

ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A RESOURCE: PHILOSOPHY AND ADULT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE
LOCAL CHURCH

A PROJECT THESIS SUBMITTED TO
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To my wife, mentors, and friends who have helped me on this journey

Heresy of method may be as deadly as heresy of message.

A. W. Tozer

APPROVAL PAGE

Accepted by the faculty and the final demonstration examining committee of Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, Ohio, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to create a resource that develops a Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. The resource written for this project entitled *Meeting People Where They Are At and Giving Them What They Need: A Christian Philosophy for Adult Education in the Local Church* explores the relationship between philosophy and adult Christian education in the local church.

The resource was evaluated by ten expert readers using qualitative and quantitative questions. The results show that the resource fulfilled the project goals.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTIONS AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

The role of educational philosophy in adult Christian education has been a contentious topic amongst Christian educators in the modern era since educational psychology and educational philosophy began to influence the church. There appear to be two sides of the debate on this topic. On one side is an attitude that tentatively adopts and/or modifies some of the theories and methods of various secular educational philosophies. The other side of the argument rejects the philosophy, theory, and praxis of secular science and seeks to discover God's way of educating in Scripture.

The resource written for this project, entitled *Meeting People Where They Are At and Giving Them What They Need: A Christian Philosophy for Adult Education in the Local Church*, takes up a stance between the two sides of this debate. Its goal was to discover God's philosophy for how to educate adults in the context of adult Christian education in the local church while recognizing that scientific data is also God's truth, and must be viewed through a Christian lens. Using information from both the Bible and scientific data is both beneficial and necessary if one is to create a Christian philosophy for adult Christian education in the local church. What makes this resource different from many other books on this topic is that it attempts to develop its own philosophy of adult Christian education rather than borrowing philosophies from secular theories or avoiding the question altogether by presenting the issues and requiring readers to decide their own paths.

The purpose of this project was to create a resource that developed a Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. The research question was: how does Christian philosophy inform the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church?

Overview

This project created a resource that serves three major functions. It educates the reader in basic philosophical principles as they relate to adult educational ministries. The resource explains in detail what the philosophical school of pragmatism is and how it is influencing the ways the church's educational praxis is carried out. This includes a criticism of pragmatism and its methods. Lastly, the resource suggests a new philosophical foundation by which adult Christian education can be conducted in the church. This philosophical foundation is informed by both Scripture and educational psychology viewed through a Christian lens.

This project is important because I believe there are many adult Christian education pastors and directors in the United States of America who perform their ministry praxis employing the philosophical foundations of pragmatism. I also believe that in most cases they are unaware of this foundation and what it teaches. Any praxis that is based on philosophical beliefs that do not conform to Christian beliefs is destined to have negative repercussions. In my view, informed by my training and experience, many of the church's problems in our current cultural milieu stem from the church's embrace of pragmatism, whether or not it is intentional.

Foundation

While one might argue that the foundations of theology, history, biblical interpretation, and personal experience are predicated on a philosophical foundation, it is also true that these areas are cyclically informing and reforming a Christian philosophical world view. These areas are constantly at play with each other as truth gained in one area may affect change in what we view to be true in another. This is a dance that must be performed wisely or it can quickly devolve into uninformed chaos that leads to a confused philosophical outlook on life, beliefs, and praxis. The following foundational section will briefly look at how the four areas mentioned above helped to inform the resource created for this project.

Personal Foundation

Adult educational ministry has been an area of academic interest, a spiritual calling, and an area of personal concern throughout my adult life. I became interested in this field while an undergraduate student at Malone University majoring in Bible and theology. Through my education at Malone, it seemed to me that I was learning about Christianity and the Bible for the first time, at least in what I perceived to be a legitimate and serious way. When I initially began to learn, I was amazed with all of the ideas my professors presented and with the fascinating new world I found in the Bible as studied with basic hermeneutical skills. Eventually, this amazement began to turn into disappointment.

The more I learned at school, the more I noticed that my experiences at church did not correspond with how it seemed to me that biblical studies and theology should be done. Often, I would listen to a sermon or attend a Bible study at church and hear concepts that I knew were simply not biblical. I began to sense that there was something wrong with adult Christian education in the church, or at least in my particular church. It did not take me long to decide to go somewhere else where I might learn about God in the same way that I was learning about God in college. Unfortunately, the teaching appeared to be similar at every other church I attended for many years. I wondered if the pastors of these churches were either ill-informed, or if they were simply not putting into practice what they had learned in their schooling, thus allowing their congregation to live in ignorance. This was all highly disturbing to me and I began to sense a calling to adult educational ministries in a church setting because I wanted to bring what I was learning in college to the church environment. During my senior year at Malone University, I took a class which allowed me to do a research project that involved interviewing many adult Christian education pastors and directors in local churches in my area. One of the questions I asked was for them to select a number on a scale of 1-10 on how skilled the people in their churches were at reading the Bible. Every one of them answered with a "one" or a "zero," and zero was not an option. This provided me with two immediate conclusions: the first was that the church lacked basic skills, and second, that the adult education pastors were aware of the problem. I would then ask a follow up question about what they were doing to address that

situation. All of them said that they were not doing anything about the issue. When I asked them why, all but two of them said they did not know; however, the two that did acknowledge it answered with virtually identical responses. They said they did not teach hermeneutical principles because they did not think the people in their congregation would “find it relevant.” This seemed a rather strange response to me. At the time I could not understand why any person in the Protestant tradition, which bases its beliefs primarily on Scripture, would think that learning how to read the Bible well is not “relevant.”

This memory remained with me throughout the years but I did not fully come to understand its philosophical underpinnings until I learned about pragmatic philosophy while studying in a Ph.D. program at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. At the time, the seminary was concerned about how the American philosophical school of pragmatism was influencing how Christian education was done in the church. The primary tenet of pragmatism is that truth is determined by whether or not something is useful and works when put into practice. If it is useful and works, then it is considered true and of value. When pragmatism is applied to educational methods there is a focus on what is useful, and therefore relevant to the learners. In this context I define relevancy as “of immediate use.” In the pragmatic educational system it is the learner, not the teacher or institution, who determines what is useful and relevant.

While these are just two components of pragmatic education, they are the two key factors for understanding the philosophy behind the approach of the two pastors who said they did not think their congregation would find learning how to

read the Bible relevant. They were allowing what they thought their congregation would desire to learn to determine their curriculum choices, and that curriculum did not include topics their congregation would not find useful, one of which was learning to become better Bible readers. The literature review discusses this matter with the verbiage of “felt needs” and “real needs.” Felt needs are the needs which learners have in their own minds, and they express a desire to learn about so they can meet those needs. Real needs are the actual needs of the learner which are sometimes recognized by the learner and sometimes not. Part of the adult educator's job is to help perceive the real needs of the learners and help them to realize these real needs so they can be addressed. This is the verbiage that will be used around this topic for the remainder of this dissertation.

It seems to me that pastors have the responsibility to know what their congregations' real needs are and address them accordingly. While the felt needs of our congregations regarding their curriculums can and should inform us, they cannot be the sole arbiters of the curriculum choices. We cannot allow pragmatism to be the philosophical foundation for how the church educates. This is because pragmatism is not true; it is not compatible with Christianity. Truth is not determined by what is useful, because pragmatism does not have a mechanism for determining whether or not something is actually, or objectively, useful and true. Rather than employing philosophies that keep people from learning how to read the Bible, the church needs to determine a foundational Christian philosophy upon which to build its educational methods and content. This observation has been the motivation of my academic and ministry interests

for many years now and I would argue is a result of the culmination of thoughtful consideration of my experiences in the church and academic institutions for the last twenty years.

Biblical Foundation

The biblical foundations section explored Galatians 3:1-5 in relation to Christian epistemology, observing the manner in which Paul is meeting the real needs of people. The second passage studied was I Thessalonians 4:13-18 in relation to the concept of meeting people's felt needs while at the same time meeting their real needs. The proposal stated that the dissertation would discuss Colossians 2:6-19, but after further reading in preparation for the resource and for the literature review it was determined that I Thessalonians 4:13-18 was more suitable because of the prominence of the discussion of real needs and felt needs in the contemporary literature.

The Bible is foundational for the project and supports two important concepts for the development of philosophy for adult Christian education in the local church. The first is that the Bible provides a model for educators to address both the felt and real needs of learners. The second is that the Bible is a resource from which we can draw both direct and indirect philosophical conclusions to build a Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church.

Nijay Gupta points out that one of Paul's reasons for writing 1 Thessalonians was to address the matter of what happens to Christians after they die (Gupta 2016, 14). Through analyzing this pericope we will observe what Paul is doing practically as he performs the role of a teacher and pastor for the

Thessalonian church. In this case, Paul is meeting both their real needs and their felt needs by addressing the topic of what happens to Christians who die before the Parousia of Christ. When closely analyzed we observe a specific pattern that Paul uses to address these needs that can be put into practice by adult Christian educators in their philosophical foundations.

The letter to the Galatians was written for reasons other than those that led the Apostle to compose 1 Thessalonians. In this case Paul is combatting the messages of false teachers that are affecting the churches in the province of Galatia. A group of Jewish followers of Jesus had come to the province of Galatia with the message that the Galatian believers had to become Jewish to be fully Christian. This meant they had to be circumcised and follow the Jewish law (Dunn 2011, 11). Paul's argument against the opponents provides us with an opportunity to learn something about the role of experience in Christian epistemology.

Theological Foundation

The theological foundation section discusses three themes that support the project: the Creator God, General and Special Revelation, and Jesus as the Master Teacher. The proposal stated that the dissertation would address the topics of creation out of nothing, objective truth, general revelation, and sanctification. After further reading in preparation for the resource and for the literature review, it was determined in consultation with my advisor that the theological topics Creator God, General and Special Revelation, and Jesus as the Master Teacher were more suitable.

Christians have long believed that God is the creator of the universe. In analyzing this belief, Alister McGrath points out three aspects that will be discussed for developing a philosophy of adult Christian education in the local church: God having authority over all creation, creation being good and yet fallen, and human beings created in God's image with a role to play within creation (McGrath 1997, 203-206). The first, God as creator of the universe, may be the most important theological concept for the development of Christian philosophy and adult Christian education in the local church.

The second theological concept discussed is how general revelation and special revelation are related to the idea of how God reveals God's self to humanity. The theological foundations section will discuss how these two concepts can inform a Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church in two different ways. First, it will serve as a model for thinking about curriculum choices for adult Christian education in the local church. Secondly, it provides a model for thinking about how we can approach the use of Scripture and social sciences in determining our educational philosophy.

The third theological topic involves a study of Jesus as he performs the role of teacher. Christian education literature often refers to Jesus as the "master teacher" in discussing this topic to describe how he took on a master/apprentice relationship with his learners and how he serves as a role model for us as a teacher (Yount 2008, 50). Through studying Jesus' interaction with his learners we can learn about his teaching methods. Studying Jesus will also help us

develop a philosophy for the role of the teacher and the role of the student in our adult Christian education philosophy.

Historical Foundation

The relationship between philosophy and Judaic/Christian thought is a long and complicated one. This section explores the relationship between philosophy and Christianity in general, demonstrating the deep links between the two since very early in the life of the church. It then utilizes an example from ancient history during a time when Greek philosophy influenced Christian education in the Alexandrian church. The second section discusses the influence of Greek philosophy on the Alexandrian catechetical school. Lastly we consider how the philosophy of pragmatism has set the stage for the current issues that will be discussed in the literature review. The proposal stated that the dissertation would address the early Christian practice of catechesis, but after doing additional reading for the resource and for the literature review, the three topics above were deemed more suitable.

Before discussing how secular philosophies can affect adult Christian education we must first explore the relationship between philosophy and Christianity in general. Throughout history in the life of the church Greek philosophy and Christian thought have been interacting with each other throughout the life of the church. Very often Greek philosophy was seen as true and valid, while Christian beliefs and Scripture were also seen as true and valid. Various attempts were made throughout history to integrate the two. Most famously Saint Augustine was a proponent of Neo-Platonism, while Thomas

Aquinas was a proponent of Aristotle (Feser 2019, 5). In this historical foundation section, we look at an example of how the thoughts of the Greek philosopher Plato influenced the church's thoughts on the soul and the afterlife. The second topic in the historical foundation section is an examination of the Alexandrian catechetical school in the early church, which was influenced by Greek philosophy. Anthony and Benson explain what happened to the school in Alexandria led by Clement and then Origen as the Alexandrian school attempted to integrate Scripture and Greek philosophy (Anthony and Benson 2003, 110-111). The result not only affected education, but the whole life of the church as well. The influence of Greek philosophy led to poor readings of Scripture, which in turn created false theological beliefs that spread throughout the church (Anthony and Benson 2003, 111). This observation is an early example of how secular philosophy influenced Christian belief and practice.

The third historical topic is how pragmatism has affected the adult education programs of evangelical Christian churches. Pragmatism can be defined as a philosophy that embraces evolution to the point where it argues that everything is in such flux that there is no such thing as absolute truth. The embrace of pragmatism in the American educational system is widespread and it has also been embraced by the evangelical Christian church. Thus, Christian educators like Gangel and Benson utilized Dewey's educational methods while rejecting his philosophy (Gangel and Benson 1983, 303).

Secular philosophies in the modern era have led to the development of theory and praxis of various educational schools of thought. Christian educators

have been working with these schools of thought and attempting to figure out how to interact with them while still maintaining their Christian belief system. Two main ways of approaching this issue are evident. The first and most prominent approach is seen in the example above from Gangel and Benson, who embrace the methods but not the philosophical belief of the school of thought which they are utilizing (Gangel and Benson 1983, 303). The second approach is to discover and then develop God's philosophy and methods for education (LeBar 1995, 24). This is the basic context for moving forward into the contemporary literature review.

Contemporary Literature

Several recently published works are either similar to this project's resource or are similar enough in topic to be highly informative in shaping the conversation in which the resource will be participating. This section will briefly discuss three of the many publications in the contemporary literature review: *Philosophy and Education* by George R. Knight, *A Theology for Christian Education* by James R Estep, Michael J. Anthony and Gregg R. Allison, and *Foundational Issues in Christian Education* by Robert W. Pazmiño. The proposal originally included *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education* by Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, but this book was determined to be not as essential to this project as some of the other literature discovered during the process and is therefore no longer included in this introduction.

Philosophy and Education by George R. Knight was first published in 1980. Its forth reprint was in 2006. It is still the most relevant and comprehensive

book for the project. Knight thoroughly discusses all of the relevant philosophical categories to educational ministries. He discusses in detail various secular philosophies that are influencing the philosophy and praxis of Christian education, while offering a critique of their strengths and weaknesses (Knight 2006, 61-63, 83-87, 99-100, 140-142, 157-169). He then offers his own suggestions towards a Christian philosophy for Christian education. This book is similar to the resource that was created for this project and was helpful as a tool in deciding what topics to include in the resource. In the beginning of his chapter explaining philosophy, he says that “educational philosophy is not distinct from general philosophy; it is general philosophy applied to education as a specific area of human endeavor” (Knight 2006, 15). This will be the same approach to the philosophy of education that will be used in the resource.

A Theology for Christian Education was written by James R Estep, Michael J. Anthony and Gregg R. Allison, who are highly influential scholars in Christian education. One of the defining characteristics of this book is that it is a theology for Christian education and not a philosophy. Part of the argument of the resource will be that philosophy, not theology, is primary in the development of a proper theory and praxis for Christian education. This is because claiming that Christianity should be founded in theology and the Bible is actually a philosophical statement. Philosophy being primary is inescapable.

Foundational Issues in Christian Education by Robert W. Pazmiño seems to be somewhat of a mixture between the first two books previously mentioned. Pazmiño is concerned about philosophical foundations but does not give this as

much of a priority as Knight. He also cares about Scripture and theology as foundations for Christian educational theory and praxis and seems to agree with Estep, Anthony and Allison about the nature of Scripture (Pazmiño 2008, 87). Pazmiño's book is more comprehensive in that it discusses other foundations such as sociological and psychological foundations, which are topics that this resource will intentionally not cover in detail.

Context

This resource potentially impacts anyone who is involved in educational ministries. This would include church volunteers, pastors, education/discipleship pastors, university and seminary students, professors of Christian education, and, potentially, university and seminary officials. It is written in such a way to be understood by people who have a minimal understanding of the topic, yet also appreciated by those who are experts.

Definition of Terms

Christian Philosophy - An approach to philosophy that utilizes the Christian religion as its foundation.

Felt Needs - The perceived needs of learners.

Real Needs - The actual needs of learners.

Project Goals

The purpose of this project was to create a resource that develops a Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. The research question was: how does Christian philosophy inform the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church?

The project goals were:

1. The resource will provide the basics of the study of philosophy which are foundational in Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.
2. The resource will provide a foundation of how philosophy affects adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.
3. The resource will provide an outline of how the philosophy of pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian education praxis in the local church.
4. The resource will present a Christian philosophy that seeks to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church.
5. The resource will provide a process for teachers to think critically about their own philosophy which affects the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.
6. The resource will provide a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.

Design, Procedure, and Assessment

The design of the project was to write a resource of adequate length to present the information on the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church properly. It was formatted as a book with chapters that build upon the knowledge of the chapter before it as the reader moves forward. It was eighty-five pages in length. The resource was reviewed by a panel of ten expert readers using an assessment tool.

The procedure for writing the book was to first write the book using this author's thoughts and opinions that arose from the research, and support the arguments used from Scripture by outside resources from biblical scholars.

The assessment for the resource was to give a quantitative 5-point Likert scale survey to the panel of expert readers as well as qualitative questions.

There were three questions for each of the project goals, which totaled eighteen quantitative questions. There were six qualitative questions, one for each project goal.

Personal Goals

My spiritual goals for the project shared a theme of creating and maintaining a routine. Getting into a good routine is the best way for me to stay productive on a consistent basis. If I get out of my routine I usually struggle. This routine helped my spiritual life as well as my ability to complete my resource and project thesis. As such, each spiritual goal was related to both my project and personal spiritual life.

My personal spiritual goals were as follows:

1. I will read the entire Bible within six months with the intention of using observations from this process towards my resource.
2. I will pray on a daily basis seeking guidance for writing the resource and then journal about how that process is influencing the process of developing the resource.

3. In order to write a well written resource for my project I will maintain my physical and mental health through exercise, proper sleep, and a healthy diet.

Core Team

My advisor was Rev. Dr. Shane L. Johnson, D.Min.

I did not have an academic research consultant.

My field consultant was Rev. Dr. Bryan C. Hollon. He is the Dean and President of Trinity Anglican Seminary. He was previously Professor of Theology at Malone University. He also served as the Rector for St. John's Anglican Church in Canton, Ohio and as the City Director of the C.S. Lewis Institute of Northeast Ohio. I chose Rev. Dr. Hollon as my field consultant because he is very interested in spirituality, education, science, philosophy, church history, theology, and biblical studies. I have observed that Rev. Dr. Hollon forms his thoughts and opinions through all of the means above, and not for instance, only the Bible. This is similar to the approach that I took in formulating a philosophy for adult Christian education, and therefore, I saw Rev. Dr. Hollon as a valuable resource.

Plan of the Paper

The project was to create a resource to address and propose a solution for the relationship between philosophy and adult Christian education in the local church so that practitioners can take this understanding into consideration for the praxis of their ministry. The Project Thesis provided the foundations used in preparation of the resource. The following chapters will include biblical,

theological, and historical foundations (Chapter Two); a review of contemporary literature (Chapter Three); a detailed description of the method, procedures, and design of the project (Chapter Four); and results of the review of the resource by the experts in the field (Chapter Five). A final chapter will reflect on the findings as they apply to ministry, and will offer personal reflections on the process (Chapter Six).

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

What we need is a systematic and well-rounded Christian understanding of reality, knowledge, and value that can direct our thinking about curriculum structure, methods of teaching and learning, and instruction in morals and values. (Peterson 2001, 95)

In the above quote, Michael Peterson points out the need for a systemic and well-rounded approach to developing a Christian philosophy for education. Grounding the project in biblical, theological, and historical foundations is vital for providing a well-informed and well-rounded approach for determining how Christian philosophy informs the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. In the biblical section we will explore Galatians 3:1-5 in relation to Christian epistemology and also observe how Paul is meeting people's real needs. We will also explore 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 in relation to meeting people's felt needs while at the same time meeting their real needs. The theological section will explore the theological topics of the Creator God, General and Special Revelation, and Jesus as the master teacher. The historical section will consider the historical relationship between philosophy and the church, the effects of Greek philosophy on the ancient Alexandrian catechetical school, and John Dewey's pragmatic approach to education as it began to influence the church in the early twentieth century.

Biblical Foundation

The biblical foundation will discuss the following two Scripture passages, Galatians 3:15 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Writing about the Bible and Christian education Roy Zuck has argued:

Evangelical educators cannot accept secular education as its source of principles because it is often at variance with Scripture. Secular educational principles are often built on unscriptural philosophical bases such as pragmatism (truth is determined by what “works”), empiricism (truth is determined by our experience), and naturalism (truth is determined by science and nature). When there is conflict or variance in principles, Christian educators need to go back to their divine source to be sure the principles they have formulated are drawn from or are consistent with Scripture. The Bible is not a textbook on education, but it does include insights into educational philosophy and method. Because God made the learner, his teacher, his content, and his environment, Christians look to God and His Word for valid educational concepts. (Zuck 1998, 91)

This section will argue for a biblical approach to experience in the area of epistemology and the concept of meeting the needs of adults in the local church. Our first topic regards understanding the nature of experience from a biblical perspective, which is vital for developing an epistemology for an adult Christian philosophy of education in the local church. Our second topic, meeting the needs of the adult learner, has become one of the most important modern-day aspects of adult Christian education in the local church. As we will see in the literature review in Chapter Three, it is a dominant part of the contemporary discussion. Of note, in the Bible we can observe God’s servants caring for both the felt needs and the real needs of those they serve.

Galatians 3:1-5

Galatians 3:1-5 contains an argument from the Apostle Paul in which he tries to demonstrate to the believers in the province of Galatia that they should trust in their experience of the Holy Spirit that came through belief in Christ rather than through obedience to the ritual Law. Paul argues that this should be proof to them that the original gospel message they received was true and complete. Paul’s occasion for writing the letter to the Galatians is because teachers had

come to the province of Galatia and were spreading a false gospel that gentiles had to also become circumcised and follow the Old Testament Law in order to be justified (Dunn 1993, 11). The letter to the Galatians is Paul's response to that false gospel.

