

REALIZATION OF THE NATURE AND ROLE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN MODERN PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT: *The Christian philosophy of education is directly opposed to the public philosophy of education. Due to this philosophical difference, the goals, objectives and purposes of Christian schools (Education) are different from those of the public schools. It is important that pastors, teachers, parents and stakeholders in education fully understand the basis for the Christian philosophy of education and its implications. The Christian philosophy of education calls for an educational process that puts the Bible at the centre and asks the student and the teacher to evaluate all they see in the world through the eyes of God. It is purposed to return both learners and instructors to God's honour in their lives, for the purpose of education is to build character; it is to mould a life that honours the Lord ('a vessel unto honour, meet for the master's use and prepared for every good work' -II Tim. 2:21). In this sense realizing Christian Education in modern pedagogy primarily brings instructors and learners to the knowledge of God. The teaching of good character, qualities and moral principles provides a framework for successful life, skills, social well-being and protection from certain behavioural consequences. True education, most simply stated, is teaching about God's creation and His providence.*

KEYWORDS: Education, Christian Education, Philosophy of Education, Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Like other issues in Christian practical theology, the question of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in an increasingly pluralist and cosmopolitan societies has become extensively relevant.

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The question as to what kind of education that Christians (students) must receive has incited views of many Christian theologians and academicians. Many scholars (especially from the west) have educated that Europe should not be approached in the first place through an exposition of Christian or biblical principles, but through a study of the actual context in which education is taking place. This is because they have taught that if theological concepts are sought before they are thoroughly analysed and understood, we may find that our theologisation is premature.⁴ But must this be the case of other continents like Africa, and nations, particularly Ghana?

Christian Education (CE) in this paper refers to a Christian philosophy or theology of education. This is to be distinguished from a theology of Christian nurture, or a Christian theology of Christian instruction. All of these are important tasks of practical theology, but they are distinguishable. It is upon this distinction that the viability of a Christian approach to religious education in a pluralist society must rest. Education -which according to many development theories is essential to human and societal development -needs to be fully examined. It is therefore upon this background that as well the religious/Christian approach to modern education must be re-justified. In view of this the role of Christian Education (CE) in modern Ghanaian pedagogy need to be realized. Pedagogy, as a term, simply refers to the science of teaching and learning. What constitutes pedagogy is complex and not easily defined. Even the definition of pedagogy appears to be somewhat obscure.⁵ Watkins and Mortimer define it as ‘any conscious activity by one person designed to enhance the learning of another’.⁶ Alexander has his own preferred definition which suggests that pedagogy requires discourse:

*Pedagogy is the act of teaching together with its attendant discourse. It is what one needs to know, and the skills one needs to command in order to make and justify the many different kinds of decisions of which teaching is constituted.*⁷

Scholars like; Leach and Moon⁸, expand further on what may define pedagogy by describing a Pedagogical Setting as ‘the practice that a teacher, together with a particular group of learners

⁴ John M. Hull, ‘Practical Theology and Religious Education in a Pluralist Europe’. In: *British Journal of Religious Education* Vol. 26, no. 1, March 2004, pp. 7-19

⁵ J. Cogill, *Primary Teachers’ Interactive Whiteboard Practice Across One Year: Changes In Pedagogy and Influencing Factors*. King’s College University of London (2008). Available at: www.juliecogill.com

⁶ C. Watkins and P. Mortimer, ‘Pedagogy: What do we know?’ In: Mortimer, P. (Ed) (1999). *Understanding Pedagogy and its Impact on Teaching*. (London: Chapman, 1999) pp.1-19

⁷ R. Alexander, *Still No Pedagogy? Principle, Pragmatism and Compliance in Primary Education*. (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2003) p.3

⁸ J. Leach and B. Moon (Eds), *Learners and Pedagogy*. (London: PCP, 1999) p267

creates, enacts and experiences'. In doing so they suggest that pedagogy is a joint activity in which the learner has an active role. This offers a different perspective from previous definitions offered and draws in the social interaction between teachers and learners. Many at times, the position of Christian education has been undermined and considered irrelevant in modern pedagogy as it has been earlier observed. However, can Christian Religious Education be given a responsible role in modern education which has developed to be extensively scientific?

The paper rediscovers the exact role of Christian education, its philosophy and role in the educational development of the Ghanaian Christian student. The education offered by a society consists of everything it deliberately teaches. Learning is a more comprehensive category than general education. Meanwhile, Teaching is the activity through which general education is transmitted, as there is a distinction between intended teaching, (the result of which is general education) and unintended teaching (best described as influence or example). We learn many things from our experience of life, but general education is an intentional activity. But from the Christian perspective what must be taught and learnt by instructors and students, alike. That notwithstanding, the paper objectively defines the purpose of Christian education while underlining its relevance to the development of students, Christianity and education in general.

EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Education:

The word 'education' is from the verb 'to educate' which literally means 'to rear or to lead out' and is related to the Latin word '*educere*' meaning 'to bring out or lead forth'. It is extensively explained as the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university. The word has often been used to mean; teaching, schooling, tuition, tutoring, pedagogy, coaching, training, guidance, indoctrination, inculcation, enlightenment and development.⁹ In other situations, it is used to simply imply the art of learning, literacy and the process of acquiring knowledge.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*¹⁰ defines education as the process of educating or teaching. To educate is further explained as "to develop the knowledge, skill, or character of..." Thus, from these definitions, we might assume that the purpose of education is to develop the knowledge, skill, or character of students. The central task of education is to implant a will and facility for learning; it should produce not learned but learning people. The truly human society is a learning society, where grandparents, parents, and children are students together. The only purpose of education is to teach a student how to live his/her life -by developing his mind and equipping him to deal with reality. Education should be to teach rather how to think, than what to think -to

⁹ The Family Word Finder (New York: The Reader's Digest association Inc., 1975)

¹⁰ <http://www.merriam-webster.com> (8/9/2014)

improve our minds, so as to enable us to think for ourselves, than to load the memory with the thoughts of others. In the general sense, the education offered by a society consists of everything it deliberately teaches; teaching is the activity through which general education is transmitted.¹¹

Christian Education:

Christian Education (CE) refers to the rearing and bringing out of persons from the Christian religious point of view. It involves the impartation of moral and Christian religious knowledge. This form of education is peculiar to Christians. The concept of rearing, along with the scriptural mandates of Bible (Deut. 4:9; 6:7-9; and 11:19), therefore, indicate that it is parents who have the primary responsibility for rearing children, not society or even the church. Therefore, the onus lies with parents in fulfilling their biblical responsibilities.

The expression 'Christian Education' seems to mean at least three things¹²: First, Christian education sometimes means that process of teaching and learning the content of which is made up of Christianity. It would be clearer if this was referred to as Christian studies, and in this sense, the study of Christianity forms part of every religious education programme. It would be possible to study nothing but Christianity, although a wide-ranging religious education would normally include studies of other religions alongside the study of Christianity.

Second, 'Christian Education' may refer to that process of teaching and learning the content of which is Christianity and which has as its purpose the fostering or deepening of the Christian faith of the students (to ensure Christian nurture, although it would be pedantic to insist upon this). However, this is probably the most widespread use of the expression. When people in the Christian churches speak of their Christian education departments, they normally have in mind the attempt, whether through churches or church-related schools, to transmit the Christian faith in the context of belief and commitment. It is increasingly common today to find that various Christian denominations also provide material suitable for inclusion within Christian education/studies.

The third meaning of the expression 'Christian Education' is that education which flows from or is compatible with or is justified by the Christian faith. This is the sense spoken of in which a specific educational process which can be contrasted with the other processes is needed. This is to suggest that Christian faith can not only generate and justify processes of Christian nurture, catechetical and evangelism -acclaim the truth of which is self-evident' -but that Christian faith can generate and justify an understanding of an educational process which is not intended to

¹¹ John M. Hull, 'Practical Theology and Religious Education in a Pluralist Europe'. In: *British Journal of Religious Education* Vol. 26, no. 1, March 2004, pp. 7-19

¹² John M. Hull, 'Practical Theology and Religious Education in a Pluralist Europe'. In: *British Journal of Religious Education* Vol. 26, no. 1, March 2004, pp. 7-19

create, deepen, or foster Christian faith and commitment. It is possible for Christian faith to extend beyond concerns for its own transmission and become the partner of an education concerned with the growth into maturity of persons, whether they adopt Christian faith or not.

UNDERSTANDING THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Philosophy: The word ‘philosophy’ comes from the Ancient Greek φιλοσοφία (*philosophia*), which literally means ‘love of wisdom’ (*philos* –‘love of’ and *sophia* –‘wisdom’)¹³. The introduction of the terms ‘philosopher’ and ‘philosophy’ has been ascribed to the Greek thinker - Pythagoras. Philosophy is the study of general and fundamental problems, such as those connected with reality, existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind, and language. It is rationally critical thinking, of a more or less systematic kind, about the general nature of the world (metaphysics or theory of existence), the justification of belief (epistemology or theory of knowledge) and the conduct of life (ethics or theory of value). Philosophy is distinguished from other ways of addressing such problems by its critical, generally systematic approach and its reliance on rational argument. In more casual speech, by extension, philosophy can refer to ‘the most basic beliefs, concepts, and attitudes of an individual or group’.¹⁴

