# THE BIBLE AND EDUCATION: WAYS OF CONSTRUING THE RELATIONSHIP

*David Smith*

*Formerly a researcher at the Stapleford Centre, near Nottingham, David is now Assistant Professor of German at Calvin College, Michigan, USA. He recently co-authored with Barbara Carvill* The Gift of the Stranger: Faith, Hospitality and Foreign Language Learning *(Eerdmans 2000). He is co-editor of the* Journal of Education and Christian Belief.

## Introduction

It is a basic assumption of most Christian educational discussion that it is possible to relate the Bible fruitfully to education. Indeed, in the world of Christian schooling this assumption is presented frequently as a badge of honour, with phrases such as 'biblical Christian education' used to indicate the superior scriptural faithfulness of some particular set of proposals. The commendable zeal of such appeals is not always matched by clarity regarding how we are to relate the Scriptures to particular educational practices – in fact at times the devout conviction that there must be such a relationship seems to lead Christian educators to espy it in the most peculiar places. Some Australian teachers working through an MA module on the Bible and education have reported various examples to me. These include an instance of a policy requiring children to wear hats before playing outside in the sun being justified by biblical references to activities occurring 'in the cool of the day'. There are also instances of scriptural references to the fire of God being brought into a unit on temperature, and even of Jesus' reference to Peter as a rock being inserted into work on geology.[1] In the light of such curious attempts to relate biblical phrases (with little regard to their canonical meaning) to educational practices which are easily justified on more mundane grounds, it is hardly surprising that the idea that education should or even could be 'biblical' has not gone unchallenged.

A prominent and pertinent challenge was mounted by Paul Hirst in his 1971 article 'Christian Education: A Contradiction in Terms?'[2] Parts of Hirst's argument now seem quite dated. The rationalism which enabled him to claim that education must be based solely on the foundation of autonomous reason, and not on the more

[1] My thanks to Maryanne Frisken, Dean Spalding and Hilary Woodley for these examples.

[2] Paul H. Hirst, 'Christian education: A contradiction in terms?' *Faith and Thought*, 1971, Vol. 99, No. 1, 43–54.

contingent basis of tradition or belief, has more recently been repudiated to a significant degree by Hirst himself.[3] However, while this appeal to reason formed the basis of Hirst's claim that we *should* not appeal to the Bible as an educational authority, there was another strand to his argument. He also maintained that even if we wanted to relate the Bible to modern education, we would be facing an impossible task. He observed that we cannot simply transfer practices from the Bible to the present day – there seems, after all, to be very little in the Bible which is very directly concerned with present day educational structures and practices, and nothing at all about schooling. Should biblical Christian educators wear sandals and teach on mountainsides, or teach learners in groups of twelve? This difficulty, Hirst suggested, is what leads Christians to be so concerned with 'biblical principles', that is, more generalised and predominantly ethical statements which can bridge the gap between the Bible and present day education. Yet it is precisely this strategy which, according to Hirst, has little prospect of success.

The problem with general principles, as Hirst saw it, is that they tend to be compatible with a wide range of specific actions, depending on the contextual factors which we take into account. Does the call to love children as image-bearers mean that we should abandon examinations because of their social divisiveness, narrow focus and tendencies to induce stress, or that we should keep them because of the need to help students to make their way in a society that places high value on examination-based qualifications?[4] Such decisions seem to rest more on our reading of various aspects of present-day educational reality than on the 'biblical principle', which may really be playing the role of mythic re-description, rendering policies 'biblical' which were in fact arrived at on other grounds.[5] This raises the suspicion that appeals to the Bible may fulfil largely rhetorical roles, a suspicion voiced in more sweeping terms by Alasdair MacIntyre in the year preceding Hirst's article. MacIntyre argued that:

> *Injunctions to repent, to be responsible, even to be generous, do not actually tell us what to do ... Christians behave like everyone else but use a different vocabulary in characterising their behaviour, and so conceal their lack of distinctiveness ... All those in our society who self-consciously embrace beliefs which appear to confer importance and righteousness upon the*

[3] Paul H. Hirst, 'Education, Knowledge and Practices' in Robin Barrow & Patricia White (Eds.), *Beyond Liberal Education: Essays in Honour of Paul H. Hirst*, (London: Routledge, 1993) 184–99.