The letter of Galatians is often analyzed by Bible scholars through rhetorical criticism. Paul's usage of classical rhetoric provides us with an opportunity to learn about Paul's epistemology. The elements of classical rhetoric relevant to our discussion of Galatians 3:1-5 are *narratio*, *propositio*, and *probatio*. The *narratio* is a statement of the current situation or problem that is being dealt with (Witherington 2009, 16). Longenecker argues that the *narratio* occurs in Galatians 1:12-2:14 (Longenecker 1990, 20). This section briefly details the events leading up to the Galatians current situation, which are: 1) the origin of Paul's gospel message which he received from Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12-13), 2) Paul's history of spreading the gospel to the gentiles after converting to Christianity (Gal. 1:14-24), 3) Paul's interactions with the Apostles and their approval of his mission and messages to the gentiles (Gal. 2:1-10), 4) Paul's confrontation with Peter when Peter decided to acquiesce with the circumcision faction (Gal. 2:11-14). In a summary of this confrontation with Peter and an introduction to the beginning of Paul's proceeding arguments, Martyn comments:

In all of this Paul saw a singular instance of unfaithfulness to the truth of the gospel. And since the work of the Teachers is now having the same effects in the Galatians churches, compelling them to commence observation of the Law (6:12), he sees the truth of the gospel to be at stake in Galatia, and he attacks the Teachers no less vigorously than he attacked Peter in Antioch. Exactly what the truth of the gospel might be is a subject Paul begins concertedly to address in 2:15-21. (Martyn 1997, 245)

Paul's presentation of the true gospel comprises the *propositio* portion of Paul's rhetoric of the argument in Galatians 2:15-21. The *propositio* is the proposed solution to the problem at hand (Witherington 2009, 16). In this section Paul points out that "Jewish Christians such as Peter and the Teachers have simply to listen to their own gospel tradition to know that their acts stand condemned" (Martyn 1997, 247). This is because people are "justified not by works of the Law" (Gal. 2:16) and that if we revert back to trying to attain righteousness through the Law then "Christ died for nothing" (Gal. 2:21). Rather than relying on the law Paul argues that we are justified through "the faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16). While Paul, Peter, and the teachers had a common experience with the Law because of their Jewish roots, the gentile believers in the region of Galatia had no such history. As Dunn points out, their shared experience was faith. It was their "common denominator" and "defining characteristic" (Dunn 1993, 53). It is the shared experience of their faith that Paul will point to as he proves his argument for justification by faith apart from works of the Law.

Immediately following the *propositio* Paul begins his *probatio*. A *probatio* is an argument in support of the *propositio* (Witherington 2009, 16). He begins his argument by confronting the Galatians by calling them foolish and asking who has bewitched them. Martyn comments that Paul's usage of magical language here speaks to the astonishing nature of the gentile believer's being led astray. Given the fact that gentiles had such an "aversion of circumcision, the Teachers

must indeed have been virtual magicians to have made the Galatians long to come under the Law” (Martyn 1999, 282-283).

Paul then, after reminding them of their hearing of Christ's crucifixion, asks whether they received the Spirit by believing in Christ and his work on the cross or by doing works of the law. He then goes on to ask how they can be so foolish as to forget about their experience of receiving the Holy Spirit and seeing miracles around them and return to the flesh (the Law). Dunn points out that in addition to the Galatians shared experience of faith, their other shared experience was the Spirit (Dunn 1993, 59). The truth of their shared experience had observable effects. Dunn further comments:

It was the tangible and evidently indisputable success of Paul's preaching among the Gentiles which had convinced the pillar apostles in Jerusalem to recognize that God worked with Paul for the Gentiles as much as with Peter for the circumcision (2:7-9). Without the manifest effects of this grace (understood as a transforming power, not just as an attitude of mind) Paul's plea for a circumcisionless gospel to the Gentiles would almost certainly have failed. (Dunn 1999, 59)

It seems that the first and most powerful argument Paul brought to bear on this problem was to remind their Galatian churches of their own experience with the Holy Spirit and it's work among them. Paul is essentially asking: how could circumcision and other works of the Law possibly bring the kind of life in the Spirit which faith has done for them?

What is relevant to the discussion here regarding epistemology is that Galatians 3:1-5 is the first *probatio* in a series of three for the validity of Paul's gospel of righteousness obtained through faith rather than righteousness obtained through following the Old Testament Law. Longenecker points out that

these three arguments are based on experience (Gal. 3:1-5), Scripture (Gal. 3:6-14), and theology (Gal. 3:15-18) (Longenecker 1990, 97). It is noteworthy from an epistemological perspective that Paul considers the experience of the Galatians as of such importance that it is grouped with arguments from Scripture and theology and presented first. James Dunn points out that “it is important to realize just how much weight was placed by the first Christians on the visible impact and transforming effect of the gospel on those who responded in faith” and that it was the determining factor of the truth of Paul’s mission to the Gentiles as he presented it to the apostles in Jerusalem as Paul argues in Galatians 2:7-9 (Dunn 1998, 59).

Paul’s argument here is that the believers in Galatia are already justified through faith, as evidenced by their experience of receiving the Holy Spirit when they believed in the gospel that Paul preached (Longenecker 1990, 101). In determining a Christian philosophy from these verses, we can conclude that experience is a valid and powerful way through which we learn and gain truth. We can also conclude that another aspect of using experience in determining truth from this section of Scripture is that it must be interpreted. Unfettered and uncritical interpretations of our experiences can lead us in all sorts of directions. In this case Paul not only reminds his audience of the powerful experiences they had, connecting the dots for them as to why those experiences matter in relation to righteousness, but he also uses arguments from Scripture (Gal. 3:6-14) and theology (Gal. 3:15-18) to help prove his point and help them interpret and understand the significance of their experience. Experience does not stand

alone, but is interpreted in light of God's truth. It is important in educational contexts to consider and discuss experience in the lives of learners and to use appropriate experiential teaching techniques, but uninterpreted or poorly interpreted experience that does not conform to Christian belief is not only untrue, but also unhealthy to the learning environment. As we will see in the next chapter, the learner's experience is highly valued in modern secular adult educational theory.

Yet it is not just what Paul is saying that we can learn from, but also what he is doing. Paul is meeting the real needs of his learners by leading them away from the beliefs of his opponents and showing them the proper way to think about the gospel. It is perhaps reasonable to presume the people in Galatia who had been convinced by his opponents did not have a felt need to be corrected in their beliefs by Paul. Nevertheless, Paul corrects them. While it may not be wise in our current context to call our learners foolish, as Paul does, he was using a form of rhetoric that would have been acceptable in his day (Dunn 1993, 151). From these verses we can conclude that as teachers it is important to identify the real needs of our students and address them in a way that is socially acceptable in our current cultural context.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Gupta points out that 1 Thessalonians was written by Paul to the church in Thessalonica for many reasons. The church was experiencing persecution. He was reminding them about sexual purity. He also addressed questions of what happens to believers that die before Christ's Parousia. Paul also gave them

assurance about the Parousia itself (Gupta 2016, 10-15). Our discussion will focus on the portion of the letter that tells what will happen to believers that die before the Parousia of Christ. But what does this have to do with the project? The objective in analyzing this pericope is to discover what Paul did practically as a teacher and pastor for the Thessalonian church. In this case, Paul met both their real needs and their felt needs when he addressed the topic of what happens to Christians who die before the Parousia of Christ.

In this pericope, Paul informed the early Christians that the situation of those who died before the Parousia is not hopeless, and the Thessalonians should not be concerned about those who have not yet died. According to Paul, when Jesus returns, those who have died will be resurrected and join the rest of the believers who are alive to meet Him in the sky at His Parousia.

As Gupta notes, Paul addressed, “a topic that seems to be of particular interest to the Thessalonians” (Gupta 2016, 91). Paul did not randomly give the Thessalonians a theological lesson about what happens to Christians who die before the Parousia. The question at hand was a felt need for those in the Thessalonian church. It is likely that this issue was raised to Timothy, and he in turn brought the issue before Paul who, in turn, gave further instruction to the Thessalonian Christians (Bruce 1982, 96). Byron points out that Paul was probably only in Thessalonica for a short time before being forced to flee (Byron 2014, 16). Perhaps this is why the Thessalonians were not informed about this particular topic. Malherbe on the other hand argues that the Thessalonians had already been taught the details of the future hope of the Parousia but that the

Thessalonians had “not sufficiently appreciated” its significance (Malherbe 2000, 262). In either case, it is clear that Paul addressed the recipients “actual concerns” (Malherbe 2000, 265.) In other words, Paul dealt with the felt needs of the audience.

It is also generally accepted that the audience of the Thessalonian correspondence was mainly composed of Gentiles (Byron 2014, 22), which might be why Paul had to explain the concept of the Jewish-Christian concept of the resurrection to the Thessalonian church as a whole. The recipients’ unfamiliarity with the doctrine of the resurrection also explains why they would have such despair over the death of their fellow Christians. The Gentile world at the time generally did not have a hope in the afterlife outside the views of some philosophers that were not adopted by the average person (Morris 1991, 136). As Leon Morris puts it, “the typical attitude of the ancient world to death was one of utter hopelessness” (1991, 137). Morris cites a letter written in the second century by a Gentile regarding the death of a friend as a demonstration of this point:

Irene to Taonnophris and Philo, good comfort. I am as sorry and weep over the departed one as I wept for Didymas. And all things, whatsoever were fitting. I have done, and all mine, Epaphroditus and Thermuthion and Philion and Apollonius and Plantas. But, nevertheless, against such things one can do nothing. Therefore comfort ye one another. (Morris 1991, 137)

The lack of hope for life after death within the Gentile world played a role in what Paul was trying to accomplish with his teaching about the resurrection of the dead.. The first statement Paul makes about this topic is that he wants to teach them the proper way of thinking about it “so that you may not grieve as

others do who have no hope” (1 Thess 3:13 NRSVUE)(Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are taken from the NRSVUE – New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition.) He then cites the general Jewish-Christian theological belief in the resurrection of the body by stating how we will be resurrected just as Jesus was. Next, he gets more specific about the timing of the resurrection. Paul says that “we declare to you by the Word of the Lord” (1 Thess 3:15) that those who have died before the Parousia will be resurrected when Jesus returns. Paul was not engaging in merely theological speculation. He stated his assertion came straight from God. Byron argues that this teaching most likely came from the resurrected Jesus but was not recorded in any of the gospels. It was being handed down to Paul after the fact (Byron 2014, 155). Paul then ends the topic of this matter with an exhortation of what should be done as a result, or as Malherbe puts it, as the “practical consequences” of Paul’s teaching (Malherbe 2000, 278). Paul’s exhortation is that believers should comfort one another with this Word from the Lord and no longer feel anxiety about the Christians they know who have died.

Here, Paul demonstrates the importance of meeting the felt needs of the congregation. He is also meeting the real needs of the congregation. In doing so establishes a pattern for Christian educators to follow in their ministry. Paul is introduced to the felt need of his recipients’ anxiety about what will happen to the Christians they know who have died. Next, he very quickly identifies the real need of his learners. As Malherbe puts it, “the cause of the Thessalonians grief is clear: their incomplete understanding of matters pertaining to Christians who had

died” (Malherbe 2000, 264). Paul is aware of this need, although the Thessalonians are most likely not aware of their need for a hope in an afterlife. This lack of hope and their incorrect view of the afterlife derived from their Gentile worldview. It is the real problem here. It is the root cause of their anxiety. Paul countered the recipients’ anxiety by addressing their real and felt needs through a presentation of Christian truth. Finally, he explained what should be the direct result or application of that truth to the needs which are being addressed. Properly understanding the truth of the Parousia should assuage the grief of the audience (Malherbe 2000 264). Paul’s pattern for meeting an adult’s need is as follows: First, be receptive to and identify the felt needs of the learner. Second, think critically about the situation and identify the real needs of the learner. Third, use Christian truth to meet both the real and felt needs of the learner. Last, help them see how it applies to their current situation.

An important note about this pattern is that it can be followed with both acute needs as they arise and more general needs that can be chronic. When Paul was on his mission trips he would teach on certain topics. He also knew the general needs of his Gentile and Jewish audiences. He would have developed strategies for meeting these needs. At other times, more acute and unique needs arose, as we see throughout his letters. Paul addressed the acute needs following the same pattern he used in dealing with chronic needs.

There is an abundance of material in Scripture for developing a Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church. Scripture gives us answers to philosophical questions about how we can determine truth and practice it. It also

gives us a model for meeting the needs of adult learners in our educational praxis. To be sure, Scripture can be a guide for developing all of the various aspects for a Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church that have been left unexamined in this section. In the next section we will examine how theology can also help us in this task.

Theological Foundation

The theological foundation section will discuss three themes that support the project: the Creator God, General and Special Revelation, and Jesus as the Master Teacher. Stanley Grenz and Roger Olsen define theology as “the articulation of the fundamental beliefs about God and the world that we share as followers of Jesus Christ, and this for the sake of living as Christians in our contemporary context” (Grenz and Olsen 1996, 108). In this case, our context will be to discover how theology can contribute to the development of a Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church, and we will see below how these three topics are essential to this development.

The Creator God

God as creator of the universe has been a long held Christian belief. Specifically, Christianity teaches the concept of creation *ex nihilo*, which means creation out of nothing. In discussing this doctrine Millard Erickson states, “we are here affirming that the whole of what now exists was begun by God’s act of bringing into existence – he did not fashion and adapt something that already existed independently of him” (Erickson 2013, 340). Erickson prefers the definition of creation “without the use of preexisting materials” to avoid the

misconception that nothing is actually something from which creation comes out of (Erickson 2013, 342).

Alister McGrath points out three implications of the concept of God as the creator which are relevant for developing a philosophy for adult education in the local church; it gives God authority over all of creation, creation is good and yet fallen, and human beings created in God's image have a role to play in that creation (McGrath 1997, 203-206). This topic may be the most fundamental theological building block for developing a Christian philosophy in general, and for adult Christian education in the local church.

McGrath points out that the first implication of God as creator and creation being *ex nihilo* is that "the creator has authority over the creation" (McGrath 1997, 204). Wayne Grudem points out that God as the creator is one of the first ways in which we describe Him (Grudem 1994, 263). He also argues that if we were to eliminate God's creation *ex nihilo* it "would challenge God's independence, his sovereignty, and the fact that worship is due to him alone: if matter existed apart from God, then what inherent right would God have to rule over it and use it for his glory?" (Grudem 1994, 264). Erickson points out that this means that "there is no ultimate reality other than God" (Erickson 2013, 345).

None of these theologians discuss an important implication of creation *ex nihilo* for not just theology but philosophy, which is that if everything in the universe comes from God then that means that truth also comes from God. God is the determiner of what is true. The universe plays by His rules, because he created the universe. If God created the universe, it is objective, outside of us,

and thus it is our task to explore and determine what that truth is. In an adult educational setting, it becomes our task to seek out God's truth. He is the source of truth, not humans. This is significantly important as current adult educational philosophy highly values the life experiences of the learner as a source of truth in the classroom.

McGrath's second point is that while creation is good, it is also fallen; as he puts it, "the world as we see it is not the world as it was intended to be" (McGrath 1997, 205). This raises implications in how Christians view social sciences; in this case, how social sciences influence the philosophy of adult Christian education in the local church. As we will see in the literature review, research regarding adults and education has shown that adults generally only want to learn about things that are related to some kind of felt need. Educators have then taken this data and decided that adult education should focus its curriculum on the felt needs of the learners. From an axiological perspective, we have placed the felt needs of the learner at the highest value in the determination of the curriculum.

The problem is that the felt needs of the learner do not always correspond with what is best for them from God's point of view, and the same would be true if the teacher was the sole determiner of the curriculum, as the teacher also does not always know what is best for the learner. The fallenness of the teacher and the learner should prevent both of them from being in complete control of this area. Instead, we should do the best we can to prayerfully consider what the real

needs are in addition to the felt needs of the learner. We should be asking what God wants the curriculum to be, not what the learner or the teacher want it to be.

McGrath's third point is that humanity is made in God's image. This is a powerful anthropological statement about humanity in Christian theology which speaks to humanity's attributes and purpose. These attributes of humanity "make communication with God possible and enable them to take up the God-given responsibilities" specified in the creation story (Birch, Brueggemann, Frethiem, and Petersen 2005, 43). These responsibilities of being the image of God mean that "human beings function to mirror God to the world, to be as God would be to the nonhuman, and to be an extension of God's own dominion" (Birch, Brueggemann, Frethiem, and Petersen 2005, 43).

These theological arguments regarding humanity as God's image bearers bring forth three important observations for developing a philosophy for adult Christian education in the local church. The first is that as humans we are capable of learning about God. He has given us the tools to communicate with Him. The second observation is that our role as image bearers should speak towards the purpose of education, we seek to educate so that people can accept and embrace their role as image bearers. The third observation is that this should speak towards the choice curriculum. Part of our curriculum should be centered on teaching people how to fulfill their role as God's image bearers.

General and Special Revelation

The concepts of general revelation and special revelation are related to the idea of how God reveals Himself to humanity. A.J Conyers defines special

revelation as “the disclosure of God’s word to specific people in specific acts of redemption or judgment, or through the words of the prophets and apostles” and defines general revelation as the “ways in which God makes Himself known to all people at all times, as in nature, and in the common features of human experience” (Conyers 1995, 18). These two concepts can aid in the development of a Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church in two different ways. First, they serve as a model for thinking about curriculum choices for adult Christian education. Secondly, they provide a model for thinking about how we can approach the use of Scripture and social sciences in educational philosophy.

As we explore these two implications we first need to explain what is meant by a “model for thinking” in regard to this topic. The theological concepts of special revelation and general revelation speak to ways in which we gather data about one specific subject, that being God. Special revelation is data about God as gained through Scripture, Jesus, and the actual words of prophets and apostles as they occurred in real time (Allison and Anthony 2008, 74). General revelation is data about God in the “created order, God’s providential care, a basic moral sense of right and wrong (conscience), and an innate sense that deity exists” (Allison and Anthony 2008, 74). This model of thinking recognizes the different sources behind special revelation and general revelation in the acquisition of data and knowledge.

If we take this as a model for thinking about things other than God, then we can start to develop a solid epistemological and theological framework for the task of adult Christian education. While the concepts of special and general

revelation in the world of theological studies may specifically refer only to knowledge about God, general and special revelation can tell us about other topics in addition to God. It could be argued that the created order that Allison and Anthony discuss could be seen as everything else other than special revelation, of which social science is a part. Educators should take seriously the knowledge that can be gained both from special and general revelation in creating a Christian philosophy for adult Christian education in the local church, and how special revelation helps us interpret general revelation properly.

The first implication is how general and special revelation can serve as a model for thinking about curriculum choices for adult Christian education. While special revelation should be the main drive in Christian curriculum, we should not leave general revelation out of our educational scope and sequences. (Zuck 1998, 93) An example of this would be church history. Millard Erickson defines history as a “loci of general revelation” (Erickson 2013, 123). Former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams argues that “history is a set of stories we tell in order to understand better who we are and the world we’re in now” (Williams 2005, 1). General revelation topics like church history are vital for creating a complete curriculum for adult Christian education in the local church.

The second implication is how special and general revelation can help us develop a Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church. In regards to general revelation, if we take seriously the idea that the created order speaks to God, then by its nature it also speaks to everything else. If things are ordered, then we can observe not only the beauty of God in it, but also the way the

created order operates. Investigating the created order tells us how the world works. Educational psychology operates within this function of trying to understand how the word operates, and seeks to understand how adults think and learn. As Estep and Kim put it, “theology and social science theories share a common origin, i.e., human inquiry into God’s revelation” (Estep and Kim 2010, 54). The concept of general revelation in the created order, when extended to all aspects of knowledge instead of just God, means that we can take the data from social psychology seriously when developing our educational philosophy. As Estep and Kim put it, “We cannot be just students of theology; we also must be students of the social sciences” (Estep and Kim 2010, 58).

But as we will see in the literature review, philosophies and educational theories are sometimes utilized by the church even though they do not take special revelation into account when being formulated. Once we figure out how the world works we must think about it through the lens of the Bible and theology, or in other words, through special revelation. Otherwise Christian educators risk the danger of making critical mistakes by failing to think theologically about the theories created out of the social science data. We have already presented an example of how to use special revelation to examine the social sciences in the biblical section in relation to how we might think about the needs of learners from a Christian perspective. Christian educators need to be diligent in closely examining the conclusions of social science through the lens of special revelation.

Another way special revelation can aid in developing a philosophy for adult Christian education in the local church is through observing what is modeled in the person and life of Jesus. We have already made observations about adult Christian education through analyzing Galatians and 1 Thessalonians in the biblical portion of this chapter; let us now look at what we can learn about this topic through the theological concept of Jesus as the “Master Teacher”.

Jesus the Master Teacher

Christian education literature often refers to Jesus as the “Master Teacher” as a way to recognize that Jesus has much to teach us about the role of the teacher in Christian education, as well as arguing that Jesus took on the master role in a master/apprentice relationship with His learners (Yount 2008, 50). Studying this theological topic is vital for Christian educators because Jesus serves as a role model, provides practical examples of how to teach, and helps us understand better how to develop a Christian philosophy for adult Christian education. To discuss this topic we will turn to the work of practical theologian and Christian educator, Rick Yount. Yount discusses several aspects of this topic that aid in the development of a Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church: the nature of Jesus’ students, Jesus’ characteristics as a teacher, and Jesus’ teaching methods.

The nature of Jesus’ learners (specifically the twelve disciples) and how he related to them can help us gain a biblical understanding of the role of the learner. Yount points out several aspects of Jesus’ learners: they were imperfect, they were slow to learn, they were self-centered, they were uneducated and

unprofessional, and they were apprentices and not simply learners (Yount 2008, 47-50). We observe that Jesus met the disciples where they were at the time and gave them what they needed. This is something that adult Christian educators should emulate. As Yount states, “we take the saints as they are, and disciple them – helping them grow to become all God intended them to be. That is our calling. And that is exactly what Jesus did with His Disciples” (Yount 2008, 47).

