

Institute for Christian Teaching  
Education Department of Seventh -day Adventists

KNOWLEDGE AS A  
QUEST FOR GOD:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The dualistic world view passed down from the classical philosophers persistently permeates Christian thought and action. Walsh and Middleton are concerned that this dualism embraced by the church fathers has “opened the door to the triumph of secularism as the guiding spirit of Western Culture”<sup>1</sup> The dominant Christian culture not only gave rise to, but re-enforces this secularity as it insists on a distinction between “secular” and “spiritual” pursuits in the life of the church. The placing of “gospel ministry” over against other ministries seems to have lead to a shallow or indifferent approach to the integration of faith and learning.

People in general embark upon the process of living in a search for meaning and fulfilment. This unveils the futility of a dualistic approach precisely because people seek some meaning in whatever they set out to do in life even if that meaning is merely the satisfaction of primal desires. Many fail to find fulfilment probably because the assumptions from which they begin have no footing in what the Bible presents as ultimate meaning.

My purpose therefore, is to argue that the process of learning, must be a quest to know God and thereby to cooperate in the fulfilment of the divine purpose in the cosmos.

It will become necessary in the process to

1. Highlight the relationship of Biblical revelation to intellectual pursuits and
2. Establish the importance of a liberal arts education as the most effective means of re-enforcing the Christian world view and carrying out the mission of making

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<sup>1</sup> Brian J. Walsh and Richard K. Middleton, The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 1984), pp 108-116.

disciples.

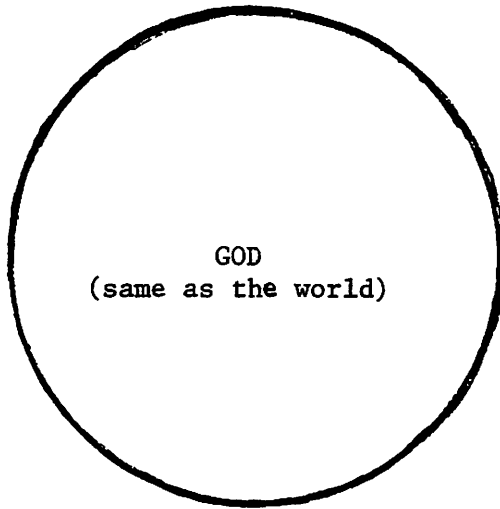
### **A PLACE TO BEGIN - THE BIBLICAL WORLD VIEW**

The Biblical account of creation and redemption refutes the dualistic theism that places God outside of this world. The story of the fall does not relate that God left humanity but that humanity left the presence of God. When God came calling, they hid. God is still in the garden, but human beings are not. The Christian endeavor therefore, must be a journey back to God - to meet God who comes calling.

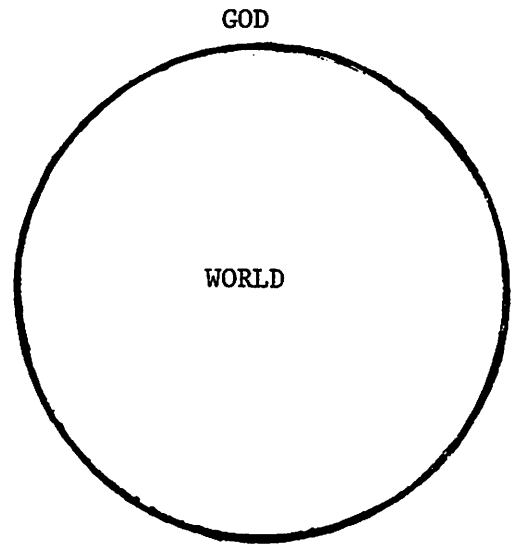
Jesus entered human history to show what human beings can become - (see phil. 2:5-11 and Heb.3) it is however not only the human that is to be redeemed, but the entire creation. John saw the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven (Rev. 2); and in Romans 8:22 the entire creation is groaning in anticipation of salvation. So in the salvific process there is an intimate interaction between humanity and the rest of creation, and most significantly between God and the creation. How one views the relationship between them will affect ones approach to knowledge. The diagrams on page three compare pervading world views with a more helpful model of the Biblical account.