[4] The former position was taken by Jay Adams in his *Back to the Blackboard: Design for a Biblical Christian School*, (Philipsberg, NJ.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1982); the latter can be elicited fairly easily by putting the issue to most Christian teachers.

[5] *Cf.* John Hedley Brooke, 'Religious Belief and the Natural Sciences: Mapping the historical landscape' In Jitse M. van der Meer (Ed.), *Facets of Faith and Science, Vol. 1: Historiography and modes of interaction*, (Lanham: University Press of America/The Pascal Centre for Advanced Studies in Faith and Science, 1996) 1–26.

> *holder become involved in the same strategies. The fact that their beliefs make so little difference either to them or to others leads to the same concern with being right-minded rather than effective.*[6]

Hirst's argument runs parallel to MacIntyre's. To be sure, the Bible might spark off ideas – just as a walk through the forest might do the same – but this is only an accidental relationship.[7] What Hirst did not think viable was that attending to the Bible could lead more systematically to a distinctive shaping of educational practice. He looked for, and failed to see, a way in which the Bible might be shown to lead to specific educational consequences.

While I consider even this side of Hirst's argument (and MacIntyre's accusation) to be quite limited, I think that it still cuts close enough to some Christian practice to cause us to wince. It reminds us that placing 'biblical' and 'education' in the same sentence does little to establish any substantial relationship between the two terms. In the remainder of this paper I will present a brief overview of a research project being carried out at the Stapleford Centre in Nottingham. This project is concerned with the question raised by Hirst, that of how the Bible can be fruitfully related to education. The work is still in progress, but has thus far identified six emphases in accounts of the relationship of the Bible to education which can be found in Christian educational literature. In what follows, I will not have space for a lengthy discussion of any of the six, but will briefly characterise each one and indicate some of the questions which it raises before concluding with some reflections on their inter-relationship. They are not intended to be seen as mutually exclusive approaches – in practice a number are likely to be simultaneously operative. Rather, throughout the discussion they should be seen as various facets of a complex whole.

## The Bible as educational content

I will begin with two ways of understanding the relationship which are quite familiar, though not for that reason without their complexities.

First, an obvious way in which the Bible comes into relationship with education is when it becomes an object of study. In ways ranging from programmes of theological education through Bible classes to study of scriptural themes in English literature, the Bible regularly shows up as part of the curriculum in various educational settings. In certain curriculum materials designed for Christian school settings, biblical texts can even be found as a regular accompaniment to worksheets dealing with, say, mathematics or grammar.

While this is one of the most familiar ways in which the Bible

[6] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1971) 24.

[7] Paul H. Hirst, 'Religious Beliefs and Educational Principles' *Learning for Living*, 1976, Vol. 15, 155–57.

impinges upon education, it leads to a restatement rather than a resolution of the question before us. The juxtaposition of Bible texts with other material does not necessarily imply an educational process which has been made in any significant sense 'biblical'. Although the presence of biblical texts as part of the curriculum does signal that some kind of value is placed on those texts, and the educational results may well be very valuable, the simple insertion of such texts into teaching materials is quite compatible with a doctrine of the autonomy of education in relation to the Bible. Insects are also a common element of educational content, and I suppose that the committed entomologist could design materials liberally sprinkled with pictures of our six-legged friends, but it hardly follows that insects have authoritatively shaped education.

In fact, at a more sophisticated level, the argument has been advanced that when the Bible becomes part of the content of education, then it passes into the jurisdiction of the educator and the learner. It is claimed that the *educational* use of a biblical text is not the same as the use of that text in the church context, and that the hermeneutic of the believing community should not hold sway in the classroom where the central concern should be what the learner can gain from the text to further his or her learning. If a biblical text fires a learner's imagination and leads to a piece of creative writing which would be regarded as entirely heretical by the believing community, this could nevertheless, on this view, represent a highly successful educational outcome.[8] In this way also, then, the presence of the Bible as educational content is quite compatible with a rejection of the idea that the Bible should shape educational processes.[9] I consider such a rejection to be a mistake, but anyone who is uncomfortable with it is still left not only with the task of defining the relationship between educational and devotional uses of the Bible, but also with the question of what a *biblical* use of the Bible as educational content would look like. If we wish to draw those biblical texts used in educational contexts into a further meaningful relationship with the rest of our educational content, then from this angle too we are faced with the task of establishing that relationship. In both of these ways, we arrive in effect at a restatement of the original question.

