

**The Westminster
Dictionary of Christian Education**

The Westminster
DICTIONARY
of **CHRISTIAN**
EDUCATION



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DICTIONARY
of **CHRISTIAN**
EDUCATION

Edited by
Kendig Brubaker Cully



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PREFACE

Although a number of encyclopedic reference works covering the Biblical, theological, and historical fields have been projected or published in recent years, not until now has a comprehensive work with religious education as its primary focus been published. In this volume there is substantial treatment of most of the subject headings that have a bearing on the educational task of the Christian church.

In order to assure a measure of creative vitality in the presentation of these materials, each writer was invited to develop his assigned subject according to his own understanding. The editor is immeasurably grateful to the large number of persons, each having an authoritative word to speak in his field, who accepted the invitation to write for the *DICTIONARY*. It will be observed that the writers come from many ecclesiastical backgrounds. Many write out of technical competence in fields other than religious education per se but which have a bearing on it.

Perhaps a word is in order as to how *THE WESTMINSTER DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION* developed. One day when I was looking through a copy of the three-volume *Encyclopedia of Sunday Schools and Religious Education* (Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1915), consigned to one of the dustier and remoter sections of the seminary library, it occurred to me that certainly we needed a new large work setting forth the whole complex of concerns and interests of mid-twentieth-century Christian education. Surely such a work would have a ready audience among scholars, seminary students and professors, directors of Christian education, pastors, lay church school workers, educators in the schools, as well as a place on the reference shelves of every library! After arrangements had been completed with The Westminster Press for the preparation of the *DICTIONARY*, the first step was to invite a small group of knowledgeable persons to a consultation on the scope and nature of the work. On November 18 and 19, 1960, these colleagues met with me at Mohonk Lake, N.Y., for much brainstorming and considerable conversation, which made the occasion memorable for us all: Iris V. Cully, Margaret A. J. Irvin, Carl Ellis Nelson, Everett M. Stowe, Roland W. Tapp, and Eugene B. Wenger. Although these initial advisers cannot in any sense be held responsible for the eventual categories covered in this work, their gracious help and encouragement spurred the effort magnificently.

I want publicly to acknowledge the faithful, cheerful, and efficient service

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of our daughter, Melissa Iris Cully, who has been my secretary, in her free time, "for the duration." Indeed, during the last stages of the manuscript preparation, my whole family came to the rescue. There were times when all four of us worked almost in shifts, meanwhile resisting the temptation of sparkling blue Caribbean waters off St. Thomas.

A work of this magnitude represents the accumulated labors of vast numbers of persons. It is to be hoped that its usefulness will reach as widely as its writers themselves are geographically dispersed. For the church is everywhere; and wherever the church is, there must be Christian education. In that work of the church this *DICTIONARY* is offered as a tool.

K. B. C.

Evanston, Illinois

A

ADMINISTRATION The function of administration in an educational agency is to provide a bridge between policy and program. Its purpose and character are defined by the nature, objectives, and educational philosophy of the agency. Its efforts are directed to enabling the teachers and program leaders so to function as to enhance the agency's character, maintain its educational philosophy, and achieve its purpose.

Administration is closely related to 2 other functions — organization and supervision. Organization provides the structure within which educational activity can fruitfully function — such as organic relation to the parent agency, departments and classes, time schedules, space assignment, personnel. Administration gives direction and management to assure the smooth running of the organization and to provide the conditions for effective teaching. Supervision is concerned with training, guidance, and support of workers to help them achieve professional growth and effectiveness. Good organization is essential to effective administration; supervision is administration directed to the education of workers for the improvement of both content and process. In practice these 3 are so intermingled in the administrative office that it is neither possible nor

desirable to make a distinction among them.

The church school is created by the church as its agency for Christian education. Hence, it is the nature, message, and mission of the church that determine the spirit, policy, and program of the church school. The administrative function will express this character in its operation and as the goal of its effort. If the church is a people of God indwelt by the Holy Spirit, a redemptive fellowship, a *koinonia*, nothing less can characterize the basic philosophy of the church school and inform the spirit and method of its administration.

