

2008

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Recommended Citation

Robinson, David W. (2008) "Book Review: Roy D. Zuck. Teaching as Paul Taught," *International Christian Community of Teacher Educators Journal*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ictej/vol3/iss2/3>

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Volume 3, Number 2:

The ICCTE Journal

A Journal of the International Christian Community for Teacher Education

Book Review: Roy D. Zuck. Teaching as Paul Taught

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Roy B. Zuck. *Teaching as Paul Taught.* Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003. 324 pp. \$31.00 (paperback). ISBN-10: 1592444237 ;ISBN-13: 978-1592444236.

“God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him?”

– Elihu, Job 36:22 (NIV)

The church of our Lord Jesus Christ has recognized from its foundation a vital connection between spirituality and the ministry of teaching. In his Great Commission to His disciples, now being transformed into His apostles, the Lord commanded them, saying, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, *and teaching them* to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matt 28:19-20a, NIV; emphasis mine) Likewise, Paul explicitly noted the spiritual gift and role of the teacher or the pastor-teacher several times in the scriptures (I Cor. 12, particularly 28-31; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-13). Teachers are mentioned early and late in the scriptures: schools of the prophets, teacher-priests like Ezra, teacher-kings like Solomon, apostle-teachers like Paul — and, of course, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, our Teacher above all teachers. To its credit, the church has pursued the ministry of teaching throughout this age, though not without some major (and at times catastrophic) failures.

The question of *how* to carry out the calling of teaching — how to teach students faithfully, how to teach and mentor the teachers, how to organize teaching, and how to administer its activities — always important, has become ever more significant in our time. Without wishing to demean the quality or worth of earlier generations of educators, it is inescapable to conclude that the scale and complexity of education, especially higher education over the past 125 years, now dwarfs anything that

preceded it. As a result, the need for developing more mature Christian theoretical and practical pedagogical models, firmly grounded in the scriptures, has become quite apparent. We must address this challenge, or allow non-Christian thought to dominate the field by default. This is an outcome that no thoughtful Christian pedagogue can tolerate.

In recent years a number of Christian thinkers, scholars, and teachers have stepped up to accept the challenge. One doesn't have to concentrate for very long to come up with a list of contemporary teacher-scholars like Sire, Wolterstorff, Lockerbie, Marsden, Noll — and there are many more — who have sought to encourage us all in our pursuit of the mind of Christ in our time. Organizations like our own ICCTE exist to promote precisely this awareness, and to further the work of outlining the implications of the scriptures in the practice of the calling of teaching. The work is very demanding, however. The scriptures abound with revealed truth about the ministry of teaching; coming to grips with that revelation, organizing it, and presenting it in a manner that will help other teacher-believers to be more effective in their own classrooms requires much of those who would address it.

Thus the work that Dr. Roy Zuck has done for his fellow teachers is all the more to be appreciated. In *Teaching as Paul Taught*, Zuck has undertaken nothing less than a theology of teaching, centered on the ministry of the apostle Paul. (He has also produced a parallel work on Jesus Christ as a teacher, which I may review in the future for the *ICCTE Journal*.) This is an extremely ambitious task, but one that Zuck proves himself to be equal to. Certainly his preparation and the fruit of his life as an educator is substantial; see, for example, Talbot School of Theology's summary of his career at http://www.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/view.cf?n=roy_zuck for more details. As a respected

professor, a writer, an editor, and a former Vice President of Academic Affairs at Dallas Theological Seminary, his CV represents substantial accomplishment at various levels in academia and Christian ministry. Clearly this is an author who brings much to the topic at hand.

The organization of the book is somewhat unusual. Rather than the usual schema of chronological or historical development, a systemic synthesis, or a thematic approach, Zuck cleverly chooses a chapter framework employing key *questions*. Like Christ Himself did from time to time, or as Socrates was known to do, Zuck starts dialogs with inquiries. “Was Paul a Teacher?” “How Did Paul’s Background Prepare Him as a Teacher?” Or even — with perhaps a touch of whimsy here — “How Did Paul Use Questions in His Teaching?” In all, he poses a series of fifteen stimulating questions, in order to get his readers to reflect deeply upon what the scriptures have to reveal about the pedagogy of Paul. In doing so, he addresses one of the truly powerful miracles of the early church: the amazing conversion of Saul of Tarsus, a “Pharisee’s Pharisee,” into that great lion of God, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. In fact, it is in that conversion that Zuck locates his central thesis. “He became the Lord’s leading apostle and also one of Christianity’s greatest teachers — a master teacher from whom we can learn much for our own teaching.” (Zuck, 10)

In pursuing the life of this master teacher, Zuck naturally mines everything that the New Testament has to say about Paul, as it remains our primary text for his life, his work, and his words. Here, his exegetical strengths come to the fore. Obviously Zuck is comfortable in the Koiné Greek and has facility in the Hebrew. His exposition of Greek words and concepts in the New Testament is clear and incisive, making certain words and passages regarding the culture and times that Paul ministered more understandable to the modern reader. I found several wonderful expository pearls in the text; certainly other readers will find themselves enjoying “Aha!” moments in the same way that I did. (Furthermore, footnote harvesters like me will find a minor treasure trove in these notes alone.) He also mentions a number of useful secondary sources; these citations are by no means an exhaustive scholarly list, but are clearly intended to

be guidelines for those seeking additional insights into the apostle’s life and times.