## 'Incarnational' emphases

A second approach focuses on the life and character of the educator or the educating community as mediating between the Bible and the

[8] See *e.g.* Trevor Cooling, 'Education is the Point of RE – not religion? Theological reflections on the SCAA model syllabuses' in Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis (Eds.), *Christian Theology and Religious Education*, (London: SPCK, 1996) 165-83; Michael Grimmitt, *Religious Education and Human Development: The Relationship between studying religions and personal, social and moral education*, (Great Wakering: McCrimmons, 1987).

[9] For examples of the use of the Bible in various areas of modern culture in ways which have little regard to any authoritatively 'biblical' framework, see David J.A. Clines, *The Bible and the Modern World*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

educational context. The focus here is not so much on a distinctive *process* of applying the Bible as on a particular idea of the scope of such applications, one which focuses on personal transformation. Put simply, parents, teachers and learners read the Bible, and hear it preached and are thereby changed in ways which are relevant to the relationships and processes of the educational setting. One version of this emphasis is common in popular evangelical writing on education, which emphasises that qualities such as patience, humility and love may be fostered specifically through meditation on Scripture and will in turn shape the character of educational exchanges.[10] The strengths of such an emphasis should be clear, though its potential defects are also reasonably straightforward to identify. It has become commonplace to berate forms of pietism which reduce response to the gospel to matters of individual character, forms which can cheerfully co-exist with obliviousness with regard to ideological influences on educational content or method. Here again there may be little intrinsic resistance to a view of educational theories and practices as autonomous in relation to Scripture.[11]

Such criticisms may often be justified, although anyone concerned for children's well-being will surely regard them as a call for something more, rather than a rejection of the importance of the educator's character qualities. One way of deepening this approach is to inquire into the relationship between particular qualities of character and the structuring of educational processes. Mark Schwehn has argued for a connection between spiritual virtues such as justice and humility and the nature of learning, pointing out that lack of humility, for instance, can block our ability to learn from a demanding text. Of interest here is his comment that 'to teach these virtues means first to exemplify them, second to order life in the classroom ... in such a way that their exercise is seen and felt as an essential aspect of inquiry'.[12] This extension of focus beyond exemplification to the structuring of learning moves a virtues-oriented approach beyond the kind of ethical add-on criticised above. Inasmuch as there is an attempt to relate the ethical teachings of the Bible to an understanding of learning processes, we can also see here continuity between an incarnational emphasis and more belief-oriented approaches discussed in the next section.

Schwehn also emphasises that these virtues grow out of particular communal contexts, highlighting the fact that an incarnational way of relating the Bible to education need not be thought of in individualistic terms. The basic idea here is that the focus of attention is not upon working out the connections between particular

[10] *E.g.* Philip May, *Confidence in the Classroom: Realistic Encouragement for Teachers*, (Leicester: IVP, 1988).

[11] *Cf.* Ken Badley, 'Two 'Cop-outs' in Faith-learning Integration: Incarnational Integration and Worldviewish Integration' *Spectrum*, 1996, Vol. 28, No. 2, 105–118.

[12] Mark Schwehn, *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 60.

biblical texts and doctrines and educational practices, but rather upon a particular quality of life which is fostered by interaction with the Scriptures and which impacts the practice of education. This may be extended beyond an emphasis on the virtues of an individual to include the basic ethos of a community.[13]

## What the Bible teaches about the world

A third approach looks for relationships between what the Bible teaches about the world and educational ideas and theories. I am including under this heading any approach which attempts to argue along the lines of 'the Bible says or teaches *X* and as a consequence we should think or do *Y* in the area of education', where 'as a consequence' can be construed in a variety of ways.