Yount points out that Jesus desired to have a master/apprentice relationship with the twelve disciples. He calls this a “practical apprentice,” someone that He not only disciplined but that He was training to be a discipler to others (Yount 2008, 50). The main characteristic of the disciples that is important for this role is that they are trainable. “The disciples were not trained, but they were *trainable*. They had not been taught, but they were *teachable*. Nothing more in learners should a teacher desire, and nothing more does a teacher need!” (Yount 2008, 50). The role of the learner then should be that of a trainable and teachable apprentice, wanting to become like the teacher. The teacher of course being Jesus, but recognizing that the human teacher is a vessel through which they can learn about Jesus who has more knowledge than the learner. Therefore, the human teacher takes on the role of a master towards the apprentice student.

Yount points out several characteristics of who Jesus was when analyzing Him in the role of the master teacher, not just with the twelve disciples but with all of the people He interacted with in a teaching capacity: He walked the walk, He taught all kinds of people regardless of circumstance, He was compassionate,

He had a strong sense of his mission, He was humble, He was calm under pressure, He was patient with his learners, He knew his learners, and He was a master of Scripture (Yount 2008, 51-59).

While emulating Jesus' characteristics in these areas is important from a practical perspective and speaks to the role of the teacher in a general way, several of these characteristics are more relevant for helping us develop a philosophy of education than others. Jesus' strong sense of His mission should have an influence on our goals and curriculum choices. "Jesus' self-concept was based on a 'Father first' perspective rather than the 'me first' philosophy of our day. He sought His Father's will and did it" (Yount 2008, 54). From a philosophical perspective, teachers need to focus on what God wants our learners to learn, not what we as teachers want them to learn. Teachers and students both should focus on trying to determine what God would have as their goals and curriculum choices.

Jesus' ability to know and understand his learners presents us with yet another example of how to approach the needs of the learner. As Yount puts it:

One of the reasons Jesus' teaching was so special is that it focused on the real-life needs of those whom he taught. Jesus knew His learners, and He used that knowledge to focus His teaching for maximum effectiveness in each situation. Jesus understood the balance of Scripture and learner needs. (Yount 2008, 57-58)

Yount further points out that Jesus sought to understand the deeper needs of His learners by observing them, skills that human teachers can develop and be gifted in. Yount encourages teachers to use relationship development to determine the

real needs of their learners so they can focus their teaching accordingly (Yount 2008, 58-59).

Jesus' mastery of Scripture is the final characteristic that can help us in developing a philosophy of adult Christian education in the local church. Yount points out two aspects of why this attribute of Jesus was essential to His ministry. The first is that Jesus used the Scripture to help people. (Yount 2008, 61). The second is that he focused His mastery of Scripture on "teaching people where they were" and "applied Old Testament Scripture to real problems in His student, He provided solutions uniquely suited to each one" (Yount 2008, 61). When teachers focus on using Scripture responsibly and meet the needs of their students they will be following the example of Jesus.

Yount discusses the various approaches and methods Jesus took in His teaching ministry. The approach most relevant here is that "Jesus stressed long-term rather than immediate results" (Yount 2008, 71). Yount points out that Jesus had the long-term goal of training the disciples for their eventual ministry as apostles and that He trusted the Holy Spirit to empower them in this mission after He gave them their proper training (Yount 2008, 71). He suggests that we also trust in the Holy Spirit to move in our educational ministries to fulfill our long-term goals. He points out an "insidious temptation to do 'whatever works' in order to make the church grow. This is fleshly, worldly thinking. Ends seem to justify the means. But it is not we who build the church - God does" (Yount 2008, 72). This means from a philosophical perspective that our methods must always be in line with our long-term goals.

The theological section above has shown various ways in which theology can help us in the development of a Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church. Yet our theological conclusions are not immune to the influence of the philosophical landscape of our time. This is true not only for our current situation but has also been true throughout history. In the historical section below we will explore the relationship between Christian thinking and philosophy, and how secular philosophy has influenced adult Christian education in history.

Historical Foundation

Greek philosophy and Judaic/Christian thought have a long and complicated history. This section will first explore the relationship between philosophy and Christianity, establishing a foundation for reading the rest of the section. It will then consider an example from ancient history when Greek philosophy was influencing Christian education in the Alexandrian church. Lastly, the modern day philosophy of pragmatism will be discussed, as it has set the stage for our current issues, issues that end up being dealt with by later generations which are explored in the literature review.

The Historical Relationship Between Philosophy, Christianity, and Plato

Before we can explore how philosophy has historically affected the church as it relates to adult education in the local church, we first need to explain the context and nature of the historical relationship between philosophy and Christianity. A prominent attitude throughout large swathes of Christian history regarding the relationship between philosophy and Christian theology has been that Christian truth is a stream from which true knowledge flows, but also that

Greek philosophy is a completely separate and valid stream of knowledge from which true knowledge flows. They are seen as different, but at some times in the history of the church they were seen as equally valid. Greek philosophy is true, and also Christian truth is true. Attempts by many church thinkers have been made throughout history to wed the two. One attempt was by Saint Augustine, who viewed Plato as being more useful for this task, while others like Aquinas saw Aristotle as more useful (Feser 2019, 5).

One of the prominent ways that Plato influenced Christianity was with his understanding of the soul and the afterlife. Plato believed that the soul was an immaterial “immortal soul or mind” and the goal of the afterlife was for the soul to go to a “transcendent nonearthly realm” (Middleton 2014, 31). Both of these concepts are not compatible with the biblical notion of the soul or of God’s plan to recreate the heavens and the earth, the promise of bodily resurrection, and the belief that God will dwell with us on earth forever in the afterlife (Middleton 2014, 34). According to Middleton, in early Christianity this influenced people to believe that we would be resurrected and then proceed to go up to heaven to live with God in eternity. Later, “Christian tradition came to embrace the more metaphysical notion that Plato actually held, concerning an immaterial, nonspatial eternal state” (Middleton 2014, 33).

It was not just Plato but also his students such as Plotinus who developed these ideas further (Neoplatonism) and began to dominate the Hellenistic world in which Christianity was forming (Middleton 2014, 32). While Saint Augustine can be credited (or blamed) for solidifying the melding of Neoplatonism with

Christianity, it would be a mistake not to recognize that Neoplatonism had already pervaded the Christian church before Augustine (Jordan 2009, 60). Saint Gregory of Nyssa, nineteen years Augustine's elder and living on the other side of the Mediterranean, was also a Neoplatonist. Gregory defined the soul as a "created, living, intellectual being, with the power, as long as it is provided with organs, of sensuous perception" and that is the "invisible thinking power in man" (Saint Gregory of Nyssa *On the Soul and the Resurrection* Argument). Essentially what Plato and his adherents believed the soul to be is what we today would call our consciousness, our thinking brain and internal dialogue.

Middleton points out the dangers of mixing theology with Greek philosophy:

That the church fathers drew on the best of the intellectual heritage of their times is natural. They were simply attempting to relate the gospel to their own culture, something that Christians of all ages have done, often unaware of the attendant dangers of assimilating practices and ideas that are antithetical to our faith. Although I am sympathetic to the church fathers, I believe that we need to be aware of the negative consequences to their synthesis of Christian faith with Greek philosophy. Those consequences include (but are certainly not limited to) a transformation of Christian eschatology beyond anything that the writers of the New Testament would have envisioned. (Middleton 2014, 33-34)

This is an example of how philosophy has affected Christian theology and beliefs. This popular understanding of the soul and the afterlife has persisted to this day and it is probable that most Christians are unaware that this understanding of theology does not come from the Bible but from ancient Greek Platonism. Middleton's statement serves as a warning against the mixing of secular philosophies of any time period with Christianity, but it is unfortunately a mistake we are still making to this day. In the next two sections we will explore

how secular philosophy has affected Christian praxis in the ancient church and also in the early twentieth century.

The Alexandrian Catechetical School

A study of the catechetical school in Alexandria serves as an ancient example of the effects of secular philosophy on Christian education. In the late second and early third centuries AD, formal learning institutions, or catechetical schools, were established, with the school in Alexandria prominent among them (Anthony and Benson 2003, 110). The approach of these schools was designed to give a well-rounded education in both Christian and Greek thought, with the purpose of combating the influences of Greek philosophy on Christianity. However, the influence of Greek philosophy began to overtake the beliefs and praxis of the institution in Alexandria (Anthony and Benson 2003, 110).

The educators in Alexandria were anxious to develop a theology that used Greek philosophy and yet would give a systematic explanation of Christianity. Because the faculty had been trained in the Scriptures and Greek philosophy, they were confident that they could integrate the two subjects. In time, however, under Origen, it was anything but positive. (Anthony and Benson 2003, 110-111)

Anthony and Benson claim that the effect on the school was that it influenced their hermeneutical approach to reading the Scriptures (Anthony and Benson 2003, 111). Rather than focusing on the original meaning of the text in its context they began to read the Scriptures using a “confusing mix of philosophical allegory” (Anthony and Benson 2003, 111). They used the concept of body, soul, and spirit as an allegory to find three layers of meaning in the text. The first layer, corresponding to the body, was correlated with the historical and literal meaning. The second layer, corresponding to the soul, was correlated to “hidden moral

meaning.” The third layer, corresponding to the spirit, was correlated to an “underlying spiritual meaning that only the most spiritually astute Christian leader could comprehend” (Anthony and Benson 2003, 111). Anthony and Benson argue that this came from a desire to prove Greek philosophy was compatible with the Old Testament using hidden meanings within the language of the text. As a result:

Rather than trying to determine the meaning of the passage as it related to the particular people to whom it was written in its historical context and perhaps an application for present believers, the Alexandrian scholars were fixated on trying to find hidden and coded meanings. Eventually, absurd and aberrant theological teachings spread throughout the church. The result was a destructive sense that Scripture had lost its ability to impact people’s lives. It had become simply another textbook added to the curriculum of study. (Anthony and Benson 2003, 111)

The employment of a Greek philosophical hermeneutic in the Alexandrian school is a good example of how philosophy can affect the goals and curriculum of an educational system. It is also a good example of the type of influence that Greek philosophy can have on the church that Middleton was warning about, but what of modern day influences and issues? While Middleton points out that the church fathers worked within the intellectual milieu of their day, the same could be said of any time period, even today. Below we will explore how the more recent philosophy of pragmatism began to influence Christian education in the early twentieth century. This will set the stage for the literature review chapter as our contemporary issues have their origins in this time period.

John Dewey and Pragmatism

While William James is the father of pragmatism, John Dewey, an atheist, brought the ideas of pragmatism into the classroom (Gangel and Benson 1983,

291). Pragmatism can be defined as a philosophy which embraces the fluid nature of evolution. It argues that since everything is in flux there is no such thing as absolute truth. Pragmatists therefore see metaphysics as unimportant, as change *is* the metaphysic, and the changing nature itself is the ultimate reality. From a human perspective a pragmatist believes that our task in life is to figure out how to navigate this ever changing world through tackling life's problems and see what works along the way (Gangel and Benson 1983, 292-294).

Anthony and Benson point out that because of its lack of belief in a stable metaphysic, pragmatism is mainly a philosophy concerned with epistemology. (Anthony and Benson 2003, 399). Because knowledge is always in flux, learners are tasked with finding out what works currently. "The truth accumulated by previous generations is not a valid guide to contemporary life because of the phenomenal changes that have taken place between then and now" (Gangel and Benson 1983, 295). The emphasis on the constantly changing environment, with the mastery of that environment for the maximum benefit to the learner, means that the curriculum is learner centered (Gangel and Benson 1983, 300). Pragmatic learner centered curriculum means that truth is determined by the learner by experiencing what works, and the curriculum is determined by the students' felt needs (Anthony and Benson 2003, 408-409). Gangel and Benson aptly describe this, saying that truth rests in the "authority of pupil experience" (Gangel and Benson 1983, 298). As we will see in the literature review, this type of pupil centered learning is at the heart of Malcolm Knowles' approach to adult

education, an approach that has been very influential on adult Christian education in the local church from the 1970s up until current day.

The embrace of pragmatism in the American educational system is widespread and has also been accepted by the evangelical Christian church. This leads Christian educators like Gangel and Benson to embrace Dewey's methods while at the same time rejecting his philosophies:

It is our contention, however, that the very processes of education described and carried out by Dewey are the processes that are effectively being used today, not only in secular education but in Christian education as well. Group dynamics, creative thinking, controlled environment, activity of the pupil, motivation through interest, and social relevance are proclaimed in every pedagogical textbook of any worth published in the last twenty-five years. The intelligent approach to Dewey then, it would seem, would have to be one that excludes his godless philosophy and adapts his practical methodology ... in other words to be progressives without being progressivists. (Gangel and Benson 1983, 303)

Gangel and Benson represent one side of an argument in the Christian education community that persists to this day, which is that we use the methods but reject the underlying philosophy. Lois LeBar on the other hand, in 1952, declared that "a chief reason for the lack of life and power and reality in our evangelical teaching is that we have been content to borrow man-made [sic] systems of education instead of discovering God's system" (LeBar 1995, 24). Her criticisms represent the other side of the argument in the community which seeks to develop a Christian philosophy of ministry with its corresponding methods, what this project attempts to do.

While it is improbable that the development of a Christian philosophy for education will create new methods, it provides an underlying basis and context for those methods which are best suited for Christianity. Adult Christian

educators in the local church must think deeply about the methods they use and why they are using them. For instance, it is possible to do activity based learning as long as the truth behind what they are learning is not grounded solely in the learner's previous personal life experience, but rather by tailoring the learning experience so the learning outcome is grounded in Christian beliefs.

Summation

It has been demonstrated in the above section that philosophy and its relation both to theology and adult Christian education in the local church have a long and complicated history. We have also seen in this chapter how the Bible and theology can contribute to answering these challenges from a Christian perspective. With so many modern and secular philosophies influencing the church and being used to develop educational theory, this is perhaps more of an issue than it has ever been, as we will see in the literature review. This is coupled with the possibility that the relationship between philosophy and education, and philosophy and ministry in general, is perhaps unknown by many educators and people in ministry as we will see in Chapter Five.

Finally, there is the matter of how the church should view philosophy. Against the kinds of attitudes similar to Aquinas and Augustine, which see philosophy as a separate stream of truth from which Christians can understand the world, philosophy should be viewed as a discipline which seeks answers to how life and the universe work. For a Christian philosopher this is a theological pursuit. As Dew and Gould put it, "Christianity and philosophy work in concert, converging on the truth. In other words, faith and reason work together to provide

truth about God, the world, and ourselves” (Dew and Gould 2019, 3). Ancient Greek philosophers were trying to figure out how the world worked *without* knowledge of Yahweh. So, too, do modern philosophies. Any philosophy that does not have Yahweh at its foundation cannot hope to describe how the world works in anything approaching an accurate way. Any philosophy for adult Christian education in the local church that is not rooted in Christianity is also doomed for failure.

This chapter was focused on how the areas of biblical, theological, and historical research are related to the concerns of the project. The next chapter will focus on current literature within the field of philosophy of adult Christian education. It will begin with a broad discussion of philosophy and then narrow to a discussion of philosophy of education. This will provide a foundation for understanding the remainder of the material in chapter 3 which narrows to Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This formulation of the business of the philosophy of education does not mean that the latter should attempt to bring about a compromise between opposed schools of thought, to find a *via media*, nor yet make an eclectic combination of points picked out hither and yon from all schools. It means the necessity of the introduction of a new order of conceptions leading to new modes of practice. (John Dewey 1938, 5)

John Dewey's quote above, in the preface of his book *Experience and Education*, points out the tendency of practitioners to choose from differing, and sometimes opposing, philosophies and methods which they employ in their practices. He also points out the foolishness of this tendency and the need to rethink our underlying philosophy before moving forward in praxis (Dewey 1938, 5). As we will explore below, adult Christian education practitioners in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been greatly influenced by the field of philosophy.

Rick Yount defines Christian education as a "reverent attempt to discover the divinely ordained process by which individuals grow in Christ-likeness, and to work with that process" (Yount 2008, 6). But what is that process? As was presented in the previous chapter, there is a debate within the field of Christian education as to whether to utilize secular education methods based on secular philosophies, or if we need to figure out what God's way of education is. Philosophy is a part of the process Yount is referring to and essential for figuring out how God wants us to learn and grow.

While some of the literature in this review is regarding Christian education in general and not just adult education, it gives us a good representation as to

where educators are currently standing on this issue of philosophy and Christian education as a whole. This literature review will move from the broad category of philosophy, to educational philosophy, to Christian educational philosophy, and finally to adult Christian educational philosophy literature. The reason there are four layers to this topic is because adult Christian education as a whole has been mostly influenced by the educational system of Malcolm Knowles, but to fully understand the topic at hand we cannot just flow from philosophy straight to Knowles, or even from philosophy, to educational philosophy, to Knowles. We must grasp the philosophical positions that Christian educators are holding regarding the relationship between Christian education and secular educational philosophy before we can fully grasp the current status of adult Christian educational philosophy.

Philosophy

The field of philosophy, meaning the love or study of wisdom, asks the most foundational questions about life and existence (Dew and Gould 2019, 1-2). For the purposes of this literature review we will discuss four major philosophical categories; metaphysics, epistemology, anthropology, and axiology. The views and assumptions educators have within these categories will greatly influence not only how they see the world, but how they conduct adult Christian education. Below is a necessarily brief sketch of these categories.

Metaphysics asks big, or meta, questions about existence. What is the nature of reality? Is there a god? What is the universe made of and how does it function? (Hasker 1983, 14). For example, a quantum physicist may describe

reality as being wholly made up of electrons, quarks, protons and neutrons (Carroll 2016, 179). In recent years prominent public scientific figures such as astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson have expressed the idea that our metaphysical reality might be that we live in a computer simulation (Tyson 2017, 32).

Questions about metaphysics are inherently linked to epistemology. Epistemology is the study of knowledge, or as Dew and Foreman say, it is about how we figure out “how do we know what we know?” (Dew and Foreman 2014, 9). When people make a metaphysical claim, it is natural to then ask how they know that claim is true. Epistemology asks about truth and knowledge. It even seeks to define what knowledge is. It asks whether or not it is something we can possess. It wonders what kind of knowledge we can know, and attempts to figure out how we can justify our knowledge and beliefs (Moreland and Craig 2017, 16).

The next category important for this chapter is anthropology. Anthropology, as it is studied in philosophy, asks questions about the nature of humanity (Naugle 2012, 47). Anthropology seeks to discover the relationship between our minds and our bodies. It wants to know things like whether or not we have free will, the nature of souls and if we even have them, the relationship between nature and nurture on our thoughts and behavior, and whether or not we are born good or evil (Knight 2008, 18).

Our final philosophical category is axiology, which is the study of morals and values (Naugle 2014, 73). Knight points out that axiology is built upon the ideas we have concerning epistemology and metaphysics (Knight 2008, 28) and

that it “stands at the very foundation of the educational process” (Knight 2008, 29). He argues that teachers unavoidably teach their values and ethics simply through the teaching process itself (Knight 2008, 29). As we will see below axiology will play an important role in the determination of curriculum and the purpose of Christian education.

Philosophy of Education

Now that we have discussed the basics of some of the most important philosophical categories we move on to the field of educational philosophy. Educational philosophy utilizes the categories we just discussed, in congruence with educational psychology, and applies them to the field of education. As we will see below, the philosophical claims that we make regarding categories such as epistemology and axiology will determine the manner in which we educate (Pazmiño 2008, 107). Below we will briefly describe these categories and give some examples of how they can be viewed in the field of Christian education.

Purpose

The question of purpose in educational philosophy asks why we educate in the first place. According to George Knight the main purpose of Christian education is redemption and reconciliation (Knight 2006, 213). He argues that Luke 19:10 is the perfect verse for communicating the purpose for education, “For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Knight also argues that a secondary goal of Christian education is to “help bring people back to at-one-ness with God, other people, their own selves, and the natural

world” (Knight 2006, 213). As we explore the literature below we will consider other suggestions as to the purpose of Christian education.

Content and Curriculum

What we teach and the needs we address are defined by Robert Pazmiño as content (Pazmiño 2008, 109-110). He emphasizes that both the “living Word of God (Christ) and the written Word of God (Bible)” are important in relating truth to the lives of students (Pazmiño 2008, 109). On the other hand, Leon McKenzie urges us to consider that a wider range of topics can be taught in a religious setting because people feel more comfortable when learning in their church environment with people they trust (McKenzie 1985, 19). Martha MacCullough points out that ultimately the content and curriculum we chose will be a reflection of our educational goals and the views we have about the roles of the teacher and the student. She points out how all of these areas are interconnected and interdependent and should be born out of a consistent worldview (MacCullough 2013, 179).

Students' needs are also considered in determining content with Galvin and Veerman arguing that curriculum “must be based on the needs and interests of adults” (Veerman 1999, 179). Nancy Foltz argues that adult Christian education should “identify the pressing problems of interest to adults” (Foltz 1986, 49). Along these same lines, Lawrence O. Richards argues that we should “focus on relevant application” (Richards 2020, 114). Robert DeVargas points out on the other hand, as we saw in chapter 2, that Jesus met both the real needs and felt needs of the adult learner (DeVargas 2008, 264-266). We will see below

how felt needs and real needs of adults is a vital aspect of adult Christian educational ministries.

The Role of the Teacher

This category asks what the role of the teacher should be both in the teaching process itself and in the general role teachers take on in the lives of the students. The way we answer this question will be informed by our basic philosophical categories. For instance, if we were to hold the epistemological belief that the Bible is the authoritative source of information for truth about God as Roy Zuck does (Zuck 1998, 91), then the role of the teacher would be to “*proclaim* to others the Word and to *portray* it in their own experiences” (Zuck 1998, 73 emphasis in original). Conversely, if we were to embrace the axiology values of our adult learners, who by and large only care about what is of immediate use, then the role of teachers would be to concern themselves only with the topics which fulfill the immediate relevant learning goal of their learners (Foltz 1986, 51). In a more balanced approach, DeVargas argues that it is our job as teachers to motivate students to “connect their (subjective) felt needs to their (objective) real needs” (DeVargas 2008, 267).