**MODEL 1:** While the world view may lead to a deep respect for the material environment and an awesomeness before what may be perceived as the nearness of God, it does not present the Biblical view; the world is not God, but God created the world (Gen1:1) . The world is in a state of degeneration and need redemption by God.

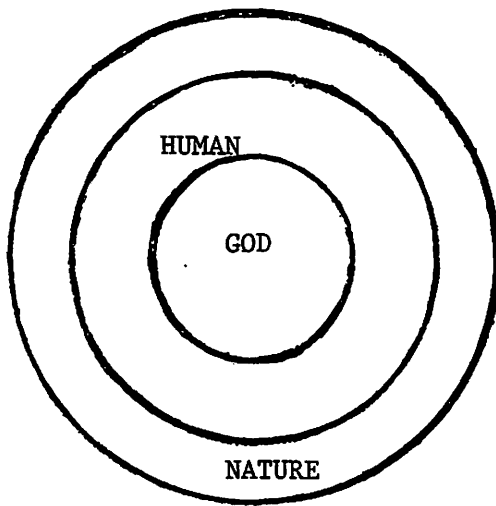
**MODEL 2:** As stated earlier this has lead to secularism - separating God from the general experiences of the world. This refutes the Biblical account of salvation "God was in Christ



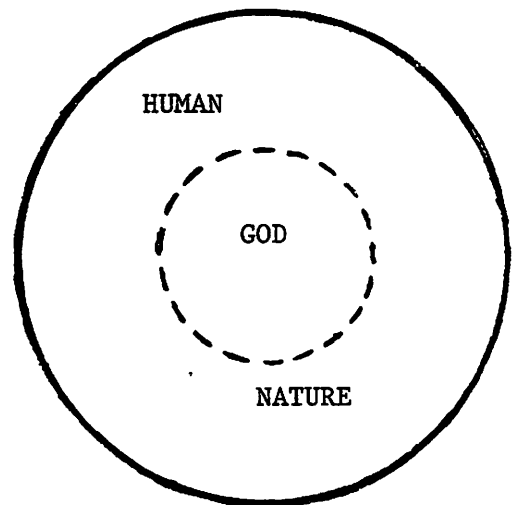
1. (Pantheism)



2. (One form of Dualism)



3. (Another form of Dualism)



4. (Biblical world-view)

reconciling the world... (2 Cor. 5:9), and "... I am with you always..." (Matt 28: 20) .

**MODEL 3:** While this world view recognizes God in this world, it makes the human a demi-god, vaguely connected to the rest of creation. This barrier between human and nature is false and chaotic for Genesis shows contingency in the creation. Further all creation has been affected by human sin (Gen 3: 17). As in model 2, it loses sight of God's intimate interaction with the cosmos (see Dan. 2:20-23).

Two major evils may result:

1. Disregard for the environment by a failure to see how natural laws relate to the well-being of all.
2. Anti-intellectualism stemming from a refusal to account for the cosmic experience both scientifically and historically as related to God's creative and salvific action.

**MODEL 4:** This recognizes God's presence in the world despite the sin barrier. The Genesis account shows human beings as part of the creation albeit the apex and stewards of that creation. The line between God and creature is broken because God is not totally separated, but is available through the omnipresent Holy Spirit (Ps. 139:7-10). The purpose of revelation is to erase that line and restore it to the pre-fall condition where God and the creation are once more united.

In summary, God has created and is redeeming the world. This is God's world, not our world. Hence God is not alien to it. It is humans in sin who are alien to it, hence degeneration and separation. God however occupies the world not because God is confined to it but because salvation necessitates it. (Note God is also outside the circle in models 2-4).