One way of construing this relationship is in straightforward linear fashion, where the consequence follows deductively from the biblical premise. This is apparently the construal assumed by Hirst in his criticisms. R.T. Allen, seeking to counter Hirst's pessimistic conclusion, offered in a more recent article an expanded set of possibilities, pointing out that requirement is not the only possible relationship between biblical statements and educational conclusions.[14] Other possibilities suggested by Allen are debarment, commendation (whereby it is required that some of a set of practices be adopted but it is left to choice which ones) and permission (where practices are neither debarred nor required but allowed). He offers various examples, including, for instance, the suggestion that the Bible's anthropology affirms the body and so we should make provision for physical education, with its precise form left to choice.[15]

Another approach is to focus not so much on the kinds of logical relationship which might hold between individual biblical or biblically derived statements and educational conclusions, as on patterns of belief and practice. The many more cognitively oriented discussions of a biblical worldview seem to suggest a particular patterning of belief which confronts education and other practices more as a whole. It is also possible to construe the relationship between beliefs and consequences in less formal and more creative terms – this I take to be a significant feature of Wolterstorff's theory of control beliefs, in which the theories which we devise do

[13] Some uses of the term 'worldview' which emphasise communal ways of life rather than cognitive networks of beliefs overlap with the emphasis outlined here, while others see 'worldview' more as a collection of beliefs or doctrines and relate to the following section. It should be noted that terms such as 'worldview' which have been prominent in recent discussions of faith-learning integration, are often used in ways which, since they attempt to describe the whole process, embrace more than one of the facets discussed here. This is part of the reason why the various emphases should be understood as facets of a complex relationship rather than alternative paths to follow.

[14] R.T. Allen, 'Christian thinking about education', *Spectrum*, 1993, Vol. 25, No. 1, 17–24.

[15] Allen, 'Christian Thinking', 21.

not follow rigidly from our control beliefs but should 'comport well' with them.[16]

It will be evident from even this partial listing of varying construals of how biblically derived beliefs are to be related to educational conclusions that there is a great deal here to discuss, but space will only allow a few brief comments. First, both Hirstian proponents of educational autonomy and those Christians who think in terms of discovering *the* biblical teaching method, despite their mutual opposition, share the assumption that a defensible account of the relationship of the Bible to education would involve tracing lines of deduction from individual biblical statements to individual educational conclusions and practices, such that the educational conclusion follows necessarily from the biblical premise. Much of the response to Hirst has tended to argue that this is an unnecessarily narrow assumption.[17] As well as missing the wider range of relationships outlined by Allen, it also fails to take into account the effects of rearrangement. By this I mean the fact that the same educational facts and techniques can be arranged differently in the light of different convictions, and can thereby come to convey quite different messages.[18] This is linked to the point that acting in the light of biblical claims involves a great deal of responsible creativity, and neither the variability of the results nor our inability to demonstrate in many cases that only one result was conceivable show that the biblical premise did not play a shaping role in the process.

## Scripture and education as narratives

One particular form of patterning to which education is subject is narrative. The widespread resurgence of narrative as a topic of discussion in a variety of fields has impacted both general educational discussion and discussions of Christian education in particular. Understanding education as the enactment and provision of a particular narrative about the world shifts attention away from individual pieces of information or elements of the curriculum and towards their narrative pattern. Meanwhile, similar developments have been underway in theology. N.T. Wright succinctly expresses the significance of narrative context for interpretation, and his point

[16] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984, 2nd ed.); 'On Christian learning' in Paul A. Marshall, Sander Griffioen, and Richard J. Mouw (Eds.), *Stained glass: Worldviews and Social Science*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989) 56–80; 'Can scholarship and Christian conviction mix? A new look at the integration of knowledge' *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*, 1999, Vol. 3, No. 1, 33–49.

[17] *E.g.* Elmer J. Thiessen, 'A Defence of a Distinctively Christian Curriculum' in Leslie J. Francis and Adrian Thatcher (Eds.), *Christian Perspectives for Education*, (Leominster: Gracewing, 1990) 83–92.