The Role of the Learner

Just as in the role of the teacher, the role of the learner in the educational process and the manner in which they learn is also informed by our philosophical views. Richard Patterson discusses this in terms of pedagogy, andragogy, and synergogy. Pedagogy is teacher-centric and the learner takes on a passive role, absorbing information from the teacher as it is dictated to them. Andragogy is the

opposite, the learner takes center stage and determines the topics being studied and takes on a more active and investigative role in the learning process. Out of these two poles synergogy has been born, which allows for a more active role for the student while realizing that the teacher is a source of wisdom and truth for the student because they know what the student does not know (Patterson 1999, 125-126).

Teaching Methods

George Knight points out that the methods we use in teaching will be reflective of what we believe in the major philosophical categories of metaphysics, anthropology, axiology, and epistemology as they help us to determine our goals and purpose for education. Those goals, along with the educator's views of the roles of teacher and student, will help educators determine their teaching methods (Knight 2008, 33-35). He stresses that it is “important for educators to choose, select, and develop practices that are in harmony with their beliefs” (Knight 2008, 35).

Christian Educational Philosophy

With the basics of philosophy and educational philosophy presented above we now discuss of the literature pertaining to Christian educational philosophy. This ranges from literature that is wholly concerned with the above topics as well as Christian educational philosophy, to literature that has these topics as part of its concern. These works are excellent examples of how this topic is addressed in the current literature. They consider all of the issues discussed above, philosophy and educational philosophy, in an organized and

systematic way. The remainder of the literature is generally only concerned with one or two of the topics within the field of educational philosophy such as the role of the learner or the purpose of education. These resources will be discussed, compared, and evaluated in relation to each other and by the critical analysis of this author in relation to the biblical, theological, and foundational chapter of this project thesis.

Philosophy and Education – George R. Knight

Philosophy and Education by George Knight is a comprehensive work written on the above topics from a Christian perspective. Knight begins his work with an explanation of the basics of philosophy which he identifies as metaphysics, epistemology, and axiology (Knight 2006, 9). He then uses these topics to move forward into educational philosophy which he describes as “not distinct from general philosophy; it is general philosophy applied to education in a specific area of human endeavor” (Knight 2006, 15). In other words, Christian educational philosophy is an application of general philosophy as it is put to work in the world of Christian education. Knight weaves together the topics of general philosophy with the field of Christian education to show how they are related to each other; for example, in discussing epistemology Knight argues that any form of Christian education should have the Bible as a source of knowledge in its curriculum (Knight 2006, 26-7).

After an understanding of the relationship between philosophy and education has been developed for the reader, Knight then presents comprehensive explanations of different secular schools of thought in general

philosophy beginning with traditional philosophies like idealism and philosophers like Plato, and then moves towards modern and postmodern philosophies such as existentialism and pragmatism and philosophers such as Richard Rorty and John Dewey. Knight analyzes each philosophy highlighting their strengths and weaknesses from a Christian perspective. For example, in discussing pragmatism Knight points out that it is “relativistic... and human centered” but argues that pragmatism’s focus on the useful and practical has helped “break up the dichotomy between academic formality and daily living – a dichotomy that has spelled death to living spirituality in those who have separated the formal aspects of religious belief from their daily activities” (Knight 2006, 83-84).

Knight then presents how these various philosophies have been used to create educational theories like perennialism and progressivism, again offering an analysis of each one. In these chapters Knight explains how these schools operate according to the concerns of educational philosophy discussed above, such as the role of the teacher and the role of the student. For example, in discussing how an essentialist understanding of education defines the role of teachers, Knight explains that they are the “one who knows what the student needs to know and is well acquainted with the logical order of the subject matter and the way it should be presented” (Knight 2006, 124).

Knight then spends the remainder of the book focusing on these topics from a Christian perspective; however, instead of taking a particular stand on an issue such as the role of the teacher and explaining what that should look like in theory for Christian education, he chooses to discuss what Christian values

should be added to these categories that are not a consideration in secular educational theory. For example, in discussing the role of the teacher Knight points out that Christian teachers take on pastoral roles for their learners, becoming models of faithful Christian living, and serve as “agents in the plan of redemption” (Knight 2006, 213).

In sum, Knight’s book is a comprehensive explanation of the topic of philosophy and education and how those relate to Christian education, but he refrains from taking a stand on many of the particular issues within educational philosophy that could be of concern to Christians, leaving it to the reader to decide their own pathway through these issues. Throughout the book it is noted that the secular world of philosophical schools of general and educational philosophy have created the framework which Christian educators will use to develop their methodology and personal philosophy of education in their ministry. This stance is reflected in statements such as

it is a part of the task of the Christian educator to evaluate the assumptions underlying these theories in the light of Christian philosophy, and then to build a personal educational theory that utilizes, where helpful, the discoveries of the educational philosophers and theorists

[and] only through an awareness of the philosophical implications of the theories can Christian educators compare them with the Christian worldview and be in a position to use those aspects of the theories that are in harmony with Christianity and building blocks for developing a Christian philosophy of education (Knight 2006, 140).

These statements portray a sentiment where bits and pieces of various schools will be utilized to fit their beliefs and/or goals rather than building a Christian philosophy of education from the ground up. In the end, Knight is among the

group of educators that desires an eclectic approach to the different schools of educational thought depending on the situation.

Foundational Issues in Christian Education - Robert W. Pazmiño

Robert Pazmiño dedicates a chapter of his book to this topic and focuses on many of the issues presented by Knight; thus, there is no need to re-examine them here. Pazmiño agrees with Knight in regard to utilizing secular educational schools of thought in developing a Christian philosophy for education. Pazmiño urges “rethinking education biblically given the prior commitment to biblical authority” in relation to the educational and philosophical schools of thought (Pazmiño 2008, 87). After a presentation of the modern educational theories of perennialism, essentialism, behaviorism, progressivism, reconstructionism, romantic naturalism, existentialism, and postmodernism, in which he discusses their strengths and weaknesses, Pazmiño presents his solution to the challenge of how we should respond to these schools (Pazmiño 2008, 117-124).

He suggests that “a careful blending of various philosophies described above best contributes to educational practice” (Pazmiño 2008, 124). Pazmiño uses Hollis Casewell's model that educational content should be threefold, centering on content, society, and persons, which when taken together will center us on God. Pazmiño argues that different modern philosophies lend themselves to these three centers. He sees progressivism, behaviorism, and reconstructionism as society-centered, perennialism and existentialism as content-centered, and finally romantic naturalism and existentialism as person-centered (Pazmiño 2008, 124-125).

In addition to the blending of the educational philosophies, Pazmiño points out that for evangelicals, the Bible is the source of all truth, and it should be utilized in how we orient ourselves in determining our educational philosophy. He also urges us to take the matter seriously and avoid “flippant proof-texting or referral to biblical principles that ignores adequate grappling with the questions” presented in educational philosophy (Pazmiño 2008, 126). Pazmiño appears to be taking the same stand as Knight, picking and choosing from various schools of educational philosophy.

With All Your Mind - Michael L. Peterson

Michael Peterson’s book is similar in content and structure to the way in which Knight and Pazmiño present their information on philosophy and educational philosophy. Where Peterson differs is in offering a unique Christian philosophy of education. He has taken the challenges presented by people like Lois LeBar seriously (LeBar 1995, 24). Peterson argues that “what we need is a systematic and well-rounded Christian understanding of reality, knowledge, and value that can direct our thinking about curriculum structure, methods of teaching and learning, and instruction in morals and values” (Peterson 2001, 95).

Peterson first grounds his perspective in metaphysics, anthropology, and epistemology. Peterson’s metaphysics emphasizes the theological concept of Creation *ex nihilo*. He constructs the rest of his philosophy on this by arguing that all things come from God (Peterson 2001, 96). Humankind’s divine image is another important aspect of his philosophical formulation. Through this concept he affirms humanity’s capacity for reason which gives us the ability to know and

understand God. For Peterson, reason is a gift that God has given so we can know God (Peterson 2001, 97). As the title of his book implies, reason in relation to the concept of humankind being made in God's image is a vital epistemological pillar upon which Peterson grounds his philosophy. He argues that "by virtue of being the image of God, we are able to think, judge, and know in ways that reflect his rational abilities" (Peterson 2001, 100).

After establishing his philosophical foundations, Peterson proceeds to discuss how these foundations inform topics within educational philosophy, such as: the role of the learner, curriculum, content, and teaching methods. Peterson criticizes the general approach of andragogy in which the learner has the determining role in curriculum, content, and teaching methods with the focus being on the learner's experiences and felt needs. He argues that such an approach "cannot provide a larger understanding of life and the world" (Peterson 2001, 111). He suggests that we need a more liberal education that prepares the learner for a deeper understanding of life's issues:

This is why the intellectual aspect of our humanity must guide the practical ... such education enables them to think not simply in terms of their immediate surroundings or needs but also in terms of the global situation in which humanity finds itself. It sensitizes them to moral obligations, and recurring problems of the race. It brings a wider perspective to practical decisions and actions. (Peterson 2001, 111)

Peterson likewise takes issue with what he calls the "fashionable proposal that educators abandon abstract, didactic instruction methods and instead employ more experiential teaching styles" (Peterson 2001, 117). He notes that while this method has been adopted in the school systems in the United States, we have undergone "serious deterioration in academic performance" (Peterson

2001, 111). He argues that while there may be many reasons why that is the case, it should not be ignored that this deterioration has occurred after the public school system shifted to this approach (Peterson 2001, 111). He suggests instead that “a better balance would be struck if we helped liberate students from patterns of thinking that are too experience-oriented and assisted them in gaining the skills of abstract reasoning and interpretation” (Peterson 2001, 111). In sum, Peterson tries to rethink the philosophical landscape in the world of Christian education and addresses many concerns that adult Christian educators should take seriously.

Adult Christian Education

We now turn to literature concerned specifically with adult Christian education. No Christian literature was located that discusses the previous topics solely in relation to the needs of adult learners. However, there are many books dedicated to adult Christian education. These works contain within them topics that address the above discussion in part rather than as a whole. We will now discuss the current philosophical landscape within the adult Christian education community.

It must be noted that the learner-centered secular pragmatic approach to education ascribed to educator and philosopher John Dewey has been incredibly influential to Christian education as a whole (Benson 2001, 28). Likewise, when considering adult Christian education, Malcolm Knowles’s secular andragogic approach has been highly influential (Parrett and Kang 2009, 243). Most of the adult Christian education literature discussed here reflects the approach of

Knowles's andragogy. Knowles was even asked to write an article in *The Christian Educator's Handbook of Adult Education* entitled "The Contributions of Malcolm Knowles."

"The Contributions of Malcolm Knowles" – Malcolm S. Knowles

Malcolm Knowles recognizes that his andragogic model has been influential in both adult education in general and adult Christian education in particular (Knowles 1999, 96). Knowles explains his model of education in his book *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* first published in 1970 and revised and updated in 1980. In it Knowles notes that andragogy as a term derives its meaning from the Greek word *anēr* which means "man, not boy" or adult (Knowles 1980, 42). In his educational approach he shifts from pedagogy, which he describes as teacher-centered, to andragogy, which he describes as learner-centered (1999, 96). Andragogy can be generally characterized as having the following approach to adult education: adult learners are at their best when they are self-directed (Knowles 1980, 41), the needs of the learner are what motivates them to learn and is the topic of their learning (Knowles 1980, 47), the learner builds on previous life experience in the learning process and gains more meaning through experience (Knowles 1980, 44) learning is viewed by the learner as a means to an end to become more competent at life skills and to become all they can be as humans (Knowles 1980, 44).

A vital aspect of Knowles' theory is that his pedagogy/andragogy comparison is not an either/or scenario. He argues that the use of pedagogical or

andragogical techniques is dependent on the situation (Knowles 1980, 43). He states that the choice between the two models depends on how familiar learners are with a particular subject matter and how apt learners are in taking responsibility for their own learning (Knowles 1999, 99). Moreover, rather than simply choosing between one model or another in a certain situation, Knowles argues that pedagogical and andragogical techniques are on a spectrum which educators operate within as they interact with their learners (Knowles 1980, 43). Knowles has pointed out how some educators have taken his andragogical model as “absolute” and feel they “have to be loyal to it and can’t deviate from it” (Knowles 1999, 98). This observation appears to be true in the field of adult Christian education and will be observed in some of the literature below.

“Basic Principles of Adult Religious Education” – Nancy T. Foltz

Nancy Foltz utilizes the approach by Malcolm Knowles’s andragogy and asserts that “one of the distinct features of adult religious education is that the center of attention is not curriculum but the learners themselves” (Foltz 1986, 31). Foltz presents several principles which are pertinent to Christian educational philosophy. Her first principle is that adult learners are focused on learning that addresses their problems rather than on simply learning about a particular subject (Foltz 1986, 49). She argues that the task of the Christian educator is to find those topics that are of interest to the adult learners and focus on those issues. She argues that “effective adult religious education brings together the needs of adults with creative ways to discuss and resolve those needs” (Foltz 1986, 50).

Foltz also argues, in agreement with Knowles, that adults are self-directed in their learning (Foltz 1985, 50). She presents four reasons why this is the case: 1) they can learn at their own pace and schedule, 2) they participate in teaching methods that align with their learning style, 3) they are free to be flexible with the learning styles they choose, 4) they determine the structure of whatever they are learning (Foltz 1986, 50). With respect to adults being self-directed, Foltz argues that it is the task of the educator to “encourage integration of the new learning into the total lifestyle of the adult” (Foltz 1985, 51).

Finally, Foltz suggests that adult learners want to learn things that are of immediate use to them (Foltz 1986, 51). “Adults are not interested in storing knowledge for later use or in hearing answers to questions they do not ask. The assimilation of new learning is directly related to the immediate need and usefulness of the information” (Foltz 1985, 51). As a result, Foltz suggests that educators focus on “short-term learning” of subjects that have direct and immediate “application to lifestyle” for the learning (Foltz 1985, 51). The weakness of Foltz’s approach is that she fails to recognize that Knowles did not advocate for complete andragogy (Knowles 1980, 43). Nor does she recognize the dangers of only focusing on the felt needs of the learner and thus ignores the “deeper issues from which the need comes” (Olsen 1999, 302).

“The Adult Learner” - Margaret Lawson

Margaret Lawson’s approach to adult learning fully embraces andragogy. It is a good example of what Knowles fears might happen when educators do not place his theory on a spectrum of both pedagogy and andragogy. She argues

that the key to adult learning is shifting focus from the teacher to the learner and presents Knowles' andragogy as the model we should follow in adult education in the church (Lawson 2008, 356). She stresses that for adults to maximize learning they need to have their needs met and their experiences recognized. (Lawson 2008, 357).

In order to accomplish this, Lawson suggests that both teachers and learners should value the role of the Holy Spirit in the classroom. She attempts to use the book of John to prove her stance on this and to explain how it works itself out in the classroom:

In John 14:25-27, Jesus says, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything that I have told you." If the Holy Spirit is indeed the teacher, and He indwells each adult believer, then each has the ability to discern the truth of the Scripture as it is revealed by the Spirit. Thus, every adult believer is both teacher and learner and should be encouraged to share his or her experiences with others, and so build up the body of Christ. Involving the learner actively in the study experience usually reaps rich dividends. (Lawson 2008, 356)

Lawson's approach can be criticized on a two fronts. Firstly, she fully embraces andragogy as an "alternative" to pedagogy by referencing Richard Patterson (Lawson 2008, 357). She fails to recognize that in the same work in which she cites, Patterson also argues that andragogy by itself is not sufficient because of the dangers of the "blind leading the blind" and that a blending of pedagogy and andragogy, which he deems "synergogy", is needed instead (Patterson 1999, 125-126). Failure to treat pedagogy and andragogy as a spectrum instead of two poles that must be chosen from is also what Malcolm Knowles was concerned about (Knowles 1999, 98). Secondly, Lawson's

simplistic account of the Holy Spirit's role of the interpretation of Scripture in the life of the believer is brought into question by Duvall and Hays who argue that the Holy Spirit does not automatically interpret the Bible for us, but rather begins with diligent study (Duvall and Hays 2012, 229).

Spirit-Filled Teaching - Roy B. Zuck

Roy Zuck recognizes the importance of the issues presented to Christian educators in relation to secular philosophies and educational theories. This book is an example of putting into practice Pazmiño's understanding of looking to the Bible as a source of truth when devising our educational practices. As Zuck puts it,

the Bible is not a textbook on education, but it does include insights into educational philosophy and method. Because God made the learner, his teacher, his content, and his environment, Christians look to God and His Word for valid educational concepts. (Zuck 1998, 91)

Zuck's particular emphasis is addressing the role of the Holy Spirit in educational ministry. One example of Zuck's exploration of this is in the role of the learner and the teacher as it pertains to their motivation to learn. Zuck suggests six helpful ways in which the Holy Spirit interacts with the student in the learning process: 1) He helps the learner understand their needs and convicts them of their weaknesses. 2) He leads people to Jesus and the Bible to fulfill their needs. 3) He uses teachers to lead students to their "highest motivations." 4) He orients the learner's drives and desires towards God. 5) He assists the teacher in identifying the learners' needs in the preparation process. 6) He helps motivate learners by striving for various spiritual goals. (Zuck 1998, 118-119)

Zuck also addresses the of the needs of the learner, and the relevance of which topics we should teach, through the lens of the Bible and the role of the Holy Spirit. He argues that adults need to see the relevance of what they are learning in their lives and have their felt needs met (Zuck 1998, 119). He then provides examples of Jesus meeting people's needs in the Gospels and Paul meeting the needs of churches through his writings (Zuck 1998, 120). Zuck argues that the Holy Spirit helps teachers address these issues in three ways. First, the Holy Spirit helps them form their lessons so that they will “capture interest and that will relate to students’ problems, needs, and experiences.” Second, the Holy Spirit helps make the Bible relevant to learners’ experiences (Zuck 1998, 120). Lastly, the Holy Spirit leads teachers to lead students in such a way that they begin to look to the Bible for answers to their needs (Zuck 1998, 120).

The weakness of Zuck’s approach is similar to those of Knight and Pazmiño. He fails to rethink the whole endeavor of Christian philosophy of education. His approach is essentially to attach what he thinks the Holy Spirit is doing within the popular framework of the field of education without evaluating whether these ideas are true. While it is important to elucidate the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian educational philosophy, Zuck fails to challenge some of the popular approaches to Christian education that may not be grounded in Christian philosophy and theology.

“The Purpose and Scope of Adult Religious Education” – Leon McKenzie

Leon McKenzie approaches the topic of the purpose of religious education through the lens of psychology. He adapts the work of Victor Frankl and suggests that what human beings want most out of life is meaning (McKenzie 1986, 9-10). He, therefore, argues that the goal of religious education is to help people find meaning. He defines religious education as “a process that enables persons: 1) to acquire meaning, 2) to explore and expand meaning, and 3) to express meaning in a productive manner” (McKenzie 1986, 10). The weakness of McKenzie’s argument is that the purpose of education is centered on the adult’s quest for meaning rather than on equipping them to fulfill God’s desire that they to be His image bearers to creation.

McKenzie also addresses the issue of the scope of religious education. He argues that any education that takes place within a religious setting should be considered religious education. The topics themselves need not be religious in and of themselves (McKenzie 1986, 18-19). He sees value in this approach for several reasons. First, he argues that adults are more likely to attend educational activities with people and in places they feel comfortable, like their local church (McKenzie 1986, 20). Second, it helps in eliminating the “neo-Platonic bifurcation of reality into two spheres: the sacred and the secular” (McKenzie 1986, 20). Third, it provides opportunities for the people in the local church to utilize their expertise in various areas of life and share it with their community (McKenzie 1986, 21). Lastly, it will create an environment in the local churches where people are open to learning. McKenzie argues that we first need to meet the felt

needs of adults before we can move forward with our agenda for religious education (McKenzie 1986, 21-22). McKenzie states his opinion regarding the importance of felt needs for the adult learner to the process of adult education in the church:

Adults will not seek out educational activities until they have arrived at a “readiness for learning.” Adults follow their felt needs and interests in regard to participation in education. They have their own agendas. They are largely self-directing and vote with their feet when they like or dislike a particular theme proposed for study. They will respond favorably only to programs that they perceive as relevant to their concerns. The determination of program topics should be based on a systematic study of the needs and interests of the adults to be served by the educational program. (McKenzie 1986, 20)

McKenzie’s comments correspond to what we have observed in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 where Paul directly meets the felt needs of his audience. We have also observed how Jesus met not only the real and but also the felt needs of those to whom he ministered. It would be unwise for educators not to meet the immediate felt needs of adult learners.

“The Nature of Theology and Education” - Michael J. Anthony

Michael Anthony utilizes a different approach than that of Leon McKenzie by focusing his arguments on what theology and the Bible have to say about the purpose of education. Citing Colossians 1:28 Anthony argues that the purpose of Christian education is to bring believers into Christlikeness (Anthony 2008, 21). He views theology, education, and discipleship as all working towards the same end, noting they are the “means to accomplishing the Great Commission” (Anthony 2008, 15-16).

Anthony, therefore, sees theology as a vital part of not just learning but in discipleship as well by arguing that “we cannot worship what we do not understand” (Anthony 2008, 22). Theology and Bible, therefore, does not just provide learners with information, but leads them into a deeper appreciation of God, which motivates their worship and service (Anthony 2008, 22). Anthony, however, points out that even as well-equipped educators help people grow, it is ultimately God who is responsible for changing the hearts and minds of learners in the sanctification process that takes place during the learning process (Anthony 2008, 22). Anthony rightly shifts the conversation surrounding purpose in the right direction. Rather than adult education being teacher focused or learner focused, it brings God back into the equation.

“Toward a Theologically Informed Approach to Education” – James Riley Estep

James Estep begins his article by asking whether or not the education that takes place within the church differs from education done elsewhere. He argues that it should be different, and should be “based on educational principles that reflect Christian theological beliefs” (Estep 2008, 264). The topics he addresses that relate to our discussion are purpose and objectives, the role of the teacher, and the role of the student.

Estep argues that the purpose of Christian education is for the glorification of God and to help believers become mature in Christ (Estep 2008, 265). He believes the three ways in which we accomplish this goal are by: 1) developing within the learner a Christian worldview with a content-centered approach using primarily Scripture, 2) developing Christian character in the learner through

learner-centered employment of spiritual disciplines, and 3) motivating the learners to participate in service of the church through process-centered teaching methods of practical service (Estep 2008, 265-267). Estep sees the role of the teacher as having five aspects: 1) someone who is God's instrument, 2) a serious student of Scripture, 3) a mentor, 4) a servant leader, 5) and a curriculum expert. (Estep 2008, 269-272). The role of the learner according to Estep is to bring glory to God through studying the Bible, being a disciple of Jesus, and becoming a servant of Jesus (Estep 2008, 273-274).