The concept of administration may have a flavor of authoritarian direction, manipulation of persons, push-button control, executive efficiency. Whatever place this type of administration may have when the objective is material accomplishment and output, it does not characterize good administration in Christian education. True, an administrator must have authority to perform his function, appropriate lines and channels of communication, and must strive for efficiency, i.e., economy of preoccupation with administration itself in the interest of maximum educational functioning. But a church school is not an arena in

which a big operator may flex his executive muscles. Its primary concern is with persons, both workers and pupils. Procedures in administration will seek the same ends in the development of persons and in the spirit and life of the institution as the program that is administered. Principles of Christian education that apply to teaching and group leadership will also inform procedure in administration.

Administration is not a lower order of service as distinguished from teaching, but merely a way of getting things done, of providing the conditions under which teaching may best proceed. While it serves these purposes, it also partakes of the nature of teaching in the best sense of the word. This is true because (1) administration best achieves its purpose through maximum involvement of workers and concern for their professional growth, utilizing meetings and staff for education as well as business, and (2) it provides for pupil participation in the process of administering, such as service on committees, program leadership, democratic approaches to program planning.

With the foregoing interpretation of the meaning of administration in Christian education, the following principles are suggested to govern its procedures.

The more mechanical aspects of running the organization should be reduced to routine procedures as far as possible so as not to obtrude any more than necessary into the program itself. This includes such matters as maintaining organizational structures according to plan, enrolling new pupils, taking records, maintaining time schedules, ordering and issuing materials and supplies, minor purchases. Within established limits,

administrators should be given freedom to deal executively with these.

It will be helpful if such matters are covered in published rules of procedure, the interpretation of which becomes a part of worker orientation. Such a statement might well include also a job description for each of the offices in the table of organization (director of Christian education, superintendent, teacher, etc.), showing duties and relationships. The original establishment of such rules of procedure is more than a routine matter and should have the attention of the policy-making body, but their application is more or less routine. Even so, let administrators not forget that they are dealing with persons in a dynamic process and not mechanically following a blueprint.

One of the chief ends of administration is to increase the interest and further the professional growth of workers through participation. This is best achieved through democratic procedures in direction and management, allowing other workers to share in planning, carrying on, and evaluating at all points where such participation is feasible. So conceived, administration is a dynamic process through which the spirit and life of the church school may be so ordered as to provide the best climate for Christian nurture. It is more than running an institution; it is encouraging persons concerned with nurture to use their own capabilities and skills to best advantage.

Administration is more than overseeing and directing other workers. It is stimulating them to self-discovery of their own creative capabilities, and enabling them to develop the professional skills that for them are most appropriate in achieving the

ends of Christian education.

It is not the purpose of this article to give a complete job description for the office of administration. Only a few of the more important tasks will be touched.

1. Establishment and maintenance of Christian education within the main thrust of the church's life. Most of the denominations provide for this in organizational patterns for the local church. It remains for administration to bring it to active functioning. Further, there needs to be a public relations effort to enlist the interest and participation of the people of the church. If the whole church is to be the center and agency of Christian education, and not just a few persons designated for the educational function, this will come to pass only by virtue of constant effort in interpretation and cultivation.

2. Establishment and maintenance of an adequate organization of the church school. Proper grouping of persons is essential for education. The nature of the program determines the size and age span of groups. Certain activities can be carried out in larger groups, with considerable tolerance as to age span. Others, such as teaching, require smaller groups with more homogeneity of age. Since given pupils are likely to be in more than one educational agency of the church, it is recommended that administratively the division (children's, youth, adult) be considered the unit for program planning and leadership coordination, so that each pupil may be seen in the total perspective of his participation in the church school. The department of 2-year or 3-year age span is usually the operational unit for worship and leadership guidance,

whereas the class or group within the department constitutes the teaching unit. It is the function of organization, in cooperation with the policy-making body, to devise the best organizational pattern to serve the policy and program of a particular church school—determining ages to be embraced by departments, size of classes, whether coeducational or segregated, etc.—and, once established, to maintain this organization and help it to function as advantageously as possible. Provision for annual promotion is necessary for maintaining the established plan.