[18] See further David Smith, 'Spirituality and teaching methods: uneasy bedfellows?' in Ron Best (Ed.), *Education for Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development*, (London: Continuum, 2000) 52–67.

would seem to apply just as well to interpretation of a school curriculum:

> *'It's going to rain.' This is a fairly clear statement, but its meaning varies with the context. The context supplies an implicit narrative, and the force of the statement depends on the role that it plays within those different potential narratives. If we are about to have a picnic, the statement forms part of an implicit story which is about to become a minor tragedy instead of (as we had hoped) a minor comedy. If we are in East Africa, fearing another drought and consequent crop failure, the statement forms part of an implicit story in which imminent tragedy will give way to jubilation. If I told you three days ago that it would rain today, and you disbelieved me, the statement forms part of an implicit story in which my ability as a meteorologist is about to be vindicated, and your scepticism proves groundless. If we are Elijah and his servant on Mount Carmel, the sentence invokes a whole theological story: YHWH is the true god, and Elijah is his prophet. In each case, the single statement demands to be 'heard' within the context of a full implicit plot, a complete implicit narrative.*[19]

The stories told by curriculum materials are, moreover, contentious. In his *Teaching as Storytelling*, discussing a unit of work on the local community, Kieran Egan sketches a possible approach designed to enable children to see the prosaic detail of everyday life in their community as 'one of the greatest achievements of human ingenuity and planning'.[20] Egan suggests as a possible opening to the unit an imagined scenario in which we wake up to find that our town has been cut off from the outside world by a huge steel wall. This is designed to provoke discussion of how we would survive without all of the basic services which would be lost to us in such a situation. The unit could move on to look at such things as threats to our food supply and the ways in which we defend it (*e.g.* pesticides), or how we would manage if our machines broke down and there was no-one with the skill necessary to fix them. The aim is to make the familiar strange, so that learners no longer see (*e.g.*) a supermarket as just part of the environment, but as 'a small miracle'.[21]

Having sketched this possible approach, Egan then points out that 'so far, it is clear that we are seeing the community as positively valuable without any qualifications. We could organise the content quite differently to give quite a different view'.[22] Thus, instead of telling the heroic story of the community's survival against the odds, we could picture the community as a small creature settled by a river:

> *As the years went by it grew by drinking the pure water and dirtying it as it passed through, and by eating away at the*

[19] N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (London: SPCK, 1996) 198.
[20] Kieran Egan, *Teaching as Storytelling*, (London: Routledge, 1988) 44.
[21] Egan, Teaching as Storytelling, 50.
[22] Egan, Teaching as Storytelling, 50.

> *surrounding land. It became bigger and fatter and more monstrous, and grew faster and faster. It sent tentacles (roads) deep into the countryside to get food from more and more distant places to satisfy its ever-growing appetite, destroying the natural woods and meadows. Some tentacles ripped up the land to get minerals and fuels which it ate in its factories, dirtying further the land, air and water.*[23]

Such educational narratives help to shape our sense of who we are and what is going on in our world. Given that the Bible also offers a narrative which bids to shape our identity, exploration of the relationships between biblical narrative and narrative theology on the one hand and implicit or explicit curricular narratives on the other seems to be invited, and some Christian educators have undertaken work along these lines.[24] Narrative, they suggest, engages more of our selfhood than merely the cognitive, and this makes it a promising vehicle for Christian education.

This approach raises a number of interesting questions: how do we obey a narrative? (As Wright puts it: 'It is one thing to go to your commanding officer first thing in the morning and have a string of commands barked at you. But what would you do if, instead, he began "Once upon a time?"'[25] How do we address the concern that narratives all too often 'dream a world in accordance with their own wishes or resentments'?[26] How can one narrative critique or suggest another – how do we get from the narrative which runs through the pages of the Bible to the narrative implied in a unit of work on late nineteenth century England or the invention of space travel? Does a narrative approach at this point hand back to us the question which it sought to answer, that of how we get from the Bible to contemporary education? These are the kinds of question which a narrative approach needs to answer.