Estep is an example of someone that is trying to bring a Christian worldview into the discussion; however, he does not discuss the matters at hand in the language of educational philosophy. For instance, he does not discuss how epistemology or metaphysics would help in determining the role of the teacher and the learner in the classroom. He does make statements such as "teachers are perceived as leaders by those they teach, and in many respects their instruction is recognized as the official voice of the church" which imply that the teacher has some authority, is a conveyor of information, and not simply a facilitator of discussion (Estep 2008, 272). The drawback of Estep's writing for field of adult Christian education is the lack of fully participating in the ongoing debate around these topics by not addressing the concerns of the topic directly, and not using the philosophical language of the field. Estep's contribution, therefore, is not as easily discernible to the philosophical topic at hand in comparison to someone like Michael Peterson's contribution to the discussion.

Current Consensus of the Field

In Chapter Two we were confronted with the thoughts of Lois LeBar who in 1958 observed that we have been guided by secular philosophies of education rather than employing a Christian philosophy of education that points to God's ways for educating believers (LeBar 1995, 24). The question is then: Have we made any movement towards this goal or are we still continuing to embrace secular educational philosophies? Certainly, there are people like Estep and Peterson who try to meet the challenge of LeBar. But what about the field in general? Perhaps a way to gauge where this topic currently stands is to compare the textbooks *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, published in 2001 by Baker Academic and edited by Michael J. Anthony, and *Christian Education: A Guide to the Foundations of Ministry*, published in 2019 also by Baker Academic and edited by Freddy Cardoza. The 2019 edition is an updated version of the 2001 edition, written for the purpose of training future Christian education leaders who are attending Christian universities, Bible colleges, and seminaries. So what is the general consensus of the field? Has anything changed from 2001 to 2019? Let us find out below.

Warren Benson, professor and author of numerous books in the field of Christian education, wrote the chapter of philosophy and education in 2001's *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*. After a discussion of basic philosophical categories, and an explanation of different secular schools of thought in the world of education, Benson notes "after summarizing these schools of educational thought, the Christian searches for a

sure and definitive base for a philosophy of education” (Benson 2001, 33). The implication is that these schools diverge from a Christian perspective. Benson further argues that we need to start with a biblical foundation in developing a philosophy of ministry. Rather than discussing what a biblical foundation might look like, he finishes the chapter with a confusing presentation of how theology fits into educational philosophy. He states that “Theology, rather than education philosophy, must control Christian education” (Benson 2001, 33). He then states that “theology answers some of the most elementary and yet profound questions regarding educational theories and ministries, but it does have some limitations in constructing an educational philosophy” (Benson 2001, 34).

The article taken in its totality understands that the tasks of philosophy and theology are so wholly different that theology is not up to the task of developing a philosophy of ministry. This seems to be a flaw in understanding of what philosophy and theology are, as though educational philosophy and theology are two separate foundations that we build from at the same time; however, philosophy and theology ask very similar questions and Christian philosophy specifically should be viewed as a form of theological inquiry. Ultimately, the suggestion is that theology is not enough and needs to be supplemented by educational philosophy. Benson argues this educational philosophy should be “biblical” in nature, but does not go on to define what he means by that (Benson 2001, 34).

David Setran’s article in the updated 2019 edition of *Christian Education: a Guide to the Foundations of Ministry* has a similar structure to Benson’s article.

Setran explains basic philosophical categories and then presents and criticizes various philosophical schools of thought. In his conclusion, Setran begins by saying “as is evident from this brief survey, all the above philosophies have both positive and negative features when considered from a Christian perspective” (Setran 2019, 44). He then explains how different schools appropriately address the needs of humanity in their various approaches and concludes that “a carefully articulated philosophy of Christian education, therefore, may be eclectic, drawing constructive elements from many different models while attempting to avoid their pitfalls” (Setran 2019, 46).

This appears to be a complete embrace of what LeBar is criticizing when she says that “we have been content to borrow manmade systems of education instead of discovering God’s system” (LeBar 1995, 24). The analysis of these two articles demonstrates that this debate is long standing and unresolved. It is our opinion that the proper approach to answering this challenge is to develop a Christian philosophy and then apply that to Christian education and adult Christian education, much in the same spirit as Michael Peterson has done.

Conclusion

There several approaches as to how philosophy influences the field of Christian education. Those like Knight, Benson, and Pazmiño believe we should pick and choose various aspects of educational philosophy that seem to be compatible with Christian beliefs and figure out how to weave them into how we educate. There are others like Michael Peterson who attempt to start from scratch, developing a Christian philosophy from which an educational philosophy

is derived. Still others like Foltz and Lawson embrace educational theories like Malcolm Knowles' andragogy. Lastly, there are people like Estep that come at the topic from a theological rather than philosophical approach thereby missing some of the concerns important to educational philosophy.

The literature as a whole demonstrates that the field has by and large taken the data from educational psychology, such as the observation that adults only want to learn about things that address their felt needs, and also accepted educational psychology's conclusion that we must then therefore focus on those felt needs (Galvin and Veerman 1999, 179). A better way would be to observe (and if necessary, criticize) the raw data of educational psychology and then think about the data from a Christian perspective to develop our Christian philosophy for adult Christian education. For instance, let us assume that it is true that adults really do only care about learning things that are felt needs for them. One way to approach the problem from a Christian perspective would be that rather than giving adult learners only what they want, we need to do as DeVargas suggests and inspire them to see what their real needs are (DeVargas 2008, 267).

The purpose of the project was to embrace Michael Peterson's approach and then propose a philosophy of adult Christian education in the local church. A Christian philosophy for ministry can be fully developed from a theological approach which views the general revelation of educational psychology's raw data through the special revelation lens of Scripture and theological truths devised from Scripture. In the next chapter we will discuss the process by which the project was completed and assessed.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESIGN, PROCEDURE, AND ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this project was to create a resource that develops a Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. The research question was: how does Christian philosophy inform the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church?

The project goals were:

1. The resource will provide the basics of the study of philosophy which are foundational in Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.
2. The resource will provide a foundation of how philosophy affects adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.
3. The resource will provide an outline of how the philosophy of Pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian education praxis in the local church.
4. The resource will present a Christian philosophy that seeks to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church.
5. The resource will provide a process for teachers to think critically about their own philosophy which affects the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.
6. The resource will provide a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.

The focus of this project was to create a resource that discussed how Christian philosophy influences the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. It also provided examples of how secular philosophies are influencing the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. It suggested a Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. Finally, it provided a method for readers to begin to form their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.

Context

My personal context for this resource is my experience within the life of the church, both as a lifelong student and as a teacher in my adulthood. I have interacted with and observed how philosophical presuppositions have influenced how I have both experienced and conducted adult educational ministries in the setting of the local church. This has been a topic of concern for me since my college years, even before I understood that my concerns related to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church in conjunction with philosophy. I have become more educated about this topic, learning a great deal more about philosophy both in seminary and through my own continuing education. As a result, a strong philosophical lens is important to how I see the world in addition to the biblical and theological lenses that I also use.

I grew up with a mother who is a mental health therapist and am married to a mental health therapist. While I do have some formal education in educational psychology, constant exposure to this field in an informal way has also come to influence how I think about what may or may not be healthy ways to

apply a psychological perspective to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. Fortunately, I have a wife who is happy to discuss my interests in adult education from this perspective as educational psychology is an important aspect of the resource.

The general context for the project is the field of adult Christian education as it is influenced by secular philosophies which impact its praxis. It has been my observation since understanding the connection between philosophy and education that while this topic is taught in seminaries to students studying adult Christian education, it does not seem to be a determining factor in how some adult Christian education practitioners conduct their ministries. This topic does not seem to be making its way out of the seminary classroom and into the praxis of the church. This observation is based on conversations I have with adult Christian educators as well as observing how the churches in my area in Northern Illinois conduct adult Christian education. As we shall see in Chapter Five, this observation is supported in the data collected from the expert reader assessment tool.

Participants

The participants reading my resource consisted of ten professors and/or practitioners of adult Christian education. My goal was to get a wide range of perspectives by selecting people who were both experts in adult Christian education and who also specialized in other areas pertinent to the resource. They would bring a welcome and unique perspective to bear on the resource.

Nine of the ten of the participants have twenty or more years of experience in adult Christian Education.

Two of the participants are Old Testament professors with Ph.D. degrees in Old Testament studies, who are highly involved in local church adult ministries either as a volunteer or as a or paid staff member. These two readers provided input to insure the resource employed Scripture in a responsible manner. One of these readers is also a missionary, teaching at a seminary in Kenya and other settings across the continent. Another participant was been a missionary in South Africa for over twenty years. This participant worked with the amaZioni population, a Christian group which the mission organization's website (Zion Evangelical Ministries of Africa) describes as a group that mixes Christianity with "indigenous African beliefs."

One of the participants is a professor of adult Christian education and also works in the local church. The other participants are practitioners in the local church with experience in adult educational ministry. They serve as adult Christian education pastors/directors, or as head pastor overseeing their church's approaches to adult Christian education. One of them also wrote curriculum for adult ministries an evangelical mega churches in the Chicago area.

Other demographic information is as follows. All of the participants were male. Two were ages 41-50, three were ages 51-60, four were ages 61-70, and one was age 71-80. Nine participants had been involved in Christian education for twenty or more years. One participant had been involved in Christian

education between 6-10 years. Two participants had a bachelor's degree level of education, two had a master's degree level of education, and six had doctorates.

Procedure and Assessment

I wrote a resource for this project and asked adult Christian education experts to evaluate it with an assessment tool to determine if the resource fulfilled the project goals. To produce the resource I utilized my formal and on-going education as well as my experience adult Christian educational ministries. The resource is entitled *Meeting People Where They Are At and Giving Them What They Need: A Christian Philosophy for Adult Education in the Local Church*. My approach in writing this resource was to create the document by using my knowledge of the issues at hand in the field, while detailing my own understanding of and solution to those issues. When making arguments from the Bible, I utilized outside resources from Bible scholars to support my arguments.

The panel of expert readers was provided with an assessment tool containing quantitative and qualitative questions, along with demographic questions. The quantitative questions were presented with a Likert scale numerating from 1 to 5: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral – I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree. The full list of questions in the demographic, quantitative and qualitative portions of the assessment tool can be found in Appendix Two: Assessment Tool.

The qualitative questions were designed to allow readers to give additional feedback concerning what could be improved to make the resource more suitable for leaders in the local church and also for use in Christian colleges or

seminary classes. The qualitative questions provided them with opportunities to express whether or not the resource helped change the way the participants approach adult Christian education in the local church. These questions also allowed room to critique the resource from the participants own personal and theological perspectives.

Much of the feedback was helpful, as it provided me with an opportunity to see areas of this topic I missed, possibly need correction, and ways to help reach a wider audience. This information from the assessment tool will be further explored in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

REPORTING THE RESULTS

This chapter will report the results of the expert reader evaluations of the resource. The findings are listed in order of prominence. The purpose of this project was to create a resource that develops a Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. The research question was: how does Christian philosophy inform the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church?

Goal 3: Pragmatism's Influence on Educational Praxis

The most prominent finding of the survey was Goal 3: "The resource will provide an outline of how the philosophy of Pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian education praxis in the local church." The goal received a rating of 4.37 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: "This resource explains the possible consequences of the local church utilizing the philosophy of Pragmatism in its praxis of adult Christian education" (#2). "This resource provides examples of how the philosophy of pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian educational praxis in the local church" (#15). "This resource explains how the philosophy of pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian educational praxis in the local church" (#9). The assessment questionnaire used a Likert scale from one to five: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Table 1. Goal Number 3 - Explain Pragmatism's Influence on Educational Praxis

Question	Average	Respondents
2. This resource explains the possible consequences of the local church utilizing the philosophy of Pragmatism in its praxis of adult Christian education.	4.60	10
15. This resource provides examples of how the philosophy of pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.	4.30	10
9. This resource explains how the philosophy of pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.	4.20	10
Composite Score	4.37	N = 10

Likert Scale: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Question #2 was the most prominent among the three with a composite score of 4.6 (strongly agree) from ten respondents. Question #15 was the second most prominent with a composite score of 4.3 (agree). Question #9 was the third most prominent with a composite score of 4.2 (agree). Overall, experts were between agreeing and strongly agreeing that the goal of explaining how pragmatism is affecting the educational praxis of adult Christian education in the local church was met. The qualitative portion of the assessment supports this data. Four of the respondents thought that the resource did an excellent job in explaining pragmatism with six of them agreeing with the assertion that pragmatism was having a negative effect on adult Christian education. Two respondents believed that the resource was being too harsh on pragmatism. Another believed that pragmatism still had good things to offer our educational praxis.

Goal 2: Philosophy's Influence on Educational Praxis

The second most prominent finding was: "the resource will provide a foundation of how philosophy affects adult Christian educational praxis in the local church." The goal received a rating of 4.03 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: "This resource provides the reader with an understanding of the field of philosophy as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church" (#3). "This resource provides examples of how basic philosophical categories influence adult Christian educational praxis in the local church" (#8). "This resource explains how philosophies that are not compatible with Christianity can negatively affect the learner as it relates to adult Christian educational praxis in the local church" (#14). The assessment questionnaire used a Likert scale from one to five: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Table 2. Goal Number 2 - Philosophy's Influence on Educational Praxis

Question	Average	Respondents
14. This resource explains how philosophies that are not compatible with Christianity can negatively affect the learner as it relates to adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.	4.20	10
8. This resource provides examples of how basic philosophical categories influence adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.	4.00	10
3. This resource provides the reader with an understanding of the field of philosophy as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	3.90	10
Composite Score	4.03	N = 10

Likert Scale: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Question #14 was the most prominent among the three with a composite score of 4.2 from ten respondents. Question #6 was the second most prominent with a composite score of 4.0. Question #3 was the third most prominent with a composite score of 3.9. Overall experts agreed that the goal of providing a foundation of how philosophy affects adult Christian education praxis in the local church was met. This was supported by the qualitative data with five respondents indicating that the resource forced them to consider their own philosophical presuppositions when performing adult Christian educational ministries.

Goal 1 – Philosophy Basics for Christian Education

The third most prominent finding was: “The resource will provide the basics of the study of philosophy which are foundational in Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.” The goal received

a rating of 3.93 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: “This resource explains how basic philosophical categories influence adult Christian educational praxis in the local church” (#4). “This resource would be effective for a learner that is new to the field of philosophy as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church” (#7). “This resource provides the reader with an understanding of epistemology as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church” (#13). The assessment questionnaire used a Likert scale from one to five: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Table 3. Goal Number 1 - Philosophy Basics for Christian Education

Question	Average	Respondents
13. This resource provides the reader with an understanding of epistemology as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	4.10	10
4. This resource explains how basic philosophical categories influence adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.	4.00	10
7. This resource would be effective for a learner that is new to the field of philosophy as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	3.70	10
Composite Score	3.93	N = 10

Likert Scale: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I Neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Question #13 was the most prominent among the three with a composite score of 4.1 from ten respondents. Question #4 was the second most prominent with a composite score of 4.0. Question #7 was the third most prominent with a composite score of 3.7. Overall, experts agreed that the resource met the goal of

providing the basics of the study of philosophy which are foundational in Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. The qualitative question for this goal was related to what improvements could be made to this resource in this area. A majority of the suggestions were related towards making the resource more academic in nature. Three respondents indicated that I should present the material in a consistently academic writing style. Four respondents indicated that I should cite more sources to support my arguments.

Goal 5 – Challenge the Reader’s Philosophy

The fourth most prominent finding was: The resource will provide a process for teachers to think critically about their own philosophy which affects the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. The goal received a rating of 3.83 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: “This resource encourages teachers to consider the philosophical foundations of their personal praxis of adult Christian education in the local church” (#5). “This resource provides a process for teachers to analyze their praxis of adult Christian education in the local church to determine if it is compatible with Christian philosophy” (#11). “This resource provides a process for teachers to analyze their local church’s praxis of adult Christian education” (#17). The assessment questionnaire used a Likert scale from one to five: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Table 4. Goal Number 5 - Challenge the Reader's Philosophy

Question	Average	Respondents
5. This resource encourages teachers to consider the philosophical foundations of their personal praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	4.20	10
17. This resource provides a process for teachers to analyze their local church's praxis of adult Christian education.	3.70	10
11. This resource provides a process for teachers to analyze their praxis of adult Christian education in the local church to determine if it is compatible with Christian philosophy.	3.60	10
Composite Score	3.83	N = 10

Likert Scale: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Question #5 was the most prominent among the three with a composite score of 4.2 from ten respondents. Question #17 was the second most prominent with a composite score of 3.7. Question #11 was the third most prominent with a composite score of 3.6. Overall, the experts mostly agreed that the resource met the goal of providing a process for teachers to think critically about their own philosophy which affects the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. Again, this is supported by the qualitative data with eight of respondents indicating that the resource challenged them to think about their ministries from the perspective of Christian philosophy.

Goal 4 – Create a Philosophy for Christian Education

The second to lowest score was for goal 4: “The resource will present a Christian philosophy that seeks to provide a foundation for adult Christian

education in the local church.” The goal received a rating of 3.76 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: “This resource presents a coherent Christian philosophy to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church” (#1). “The Christian philosophy presented in this resource utilizes Scripture responsibly to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church” (#10). “The Christian philosophy presented in this resource utilizes Christian history responsibly to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church” (#16). The assessment questionnaire used a Likert scale from one to five: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Table 5. Goal Number 4 - Create a Philosophy for Christian Education

Question	Average	Respondents
1. This resource presents a coherent Christian philosophy to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church.	3.90	10
10. The Christian philosophy presented in this resource utilizes Scripture responsibly to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church.	3.80	10
16. The Christian philosophy presented in this resource utilizes Christian history responsibly to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church.	3.60	10
Composite Score	3.76	N = 10

Likert Scale: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Question #1 was the most prominent among the three with a composite score of 3.9 from ten respondents. Question #10 was the second most prominent with a composite score of 3.8. Question #16 was the third most prominent with a composite score of 3.6. Experts mostly agreed that the resource fulfilled the goal of presenting a Christian philosophy that seeks to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church. Four respondents indicated that this goal would have been improved upon by using Scripture more often to make arguments. Two other's comments indicated that a more consistent tone and presentation also would have helped in making the presentation of the arguments more clear to the reader. Two others also said that the arguments would have benefitted from more practical examples. Another commented that he liked how the material was presented in the first few chapters. He felt it was

well patterned and that the final two chapters when I present my philosophy would benefit from following the same pattern.

Goal 6 – Help the Reader Develop a Philosophy

The lowest score was recorded by goal 6: “The resource will provide a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.” The goal received a rating of 3.43 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: “This resource provides a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church” (#6). “This resource provides suggestions of other resources for teachers to use in the development of their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church” (#12). “This resource provides a structure for teachers to help their local church develop a Christian philosophy for their praxis of adult Christian education” (#18). The assessment questionnaire used a Likert scale from one to five: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Table 6. Goal Number 6 – Help the Reader Develop a Philosophy

Question	Average	Respondents
6. This resource provides a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	3.80	10
12. This resource provides suggestions of other resources for teachers to use in the development of their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	3.50	10
18. This resource provides a structure for teachers to help their local church develop a Christian philosophy for their praxis of adult Christian education.	3.00	10
Composite Score	3.43	N = 10

Likert Scale: 1) Strongly Disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral - I neither Agree or Disagree, 4) Agree, 5) Strongly Agree.

Question #6 was the most prominent among the three with a composite score of 3.8 from ten respondents. Question #12 was the second most prominent with a composite score of 3.5. Question #18 was the third most prominent with a composite score of 3.0. Experts were between agreeing and being neutral about whether or not the resource met the goal of providing a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. This is supported in the qualitative data with one respondent wanting more practical examples of how to develop their philosophy for adult Christian education, while another suggested I ask a series of questions to help guide the reader in the process of developing a process for adult Christian education. Six of the respondents were concerned about the tone of the writing.

Qualitative Analysis

The ten expert readers were asked to answer six qualitative questions for the resource entitled *Meeting People Where They Are At and Giving Them What They Need: A Christian Philosophy for Adult Education in the Local Church*.

These questions were designed to determine how the resource could be improved on and critiqued based on the participant's knowledge and expertise in the field of Adult Christian education. They were also designed to determine how it would be received by practitioners and professors in the field, as well as give them a chance to share if the resource helped them in their own ministries. There was one qualitative question for each of the project goals.

The first qualitative question was: "What could be improved upon in this resource to make it suitable for use by leaders in the local church to help them develop their own philosophy for adult Christian education?" It was related to goal six: "The resource will provide a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church." There was a wide variety of responses to this question. Five respondents said that I should be more concise and academic in my language. One said that the tone of the writing shifted back and forth between academic sounding to more personable, and that it should be kept consistent. Two respondents desired that I had used examples from Scripture more to make my arguments. One asked for more practical examples of how to develop their philosophy for adult Christian education while another suggested I ask a series of questions to help guide the reader in the process of developing a process for

adult Christian education. Lastly, another reader suggested I expand the scope of the book's focus to go beyond how things are conducted in the classroom/small group setting.

The second qualitative question was: "In what way did this resource challenge your own personal educational philosophy?" It was related to goal five: "The resource will provide a process for teachers to think critically about their own philosophy which affects the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church." Eight of respondents indicated that the resource made them think more deeply about how they conducted their own teaching and ministries. One said, "I wouldn't say it challenged, but rather reminded of some things." Another respondent said that he agreed with the resource's claim that many churches have given up on education.

The third qualitative question was: "Please provide an example from the resource that you may have differing views. Explain why your views are different" It was related to goal four: "The resource will present a Christian philosophy that seeks to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church." Four of the respondents suggested modifications to the resources' argument about the role of the Holy Spirit in the learning process as it relates to biblical interpretation while two respondents said they had no disagreements with the document whatsoever. The remaining four respondents voiced some disagreements that did not seem to be theologically related. One implied that I was not gracious enough to learners. Another believed my evaluation of the state of the church's adult education comes across as anecdotal and biased. Another

respondent thought I was too general and broad in my presentation of secular philosophies. Another questioned the resource's claim that because the world is objective we have the capability of understanding it.

