

Guignebert, Charles. *The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus*. New York: University Books, 1959.

Havey, C. Benton, *Principles of Teaching for Christian Teachers*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.

Holmes, Arthur F. *The Idea of a Christian College*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns Publishing Co., 1968.

Horne, Herman H. *Jesus the Master Teacher*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1968.

Howe, Michael J. A. *Understanding School Learning*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1972.

Humkins, Francis P. *Involving Students in Questioning*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1976.

LeBar, Lois E. *Education That Is Christian*. Fleming H. Rowell Co., 1958.

Mager, Robert F. *Developing Attitude Toward Learning*. Palo Alto: Fearon Publishers, 1968.

Magness, Lee. "Teaching and Learning in the Gospels," *Religious Education* Nov. 1975, 629-635.

McKeon, Richard. (ed.). *Introduction to Aristotle*. New York: Modern Library, 1947.

Richards, Lawrence. *A Theology of Christian Education*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975.

Russell, William H. *Jesus the Divine Teacher*. New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1944.

Wilson, Clifford A. *Jesus the Master Teacher*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974.