## Metaphor in Scripture and education

Fifthly, teaching as storytelling is, of course, a metaphor. The role of metaphor in our theorising and acting in general, and in education in particular has been widely discussed in recent years.[27] Here I will

[23] Egan, Teaching as Storytelling, 51.

[24] See John Bolt, *The Christian Story and the Christian School*, (Grand Rapids: Christian Schools International, 1993); Harry Fernhout, 'Christian schooling: Telling a worldview story' in Ian Lambert and Suzanne Mitchell (Eds.), *The Crumbling Walls of Certainty: Towards a Christian Critique of Postmodernity and Education*, (Sydney: CSAC, 1997) 75-98.

[25] N.T. Wright, 'How can the Bible be authoritative?' *Vox Evangelica*, 1991, Vol. 21, 7-32, 10.

[26] Amos N. Wilder, 'Story and Story-World' *Interpretation*, 1983, Vol. 37, 353-64, 364.

[27] For general discussion see *e.g.*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Andrew Ortony, (Ed.), *Metaphor and Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 1993); Sheldon Sacks, (Ed.), *On Metaphor*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). For educational discussions ▶

restrict myself to three brief observations concerning the importance of this for the present topic.

First, in recent accounts metaphor has shifted from its empiricist niche as a decorative element of poetic language to a much more substantial role in shaping our living. To take Lakoff and Johnson's well-known example, viewing argument as warfare (winning, losing, defending, destroying or shooting down arguments) yields different perspectives and behavioural emphases from a view of argument as dance (co-operation, turn-taking, rhythm, *etc.*). Our metaphors are closely inter-related with our practices.

Second, this shift has impacted discussions in the field of education, where particularly fruitful metaphors can also generate particular emphases in theory and practice. Minds as computers, learners as plants or buckets, teachers as coaches, schools as market-places or factories – these and many more metaphors inhabit educational discussion. Once education is viewed as a market-place, then viewing parents and children as consumers, the curriculum as a product which we deliver, and factory-like quality control as a central emphasis follow all too naturally. The process here is not a matter of working from premises to conclusions, of working out the consequences of consciously formulated beliefs. It is rather a more imaginative elaboration of parallels between two complexes of meaning, an elaboration which can draw us unsuspectingly into particular ways of seeing and being.

Third, the Bible is rich in metaphorical language. Given these recent perceptions of a more pervasive and substantial role for metaphor in shaping our praxis, there would seem to be a case for asking whether biblical metaphors might shape education precisely as metaphors, rather than as masked propositions from which inferences can be made. Talk of pastoral care in schools seems to represent a residual biblical metaphor in educational discourse, that of the teacher as shepherd. Talk of the school as a garden has not been the sole preserve of the Romantic tradition deriving from Rousseau – Comenius' use of the same metaphor can be plausibly connected with Genesis 1–3, and focuses on our responsibility for cultivating the garden rather than leaving it to grow 'naturally'.[25] Parker Palmer's proposal that the dominant western notion of 'knowing as power' should be replaced by an understanding of 'knowing as loving' can be helpfully read as functioning as an alternative root metaphor for our educational thinking, one which

see *e.g.* Allan K. Beavis and A. Ross Thomas, 'Metaphors as Storehouses of Expectation: Stabilising the Structures of Organisational Life in Independent Schools' *Educational Management and Administration*, 1996, Vol. 24, No. 1, 93–106; H. Munby, 'Metaphor in the Thinking of Teachers: An Exploratory Study' *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 1986, Vol. 18, No. 2, 197–209; William Taylor, (Ed.), *Metaphors of Education*, (London: Heinemann, 1984).

[25] See M. W. Keatinge, *The Great Didactic of John Amos Comenius*, (New York: Russell and Russell, 2nd ed., 1967).

must be delimited by a biblical conception of love if it is to reflect Palmer's intent.

Naturally this approach raises a host of questions: what is meant by a 'biblical metaphor'? One found in the Bible or one merely consistent with the Bible or something else? Given the open-ended polyvalence of metaphor, how does this approach relate to notions of biblical authority? In what ways might biblical metaphors conceal as well as reveal when explored in relation to learning? What happens if we go beyond individual metaphors and ask how the structure of complexes of biblical metaphors might map onto educational metaphor? These and other questions are raised if we focus our attention on metaphor.