The fourth qualitative question was: "What could be improved upon in this resource's description of pragmatism as it relates to adult Christian educational praxis in the local church?" It was related to goal three: "The resource will provide an outline of how the philosophy of Pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian education praxis in the local church." Four of the respondents said that the presentation was excellent and did not need improving upon, while another said it had good criticisms of pragmatism. Another three felt that I was being too harsh about pragmatism and that pragmatism could be useful. Another pointed out that I make no mention of John Dewey in my description of pragmatism. One respondent said that I should be more gracious to my learners and understand that they are going to read the Bible pragmatically.

The fifth qualitative question was: "Please share any new perspectives you gained regarding how philosophy affects adult Christian educational practice in the local church." It was related to goal two: "The resource will provide a foundation of how philosophy affects adult Christian educational praxis in the local church." One respondent shared that they had never pondered how they arrived at their educational practices and that intentionally thinking about them will be helpful moving forward. One respondent noted how my personal experience shared in the first chapter helped frame the issue and made them ponder the topic more deeply than they have in the past. One enjoyed the

teaching examples I gave in the resource. Another shared that he would use it as a teaching tool in his own ministry. One shared how it reminded him about how we have to gently steer people's experiences with the Word. Two said it provided them with the opportunity to explore their own perspectives on the topic. One respondent said they did not gain any new perspectives from the resource. Another said that the way I presented the information by first telling my personal story in the first chapter and then explaining how philosophy affects adult Christian education in the second chapter really helped him understand the concept and got his mind engaged in the topic. This same respondent later contacted me to tell me how after reading the resource they are starting to view this topic through a new lens. A final respondent did not answer this question.

The sixth qualitative question was: "What could be improved upon in this resource to make it suitable for use in a university or seminary setting to assist in teaching about philosophy of adult Christian education?" It was related to goal one: "The resource will provide the basics of the study of philosophy which are foundational in Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church." One respondent said I should write more concisely and with a more scholarly tone. The recommendation of presenting in a more scholarly tone was a view shared by two of the other respondents. Four respondents said that I needed to present more hard data and research with my arguments. One said that the latter chapters of the book need more material and need to be reorganized to fit the first few chapters of the resource. Another said that the goal

of the book needs to be clearer, while another said that the resource needs more application.

The assessment tool indicated that the resource received above a 4.0 on two of its goals, above a 3.5 on three of the goals, and above a 3.0 on one other goal on a Likert scale from 1-5. The qualitative questions yielded positive findings as well as suggestions for improvement of the resource. Chapter six will present an analysis of the data which was presented in chapter five. It will also present reflections of the project as a whole including personal goals and suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS

Leon McKenzie states that:

Progress in any professional field is gained only through criticism of the status quo and the paradigm that supports the conventional wisdom in that field. A professional field can grow only when the body of theory and knowledge that constitutes that field is subjected to systemic scrutiny. Fundamental questions need to be raised to preserve a professional field from sclerosis and stagnation. (Leon McKenzie 1986, 7)

The resource written for this project sought to challenge the status quo. It suggested a new philosophy for adult Christian education in the local church as we face the challenges of our current society. It was noted in chapter three that David Setran concludes “a carefully articulated philosophy of Christian education, therefore, may be eclectic, drawing constructive elements from many different models while attempting to avoid their pitfalls” (Setran 2019, 46). Chapter Three asserts that this is the perspective that most practitioners have. It is not a perspective I share. For this reason, I was motivated to write this resource.

For this project I sought to create a Christian philosophy of adult Christian education for the local church. I believe that the project met many of its goals but it can be improved. In retrospect, I have learned through this doctoral process, receiving feedback from expert readers, and my own analysis of the resource post-completion, there are many strengths in the resource. I also need to make some changes and additions that need to be made to make it a valuable tool for the church. These strengths and weaknesses will be discussed below.

Project Goals

The purpose of this project was to create a resource that develops a Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. The research question was: how does Christian philosophy inform the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church?

The project goals were:

1. The resource will provide the basics of the study of philosophy which are foundational in Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.
2. The resource will provide a foundation of how philosophy affects adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.
3. The resource will provide an outline of how the philosophy of Pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian education praxis in the local church.
4. The resource will present a Christian philosophy that seeks to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church.
5. The resource will provide a process for teachers to think critically about their own philosophy which affects the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.
6. The resource will provide a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.

The following is an analysis of the project goals in the order of most prominent to least prominent.

Goal Number 3 Pragmatism's Influence on Educational Praxis

The highest scoring finding of the project was: "The resource will provide an outline of how the philosophy of Pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian education praxis in the local church." The goal received a cumulative rating of 4.37 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: "This resource explains the possible consequences of the local church utilizing the philosophy of Pragmatism in its praxis of adult Christian education" (#2). "This resource provides examples of how the philosophy of pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian educational praxis in the local church" (#15). "This resource explains how the philosophy of pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian educational praxis in the local church" (#9). Overall, the experts ranked this goal between agreeing and strongly agreeing, indicating that the resource goal of explaining how pragmatism affects the educational praxis of adult Christian education in the local church was met.

In retrospect I agree that this is the strongest part of the resource and reflects the amount of energy I have put into the topic over the last ten years. Six of the expert readers agreed with my assertion that pragmatism has negative effects on adult Christian education. One reader felt that I was being too harsh on pragmatism. Another thought that "some good things that come out of pragmatism if we don't let it drive the bus but instead use it to understand our people." Overall, I succeeded in this goal and it is the part of the resource with which I am the most content. George Knight says that "it is a part of the task of the Christian educator to evaluate the assumptions underlying these theories in

the light of Christian philosophy” (Knight 2006, 142). I believe that the resource has succeeded in the area of pragmatism based on the data.

Goal Number 2 Philosophy’s Influence on Educational Praxis in the Church

The second scoring finding of the project was: “The resource will provide a foundation of how philosophy affects adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.” The goal received a cumulative rating of 4.03 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: “This resource provides the reader with an understanding of the field of philosophy as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church” (#3). “This resource provides examples of how basic philosophical categories influence adult Christian educational praxis in the local church” (#8). “This resource explains how philosophies that are not compatible with Christianity can negatively affect the learner as it relates to adult Christian educational praxis in the local church” (#14). Overall, experts agreed that the goal provided a foundation for how philosophy affects adult Christian education praxis in the local church, meeting the goal I had set.

The purpose of this goal is summarized well by Pazmiño. “The challenge for Christians is to think ‘Christianly’ and rightly in all areas of human endeavor. One such area of endeavor is education and the challenge for Christians is to think about and realize an education that is in fact Christian” (Pazmiño 2008, 87). The reception of this goal reflects a competent explanation of complicated issues. Five of the readers walked away from the resource thinking more intentionally about their own philosophy and methods. Two of the readers suggested I present more practical examples of how this occurs. One reader text

messed me months after reading the resource and said, “Regarding your book, I am listening with a different sense when I sit in worship, read devotionals, and participate in a small group than I did before. I would have easily let a bunch of things pass through my ears undiscerned without what you wrote.”

Goal Number 1 Philosophy Basics for Christian Education

The third scoring finding of the project was: “The resource will provide the basics of the study of philosophy which are foundational in Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.” The goal received a cumulative rating of 3.93 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: “This resource explains how basic philosophical categories influence adult Christian educational praxis in the local church” (#4). “This resource would be effective for a learner that is new to the field of philosophy as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church” (#7). “This resource provides the reader with an understanding of epistemology as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church” (#13). Overall, the experts agreed that the resource met the goal of providing the basics of the study of philosophy which are foundational in a Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.

The purpose of this goal is to address the general lack of philosophical knowledge by practitioners as they function within an uninformed worldview. In speaking of how she begins teaching on the topic of philosophy of education, McCullough states that she opts to develop in practitioners a generalized worldview or ideology rather than a rigorous academic philosophy. She takes this

approach because she argues that “most educators have not taken many, if any, courses in philosophy nor have they conducted the disciplined study of the historically full-blown general philosophies that might be necessary... however, all educators do have a worldview” (McCullough 2013, 16). The resource takes a different approach and attempts to construct a philosophy of Adult Christian education in the local church on top of a foundation of the academic field of philosophy. It seeks to expose the reader to the academic field and encourages them to see their praxis through that lens.

This goal was similar to goal #2 and received 0.10 of a lower score the assessment tool than goal #2. Four of the readers suggested that the resource needed to present a consistent tone and I recognize that this goal would have benefitted from more consistency in tone. At the time I wrote the resource I was torn between writing an academic book and writing something more personable and directed at practitioners who do not want to read a textbook. I felt this topic is something that is better understood when it is seen in action, so I tended towards a more personable approach; however, the resource went back and forth between sounding personal and sounding academic. When I rewrite this resource I will take a less academic tone, which I hope will be less confusing to the readers. There are already multiple books discussing this topic from an academic perspective. I believe that a more personable book about this topic would help practitioners be more aware of the issues related to philosophy and adult Christian education in the local church.

It is noteworthy that a similar question not directly tied to this goal in the assessment tool, question #2 “The resource will provide a process for teachers to think critically about their own philosophy which affects the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church,” indicated that 8 of the 10 respondents stated that the goal made them think more deeply about their philosophical assumptions as it relates to ministry. This would seem to indict a positive result closely related to this goal.

Goal Number 5 Challenge the Reader’s Philosophy

The fourth scoring finding of the project was: “The resource will provide a process for teachers to think critically about their own philosophy which affects the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.” The goal received a cumulative rating of 3.83 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: “This resource encourages teachers to consider the philosophical foundations of their personal praxis of adult Christian education in the local church” (#5). “This resource provides a process for teachers to analyze their praxis of adult Christian education in the local church to determine if it is compatible with Christian philosophy” (#11). “This resource provides a process for teachers to analyze their local church’s praxis of adult Christian education” (#17). Overall, the experts agreed that the resource met the goal of providing a process for teachers to think critically about their own philosophy which affects the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.

As the reviewers suggested, the resource helped readers think critically about their own philosophy in adult educational ministries, but it could have been

improved by providing the reader with a better “process” for doing so. This problem is reflected in the fact that question #5, “this resource encourages teachers to consider the philosophical foundations of their personal praxis of adult Christian education in the local church,” received a score of 4.2, while question #11 “This resource provides a process for teachers to analyze their praxis of adult Christian education in the local church to determine if it is compatible with Christian philosophy,” received a score of 3.6. The readers were able to reflect on their own philosophy in spite of the fact that they were not provided with a clear process for doing so. The resource would have benefitted from asking questions of the reader to encourage them to engage actively with their own thoughts on the topic. This is something that is done by Martha McCullough in *By Design: Developing a Philosophy of Education Informed by a Christian Worldview*. In speaking about the development of goals for adult Christian education McCullough invites the reader to answer the question “what would you like to say about the place of the heart and the head in your aim of education” (McCullough 2013, 41). The resource would likely have had more success with this goal if I had asked the reader to analyze their current thought processes as McCullough does throughout her book.

Goal Number 4
Create a Philosophy for Christian Education

The fifth scoring finding of the project was: “The resource will present a Christian philosophy that seeks to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church.” This goal received a cumulative rating of 3.76 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: “This resource presents a coherent

Christian philosophy to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church" (#1). "The Christian philosophy presented in this resource utilizes Scripture responsibly to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church" (#10). "The Christian philosophy presented in this resource utilizes Christian history responsibly to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church" (#16). The experts mostly agreed that the resource fulfilled the goal of presenting a Christian philosophy that seeks to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church. While the experts mostly agreed that this goal was met, it is the result that is the least satisfying. This goal was the most important for me. In retrospect the quantitative questions for this goal should have been written more clearly. Question #10 was, "the Christian philosophy presented in this resource utilizes Scripture responsibly to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church," which received a score of 3.8.

The purpose of this goal was to present a Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. The resource takes an approach to this matter similar to that of Michael Peterson in his book *With all Your Mind: A Christian Philosophy of Education* in which he writes:

Convinced that thinking philosophically about education is our only hope for meaningful progress, I explain basic concepts, work out their implications, and then evaluate their adequacy. The reader will learn a good deal of philosophy while being able to grapple with extremely important educational matters. (Peterson, 2001 xi)

In regards to this goal I was disappointed by the result of 3.8 from question #10 as utilizing Scripture responsibly was one of my chief concerns

while writing the resource. As Roy Zuck points out, the Bible is foundational for developing a Christian philosophy or Christian education. “Because the Bible is the authority for Christian education, it should be our ultimate source of educational principles” (Zuck 1998, 93). Three of the respondents who gave a lower score for this question also indicated that they thought the resource underutilized Scripture by hand writing a comment next to the question, such as “needs more Scriptures undergirding.” This made me wonder if their definition of “responsibly” means that the resource used Scripture with both responsibility and sufficient frequency. The intention of the question was to discover if the Scriptures used in the resource were presented in a responsible manner to support its arguments. My definition of responsible use of Scripture is to use interpretations that are validly within the realm of possibility and are represented in the literature of biblical studies. In my view, if someone gives an interpretation and that interpretation has support in the scholarly community, this would be a responsible usage of Scripture regardless of whether or not I agree with their interpretation. This is something that I know I did for certain throughout the resource. The question would have been better worded as “When this resource utilizes Scripture to present a Christian philosophy for adult Christian education in the local church, it does so in a responsible manner.” That being said, the extra hand-written comments provide valuable feedback regardless of my lack of intention to ask about frequency of biblical references. Knowing that for some experts I am not using Scripture enough to support my arguments is something

that will be taken into account when I rewrite the resource in an attempt to publish.

Regardless of my qualms with the quantitative data, I believe ultimately that the objective for this goal was not realized to my full potential. One particular reader made a very helpful comment in this regard. This individual noted that the first few chapters of the book, which dealt with the three goals which I scored the highest were much more organized and presented more clearly, but when I started to present my own philosophy, it was presented less clear.

This is consistent of my own reflection of the resource. When I was writing the book I systematically explained the topics of philosophy and the philosophy of education. Then it explored the problems presented to the church because of pragmatism. When it was time to present my own philosophy, I wanted to explain my thinking, but also wanted to present different principles for adult Christian education in the local church that were born out of my philosophy. I envisioned two different ways of presenting this information. I could systematically present my philosophy in one chapter and then in the following chapter present the principles born out of my philosophy, or I could present my principles and weave my philosophy into those principles as I explained them. I opted for the later approach and I believe this was a mistake. It did not flow the same way as the rest of the book and did not present as coherently as it would have if I had used the former approach. Nor did I use as many biblical arguments as I should have. This is a part of the resource that will be rewritten in the future if I decide to have the resource published.

Goal Number 6 Help the Reader Develop a Philosophy

The lowest scoring finding of the project was: “The resource will provide a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.” The goal received a cumulative rating of 3.43 out of 5 based on three quantitative questions: “This resource provides a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church” (#6). “This resource provides suggestions of other resources for teachers to use in the development of their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church” (#12). “This resource provides a structure for teachers to help their local church develop a Christian philosophy for their praxis of adult Christian education” (#18). The experts were between agreeing and being neutral about whether or not the resource met the goal of providing a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.

The purpose of this goal was to help the readers begin to develop their own philosophy. It is a call to action based on Lois LeBar’s assessment of the situation. “A chief reason for the lack of life and power and reality in our evangelical teaching is that we have been content to borrow man-made systems of education instead of discovering God’s system” (LeBar 1995, 24). The emphasis in the quote above in relation to this goal is the word “we.” The development of a Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church

must be an endeavor that the body of Christ takes on as a community in communication with each other.

In retrospect this goal certainly deserves to receive the lowest score. One reader said, "I think adding a series of questions that guide a leader through the process of developing their own philosophy would be helpful." Another said, "I think by giving the reader practical examples of how to develop their philosophy they would be able to understand more clearly the development of their philosophy of adult Christian education." While there is material in the book that helps guide readers in developing their own Christian philosophy for adult Christian education in the local church, that material is not as helpful as it could be and this goal could have more prominence within the resource.

Application

There are four ways in which I will apply the project to my ministry setting. The first is that I will continue to advocate for adult Christian education in the local church as strongly as I can. I hope to publish a book on this topic and the process of the project with the project thesis and assessment tool will help me to improve on what I have already written. I want to write a book that will be easily understood by people who are neophytes in philosophy. There are many academic books on this topic but I believe the church needs something that is written in more practical language aimed at the church rather than the academy.

There are three other ways I will apply the project are in my personal ministry. I will continue to advocate for the importance of developing a philosophy of adult Christian education in the local church which I will attend or serve. I will

also apply the project in the adult Christian education classes that I teach in local churches. Lastly, I plan on writing adult educational curriculum for Bible studies in the near future where I will have the opportunity to apply the project in how I write the curriculum.

Further Study

This project could be duplicated in its entirety, and be beneficial, simply because we need more voices addressing the issue of how philosophy and ministry are related. It is complex and affects different denominations and ministries in different ways. This project focused on adult Christian educational in the local church, with my personal context being the American Evangelical church culture. Aside from students duplicating this process here are some of the ways in which this project could be expanded on:

1. A survey and analysis of educational curricula to identify their underlying philosophies.
2. Analysis of various secular philosophies and their effects on Adult Christian education in the local church or other ministries in the local church.
3. Developing a Christian philosophy for other ministries such as; preaching, worship, children's ministry, youth ministry, care ministry, counseling, missions, outreach and evangelism.
4. An impact study analyzing the effects of putting a particular philosophy into practice in the adult learning environment.

5. Surveying the degree of knowledge which practitioners possess on the topic of philosophy and ministry praxis.

Personal Goals

While it would be nice to imagine that my personal goals were completed and my personal life would be enjoyable during the time of the project, this was not the case. Not long before entering the phase where I would start writing the resource and work on my project thesis, the Covid-19 virus became prevalent. My work life took over as the company I worked for was producing a compound that was part of a Covid-19 treatment and I was put in charge of this project.

After this work project was over, my work life became more stressful. The company owner's wife died, and I went from seeing him about once a year to seeing him almost every day. He became intent on growing the company from about four million dollars in revenue to twenty million dollars in revenue. He saw me as a valuable asset for completing this mission. Because of my family's situation I had no choice but to stay in that position and it ruled my life until January of 2024. I had zero emotional or physical energy for anything other than work and I did not pay adequate attention to the project for several years.

Fortunately, during the fall of 2023 I was able to take some time off work and finish writing the resource and reach out to expert readers. I was on a roll; I had taken a week off work and got into a routine, getting up, eating breakfast, working out, and then proceeded to write the resource. It was perhaps the most enjoyable week of my life. I was finally getting to do what I would really love to do with my life, sit around and write books!

My plan from there was to continue to take one week off work at a time to finish the chapters of my project thesis. My plan was to take off work the week of Thanksgiving in 2023 to write chapter two of the dissertation and then over Christmas write chapter three. Before Thanksgiving break the owner brought a major project to the company and I was not able to take off work. It was then that I decided I would quit my job in the new year because I would not be able to finish the project thesis while continuing to work there. I knew that I had to leave that position for many other reasons as well.

I put my two weeks' notice in at the beginning of the year and started on a new path. I had enough money saved up that I could work exclusively on the project thesis until it was finished. I hoped it would take me two or three months and then I would start working again. I was wrong. Not working felt very odd. I felt out of place and I was not quite sure what to do with myself, even though I had the task of the project thesis before me. It took me three months before I started working on the project thesis, but once I was in a better mindset I was able to do quite well.

Because of all this, my personal spiritual life and goals for the project suffered during this time. Just before Covid-19 started the pastor of my church retired, and my wife and I decided to look for a new church. We spent several years being without a church home because of the inability to attend services. Luckily in the fall of 2023 we found a wonderful church to call home and I have become friends with the staff there and will soon start doing volunteer ministry.

My personal spiritual goals were as follows:

1. I will read the entire Bible within six months with the intention of using observations from this process towards my resource.
2. I will pray on a daily basis seeking guidance for writing the resource and then journal about how that process is influencing the process of developing the resource.
3. In order to write a well written resource for my project I will maintain my physical and mental health through exercise, proper sleep, and a healthy diet.

Goal Number 1
Read the Entire Bible in Six Months

I started working on this goal as soon as I entered the writing phase, and failed at it fairly spectacularly. Over the last four years I read about half of the Bible and focused on parts that I thought would be the most beneficial. I still gained from it but it is unfortunate that I was not able to complete this goal. I made two important observations from Scripture through this process that were helpful for the resource and to the project that I had not considered previously. Both of these observations were related to observing praxis in the text rather than looking for propositional truth statements within it.

The first was observing how needs of people are being met by God and those that work with Him like the apostles and the prophets. This was something I observed after writing the resource but before I started working on chapter 2 of this document. Observing how Paul meets the needs of his learners prompted me to use I Thessalonians 4:13-18 in the biblical research portion of chapter 2.

The second was to observe in Scripture God's use of what I loosely associate with educational psychology's concept of the zone of proximal development. This was an important part of the resource. Generally speaking the zone of proximal development can be described as the learning zone where the learner is accomplishing things they can accomplish with a little bit of help but would not be able to accomplish on their own otherwise. It seems to me that throughout Scripture God is participating with humanity within this zone as He gently helps us forward in what we are able to accomplish at that time. The transition from the old covenant to the new covenant, Jesus' slow reveal to his disciples about his true mission, and the mystery of the Holy Spirit's work in our sanctification process are all examples of God working within humanity's zone of proximal development.

Goal Number 2 Pray and Journal About the Resource

I certainly did not pray about this as much as I would have liked, especially during the four-year time period when I was not actively writing the resource. I should add at this point that while my work life prevented me from actively writing the resource and project thesis, I did spend most of my days at work prayerfully thinking about the project to distract myself from the misery of my job. I ended up with several full journals from jotting down my thoughts.

In relation to pragmatism and its desire to only learn useful things I mused, "Real learning and growth takes place when those things become part of the very fabric of our being. Not just a tool we use. It becomes natural for us and a part of who we are as a person. In our thinking, and emotions, and our spirit." In relation

to pragmatism and the obsession with relevance in today's church culture I wrote, "Relevance is just relevance. Something is either relevant or it is not. It is not related to value, truth, or goodness." There was a point of time during the beginning of this process when I thought constantly about the issue of relevance. Our church culture's obsession with it was so irritating to me that for a time I began to think that relevancy was actually bad. I think this was because I was having a strong emotional reaction to it. After I was able to process my emotions about the topic I was able to come to a more sensible understanding of relevancy and wrote, "relevancy is not bad in and of itself. The concept is used improperly when it becomes the grading scale by which ultimate value is determined."