3. Enlistment, orientation, training, and supervision of workers. This is the most crucial aspect of administration, for any school will be largely what the workers make it. In turn, the quality of the relationship of the management to the workers is an important factor in their commitment and professional growth.

4. Assignment of available space, provision of equipment, supplies, and other working tools; proper care for servicing building and equipment, and seeing that it is in readiness when needed.

5. Evaluation. Church schools have been notoriously weak in seeking to assess the results of their work. This is primarily a cooperative process, the administration leading the workers in making self-studies and evaluations, not a checking system arbitrarily superimposed on them.

The above has been written from the viewpoint of the total function of administration, not as a job analysis of a particular administrator. The office will be held in varying degree by many persons—pastor, director of Christian education, secretary,

division and department heads, and others. — *Paul H. Vieth*

ADOLESCENCE The age boundaries are average and approximate for the flexible and diversified period of transition from childhood to maturity that is known as adolescence. It was formerly limited to the ages from 18 to 25, but extended later to include the full transition from puberty to maturity (about 12 to 25). The recent tendency is to consider that adolescence begins with the prepuberty period at about age 10, and ends around the legal age for maturity — 18 for females and 21 for males. Strong factors for change in estimating the boundary ages of adolescence are the increase in the number of teen-age youth who marry and begin families, and the rising rate of juvenile delinquency. Moreover, youth in the 20th century are showing sober and profound concern with spatial, economic, scientific, philosophical, and theological problems, especially those which pertain to human survival.

The most phenomenal change during adolescence occurs in the emergence of reproductive power. This is the center of a broad group of other changes, and its significance can hardly be overestimated. Biologically, the young person changes from a derivative to a determinative relationship to the continuation of the human species. Sociologically, the young person is endowed with power to become a cocreator of a basic unit of society, the family. Psychologically, the gift of freedom for individual decision carries heavy burdens of responsibility to other human beings. Philosophically, self-realization expands to concern for social self-satisfaction. In a Christian perspective these movements are

very important because they include the relations of a person to society, to nature, to God.

One Biblical word picture of the divine-human encounter shows human beings hiding the reproductive organs. Although this gift of God is a means whereby living creatures can with God's help accomplish what God otherwise reserves for himself, that is, the giving of new life, the misunderstanding and taboos that overlie the reproductive function retard and even block youth's vision of the sacredness and blessedness of life. In the adolescent view, similar taboos cover many other aspects of the human predicament.

Growing up during adolescence, the young person must cope with an unlimited number of predicaments. Much emphasis has been laid on youth rebellion but too little stress has been given to the causes of that rebellion. The flexible and variegated changes that occur during adolescence drive many young people into ambivalence. Attracted and repelled simultaneously by objects, persons, and actions, they seem to rely on two authority sources as correctives for ambivalence. One source of authority is the social reference, "Everybody else is doing it." The other is taken from inner and deeply personal efforts to develop a new type of self-organization or personal frame of reference on which to base clear-cut, durable decisions. Neither corrective seems to be completely reliable and the only other alternative to ambivalence and compromise seems to be rebellion.

Part of the motivation to seek authority sources is the urgent need to find an authority that can stand alongside, and even above, the au-

thority that adults seem to derive from an unknown source. Since the world that the adolescent must live in is obviously controlled by adults, and since the boundless energy of the adolescent is impotent to grasp adult authority except by imitation, young people have created a world of their own. The mysterious style of life in this world is marked by symbols of meaning, patterns of behavior, and standards of valuation that are typically and peculiarly youth's own. This style of life or culture helps to render more tolerable the period of waiting for maturity. It also softens some of the secret sorrows that rise out of the ambivalence inherent in the flexibility and diversification of the whole transition period. The youth culture has more material than spiritual characteristics, yet changes that occur within it take place as suddenly and rapidly as some movements of the Holy Spirit. In the youth culture, language and behavioral phenomena change overnight. The subtle standards by which consensus is achieved are not set by a nationwide convention, nor are they universally ratified according to a constitution or bylaws. Nevertheless, when any facet of the youth culture changes, all young people know and demonstrate the change.