## The Role of the canon

Sixthly, another approach to relating the Bible to education draws upon the results of canonical criticism as developed by biblical scholars such as James Sanders and Brevard Childs. This not entirely uniform movement sought to redress the imbalances of historical criticism by refocusing on the canonical text in its final form or on the process by which the canonical text was established. This might, for instance, involve asking why Matthew is placed first of the four Gospels in the canon rather than, say, arguing the chronological priority of Mark, let alone a reconstructed Q.

This emphasis on canonical shape and process provides further ways of attending to the relationship of the Bible to education. Looking at canonical process involves looking at what the community found worthy of being passed on to succeeding generations and at how they went about doing so, both basic educational questions. In this way the very process of the formation of Scripture comes into focus as an educational issue. A consideration of canonical shape may seem of less immediate educational relevance, but its implications have been developed in relation to education by writers such as Brueggemann and Spina.[29] The argument which they present, based on the assumption that canonical shape tells us much about 'the community's self-understanding and its intent for the coming generations',[30] can be summarised briefly but elaborated quite extensively.

Both focus on the basic divisions of the OT, its inclusion of Torah, Prophets and Writings.[31] Each kind of writing is explored for its basic pedagogical mode. Thus, to give an outrageously brief summary, Torah offers instruction in what is authoritatively known, in the

[29] Walter Brueggemann, *The Creative Word: Canon as a Model for Biblical Education*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982; Frank Anthony Spina, 'Revelation, Reformation, Re-creation: Canon and the theological foundation of the Christian university' *Christian Scholar's Review*, 1989, Vol. 18, No. 4, 315-32.

[30] Brueggemann, *The Creative Word*, 3.

[31] Brueggemann goes on to consider Psalms as a separate category.

narratives which ground the community's identity. The Prophets, while grounded in and constantly appealing to Torah, bring a disruptive poetic challenge to see and hear anew, to embrace radical reformation. The Writings are more exploratory and ambiguous – instead of 'Thus says the Lord' we have 'consider the ant' – we are invited to find meaning in experience and in creation and to embrace the mystery at the heart of both.

Thus far we might in the main be engaged in the kinds of activities to which our other five facets might point – examining biblical statements, narratives and metaphors and exploring their educational implications. Where the canonical model makes a more distinctive contribution is in its appeal to overall canonical shape, yielding the suggestion that a truly biblical education will maintain the balance or tension between Torah, Prophets and Writings, or between what we might fairly loosely think of as traditional, critical and experiential approaches. This approach gives us a further question to ask ourselves even after we have engaged in the kinds of exploration described so far – assuming that we have made some genuine connections using biblical teaching, narrative or metaphor, will we still find that we are imbalanced if we fail to take the wider shape of the canon into account?

Other, more critical questions seem to be invited by this approach. If the investigation of canonical process is applied to contemporary education, do we inevitably fall back into the difficulty raised at the outset of applying features of the particular culture of Bible times to our own educational settings? What are we to do with the NT? Interestingly so far, the canonical approach has only been explored to any great extent in relation to education using OT categories. This raises the obvious question of whether the NT adds anything. How does the big picture offered by these canonical accounts relate to that offered by talk of the Bible's overall story or by talk of a biblical worldview? There has also been a marked clustering of interest around the wisdom literature in recent publications, which invites the kind of question of balance addressed above.

## General questions

So far I have sketched all too briefly six emphases which each offer particular ways of exploring the relationship of the Bible to education. These concerned themselves with the Bible as a part of the content of education, with the character of the teacher as mediating between the Bible and education, with exploration of the implications of biblically derived beliefs about the world, with the role of contentious narratives in teaching, with the capacity of metaphor to reframe praxis, and with the wider framework suggested by canonical considerations. Having outlined each, I will conclude with some general comments.

Such a survey necessarily invites further questions. Are the categories meaningfully distinct? Are they all necessary? Are there enough of them?