Goal Number 3 Maintain a Healthy Lifestyle

After quitting my job I was able to succeed in this goal. Even when I felt out of sorts after quitting, I was able to get into a routine of working out and sleeping well. I was going to bed earlier than I was when I was working and got an extra two or three hours of sleep. I also worked out more regularly and because I was at home I cooked most of my meals and ate healthier in general. Thus, I was able to get into a better place to work on the project thesis.

Going through this process has helped me realize just how much more productive I can be when I live a healthier lifestyle and just how unproductive I am when I am not. Generally speaking this increase in productivity was simply through an increase in healthy physical living. Since finishing the resource and entering into the final editing processes of this document I've become more engaged in Scripture, prayer, and church community than I was during the

pandemic and have noticed my productivity levels increase even further. In order to be as productive as I can be in my calling of adult Christian education I need to be sure to take care of myself physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Concluding Thoughts

This project has possibly been the most difficult thing I have accomplished during the most difficult time in my life. It was taxing and exhausting. This project has also been very rewarding for me in several ways and I retroactively accomplished some goals I did not foresee. First, it gave me the opportunity to write a book for the first time, which ended up being much more difficult than I anticipated because I could write and organize the book in any way that I wanted rather than having a prompt from an assignment.

Second, the project presented an opportunity for my thoughts and opinions to be analyzed by expert readers. Their feedback and suggestions will be helpful for moving forward as I write a revised version of this book which I hope to submit for publishing. It helped me grow in my confidence and as a person from having completed something that I found to be incredibly difficult. I feel that God has called me to bring this conversation to the table within the life of the church and I hope and pray that this is the beginning of that process.

Last, this project has helped me discover where my stress limits are as they relates to my work and ministry life. I now know that if I am not doing full-time ministry I do not have the capacity to work high stress jobs and still do part-time ministry related activities such as writing or teaching. I need to keep this

mind in the future as my ministry related activities are more important to me than work.

APPENDIX ONE
PROJECT PROPOSAL

ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A RESOURCE FOR CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY FOR PRAXIS OF ADULT
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

A PROJECT PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
WILLIAM P. DOHERTY

ASHLAND, OHIO
DECEMBER 9, 2020

Purpose Statement

It is the purpose of this project to create a resource that develops a Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. The research question is: how does Christian philosophy inform the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church?

Overview

This project will create a resource that will serve three major functions. It will educate the reader on basic philosophical principles as they relate to adult educational ministries. It will then explain in detail what the philosophical school of pragmatism is and how it is influencing how the church's praxis in education is carried out. This will include a criticism of pragmatism and its methods. Lastly, it will suggest a new philosophical foundation by which we should do adult Christian education in the church. This philosophical foundation will be informed by both special and general revelation.

This project is important because I believe there are many adult Christian education pastors and directors in the United States of America that are performing their ministry praxis under the philosophical foundations of pragmatism. I also believe that in most cases they are unaware of this foundation and what it teaches. Any praxis that is based on untrue philosophical beliefs is destined to have negative repercussions and I believe that many of the churches problems in our current cultural milieu stem from the church's embrace of pragmatism whether or not it is intentional.

Foundation

While one might argue that the foundations of theology, history, biblical interpretation and personal experience are predicated on a philosophical foundation, it is also true that these areas are cyclically informing and reforming a Christian philosophical world view. These areas are constantly at play with each other, as truth gained in one area may affect change in what we view to be true in another. This is a dance that must be performed wisely or it can quickly devolve into uninformed chaos that leads to a confused philosophical outlook on life, beliefs, and praxis. The following foundational section will briefly look at how the four areas mentioned above help to inform the resource created for this project.

Personal Background

Adult educational ministry has been an area of academic interest, a calling and an area of personal concern for my entire adult life. I became interested in this area while I was an undergraduate student at Malone University majoring in Bible and Theology. It was through my education at Malone where it seemed to me that I was really learning about Christianity and the Bible for the first time, at least for the first time in what I perceived to be a legitimate and serious way. When I initially began to learn I was amazed with all of the things my professors presented and with the fascinating new world I found in the Bible after learning basic hermeneutical skills. After a while this amazement soon began to fade into disappointment.

The more I learned at school I began to notice that my experiences at church did not line up with how it seemed to me that biblical studies and theology should be done. Time and again I would sit in a sermon or a Bible study at church and listen to things that I knew were simply not even possibly within the realm of truth based on basic hermeneutical principles. I began to sense that there was something wrong with adult education in the church, or at least in my particular church. It did not take me long to decide to go somewhere else where I might learn about God in the same way that I was learning about Him in college. Unfortunately it seemed to me that it was like this at every church I tried. It seemed to me at the time that the pastors of these churches were either ill-informed or that they were simply not putting into practice what they had learned in their schooling and were allowing their congregation to live in ignorance. This was all highly disturbing to me and I began to sense a calling to adult educational ministries in a church setting because I wanted to bring what I was learning in college to the church environment.

During my senior year at Malone I took a class which allowed me to do a research project that involved interviewing many adult Christian education pastors in local churches in my area. One of the questions I asked was for them to give a number on a scale of 1-10 on how skilled the people in their church were at reading the Bible. Every one of them answered with a “one” or a “zero,” and zero was not an option. This provided me with two immediate conclusions; the first was that the church lacked basic hermeneutical skills, and secondly that the adult education pastors were aware of this. I would then ask a follow up

question about what they were doing to address that situation. All of them said that they were not doing anything about it. When I asked them why, all but two of them said they did not know; however, the two that did had virtually identical responses. They said they did not teach hermeneutical principles because they did not think that the people in their congregation would “find it relevant.” This seemed rather a strange response to me. At the time I could not understand why any person in the Protestant tradition, which bases its beliefs primarily on Scripture, would think that learning how to read the Bible was not “relevant.”

This memory would stick with me throughout the years but I did not fully come to understand its philosophical underpinnings until I learned about pragmatic philosophy while studying in a PhD program at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. At the time the seminary was focused on criticizing how the American philosophical school of pragmatism was influencing how Christian education was done in the church. The primary tenet of pragmatism is that truth is determined by whether or not something is useful. If it is useful, or relevant, then it is considered true and of value. When pragmatism is applied to educational methods there will be a focus in its curriculum on what is useful and relevant. In this context I define relevancy as “of immediate use.” In the pragmatic education system it is the learner, not the teacher or institution that determines what is relevant. While these are just two components of pragmatic education, they are the two key factors in understanding the philosophy behind the approach of the two pastors who said they did not think their congregation would find learning how to read the Bible relevant. They were allowing what they

thought their congregation would want to determine the curriculum, and that curriculum did not include what their congregation would not find useful, learning to be better Bible readers.

It seems to me that pastors, being educated, have the responsibility to know and teach what their congregation needs. While our congregation's desires regarding their curriculum can and should inform us, they cannot be to sole arbiters of knowing that they need to be taught. We cannot allow pragmatism to be the philosophical foundation for how the church educates. This is because pragmatism is not true; it is not compatible with Christianity. Truth is not determined by what is useful, because pragmatism does not have a mechanism for determining whether or not something is *actually*, or objectively, useful and true. Rather than the church following by philosophical schools that lead them to not teach people how to read the Bible, we need to determine, from the ground up, a Christian philosophy to build our educational methods and content on. This assertion has been the motivation of my academic and ministry interests for many years now and I would argue is a result of the culmination of thoughtful consideration of my experiences in the church and academic institutions for the last 20 years.

Biblical Research

We will discuss Colossians 2:6-19 in order to demonstrate that the Bible warns against worldly ways of thinking and Galatians 3:1-5 will be used to demonstrate how we can begin to develop a Christian philosophy from observations made from the text. The Bible is foundational for the project and will

support two important arguments. The first is that the Bible warns against worldly philosophies, beliefs, and ways of thinking that are antithetical to Christian beliefs. The second is that the Bible is a resource from which we can draw both direct and indirect conclusions from which to build a Christian philosophy for adult education in the local church.

One of the reasons that Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians was to warn them about a false teaching that was being spread at the time. He urges them to “see to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8 NRSV). While it is unclear what the exact nature of this heretical belief system was, N.T. Wright summarizes its elements by describing it as a combination of Judaism, paganism, angel worship, and asceticism (Wright 2008, 25-26).

This passage is not meant to be used to serve as an example of bad philosophy in the proper sense of the study of philosophy, nor just as an example of how religious adherents of Judaism could go astray by mixing elements of paganism into their belief systems; rather, it is an example of a “human way of thinking” (Col 2:18 NRSV). According to Peter T. O’Brien, Paul is characterizing the beliefs of these false teachers as a false “human fabrication standing over against the apostolic tradition which centered on ‘Christ Jesus as Lord’” (O’Brien 1982, 110). The main point here is that this belief system was created by men and quite separately without Christ. Earlier in Colossians Paul states that Christ “himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:17 NRSV).

Christ is the center of everything, and so should be our way of thinking. It is folly to try and develop a philosophy or belief system that does not have Christ as its foundation.

The letter to Galatia was written for a similar reason, although in this case more is known about the false teachers that Paul was combating. It seems as though a group of Jewish followers of Jesus had come to the province of Galatia with the message that they had to become Jewish in order to be fully Christian. This means that they had to become circumcised and follow the Jewish Law (Dunn 2011, 11). Paul's argument against the false teachers provides us with an opportunity to learn something about the role of experience in epistemology.

One of Paul's arguments against the false teachers occurs in Galatians 3:1-5 and centers around the Galatians experience of receiving of the Holy Spirit and the working of miracles among them after they believed the message of the gospel and not from doing works of the law (Longenecker 1990, 101). Paul is telling them that they were already fully Christians and it is because of their belief and not because of their adherence to the Law. The proof for his argument is that they were filled with the Holy Spirit and miracles were worked among them after they believed. From this passage we should glean the fact that our experience is one of the ways in which we as human beings learn and know truth. We should also observe from the text that experience needs to be interpreted, just as any other avenue of gaining knowledge. In this instance we see Paul helping the Galatians interpret their experience through the lens of the gospel message.

Theological Research

Because of the overlap between theology and philosophy, many long standing theological concepts will be employed in the development of a philosophy for adult Christian education. This section will explore the concepts of creation out of nothing, objective truth, general revelation, and sanctification. The most foundational theological concept for the project is creation of out nothing. Thomas Aquinas is perhaps the most famous theologian for this theological concept. The essence of Aquinas's argument is that while other builders need pre-existing matter in order to make things, God does not need pre-existing matter. For Aquinas, God is existence itself; therefore, "God must be the cause of existence of all things that are" (Aquinas *Shorter Summa* 68). The idea of God being the source of all things will be important to developing metaphysical beliefs and epistemological ones, as it logically follows that if God is the source of creation he is also the source of truth.

The theological concept of God as the source of truth will be undergirded by the thoughts of Lesslie Newbigin. Newbigin was a critic of both relative and subjective truth and believes that "there is a reality which is not in my mind but out there" (Newbigin 1991, 33). He further argues that the quest for truth starts with faith, faith in the revelation of God (Newbigin 1991, 33). This is over and against Descartes idea of the thinking subject being the foundational for truth, as he put it Descartes "sought a basis of certainty in his own mind and not in the faithfulness of God" (Newbigin 1991, 27). The project will argue that everyone's

foundation for truth begins with faith in something, and that Christians are not unique in this regard.

While Newbigin is helpful for highlighting Scripture as a source of God's truth, the project will also draw on Millard Erickson to assist in presenting the idea that there is also truth to be found in God's general revelation. This is an aspect of God's truth that he argues is often disregarded by some Christian groups. (Erickson 2013, 59) The project will argue that we need to utilize social science research, or just simply truth that lies outside of the scope of the topics that Scripture presents us with, in order to develop a philosophy for adult Christian education. The project will draw on psychological concepts so it will be important to ground the justification in doing so with a solid theology and philosophy. The idea of general revelation being a source of truth is a natural consequence of believing that God created it, and that he is the source of truth. The truth about everything is out there for us to discover. Erickson argues that general revelation and special revelation are harmonious, but the challenge is to understand both general revelation and special revelation properly. (Erickson 2013, 59)

A fourth theologian will be Wayne Grudem and his understanding of the sanctification process. Grudem stresses that sanctification is both the work of God and of the human being. He says that sanctification is "primarily the work of God" (Grudem 1994, 753). He also argues that we play both a passive and active role in our own sanctification process, "a *passive* one in which we depend on God to sanctify us, and an *active* one in which we strive to obey God and take steps that will increase our sanctification" (Grudem 1994, 754). He points to Bible

reading and meditation, prayer, worship, witnessing, Christian fellowship and self-discipline as some of the ways that we are active in the process. (Grudem 1994, 755) Based on this idea, an important part of the project will be to argue that adult Christian education is a vital part of the sanctification process.

Historical Research

One of the ways in which someone could analyze the history of the Christian church is to see how philosophical assumptions have influenced its beliefs and praxis in every era. This section will discuss two ways in which this has affected the church's understandings of its educational praxis. The first example will be the early church's practice of catechesis. The second will be the catechetical schools that developed soon afterwards.

In the generation after the apostles the early church practiced what was known as catechesis. The word catechesis is the transliteration of the Greek word κατήχησις, which means "instruct" (Anthony and Benson 2003, 108). Catechesis was the process that new converts went through before they were allowed to be baptized, and usually took three years (Wright 2002, 117). What is evident from this process is that the early Christian church took education about the faith extremely seriously. This seriousness was necessary because the people who were converting at this time were coming from paganism, while generally the first generation of converts were either Jewish or God-fearing gentiles that were worshipping at their local synagogue. This would mean that the first generation of Christians were all highly educated in the Old Testament and about Judaism; they were already accustomed to the Jewish worldview and

belief system. The pagans that would become believers after this however, needed to be completely educated.

Michael Anthony and Warren Benson say that the church at this time developed the catechesis process because “some systematic form of instruction was necessary to ensure authenticity of faith and consistency in practice” (Anthony and Benson 2003, 107). Some amount of reading between the lines is necessary at this point to determine the epistemological beliefs and foundations of the early believers that developed the catechesis method. It should be obvious to observe they believed that truth was objective. There was some truth about Christianity which was out there to learn, discover, and know. The idea that truth comes from God, rather than us, seems to be an important epistemological belief in the early church at this time. Robert Wilkin points out that during this time period people were “philosophically astute” and they “knew why they did what they did” (Wilken 2004, 62). From this we can make the conclusion that ministry praxis was in fact tied to a Christian theological and philosophical worldview.

The second example is the influence of Greek philosophy on catechetical schools. In discussing this phenomenon, Anthony and Benson focus their attention on the school in Alexandria which was led by both Clement and by Origen after him.

The educators in Alexandria were anxious to develop a theology that used Greek philosophy and yet would give a systematic explanation of Christianity. Because the faculty had been trained in the Scriptures and Greek philosophy, they were confident that they could integrate the two subjects. (Anthony and Benson 2003, 110-111)

This is a very early and clear example of how secular philosophy influenced Christian belief and practice. This not only effects education, but the whole life of the church. The end result was that “absurd and aberrant theological teachings spread throughout the church” (Anthony and Benson 2003, 111).

Again, some degree of reading between the lines is necessary here. It should be observed in this case that the leaders in Alexandria believed in two equal sources of truth, Scripture and Greek philosophy. They sought to wed them together. One of the purposes of the project will be to show that in the present day church pragmatism is influencing the church’s belief and praxis in the same way that Greek philosophy did in the early church.

Contemporary Research

There are several recently published works that are either similar to this project’s resource or are similar enough in topic to be highly informative in shaping the conversation in which the resource will be participating. This section will briefly discuss four of the more important publications in the contemporary discussion. The first is *Philosophy and Education* by George R. Knight. This book, first published in 1980 and most recently for the fourth time in 2006, is still the most relevant and comprehensive book for the project. Knight thoroughly discusses all of the relevant philosophical categories to educational ministries. He then goes on to discuss in great detail various secular philosophies that are influencing the philosophy and praxis of Christian education, while offering a critique of their strengths and weaknesses (Knight 2006, 61-63, 83-87, 99-100, 140-142, 157-169). He then goes on to offer his own suggestions towards a

Christian philosophy for Christian education. This book is the most similar to the resource that will be created for this project and will be very helpful as tool in trying to decide what topics to include in the resource. In the beginning of his chapter that begins to explain philosophy section he says that “educational philosophy is not distinct from general philosophy; it is general philosophy applied to education as a specific area of human endeavor” (Knight 2006, 15). This will be the same approach to philosophy of education that will be used in the resource.

The second book is *A Theology for Christian Education* which is written by James R. Estep, Michael J. Anthony and Gregg R. Allison, all highly influential scholars in the area of Christian education. One of the defining characteristics of this book is that it presents as a theology for Christian education and not a philosophy. Part of the argument of the resource will be that philosophy, and not theology is primary in the development of a proper theory and praxis for Christian education. This is because claiming that Christianity should be founded in theology and the Bible *is actually* a philosophical statement. Philosophy being primary is inescapable. One example of this from the book is that the authors use the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) for their understanding of the Bible should inform their educational theory and praxis (Estep, Anthony and Allison 2008, 860). But the Chicago statement is simply a theological opinion that is based on fundamentalist and modernistic hermeneutics, which are based on their philosophical belief about what the Bible “is.”

The third book is *Foundational Issues in Christian Education* by Robert W. Pazmiño. This book seems to be somewhat of a mixture between the first two books previously mentioned above. Pazmiño is concerned about philosophical foundations, but does not give it as much of a priority as Knight. He also cares about Scripture and theology as foundations for Christian educational theory and praxis and seems to agree with Estep, Anthony and Allison about the nature of Scripture (Pazmiño 2008, 87). Pazmiño's book is more comprehensive however in that it discusses other foundations such as sociological and psychological foundations, which are topics that this resource will not intentionally cover in detail.

The fourth book is *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education* by Michael J. Anthony and Warren S Benson. This book focuses on the various trends in thinking and culture as they influenced Christianity, beginning in its Hebrew roots. The weakness of this resource is that it does not often (although does sometimes) discuss matters in terms of philosophical categories, but rather analyzes the praxes that were developed during that time period or under that philosophy. This leaves the educated reader to infer the underlying philosophy and leaves the uneducated reader ignorant of them. Two areas that will be paid close attention to in this book are the discussions on Pragmatic philosophy and James Dewey (Anthony and Benson 2003, 327-334).

Context

The people that will be potentially impacted by this resource will be anyone that is involved in educational ministries. This would include church

volunteers, pastors, education/discipleship pastors, university and seminary students, professors of Christian education, and potentially university and seminary officials. It will be written in such a way that it could be understood by people that know little to nothing about the topic, yet appreciated by those that are experts.

Definition of Terms

Christian Philosophy – An approach to philosophy that utilizes the Christian religion as its foundation.

Epistemology – The philosophical field of study that focuses on how we acquire knowledge and determine truth (Dew and Gould 2019, 11).

Project Goals

It is the purpose of this project to create a resource that develops a Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church. The research question is: how does Christian philosophy inform the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church?

The project goals are:

1. The resource will provide the basics of the study of philosophy which are foundational in Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.
2. The resource will provide a foundation of how philosophy affects adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.

3. The resource will provide an outline of how the philosophy of Pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian education praxis in the local church.
4. The resource will present a Christian philosophy that seeks to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church.
5. The resource will provide a process for teachers to think critically about their own philosophy which affects the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.
6. The resource will provide a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.

Design, Procedure, and Assessment

The design of the project will be to write a resource of adequate length to present the information properly. It will be formatted as a book with chapters that build upon the knowledge of the chapter before it as the reader moves forward. It will be between 120-200 pages in length.

The procedure for writing the book will be to first write the book using this author's thoughts and opinions and then go back into the resource and support it with the thoughts of other authors.

The assessment for the resource will be to give a 5 point Likert scale survey to the panel of expert readers. There will be four questions for each of the project goals, which will be 24 total questions.

Personal Goals

My spiritual goals for the project will all share a theme of creating and maintaining a routine. It seems to me so though getting into a good routine is the best way for me to stay productive on a consistent basis and if I get out of my routine I usually struggle. This routine will help my spiritual life as well as my ability to complete my resource and project thesis. As such, each spiritual goal will be related to both my project and personal spiritual life.

My personal spiritual goals are as follows:

1. I will read the entire Bible within 6 months with the intention of using observations from this process towards my resource.
2. I will pray on a daily basis seeking guidance for writing the resource and then journal about how that process is influencing the process of developing the resource.
3. In order to write a well written resource for my project I will maintain my physical and mental health through exercise, proper sleep, and a healthy diet.

Field Consultant

My field consultant is Dr. Bryan C. Hollon. Dr. Hollon is a Professor of Theology at Malone University. He also founded and serves as the Rector for St. John's Anglican Church in Canton, Ohio and as the City Director of the C.S. Lewis Institute of Northeast Ohio. I chose Dr. Hollon as my field consultant because he is very interested in spirituality, education, science, philosophy, church history, theology, and biblical studies. I have observed that Dr. Hollon

forms his thoughts and opinions through all of the means above, and not for instance, just the Bible. This is similar to the approach that I will take in formulating a philosophy for adult Christian education and therefore I see Dr. Hollon as a valuable resource.

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APPENDIX TWO ASSESSMENT TOOL

Final Assessment Tool

Please provide the following personal information

Present Age:

- ☐ 18-30
- ☐ 31-40
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ 51-60
- ☐ 61-70
- ☐ 71-80

Sex:

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

Years of experience in adult Christian education in the local church:

- ☐ 1-5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11-15
- ☐ 15-20
- ☐ 20+

Level of education:

- ☐ Bachelor's
- ☐ Master's
- ☐ Doctorate

Other _____

Please circle the number that pertains to your level of agreement on the statement. See scale below.