Christianity has a mission to the youth culture. It resembles the mission which Christians carry to any other peoples or cultures in that it cannot be effective until those who are under the culture's influence are themselves involved in the mission. It is like the mission to other cultures in that its most effective functions take place via educational channels. The educational function of the mission with youth who are in the church has a difference and

an advantage. It can educe, that is, bring or draw forth, that which has been received through revelation, instruction, and discipline prior to and during the adolescent years. Christian education can assist in opening young minds and hearts to the "wideness in God's mercy" and it can introduce them to the fact that "the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind."

If young persons are to learn to accept God's love, it is essential that they begin to learn about it or to prepare to accept it during adolescence and not to wait until after they become adult persons. The ever-present, deep need is to learn in relation to and under God the Father, through Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, while they are adolescents. An understanding of the incarnation as God's self-revelation in the flesh and of God's seeking love in Jesus Christ is mighty enough, if it is shared in the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, to arouse cordial response.

There are many barriers to this understanding. Sooner or later, young people identify these barriers as Satan, sin, and their sins, which are the damages they do to God's love, to others, and to themselves. The clearest understanding of God's method of dealing with Satan, sin, and sins is available in the concept of justification by faith.

If Christian education were offered to adolescents in and under the proclamation of this good news, what a vast and all-embracing change it would bring! Youth are more aware of the gravity of their sins, more eager to be saved, more ready to accept help, more anxious for a right relationship with the Lord of life, and more burdened

with guilt than they can admit. Many of them are well informed as to God's knowledge of their situation. Like the seraphim in Isaiah's vision who hid their faces and their secret parts but could not fly from the awful presence, youth seek to hide the reality of their situation from the ultimate Reality. Is there any way for them to enter personal encounter with him "unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid"? None is possible except that which God offers, for God alone can justify them. God accepts persons, just as they are, by their faith.

Among all the changes throughout the transitory period of adolescence, the greatest change that adolescents long for is to become whole, complete, and justifiable persons. The greatest need for this greatest change is redemption. The price that the person must pay is repentance, but the consequence for the sinner's situation is so radical, glorious, and thankworthy that he cannot be invulnerable to it. Spontaneous response emerges in good works. Liberated from despair, guilty shrinking, and lonely struggle into hope, reconciliation, and glad fellowship, the Christian is set free to fulfill his longing to show gratitude by doing God's will and extending his love to mankind.

— *Richard L. Harbour*

ADULT EDUCATION The education of adults has always been considered important. Almost all the events of Biblical record pertain to adults, and the propagation of the meaning of those events through sermon, story, and chronicle is to adults and through parents to children.

"Adult education," however, is a

comparatively new term and movement. The Sunday school movement served chiefly for children and young adolescents. The beginnings of modern adult education in the church are rooted in the same forces that produced the Chautauqua movement, which inspired the establishment of lecture classes for adults in local churches. These were stabilized and reinforced by the development of the International Uniform Lesson Series in 1872 as the standard type of adult education for Protestant churches. In fact, the International Uniform Lesson Series continues as the most widely used curriculum for adults.

Because many organizations were engaging in various types of adult education, the Carnegie Corporation called the first conference on adult education in 1924 to help coordinate the movement. This conference and the subsequent formation in 1926 of the American Association for Adult Education stimulated Christian educators to give serious consideration to the wider potentialities of adult education in the church. During the next decade many books on Christian adult education were written, though as late as 1938 one important book called adult education in the church "new." In 1930 the International Council of Religious Education appointed a staff member to help direct the church's interest in this field: the United Christian Adult Movement was established in 1936. There soon developed a strong young adult movement, partially in reaction to stereotyped adult Bible classes and partly in response to the special needs of young adults.