Philosophy of Christian Education:

The question that needs to be answered here is that ‘Does education need a philosophy?’ The answer is definitely ‘Yes’. In fact, education does have a philosophy. The basis for all educational systems of the ages is at least formed in a foundational philosophy. This is to say that the philosophies of the Greeks, the Romans and even the British and Americans still speak throughout the centuries. It is the power of philosophical teachings that has shaped nations, governments, and movements.¹⁵

From the above meaning of philosophy, Philosophy of Christian education would simply refer to the philosophical reflection on the nature, aims, and problems of education. The philosophy of education is Janus-faced, looking both inward to the parent discipline of philosophy and outward to educational practice (In this respect, it is like other areas of ‘applied’ philosophy, such as the philosophy of law, the philosophy of science, the philosophy of medicine and the philosophy of

¹³ J. Teichmann and C. E. Katherine, *Philosophy: A Beginner’s Guide*. (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 1999).

¹⁴ A. Quinton, ‘The Ethics of Philosophical Practice’. In: T. Honderich (Ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). Also see: G. A. Russell, *The ‘Arabick’ Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England*. (Brill Publishers, 1994).

¹⁵ Edward Watke Jr., *What is a Christian Education? Revival in the Home Ministries, Inc.* (Augusta, GA, 1998).

religion)¹⁶. It focuses on the more specific issues arising from educational practice. In addressing these many issues, the philosopher of education strives for conceptual clarity, argumentative rigour and informed valuation.

In the philosophy of Christian Education, therefore, the primary goal is to bring a child to the knowledge of God, leading to saving faith and then to help them grow in their trust in Christ and His good news. The teaching of good character, qualities and moral principles provides a framework for successful life skills, social wellbeing and protection from certain behavioural consequences. True education, most simply stated, is teaching about God's creation and His providence. Each area of study: science, mathematics, religion, literature and history among others, leads us to a greater understanding of God's creative power, order, providential work in man and nations. Woven within the truths of each area of study is God's general revelation of Himself. God has given man the ability to gain knowledge through empirical observation, critical reason, intuitive insight, and scientific observation.

The Philosophy of Christian Education states that if we educate students to the exclusion of biblical truth, we have failed in true education. We educate not only to impart skills and information about how our world and culture works, but to also teach a worldview that includes God in everything with no separation between the secular and the spiritual. In view of this, students must recognize this truth; they will also have to recognize the worth God has placed on them and how they can live in a manner worthy of the gospel. Here is one of the clearest and most concise statements regarding the Philosophy of Christian education. Roy Zuck of Dallas Theological Seminary in investigating Christian Education wrote that:

Is there really a 'Christian view' of science, literature and history? Aren't the facts of science, literature and history the same no matter where they are taught? Yes, the facts may be same. If it is mathematics, it is mathematics, if English, it is English. However, it is the interpretation of the facts that makes the difference. Whether my child attends a secular or public school, they will learn basically the same facts (although they are changing many of the facts of history or even neglecting to tell the truth about them in their curriculum). But in a Christian School or Home School they will learn to understand, interpret, and analyze those facts from a biblical perspective.¹⁷

¹⁶ A. Quinton, 'The Ethics of Philosophical Practice'. In: T. Honderich (Ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁷ Edward Watke Jr. *What is a Christian Education? Revival in the Home Ministries, Inc.* (Augusta, GA, 1998). This point is to emphasize the role of philosophy in Christian education. In the book of Jeremiah (10:2) we read, "Learn not the way of the heathen (or the unsaved)." The apostle Paul also tells us, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit" (Col. 2:8).

THE CONTENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

This refers to what the religious educator should teach when doing Christian Education. Its content should include the following aspects:

- Good Self-Image: Christian religious educators worth their salt will begin doing Christian education from where the people that they are educating are, and help them to move along the journey of life of faith according to the people's pace and not that of the religious educator. In other words, religious educators must begin from the life experience of the people they are educating. There are many people, especially women who because of their culture or family have very low self-esteem. It will be very good Christian Education, if the religious educator can be silent from time to time and listen to such people. The religious educator must never forget that having a good self-image is an important step in any form of growth. So religious educators must always help the people they are educating to have a good self-image.
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- God/Christ: Teaching about God is very central to Christian Education. The image of God that Christian educators have will greatly influence their teaching. God is the creator of the universe who created human beings in his own image and likeness. We were created not out of any other thing than out of God's love. The fact that we were created in the image and likeness of God does not mean that we are the same as God. As human beings we can only speak about God in analogical terms. As Thomas Aquinas said, 'we cannot use of God any terms other than those for creatures' and therefore we must acknowledge the existence of God in all forms of education of which Christian Education must be in the centre. An education of this nature can in no way exclude the reality of God who is ultimately a reality in Christianity. The centrality of God is that which makes Christian Education what it is.

THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

- Centrality of the Bible: The Bible is the basis and the foundation of Christian education and its philosophy as well. It teaches us that before a man can be truly educated, he must be born again. It gives us authority and a God-given basis for discipline. It teaches that there is no difference between the sacred and secular, that all of life is to be lived for God, and that every discipline of life is to be taught in relationship to Christ, and to His claim upon a person's life. If the Word of God is not the foundation for all that is done, taught, etc., then we are on a very shaky ground. If we cannot prove a God-given mandate for the Christian school then we could well ask why we should have it. If there is not a Bible reason for the Christian home/school movement (education), then it should also cease to exist. The Word of God therefore has many critical proclamations as to its veracity, infallibility, divine origin, power and authority for every aspect of life (II Tim.

3:15-17). In his book, *Elemental Theology*, E. H. Bancroft¹⁸, writes that “By the credibility of the Scriptures (it) is meant that their records are true and are thus to be relied upon as the statements of the facts.”

- **Ontological nature:** In Christian Education, the educator must emphasize the great importance of good human relations. There is the tendency for many people to be so concerned with their relationship with God at the neglect of their relationship with their neighbours or other human beings. The religious educator must point out that Christianity is not only about one's relationship with God. Rather, it is also the relationship with fellow human beings (man-man). The Christian religion, therefore, has a horizontal as well as vertical dimension with respect to the ontological nature of Christian education. This form of education is therefore geared towards the critical development of the human society. This characteristic of Christian Education is highly revered in almost all human communities that seek to promote cordiality and proper living conditions (co-existence).
- **Transcendental nature:** Another aspect of Christian Education is that it is transcendent. The human person is not an island. As human beings, we are by nature relational. We transcend ourselves to be in relationship with other created beings and the creator of such beings. St Augustine said it all when he proclaimed that our souls were made for God and they will continue to be restless until they finally rest in God. This emphasizes the fact that Christian Education should be able to make students realise their relationship with the supernatural. The world external to humans must at all times be realized and approached in order to obtain a perfect relationship with it. The world of the supernatural that transcends human understanding is a major part of all human existence. In this case the Christian educational system should be able to buttress its relevance to humanity.

PURPOSES OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Christian education is about teaching and learning skills and knowledge from the perspective of Christianity. The purpose is to:

- Return to God's honour in life (of Christians, educators and learners), for the purpose of education is to build character, to mould a life that honours the Lord; to be God-cantered, to love God with all the heart, mind, soul, and body (Matthew 22:37-39). We should desire to produce young people with the kind of character and conduct that will be a godly influence wherever they go. Their lives are to be evident in their devotion to serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ E. H. Bancroft, *Elemental Theology*.

- Transform teachers/educators –in the light of good moral and ethical conduct. Thus, give an education that moulds the total person to be ‘a vessel unto honour, meet for the master’s use and prepared for every good work’ (II Tim. 2:20-22). To aid educators develop self-control; to live a disciplined life according to Bible rules under the control of the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 10:5; Phil. 4:8; Titus 2:11-14; Eph. 6:18; Gal. 5:15-17, 22-24)
- Be heavenly minded, to learn all truth in the light of scriptural revelation and principles, and to apply that truth to every facet of life (Col. 3:14). To embrace the absolutes and the unchanging truth of the Word of God and to relate all knowledge and life to this revelation (John 17:17; II Tim. 3:14-17).
- Good Christian Religious Education is to glorify Christ and the teachings of God’s word that are freely shared with a generation of people who are reaching out for peace through education.
- Look ahead to eternity and to look upon eternal values as the most important in view of one’s existence (Romans 14:11-12).

IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

This paper significantly addresses the need for good educational system for individuals who seek pure education. It further promotes Christian Education which seems less advantaged in many secular states across the world. Indeed, it contributes to the search for proper education for all people by ensuring good character formation, good and moral conduct as well growth in human mind.

CONCLUSION

Christian Education refers to the teaching of the Christian student good morals and Christian religious knowledge. It involves the concept of rearing, along with scriptural mandates. It is only through this that a real knowledge and relationship among all creatures can be achieved. It mandates for the inclusion of parents who have primary responsibility for educating their children, alongside Christian religious educators. It is extremely important that parents understand the hidden dangers of the world’s (secular) philosophy of education which is based on humanism, secular atheism, anti-God evolutionary teaching and a host of things contrary to Scripture. Parents are to leave the education of their children to the professionals in Christian education who are basically ‘change agents, set to prepare children/individuals ex a ‘one-world’ order where God is totally ruled out.

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