

EDITORIAL

YOUTH AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP: A CHURCH IN TRANSITION

Mere Semantics?

It is an interesting time to be editor of a journal called *Youth and Christian Education Leadership* . . . when you don't have any idea what is going to happen to the "Christian Education" part! By the time you are reading this, the ordained bishops of the Church of God will have deliberated (and presumably decided) on changing the familiar denominational language of "Youth and Christian Education Leadership" to "Youth and Discipleship." Assuming that change does come to pass, the title of this publication will presumably change along with it.

As Herbert McCabe demonstrated in his important book on ethics—*Law, Love and Language*—language matters, especially language about God and the Church. I do not wish to overstate the case: I do not think local churches will make sweeping, immediate changes based on this change. But the conversation is about more than mere semantics. The change reflects a general ambiguity about the nature and character of Christian education, both in the Pentecostal Movement and beyond. While Sunday school continues to be the primary arm of Christian education for many of our churches, small groups

are the primary arm for others. Others use a hybrid. At any rate, there is a wide diversity in our approaches to catechesis/discipleship within our churches. How we narrate (and even name) our past, our present, and our future as disciple makers has enormous implications for pastoral work at all levels of ministry.

The Times, They are Changin'

When I started out in the ministry, my first job was as a pastor of youth and Christian education. It was a good gig, and I loved my title (I was 21, so I loved the idea of *any* title). Nonetheless, I don't mourn the change in language. I was talking with Geoffrey Wainwright of Duke Divinity School about this transition and he remarked that he tended "to fight shy of all mention of Christian education . . . to my mind the term is now inextricably associated with 20th-century 'Educational Theory,' which, on the whole, I find disastrous." I think Dr. Wainwright's point is well made: Much of our way of thinking about Christian formation in the Church has been shaped more by North American cultural trends in secular education than the explicitly stated charge to make disciples given in Matthew 28. "Christian education" is hardly a Biblical expression;

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and if moving away from it and into the language of the Gospels might signal a return to more primal, early church ways of thinking about the task of discipleship, I am all for it.

But we wanted you to hear from a variety of voices about the potential implications of this change. In the midst of this transition, the following pages in this interview-driven issue speak to where we've been, where we are, and where we might be headed. If we need to pause for a moment of silence to say goodbye to "Christian education," then so be it. But most of all, we want to incite your Spirit-filled imagination to dream out loud as to how God might choose to revitalize your process of disciple-making in your own church.



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