The traditional 19th-century pattern of Christian education as training for confirmation or as preparation

for conversion in adolescents was strongly reinforced during the first quarter of the 20th century by the development of progressive education methods that achieved almost universal acceptance in childhood education. The traditional strategy assumed that if we could educate a child religiously, he would flower into a competent, articulate Christian adult. Now we realize that the child reflects the cultural pattern that is mediated to him by family and community. The Christian faith is in part a judgment on culture and an impulse to reorder society in harmony with God's will; adults must be the starting point of this process or no significant change will ever be brought into being. This shift in strategy does not lessen interest in children or youth but it insists that there cannot be an effective Christian education process for them until adults and parents who have control of the social processes shaping the immature child's mind face their responsibility realistically.

Perhaps the best way to summarize the status of adult education in the churches is to indicate trends since World War II.

Since the publication of Kraemer's *A Theology of the Laity* (1958) there has been a growing concern to reinterpret the place of laymen in the church. The traditional view that the minister was employed to minister for and to the congregation placed the layman in the position of supporting with work and money the institutional program of the church. Now we see that the layman also has a responsibility: he is a minister to other laymen in the church, not just in visitation of the sick but in sharing physical and spiritual burdens. Moreover, it is the layman who is in constant touch

with the nonchurch world. This view would formulate the purpose of Christian education of adults as helping them to be ministers to one another and to the world through their work, and would make adult education a coaching for this purpose more than merely for training in churchmanship.

Large, formal lecture classes, often institutionalized with constitution, elected officers, and budget, are a characteristic of the past when adult education was something added to the church's program. Now that we consider adult education as having a prime claim on the church's resources, we are in a position to utilize better methods. Almost all the methods shown to be effective in changing people's attitudes and in helping them to acquire new knowledge are associated with small groups. Usually limited to 15, perhaps more effective if even smaller in size, these groups study, pray, and work together over sufficient time for people to drop their pretenses. They are able under these conditions to develop a concern for, and interest in, one another, thus sharing life experiences at deeper levels.

The leadership role in small groups is redefined. Rather than depend upon the expert or charismatic leader, the small group can function effectively with a leader who has qualities that help a group achieve cohesion. In fact, some functions of leadership can be shared through assignments carried out by individuals or teams within the group. This process expects participation by all or most of the individuals within the group according to their capacity and training.

There is a versatility about small groups. They can be formed by common interest, such as young

adult groups or young parent groups; they can cluster about topics such as Bible study or church and state; or they can be formed by occupational concerns. Moreover, many of the small study-work groups are not limited to meeting on Sunday or in the church but rather set a time and place according to their convenience.

For groups who take the theology of the laity seriously there is a renaissance of Bible study and the use of college-level textbooks in religion. Small groups explore all types of materials for parents, books dealing with ethical issues confronting professional persons in their work, and paperback books on the interpretation of Christianity. Many denominations now publish selective units of study in quarterly or book form on a variety of topics. Some of the groups with trained leaders are making a critical examination of the relation of their church to the community in which they live. This latter project requires an understanding of historical, theological, and sociological factors that make up the church's life; and the development of an understanding and utilization of these materials becomes the curriculum for a group who, over an extended period of time, seek to understand the nature of the church in society.

The effectiveness of modern medicine has lengthened life expectancy so that an increasing proportion of the total population is made up of older adults. These adults have special needs, and offer special opportunities because of their experience and available time. Although churches are developing groups for older adults, seldom has enough attention been given to the way the older adult's talents can be used for important tasks in the church.

For at least 25 years Christian educators have been calling attention to the need for more effective ways to help the family. Denominational curricula in the past few decades have been designed to enlist the home in the Christian education of children, reinforcing and elaborating what was taught in the church schools. Without losing interest in that possibility, Christian educators are now proposing that the church center more on efforts and materials that will help the home discharge its unique task as a genuine unit of education. Family camping is an illustration of an activity that has emerged from this newer view. Curriculum materials to be used exclusively in the home are another sign of an important shift in emphasis. — *C. Ellis Nelson*

ADULTS The modern American adult has been the object of concern in innumerable volumes produced by psychologists, sociologists, theologians, and other students of humanity. From this vast plethora of observation and analysis a few basic insights concerning the American adult character are especially worthy of mention because of their implications for Christian educators who would minister to adults in relevant ways.