But the key strength of the book remains the very exhaustiveness of its approach to the scriptures and the teaching ministry of Paul. For example, if you wanted to see a chart of the “Questions Paul Asked,” Zuck provides a listing of all 250 (yes, that’s “250”) of them, organized by their scripture passage, plus a handy cross-reference as to the type(s) of question asked. If that isn’t enough, he provides twenty other tables, covering topics like “Paul’s Diatribes,” “Paul’s Similes,” “Paul’s Lists of Virtues and Vices,” “How Did Paul Use Picturesque Expressions in His Teaching?” and “Verbs Used of Paul’s Lecturing and Discussing.” In every case, Zuck’s exegetical thoroughness leads him to find and list every verse in the scriptures that pertains to the aspect of Paul’s teaching that is being covered. The amount of effort expended to produce these useful charts must have been quite substantial.

Indeed, there are times when the amount of information being produced is nearly overwhelming. For example, chapter twelve’s discussion of “picturesque expressions” leads into a summary of a number of types of such expressions: similes, metaphors, synecdoches, personifications, euphemisms, sarcasm, and so on. It’s a fine summary and overview of each type, and includes examples of Paul’s use of each in the scriptures. Zuck covers rhetorical devices in like fashion in chapter 13 (e.g., synonyms, antitheses, lists, and parallelisms), and logical devices in chapter 14 (e.g., *reduction ad absurdum*, *non sequitur*, the principle of non-contradiction, and so on). Dozens of items are listed and explained. In each case, he periodically addresses the question of how modern teachers might apply such qualities and techniques in their own lives and practice. Because of its breadth and depth of coverage, the teacher-practitioner or educational theorist will certainly find that much advance ground-plowing of New Testament revelation has been done for him or her in these pages. Certainly the marshalling and organization of the scriptures to address the questions that Zuck raises has produced an extremely useful resource: a true theology of education, centered on the life and work of Paul.

Having praised its many virtues, I must also mention several weaknesses that I found in the

book. First of all, we must keep in mind that our strengths are too often our weaknesses. The very thoroughness of Zuck's work that commends it to the patient and careful reader, the theoretician, or the educational researcher, may actually render *Teaching as Paul Taught* a difficult read for some who take it up with less rigor or commitment. Certainly this is not your typical casual tome, nor (unless you are a person like me) should you take it along as your next "beach book" to Maui. This work demands attention. Second, I suspect that some will find that Zuck's sections read perhaps too much like an exegetical theology; certainly those who are not comfortable with learned discussions of the occasional Koiné Greek or Hebrew word may squirm from time to time. Patience will be rewarded, but we do not live in notably patient times. Third, the teacher in me found that the questions at the end of each chapter were sometimes too obvious, a bit too predictable and textbook-like, harkening back a generation in their phrasing. Well intentioned, yes; sometimes quite on the mark, yes; always as strong or artful as they might be, no. Fourth, since this is a theology of education, do not read Zuck's work with the expectation of theoretical structures or new paradigms for educational professionals. No such frameworks are to be found in its pages. In all fairness, though, I think that this is not what Dr. Zuck was seeking to accomplish. (That task, I suspect, is one that may be taken up by the next generation of educational thinkers, building on the theological foundations that he has provided.) The context is firmly theological, not sociological; *caveat lector*. Finally, while Dr. Zuck has provided a subject index, two very useful appendices, and, quite helpfully, a very thorough scripture index, I am sorry to say that there is no bibliography or bibliographical notes. Those who are seeking to pursue or evaluate his sources will have to do the same thing that I did: mine the footnotes with a highlighter as you read, so that you can find your nuggets later.

Despite these drawbacks, I found Zuck's book *Teaching as Paul Taught* to be a stimulating and challenging book. In providing Christian educators with a true theology of teaching, focused on the life of the apostle Paul, he has done an important service to those of us who would like to search the revealed truth of the scriptures to inform our hearts and minds as we carry out the great calling of teaching. Zuck points out that the Lord

can teach us much through the life and faithful work of Paul, as documented in His word, and that we have much that we share with him as fellow teachers before the Lord.

"So while it is impossible for us to imitate Paul in his teaching ministry in a number of ways, it is possible for us to teach as he did because of several factors we have in common with him. With the church's greatest apostle we can share his desire to advance spiritually; his commitment to communicating the gospel and essential doctrines; his empowering and leading by the Holy Spirit; his effective avenues of communication; his sense of pressure, concern, and struggle for others; and his involvement in self-supporting means. With these common elements we can thrill at the thought of teaching as Paul taught." (Zuck, 22-23)

If this call resonates in your heart as it does in mine, then you will find *Teaching as Paul Taught* to be an essential resource in your professional library.