## **THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE**

For the primitive Christian community, human history climaxes with the liberation of the world from the grip of evil. This is the theme of the Pauline writings. The Gospel of John explicitly indicates that knowledge of the truth is the means of liberation. "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). John addresses a Hellenistic world view in which freedom is sought through an intellectual apprehension of reality.<sup>2</sup> This ultimate reality is what is truth. John meets this idea by defining this truth as the Logos (John 1:1-14). Hence for him ultimate reality is God as manifested through Christ. By this is meant the entire act and process of creation and redemption - God's purpose in the world as it is focussed in Christ.

One may then ask; how does truth and knowledge relate?

## **KNOWLEDGE**

In Greek thought, knowledge is the apprehension of ultimate reality.<sup>3</sup> In the Biblical context however that apprehension is complete in experience. Knowledge of God and God's purpose must lead to a response with reference to ones purpose in life. More specifically the teachings of Jesus and the apostles re-enforce this concern of knowledge. The principle is taught, the application is given and a call is made to respond. Jesus has stated in the sermon on the mount (Matt.5-7) that all that one knows to be truth (the law and the prophets in this context) must have one-basic result - the golden rule - do to other what you would have them do to you

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<sup>2</sup>See George Eldon Ladd, A Theology of The New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), pp 295-304

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p 296

(7:12). This seems to be key to harmony and survival. According to Sire, “knowledge is so tied to ethics that on the most important issues of life, knowing the good and doing the good are one and the same.”<sup>4</sup>

Reality however does not relate only to the good, but relates also to evil. This by no means negate the fact that ultimate reality is centered in God. Neither does it mean that God is also evil. Rather it is by knowledge of God (as knowledge has been defined) that one is able to apprehend evil and respond to it appropriately. It was this knowledge of God, that cause Adam and eve to recognize that they had sinned (Gen. 2). Good must be responded to positively, evil must be responded to negatively. This is basic to the process of restoration.

If we therefore perceive the world as created by God, as being redeemed by God as heretofore stated, then the learning process becomes a journey of faith in which we seek to know more about God and God’s purpose in the cosmos and how we are to respond to it. Values Versus World View

Education is therefore approached by the above stated world view - the quest for unity with God creator and redeemer. World views and values however, are not one and the same. Ones world-view is the place where one stands in the quest for knowledge. Value is a final stage in the process of knowing.

If one knows how HIV is contracted, one may not refuse to reach out to an aids patient. If one knows the effect of alcohol on the body, one does not indulge in alcoholic beverages. To

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<sup>4</sup>James W. Sire, Discipleship of the Mind: Learning to Love God in the Way We Think (Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, 1990), p. 97

impose values on the learning process is to assume that one already knows ,and learning becomes at best an exercise that merely prepares one for the market place. At worst it becomes an expose of arrogance.

### **DERIVING VALUES IN THE PROCESS OF KNOWING**

Myrtle Pennicook in applying the Eden model of education relates the subject matter of nature to nature walks and contemplation of nature.<sup>5</sup> This model may be further integrated into the curriculum however, when students in the sciences are lead to view each discovery as a step in understanding how the world works (that includes the human person [figure 4,5]) and how to adjust one's values and life styles accordingly.

One may be baffled as to how to integrate faith into the so-called exact science only if one looses sight of the world-view. The exact sciences can lead one into an understanding of the "mysteries" of God in a way that no other discipline can.

This fact my be evident in the book A Brief History of Time by Stephen Hawkins,<sup>6</sup> professor of Mathematics at the University of Cambridge. In the introduction Carl Sajan states "This is a book about God... or perhaps the absence of God"<sup>7</sup> By his very able explanation of simple even complex Mathematical principles, Hawkins embarks on a quest to understand the mind of "God". In analyzing the projection of light rays he seeks to verify the possibility of

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<sup>5</sup>Myrtle Pennicook, " Integration of Faith: The Second Dimension of Curriculum in SDA Schools" Eighteenth Faith and Learning Seminar June 1996 p:4

<sup>6</sup>(New York: Bantham Books, 1988)

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., x



standing in the present and viewing both the past and the future. Hawkins concludes that based on the general theory of relativity there must have been a state of infinite density in the past - the big bang - the beginning of time and a similar state of infinite density in the future - the big crunch, which would be an end of time. When he combines quantum mechanics with general relativity, a new possibility arises - that space and time together may form a finite four - dimensional space without boundaries, completely self-contained, with no role for a creator. Based on the uncertainty principle however, Hawkins admits, the theory is not complete. There is still much that is not known, but may be known, based on our observation of the historical progression of scientific knowledge.