Likert Scale

1- Strongly Disagree

2- Disagree

3- Neutral – I neither Agree or Disagree

4- Agree

5- Strongly Agree

1. This resource presents a coherent Christian philosophy to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
2. This resource explains the possible consequences of the local church utilizing the philosophy of Pragmatism in its praxis of adult Christian education.	1	2	3	4	5
3. This resource provides the reader with an understanding of the field of philosophy as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
4. This resource explains how basic philosophical categories influence adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
5. This resource encourages teachers to consider the philosophical foundations of their personal praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
6. This resource provides a structure for teachers to develop their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
7. This resource would be effective for a learner that is new to the field of philosophy as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the number that pertains to your level of agreement on the statement. See scale below.

Likert Scale

1- Strongly Disagree

2- Disagree

3- Neutral – I neither Agree or Disagree

4- Agree

5- Strongly Agree

8. This resource provides examples of how basic philosophical categories influence adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
9. This resource explains how the philosophy of pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The Christian philosophy presented in this resource utilizes Scripture responsibly to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
11. This resource provides a process for teachers to analyze their praxis of adult Christian education in the local church to determine if it is compatible with Christian philosophy.	1	2	3	4	5
12. This resource provides suggestions of other resources for teachers to use in the development of their own Christian philosophy for the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
13. This resource provides the reader with an understanding of epistemology as it relates to the praxis of adult Christian education in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5

Please circle the number that pertains to your level of agreement on the statement. See scale below.

Likert Scale

1- Strongly Disagree

2- Disagree

3- Neutral – I neither Agree or Disagree

4- Agree

5- Strongly Agree

14. This resource explains how philosophies that are not compatible with Christianity can negatively affect the learner as it relates to adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

15. This resource provides examples of how the philosophy of pragmatism is currently affecting adult Christian educational praxis in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

16. The Christian philosophy presented in this resource utilizes Christian history responsibly to provide a foundation for adult Christian education in the local church.	1	2	3	4	5
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17. This resource provides a process for teachers to analyze their local church's praxis of adult Christian education.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

18. This resource provides a structure for teachers to help their local church develop a Christian philosophy for their praxis of adult Christian education.	1	2	3	4	5
--	---	---	---	---	---

Qualitative Open-ended Questions

1. What could be improved upon in this resource to make it suitable for use by leaders in the local church to help them develop their own philosophy for adult Christian education?

2. In what way did this resource challenge your own personal educational philosophy?

3. Please provide an example from the resource that you may have differing views. Explain why your views are different.
4. What could be improved upon in this resource's description of pragmatism as it relates to adult Christian educational praxis in the local church?
5. Please share any new perspectives you gained regarding how philosophy affects adult Christian educational practice in the local church.
6. What could be improved upon in this resource to make it suitable for use in a university or seminary setting to assist in teaching about philosophy of adult Christian education?

APPENDIX THREE SAMPLE CHAPTER FROM RESOURCE

This attachment includes the table of contents, the introduction and the first chapter of the resource that was prepared and reviewed for this project.

	Table of Contents	
Introduction		2
Chapter 1 - Philosophy 101		8
Chapter 2 - An Incredibly Brief History of Philosophy and the Church in the United States in the Modern Age		18
Chapter 3 - Current Issues in Christian Education		31
Chapter 4 - A Proposal for a Solution: Meeting People Where They Are At and Giving Them What They Need		44
Chapter 5 - Putting My Philosophy into Practice		75
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Introduction

As I sit down to write about what I believe is one of the most important topics in the life of the church in the 21st century, I find that perhaps the hardest thing about writing a book is to figure out how to start it. I have so many things to say about philosophy and education in the church, but how do I begin? I have written the introduction for this twice and deleted it completely! So I decided to just let it lie for a bit and eventually the light bulb would go on.

After a few weeks, it dawned on me that perhaps the best way to begin this book would be to tell you the story of myself and why I find this topic so important. I figured if God started off His book with a story it's probably a good idea, right? It is in stories that we discover people's motivations and passions, but it is also a powerful way that we connect with one another. My hope is that by listening to my story you might identify with some of it and appreciate why I think this topic is important in the life of the church.

My Journey to Caring about Philosophy of Education

I was raised in a middle-class Christian home, I cannot remember a time in my life where we were not going to church (even though I did not always want to be there!) I can remember "asking Jesus into my heart" when I was 5 or 6 years old in my living room in Florida, but it was not until middle school when I realized that Christianity is not about being saved and going to heaven. While salvation is a part of Christianity, it is *really* about living for God, and so it was after that when I started to take my faith much more seriously.

One of the important aspects of my childhood is that I attended 3 different churches and my parents did not raise me with any strong theological bent; however, it was still within a broad evangelical framework. My early childhood was in a Baptist church in Florida, then when we moved to Ohio we went to a non-denominational church, and finally in middle school we moved to a new city and I attended a Friends church until my 2nd year in college. None of these churches I would say pushed a particular theological view very strongly. The Friends church I went to did not even discuss some of the unique aspects of their denomination. I did not even hear of “the light” until I was in college, and I learned that in my college classes and not in the church. All of this is to essentially say that I entered into my college years with a steady dose of what I like to call “Jesus, Jesus, Jesus” but free of all of the things that many Protestants are famous for bickering over. I had to a certain degree a clean slate and open mind as I entered college.

There is one topic from my high school years however that I want to touch on. I recall having a fairly healthy spiritual life at that time. I had good Christian friends and we *mostly* stayed out of trouble. I went on missions trips, was very involved in my youth group and was part of the youth leadership team. I was vocal, I think in a healthy way, and people looked at me as a leader. But there was one big thing missing for me. As I’m sure most middle school and high school youth pastors do, mine encouraged us to pray and read the Bible every day. I have very distinct memories of sitting down, reading my Bible for 5 minutes and not knowing what was going on, and then putting it down in frustration. I tried

this for a while before I simply gave up. I'm a pretty smart person, or at least I would like to think so, and I knew enough to know that I did not know what was going on. It wasn't until I went to college that I actually learned to read the Bible, simple basic contextual and hermeneutical principles were not a part of my mental framework before college. Just the idea that the book of Romans was a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome completely changed how I viewed the Bible. I went from seeing the Bible as something that fell directly from heaven and written to me, to seeing it as a collection of ancient texts written to people other than me which I can now read and partake in as well. I imagine that most people reading this book are either college or seminary students, pastors, or adult education teachers in the church. Hopefully if you are reading this book, you have at least had enough education on this topic to know what I am talking about, and perhaps you have gone through a similar transformation in how you understand the Bible.

As I said earlier, I entered college at Malone University with a fairly open mind, interested in Christianity, theology, and the Bible but also being frustrated with my lack of ability to understand Scripture. I spent my freshmen year taking general education courses because I had not decided on a major, and I thought perhaps I would find something of interest through that process. Because Malone is a Christian university, introductory Bible classes are a part of the required general education courses, and I took both OT 101 and NT 101 in my first year. I was *amazed* by what I was learning.

Long story short, I ended up majoring in Bible and Theology and became fascinated with the world of biblical studies. If you are a college or seminary student, perhaps you know how I felt. I quickly felt called to bring what I was learning to the church, mostly because in my personal experience it was not being taught there. While I really enjoyed learning all of these things in college I thought it was tragic that I had to go to college to learn it in the first place and at times it actually made me angry. It was because of this that very early on in college I felt called to become involved in Christian education in the church in some way. I wanted to bring to the church for free what I had to pay lots of money for, and so my road which led to this book began.

During my senior year at Malone I took a class which allowed me to do a research project that involved interviewing adult Christian education pastors in local churches in my area. One of the questions I asked was for them to give a number on a scale of 1-10 as to how skilled the people in their church were at reading the Bible. Every single one of them answered with a “one” or a “zero,” and zero was not an option.

This provided me with two immediate conclusions; the first was that the church lacked basic hermeneutical skills, and secondly that the adult education pastors were aware of this. I would then ask a follow up question about what they were doing to address that situation. All of them said that they were not doing anything about it. When I asked them why, all but two of them said they did not know; however, the two that did had virtually identical responses. They said they did not teach hermeneutical principles because they did not think that the people

in their congregation would “find it relevant.” This seemed rather a strange response to me and at the time I could not understand why any person in the Protestant tradition, which bases its beliefs primarily on Scripture, would think that learning how to read the Bible was not “relevant.” Nor could I understand why an education pastor would care about the learner not finding it relevant. If the pastor *knows* what people need to know shouldn’t they teach it regardless of what they think the learner wants?

Since this time I have made it my mission to bring basic hermeneutics to the church, along with all other topics of theological and biblical education that Christians should be learning. It wasn’t until I furthered my education in seminary that I began to understand why the pastors answered my questions as they did. When I attended seminary I majored in Christian Formation, which is a fancier more spiritual way of talking about Christian education, I learned about the concept of a philosophy of education. This is not philosophy in a generalized sense of the word where you might discuss a football coach’s defensive philosophy or something along those lines. No, what I mean is the actual study of the academic field of philosophy and its categories as it is applied to education.

After gaining knowledge of educational philosophy I was finally able to understand the results of the undergraduate project from my college years. Whether or not they were aware of it, I cannot say, but the two pastors that said they did not teach basic hermeneutics because their congregation did not find it relevant were operating under the educational philosophy of pragmatism. One of the tenets of pragmatic philosophy of education is that learners should only learn

about things that *they* find useful, or “relevant.” In other words, the learner determines the curriculum.

At the time, for some reason, I did not find this whole topic of philosophy and education to be of particular importance, and I think to some degree I was so ignorant of philosophy in general that it went over my head a bit. I just wanted to get into the trenches and teach people about the Bible in church and I wanted to get better at doing that. With the hopes of improving my teaching skills I entered a PhD program at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. At that time the education program there was focused on how pragmatism was affecting education in the local church and was encouraging students to develop a Christian philosophy for education. At the time I was a bit frustrated by this, it was not what I had wanted to go to school for, but I found out later it was exactly what I needed (trust me the irony that I did not get to determine my own curriculum is not lost on me!)

At that time I simply did not have an interest in all this philosophy talk and so after a year I left the program and moved to Illinois to work for my friend and also to do adult education for one of my old pastors who had recently moved to the same city in Illinois. The first week of church I attended one of the Sunday school classes. The teacher, a man I came later to respect and look up to, introduced himself as the “facilitator” of the class. I chuckled softly to myself as this is the word that pragmatists use to describe teachers under their philosophy. At that moment something clicked within me, I realized just how important this whole philosophy thing really was, and how fundamental it was not only to adult

education but to literally everything in life. Since that time philosophy has been my main academic focus and I hope that through this book I can stoke your interest in this topic, add my own thoughts to the conversation, and encourage you to develop your own philosophy of education (or any other ministry!)

I have several goals for the rest of this book that I will tackle in subsequent chapters:

1. Explaining the basics of philosophy and philosophy of education.
2. Giving a very basic overview of the philosophical landscape in the United States in the last 150 years or so.
3. Explaining the problem of pragmatism in education and the church.
4. Presenting my own Christian philosophy for adult education.
5. Concluding with an encouragement and an exercise for you to develop your own philosophy of education.

Chapter 1 – Philosophy 101

The study of Philosophy has many fields, however for the purposes of this book we will be dealing with those that pertain most directly to developing a philosophy for adult Christian education in the local church. In this chapter we will discuss Metaphysics, Epistemology, Axiology, and Anthropology. These are not all the fields within the study of philosophy but are four of the most important for developing a philosophy for education.

I think it's important to note at this point that *everyone is a philosopher* already, including you. If you are new to philosophy you will find in the discussion of these 4 topics that you might already have thoughts about them, perhaps well thought out or perhaps not, but these things are unavoidable parts of life and we are already living by our own philosophy. The point, I think, is to refine and hone that philosophy to be more consistent and well thought out, myself included.

Philosophy is a lifelong journey, so let us begin!

Metaphysics

Metaphysics is perhaps the most well-known subfield of philosophy in pop culture. If we break down the word metaphysics itself we can gain a clearer understanding of its meaning. Physics is the understanding of how the physical world functions. Classical physics studies the macroscopic world of anything bigger than an atom. It's the stuff of Sir Isaac Newton, apples falling from trees and sending rockets to space. Quantum physics is about the micro world of electrons, protons, quarks and the like. This is a field that scientists are still trying to figure out because it seems from our understanding so far that the quantum

world does not work the same way as the macroscopic world. It seems to follow a different set of rules. But what classical and quantum mechanics have in common is that they are studying the physical world of the universe.

The prefix “meta” means beyond or above. When we attach it to the word physics we start to think about things that are *beyond* the world of physics and physical, and beyond the realm of the type of questions that science can answer. A quick way to understand this concept is to think about the movie *The Matrix*. In the movie the main character, Neo, discovers that the reality he is living in is a virtual simulation known as the Matrix. In actual “real world” he is living in a world that has been taken over by A.I. machines and he is plugged into pod that harnesses the electrical energy from his body to feed the machines electrical power all while his brain is plugged into the Matrix to make him happy, cooperative, and basically a good little battery. Neo comes to understand, from a metaphysical perspective, that the “real world” is beyond what is going on in the Matrix and eventually, with the help of other people living in the meta (real) world, is able to break out into the real world to fight the machines and try to free the rest of the humans.

The field of metaphysics then asks questions and seeks answers along these lines. What is real? Why does the physical world exist? Is there a god? Is there anything beyond our universe? As you can imagine, the way that we answer these types of questions will have a lot of determination on how we live our lives or how we might answer other philosophical questions. You might think that the story of the Matrix is crazy talk, but even Elon Musk said in 2016 at the

Redcode's Code Conference that there was "one in billions" chance that we *are NOT currently living in a simulation*. I don't agree with Elon but I think it is very interesting that the richest and one of the most looked up to public figures in the world believes, in essence, that we live in a world that was created by something that exists in a completely different metaphysical reality than we do.

Epistemology

The word epistemology originates from the Greek word *episteme*, which means knowledge. This field of philosophy studies how we acquire knowledge and determine what is true. Imagine you were having a conversation with someone and made a metaphysical claim such as "God exists." It is very probable that the person would reply with an epistemological question like "how do you *know* that?" I think sometimes many people are tempted to simply say "I just know" when challenged on their epistemological assumptions.

On the other hand, as I write this in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic it seems as the question of how we know things is becoming more and more important to people. How do we know that masks or vaccines work? Are the COVID-19 vaccines safe in both the short and long term? Should I trust Anthony Fauci over my own doctor if my doctor does not want me to get the vaccine? Should I trust the CDC? All of these are important epistemological questions that are on the forefront of many people's minds today.

One of the more important contributions to epistemology in Christianity was made by theologian John Wesley who proposed what is now called the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, which argues that there are essentially four ways that

Christians come to know Christian truth. These four ways are Scripture, tradition, reason, and personal experience. For Wesley of course, Scripture was primary, but it was the idea of learning from personal experience that was the main contribution to the conversation by Wesley. Personal experience is very powerful and indeed, someone might say at the end of the day that the most important factor in their belief in God is their personal experience with Him.

We will get into epistemology in more detail later but it seems to me that epistemology is trickier than it appears if we just view these 4 categories in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral separately, they are all interconnected in a way that requires us to think deeply about how we know things. While Wesley and I would agree that Scripture is primary to how we know Christian truth, we also should realize that our tradition and personal experience can both hinder and help in our quest to understand the Bible. Additionally we also use logic and reason to understand what the Bible is trying to say. How we know the truth is certainly a difficult and messy business.

Axiology

Axiology is the study of morals, ethics, and values. It asks questions like, what is of value? What is the moral decision in this situation? What does it mean to behave ethically? At this point we can start to see how these fields are interconnected with each other. Let's go back for a moment to the example of *The Matrix*. The main character, Neo, begins the story as a computer programmer by day and computer hacker by night. For him there are rumors of a Matrix but he's not sure what it all is. He is on a quest for truth. Once Neo finds

out the truth about the Matrix after he is outside in the real world he also starts to value freedom from the machines in addition to his quest for truth. These two values, truth and freedom, are connected to Neo's epistemological realization of the true nature of his metaphysical world. The "real world" is outside of his brain that is enmeshed with the Matrix and enslaved by the machines.

But there is another character in the story named Cypher that does not value freedom and truth. Cypher is one of the humans in the real world that is working towards fighting the machines and freeing people from the Matrix. The "real world" within the story is harsh and unforgiving, it has only a small group of humans living deep in the earth, barely getting by with the little resources that they have. Cypher decides he's had enough of this miserable life and decides he wants to go back into the Matrix because he wants to live a decadent life rather than fight for freedom and truth. He makes a deal to betray his friends so that the machines will put him back in the Matrix. In the end Cypher decides to value pleasure and comfort over freedom and truth. He would rather be a slave to the machines than have a hard but free life.

It might be hard at first to see how the study of morals and values is connected to adult Christian education. I find it is helpful to think of the "value" aspect of axiology when considering how it is connected to education. If we think back to my college project from the introduction, we can make some axiological observations. There are at least two value judgments we can observe from the decisions of the pastors to not teach their congregation basic hermeneutical principles. The first is that they believed that their congregation did

not *value* such knowledge, the second is that the pastor *valued* the values they perceived their congregation to have. I would argue that as pastors we should consider what is of actual value according to Christianity rather than simply making decisions from the values of the masses.

Anthropology

The fourth category we will consider is anthropology. In the context of philosophy the field of anthropology asks questions about humanity. It asks questions such as, what does it mean to be human? What is the nature of humanity? Is humanity good, bad, or both? Are humans just animals or is there something special about us? What are humans capable of knowing?

Again, we can connect this area of study to the others we have already discussed. If we consider things like how human beings learn, what they are capable of understanding, what is humanity's purpose, and what the best methods are for conveying information to humans, we then see how epistemology and anthropology interact with one another. Answering these kinds of questions will determine things like how we teach and what we teach.

Philosophy of Education

Now that we have discussed the basics of some of the most important philosophical categories we can now move on to the field of educational philosophy. Educational philosophy takes the categories we just discussed and implements them in the field of education. As we will see below, the philosophical claims that we make in categories like epistemology and axiology will determine how we educate. In fact, I would argue that our philosophical claims determine

how we think, act, and do everything in our lives. That is perhaps another book for another time but I believe if we really embrace the full scope of what philosophy is all about then we can see how fundamental it is to literally everything.

The Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher is an incredibly important category in developing a philosophy of education. This category asks what the role of the teacher should be. Does the teacher stand before the student with the full weight of authority behind him as they dictate to the student what the truth is? Or is the teacher a fellow traveler with the student, a seeker of the truth helping the student along the path as someone whose footprints have helped worn the path in? Or maybe the role of the teacher is to show the student where the path begins and simply get out of their way?

The way in which we answer this question will be informed by our basic philosophical categories. For instance, if we were to hold the epistemological belief that truth is objective (which means truth comes from outside of the learner rather than from within) then we might be more inclined to believe that the role of the teacher should be to pass along this knowledge to their learners. On the other hand, if we believe that experience is the most important source of truth then we might lean more on the experience of the learner. This would mean the teacher would take a more of a backseat in the classroom and give the students additional power.

The Role of the Learner

The role of the learner in the classroom is of course closely connected to the role of the teacher and we should be sure that in whatever philosophy we decide to implement in the classroom that these two roles complement each other. We would never want to have a system where the role of the teacher was based on objective ideas of truth but the role of the learner was based on subjective ideas of the truth. This is one reason that we must be very thoughtful about how we are doing things when we step into the classroom.

Let us take the example above and determine what the role of the learner would be in those two systems in a public school system. In a system where truth is held to be objective and is communicated by the teacher, the primary role of the student would be to attempt to understand and absorb that knowledge. They would then be expected to reflect that knowledge back to the teacher through objective measurements like quizzes and tests, and they would eventually be expected to put that knowledge into use through solving complex problems. In the system based on experiential truth things would work differently, if the source of truth comes from the experience of the learner then the learner would most likely be involved in various projects where a search for truth is conducted, perhaps in the form of experiments. In this system the learner is expected to draw conclusions about their quest and it might be considered okay if the student draws different conclusions about the experiment than the teacher's past experiences.

Teaching Methods

The interconnectedness of philosophy should start to come into view now as the types of methods one might use based on their philosophy has already been mentioned in trying to explain the role of the learner and role of the teacher. The methods we use as teachers should line up with our philosophical beliefs. One of the reasons I have an interest in teaching this topic is that I have very often observed people using teaching methods that do not line up very well with their beliefs or with Christianity.

Role of Holy Spirit

When developing a philosophy for education one should not just focus on the human side of the endeavor of education, but also ask what God's role is in it. What is Jesus' role? What is the Holy Spirit's role? What is the trinity's responsibilities compared to our responsibilities as educators? The way we do things might look completely different based on how we answer these questions. If we cut God out of the picture, or forget about His role in the process, we will be missing out on the support He can give us or be simply getting in His way.

Purpose of Christian Education

When we educate people in Church we don't just do it because it's a thing we are supposed to do, there are of course purposes or goals for educating people. But from time to time we might not have that in mind. Sometimes we can get caught up in our own agenda or maybe are so busy that we just throw something together for Sunday morning and hope that it works out okay. When we make these kinds of mistakes one thing that we forget about is why we are

doing it in the first place. It is important to figure out just what the goals of our educational ministries are and keep them near the front of our mind as we figure out what to teach and how to teach. As we talk more about methods of teaching and begin to think deeply about them, we might find out that our methods are at odds with our goals.

Curriculum

The curriculum is the content that we choose to teach and if you purchase a curriculum to use instead of creating your own that will typically come with its own methods for the lesson. Christian education curriculum often reflects the theological persuasion of the author and publishing company so it is important to make sure these line up with your church's belief. But the curriculum will also reflect a certain philosophy in regards to the roles of teacher, student, and methods so it is important to analyze them closely before using them. You might agree with the content of a curriculum's theology but not its methods!

Why Philosophy Matters

There are many reasons why philosophy and its influence on education matters, but at this time I want to highlight what I find to be the most important reason. It seems to me that whatever philosophy we use, the way we determine the role of the teacher and learner, the methods we employ, will determine the types of people we produce through our education *even if we are not actively teaching the beliefs of that philosophy*. In other words, if we use the philosophy of pragmatism then we will produce pragmatists, if postmodernism then we will postmodernists, and so forth. We need to be intentional deep thinkers about how

we go about our education in the church. We need to determine a Christian philosophy, so that we can produce Christians. As we move forward through the rest of this book my goal is to highlight some of the philosophical issues I believe the church is facing today around education, present my own thoughts on a Christian philosophy of education, as well as to encourage you to develop your own philosophy of Christian education.

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