Pragmatism is deeply ingrained in adult folkways and attitudes. Adult interest in learning generally begins (and all too often ends) with the words "how to . . ." Adults are far more interested in learning efficient techniques for meeting problems or fulfilling duties or for some other sharply definable purpose than they are in acquiring knowledge whose utility is not immediately evident. Thus almost invariably far more adults will attend training

sessions for church school teachers, financial canvassers, evangelistic callers, new members, and parents of children to be baptized than will attend learning groups whose purposes are less utilitarian. The educator in the church must keep in mind that training sessions, for all their obvious limitations, nevertheless command the attention and the energies of a considerably higher proportion of adults than do more generalized study groups.

Conformity as an increasingly salient characteristic of the American adult has been noted by many. Probably no one has described this phenomenon more tellingly than David Riesman in the elaboration of his concept of other-directedness. The trend toward increasing conformism affects not only the externals of life but also opinion and attitude formation. Thus the pressures toward conformity inherent in our culture greatly heighten the leverage that the learning group exerts on the individual adult participant. The power of the group to change people's attitudes, beliefs, and values has been steadily augmented through the years by this social tendency toward other-directedness. Conformity to the cues and expectations of friends is also an increasingly important determinant of group composition and loyalty. Thus conformism can be a powerful ally in the enlistment of adult interest as well as in the effectiveness of the group process itself for learning.

The breakdown of community through the processes of urbanization is one of the most prominent developments in American society. Urban life organizes people tightly together in terms of specialized functions, but it disorganizes them in terms of

close human relations. Anonymous or essentially commercial contacts characterize many, if not most, of the associations people have with one another. There has been a marked decline in the strength of social bonds in all phases of urban life. Social anonymity seems to be as great or even greater in the suburbs, especially in those newer and smaller suburbs which do not have the extensive recreational, social, and commercial facilities that in urban areas serve as centers of community life. Furthermore, the uprooting process of frequent relocations plagues suburbanites even more than it does their urban neighbors. No doubt the upsurge in church membership since World War II is partially attributable to an instinctive quest for community through religious identification, a reaction against the depersonalizing tendencies of metropolitan life. This quest for community within the church presents the adult educator with a special challenge and opportunity, since the small learning group is especially well suited for providing the close and redemptive human relationships these people are seeking, whether deliberately or unconsciously. The chief problem that the adult educator faces in this regard is that this quest for community has impelled the great majority of adults into so many other kinds of groups in the community and the church that they feel they have little or no time for a learning group in the church. The great proliferation of voluntary associations, clubs, teams, and special-interest groups of all kinds that has accompanied the gradual increase of leisure time in our society has preempted most of that leisure for a superficial kind of conviviality.

Apathy rooted in a sense of fatalism for the most part characterizes the attitude of the modern adult toward social questions. Indifference or at least passivity typifies his reaction to current events. He feels controlled by the impersonal workings of fate in the area of political decisions, as well as in his business and social life. He feels helpless in the face of social, political, and economic developments, and frequently fails to act responsibly because of this dominant attitude. He is a spectator of the public scene, feeling unable to influence in any significant way the course of events that determine so many aspects of his life. He usually participates in political affairs vicariously or indirectly, through affiliations with special-interest groups such as commercial and professional associations, taxpayers' associations, and the like. He leaves it to these groups to defend his interests and speak for him. His political and economic concerns are generally confined to the effect of these factors on his own family, his neighborhood, and his job.

The Biblical and theological illiteracy of the average adult today constitutes an enormous challenge to educators in the church. What is particularly disheartening about this challenge to the educators is that most adults do not seem to regard it as a challenge. They do not see that such illiteracy matters very much, because their commonsense pragmatism centers on action rather than on ideas. Theirs is essentially a humanistic faith, a system of ethical ideals lacking organic relation to the Christian doctrines from which the ideals originally arose.