Another work worthy of note is an article by Will Clarke in the Christ in The Classroom Series "The Finite, The Infinite and God". Here again Clarke analyzes Mathematical principles in seeking to determine the possibility of finite existence.<sup>8</sup>

These and other works may give insight into the deep possibilities of the faith experience in learning. A teacher who embraces the Biblical worldview can interpret the facts in such a way that develops in the non-believer a desire to seek for a deeper reality.

As one studies the workings of the body the mind and the environment as a unity created by God [figure 4] one recognizes that co-operation with nature in eating habits, in hygiene, in the practice of medicine and in technological pursuits is key to healthy and wholesome living. In the human sciences one seeks to discover the reason and results of human behaviour.

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<sup>8</sup>Will Clarke, "The Finite, the Infinite and God" (No. 003-88; ICC:29-45)

When the result of a particular stimulus is known then the degree of change adjustment or re-enforcement may be determined in order to achieve the desired results. With a Biblical worldview one may achieve this.

The student of literature and the arts may be lead to appreciate life and beauty in the midst of death and disorder. This has great implications in the prevention of substance abuse. The creative arts - drama, literature and the visual arts observes and critiques the cosmic experience. This is the student's opportunity to determine where change is needed and how it can be initiated.

History encompasses all these human experiences. In whatever aspect or period of history one studies or teaches, one must be engaged in an interpretive and reconstructive task. Humanity is on a journey of becoming - a journey from the unknown towards the known. The Christian world view says that we believe. We believe not because we know, but rather like Anselm, we believe in order that we might understand - understand who we are, why we are what we are, and what we are to do about it.

### **SCRIPTURE**

Thus far nothing has been said about the scripture as a means of knowing God. How does scripture figure in the process of knowing? It becomes necessary to discuss scripture in a separate category, because too often scripture is either taken for granted, misapplied, or unduly idolized.

At this point in the discussion it should be understood that without the revelation in scripture,

there is no place to stand.

It is important to recognize however that the scripture does not tell us all we need to know about God and the cosmos. The Bible is not a science book, a psychology book or a history book etc. It is not even a book of dos and don'ts. Rather it is a story of God's salvation. This is what makes it "Special". That story however, comes within certain cultural and historical frameworks that must be interpreted and reconstructed as human understanding develops. Culture and tradition in scripture is not the revelation of God, rather it is the vehicle of that revelation.<sup>9</sup>

To view the traditions in scripture as the revelation becomes an hindrance to the revelatory process in history. The following are cases in point:

1. The Jews as a nation were too biased in their cultural understandings to perceive the true principles of the Kingdom of God. Hence Jesus said of them (quoting from Is. 29:13) "... They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men".

2. Paul struggled with Jews and non-Jews in questions of traditional practices. Col. 2:20-22 summarizes Paul's attitude to tradition: "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why as though you still belonged to it do you submit to its rules: 'do not handle!' 'do not taste!' 'do not touch!'"? These are destined to perish with use because they are based on human commands and teachings".

3. Up until the point of history that closes the canon it was not generally understood that

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<sup>9</sup>In "The Evil of Gender Bias", Ashley Smith seeks to distinguish between Biblical Culture and God's Word. Sunday Gleaner, 10 September 1995, !D.

the earth orbited the Sun rather than the reverse or that the earth was spherical rather than flat. Hence when scientist such as Copernicus and Galileo discovered the reality, the church crushed it for a long time because these men were believed to be refuting the revelation of scripture.