Concerning the first point, I would wish to emphasise that the above account is more a survey than a systematisation. Some of the facets surveyed differ along different lines. Many examples of an incarnational emphasis, for instance, are characterised by a particular idea of the *scope* of the Bible's application (*i.e.* personal character transformation rather than educational theories or structures), while the interest of metaphor lies in the *processes* involved. This broad survey does, however, suggest that there are a number of distinct processes which can form part of the Bible's interaction with education. Working out the implications of a particular claim is not the same process as seeking to read the world in terms of a particular narrative or see some practice through the lens of a certain metaphor. Making inferences from particular statements which the Bible makes differs from examining the overall canonical shape within which such statements find their place.

It also seems to me that these various emphases are not happily reducible to one or two. Each seems to me to be potentially fruitful in distinct ways. In this connection it is interesting to note that it is possible to find arguments for the basicality of several if not all of them. The view that everything that's very important boils down to propositional knowledge is familiar not least because of the vigour with which it has been attacked from various quarters. In its place, narrative and metaphor have both been put forward as ultimate categories to which virtually every aspect of our thinking can be reduced. That all of this is a waste of time without a life of personal holiness is a familiar evangelical complaint, while the canonical approach offers a framework which bids to order the results of all of the other approaches.

At the same time, it is important to note that the various facets outlined here are deeply intertwined. Teaching as storytelling is a metaphor, offered by Egan on the basis of assertions about how children learn. It has become commonplace to argue that literal, factual discourse draws upon metaphor and that its individual statements draw their meaning from their place in wider narratives, yet it can also be pointed out that a metaphor such as 'knowing is loving' can only be given a specifically biblical sense through further doctrinal elaboration of what is meant by loving, and that relating two narratives to one another is likely to involve considering what assertions about the world can be inferred from them. Again, I am not sure that questions of priority are the most important or fruitful questions. For practical purposes what is most pertinent is to see the approaches surveyed as both partial and interdependent – pursuing any one of them in isolation is likely to lead to distortion of one kind or another. What each offers is perhaps best seen as a particular way of attending to the Scriptures which brings some particular aspect of them into focus while continuing to draw tacitly upon the others. Exploring them together, with an eye both to their harmonies and to their mutual critique, may help us get a little closer to a fully rounded application of the Bible to education.

The third question was whether there are enough of them. Here I remain open to suggestions. Are there other distinct ways of relating

the Bible to education which do not boil down to some combination of the ways surveyed above? Thus far, while it is clear that some of the categories offered here are open to various kinds of subdivision and greater systematisation, they seem to me to account in broad terms for the range of approaches to applying the Bible to education which can be found in Christian educational literature.

Finally, I would like to make a few comments concerning the value of getting clearer about the range of possibilities which are in play when people make claims to be offering a 'biblical' approach to education. There seem to me to be some important benefits.

First, any Christian educator discomfited by the criticisms of the very idea of such a relationship mentioned at the outset, or struggling to identify the relevance of the Bible to their work should be encouraged by the existence of a substantial range of avenues for exploration – applying the Bible to education begins to seem more like exploring a forest than walking a tightrope. Once it is accepted that moving by logical deduction from individual biblical presuppositions to individual educational conclusions is not the only or even always the most fruitful approach, the possibilities begin to seem very rich. Parallel developments in related disciplines offer obvious starting points for investigation – what, for instance, do metaphorical or narrative theology have to say to educational discussions of metaphor and narrative? Having worked with the issues surveyed here with Christian teachers I can report that few are consciously aware of more than a couple of the facets surveyed here, and most are encouraged and invigorated by the expanded sense of possibility which comes with discovering further options.

Second, becoming clearer about the various processes which can underlie educational appeals to Scripture might help to improve communication not only in terms of articulating further what we mean by the loaded term 'biblical', but also in terms of avoiding mutual accusations of inadequate respect for Scripture which may be fuelled in part by tacit reliance on different processes when applying Scripture.

Third, and finally, if we believe the Bible's contribution to education to be life-giving, then surely the more ways we can identify of exploring its relevance the better.