Perhaps an even greater challenge than the adult's unspeculative indifference to theology as such is

his alienation from the thought world of the Bible. The fact that he shows little interest in reading the Bible by himself does not mean that he is uninterested in its content. It merely means that he is unable to comprehend most of it. One example of the difficulty is that both the formal training and the experience of most of our laymen incline them to interpret all verbal information in a very literal sense. They have trouble grasping poetic and metaphorical meanings in the Bible. Subtle distinctions between fact and truth are often lost upon them. In this and in other ways the modern adult sees little direct relation between his thought patterns, his ways of reacting to things, and the concerns of the Bible. Not only individual Biblical words but also and especially whole concepts and metaphors are in urgent need of receiving relevant translations and interpretations if they are to be meaningfully communicated to the adult.

The aspects of American adult character enumerated above are external symptoms of a central human malady. This underlying malady, viewed theologically, is the alienation of the adult from other persons and from a sense of meaningfulness. The most basic need of the modern adult is help in overcoming his estrangement from other persons and from the sources of ultimate meaning in life. Because the adult's doubt and despair are interrelated with his condition of estrangement, and because the discovery or recovery of ultimate meaning takes place within the context of close personal relationships, educators in the church can help adults simultaneously in their search for meaning and in their quest for redemptive personal relationships through fostering the kind

of small learning groups in which the gospel and the experience of reconciliation reinforce each other.

—David J. Ernsberger

ADVENT Advent is the period beginning 4 Sundays before Christmas. The term “Advent,” which means “coming,” was once applied to Christmas only. Gradually it was expanded to describe the whole season of preparation, which includes 4 Sundays and ends on Christmas Eve. Since the 8th century, Advent has marked the beginning of the Christian year for the Western churches. It has become the prologue to the life of Christ that is portrayed throughout the rest of the year. We celebrate it through worship, prayer, Bible-reading, and hymn singing.

Advent is a particularly significant time for Christians in our day, when the sights and sounds of Christmas appear in the commercial world the day after Thanksgiving. Much is done to tempt us to celebrate Christmas ahead of time, thus robbing the season of its climax of joy. Pastors, parents, and teachers can do a great deal to help avoid this, for a proper keeping of Advent can make our admonitions to the young (“Christmas isn’t just presents”; “Christmas does not belong to Santa Claus”) more practical and full of deep meaning. Old and young enjoy anticipation. In Advent we anticipate the wonder of Christ’s First Coming upon the earth.

For a thousand years Christians celebrated Advent on a note of pure expectation and joy. By the 12th century the Advent of Christ was interpreted in more than one way: his coming in the past to Bethlehem; his present coming in the hearts of men through grace; and his future

coming as Judge at the end of time. It was then that the themes of penitence and resolution crept in, and to this day we think of the threefold coming. Advent continues to be a time of both joy and penance, with the mood of expectation dominant in all hearts.

The Biblical foundations of Advent provide the content for its interpretation in the church and the church school. God’s action is summed up in the famous Advent hymn, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” which is composed of ancient antiphons (choral responses). The Scriptures point to the need for meditation on the entire past and future of mankind before we welcome the Christ-child. We remember our creation, rebellion, and exile. We read of man’s awaiting God in the darkness and of how God delivers him. Always Advent shows the coming of God. Today Christendom continues to prepare the world for the ultimate Advent.

Bible readings, such as the Messianic prophecies, are suitable for private study, for teaching, and for preaching. The references should be given in the parish bulletin or church program so that young and old may think together, and anticipation grow in both generations. This expectation of God is also encouraged by play-readings, the giving of chancel plays, and “hymn sings” when Advent hymns are sung (not Christmas carols, which should be saved for the great time of the Nativity itself).

Pre-Christian peoples celebrated Yule with the burning of lights and fires, and we now use the lighted Advent wreath, brought to America by the Lutherans from eastern Germany. Happily, it has become a cherished custom in many homes,