That Joshua commanded the sun to stand still (Joshua 10:12-13) or that John saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth (Rev. 7:1) does not in light of scientific discovery, refute the authenticity of Biblical revelation. Rather it highlights the progress of human understanding.

Based on this, one should not assume that humans have reached the final frontier of knowledge. What if science is able to explain Jesus walking through the wall? (And this seems probable based on theories of mass and density). What if careful study of the great section of the human brain that remains unused realizes a power never before imagined? Should all this lead to disbelief? Based on a wholesome perspective of scripture as stated above, this should not. Faith must move beyond a disjointed modality and see all of life as a unified process in which God is seeking to save the world. This is a solid faith that will survive the inevitabilities of history.

### The Biblical Paradigm

The Bible presents a paradigm of human history, the focus being God's action and the human response in the process of salvation. God does not superimpose upon the human. If this were so restoration may have been long completed. Salvation is not just an act. It is also a process - a journey.

The Bible gives guidelines for remaining on the right path in the journey. Such

guidelines are not to be found in the letter of the norms and mores which flavour thought, language and expression. According to Faye E. Scott, "No one culture, even a Biblical one, can finally determine the full meaning of the relationship to which the Bible witnesses."<sup>10</sup>

Guidelines of scripture are best spelt out in Matt: 7:12 - the golden rule, as the guiding principle of love and justice. This according to Christ is the ideal to which all communities must aspire. The Biblical history has shown how God's people fell short of that standard. Today the Christian community seems to struggle to meet that mandate. This is evident in the way one race interacts, with the another, one gender treats the other, one nation relates to the other and the indifference towards environmental issues. The ironic twist seems to be that failure to grasp the true intent of scripture has fixated humans in a culture of sin. This is so because values are imposed upon the text, both by the people of the text and the readers of the text.

### Biblical Authority

In light of the proceeding, questions may arise as to the Bible's claims to authority. Such questions need not arise. Scott argues that "any claim to Biblical authority must take seriously the fact the Biblical witness as a whole is not concerned with the communities possession of revelation (God's word contained in a text). Rather it centers on the promise of ongoing and future redemptive relationship (God's faithfulness)."<sup>11</sup> Such relationship is spelt out in the teachings of Christ (see above) and the message of apocalyptic. The Bible is our final rule of

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<sup>10</sup>"Biblical Authority and God: A Theological Reflection" Currents 23, no. 1 (April 1996):123

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 121

faith but not all the truth about everything is revealed in them.<sup>12</sup>

No one therefore needs to defend it against rational thinking or disregard it as inauthentic or irrational. This understanding should lead one to see the revelation of God in all the academic disciplines. The teacher does not in turn need to find a Biblical reference to every subject matter. (This most often leads to misapplication of text). Rather, he may dig deep within the subject matter itself to grasp the lesson it teaches about the cosmos as the space of divine human interaction in the process of salvation.

### **BRINGING THE DISCIPLINES TOGETHER**

Holmes argues that all our knowledge of anything comes in focus around the fact that God created everything. "All truth is God's truth, wherever it is found is how he summarizes."<sup>13</sup> Based on this he prescribes a liberal arts education. By liberal arts he does not mean that one dabbles in a variety of disciplines, but rather one becomes truly prepared for life as one understands how one thing fits into the whole.

Indeed disputes arise between professionals in the various disciplines, because each one focusses on one area of life, such a person often sees the world from his own little cubicle of knowledge.

The Biblical theologian may view the scripture as the only source of revelation . Matters are further complicated when such a person has little or no knowledge in the areas of literature,

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<sup>12</sup>Arthur F. Holmes, The Idea of a Christian College (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.,

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp 17-22

social science or philosophy. Such person does not have the tools to analyze and apply scripture appropriately. The scientist, the sociologist or psychologist who lacks proper understanding of the nature of Biblical revelation may disregard scripture as irrational (scientist) oppressive (sociologist) or delusionary (psychologist).

Very often Christian scientists - whether in the physical natural or social sciences - seek to make unnecessary or uninformed excuses for scripture. A popular excuse is that divine revelation is not rational. Such an excuse has two major flaws:

1. It denies that part of God's revelation may be found in the scientific discipline .
2. It admits rationality in one revelatory process, but irrationality in another.

Those who seek careers in literature and the arts must have adequate knowledge in all the major disciplines in order to be truly effective. These are engaged in the observation and critique of the human experience. Without a broad knowledge of all that affects the cosmic reality such observation and critique may be narrow and one sided. Michaelangelo for example painted and sculpted great masterpieces because he was willing to visit the dead room of the monastery Santo Spirit in his hometown of Florence to study the human structure so he could fully reproduce the form in his art.<sup>14</sup> The world of natural science owes its knowledge of anatomy to this artist. Michaelangelo is also referred to as the father of geometry having developed principles and perspective in Architecture in order to balance his massive sculptors. This enabled him to build the captivating St. Peters Dome.

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<sup>14</sup>See Irving Stone, The Agony And The Ecstasy (New Jersey:New American Library, n.d.) Pp. 203 - 213

One of America's leading public intellectuals Cornel West in the opening address of the 1995 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in speaking of "religion, citizenship justice and love," critiques the one-sided approach to knowledge that does not equip the individual to confront the challenges of the twenty first century as we ask "who we are, why we are what we are, and what are we to do about it."<sup>15</sup> His own depth and breath of knowledge his mastery of language lends profoundness to the body of literature in which he critiques and seeks to reconstruct the prevailing western world view.

The above has important implications that must be considered in an aggressive task of integration of faith and learning. They are as follows:

1. The process of instruction should not only be an effort in developing proficiency in one subject area but must also deliberate in relating it to the whole picture.
2. Teachers should not be knowledgeable only in their particular area of instruction but should seek adequate knowledge whether formally or informally in other areas.
3. Students should be encouraged to read widely. Assignments that requires bringing together the various disciplines should be given
4. Teachers should have an adequate grasp of principles of Biblical interpretation.

This may help to prevent the perpetuation of ignorance regarding the nature of revelation and its relationship to all of life.

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<sup>15</sup>Cornell West, "Interrogating W.E.B. Debois".



5. Sermons should stimulate thought and extend into teaching and dialogue in settings outside of the traditional preaching hour.

6. Anti-intellectualism should be discouraged on all fronts. It perpetuates the separation of faith and learning in the deepest sense and hinders the revelatory process.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The earth is the space of divine/human interaction. Because God created everything and acts in history for human salvation, whatever is known about the world relates to the creative and the salvific. The Bible therefore, should not be taken as the only revelation of God, albeit God's special revelation, rather it should be seen as a paradigm of God's action in human history and an assurance that God continues to act in history in the revelatory/redemptive process. As Holmes states, "... the eternal logos has left his imprint on nature and human beings and history, and the truth discovered therein is God's truth too"<sup>16</sup>

Christians should therefore approach learning as an effort to fully grasp God's purpose in history and become engaged in fulfilling that task (God has no hands but ours). This quest finds perspective as the teacher/student seeks to view the whole through a liberal arts education.

Countless many have in the scientific endeavour encountered a reality bigger than them, and have been lead to believe. Others in their observation and critique of the cosmic experience through the arts and humanities, have searched for a place to stand in the face of life's baffling absurdities. They may be gently lead to that place - to Christ the author and finisher of our faith.

Integration is best understood therefore, not as an exercise of relating faith to learning, but rather as the pursuit of learning as an experience of faith. It is a quest to know God.

Who knows what lies ahead in this limitless possibility of time and space? The Christian

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<sup>16</sup>Holmes, p. 63

stands on the Solid Rock. As she climbs the mountain of knowledge, she cannot see the peak, but she is assured of God's faithfulness to take her there. The Christian endeavour is to beckon others to embark on that journey of faith - the way to God - to love, justice and human liberation - "a new future".<sup>17</sup> Now we know in part; but then we shall fully know (1Cor. 13:12).

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<sup>17</sup>See Thomas H. Groome, Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980) p. 21

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