

Philosophy of Christian Education: Exploring Personal Faith and Convictions

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Abstract: Philosophy and Christian education relate because both address life's basic questions like meaning of life, nature of morality, worth of knowledge, et cetera. Christian education is concerned with philosophy in that it seeks to know truths about God, about man and how to communicate those truths to others. Philosophy and theology are closely tied. While philosophy derives its nature and structure from human categories, "theology derives its structure and nature from the events of revelation of God in His Word." From one hand, "revelation must be recognized as sources from which truth and meaning are gained; and on the other hand, as "principles of clear thinking [it] must be applied to the interpretation of God's revelation as found in the Bible and in nature" (*Exploring Christian education*). A personal philosophy of Christian education in this write-up is based on my faith and convictions as a Christian.

Keywords: Christian education, Philosophy, Personal philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy is primarily concerned with theory, the examination of ideas and ideals. Education is concerned with acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes and skills for the purpose of enabling individuals so educated to cope with life experiences and challenges.

Philosophy of education as defined by M. L. Peterson is "the attempt to bring the insights and methods of philosophy to bear on the educational enterprise". How education and philosophy relate warrant a further definition. Philosophy is a subject matter which deals, in a dialogue form, with life's most important questions. When these questions are answered in perspective, enlightenment and sensitivity is brought about, thus resulting in change of actions in life. Such questions relate to issues of metaphysics, epistemology, logic, aesthetics and axiology as shall be discussed below. Philosophy also is an activity which involves intellectual functions of synthetic, analytic, descriptive and the normative. All these functions assume man as a rational being with an inner arrangement and consistency [1].

Christian education can be defined narrowly as education that the church provides through her educational programmes, for example, Bible studies, and Sunday school classes for all ages. It can also be defined broadly as education that is Christian in the sense of the sacred being integrated with the general education, with godly or biblical values at the base. Therefore, all areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes are based on biblical values. For the Christian, these biblical values permeate every area of life experience as the Christian seeks to promote God-given and God-

directed values. Hence, living and working as a Christian doctor or teacher or driver because of Godly values that form the basis.

Biblical and Theological Bases

For a system of Christian education to be meaningful and effective, it must be based on a clearly thought-out and reasoned philosophy that takes into account the implications of a Christian worldview. D. C. Chemorion [2] rightly describes a Christian worldview as:

A framework of thought for understanding reality. [This framework] . . . consists of an integrated system of beliefs, derived from faith in Jesus Christ, which Christians use to make sense of the reality around them. [The Bible] is the primary source of Christian beliefs; Christian worldview is also a biblical worldview. A person with a Christian worldview has a Christ-centric mindset and a heart that is oriented towards the things of God. Such a person thinks and acts in ways that are consistent with Christian beliefs. Committed Christians view life as Jesus would. . . . [This Christian worldview is used to interpret all aspects of life, be they] leadership, morality, business . . . health] (p. 4)

In concurrence with Paul A. Kienel, philosophy of Christian education must be based on the

following thirteen biblical and theological bases: First, it must be based on the authority, authenticity and reliability of the Bible as the complete and final revelation of God concerning all matters of faith, truth and practice. How we live the Christian life is based on the Scriptures. Second, the centrality and authority of Jesus Christ in all that we believe. Thirdly, on clearly defined goals and objectives, found in the Bible so that these goals and objectives are applied in every particular context. Fourth, the conviction that knowledge of the Bible and of Jesus Christ is essential to the development and growth of the individual in all aspects – physical, mental, social and spiritual. Fifth, a personal commitment to Jesus Christ on the part of all who are involved in the educational process, especially as it relates to uncommitted teachers or impotent instructions. Sixth, the ministry of the Holy Spirit; this involves the inspiration of the Bible, illumination of the individual, involvement in spiritual gifts and the inability to understand the things of God without the Spirit's help.

Seventh, it must also be based on proper relationship between the family, church and educational processes. Eighth, it must be based on the establishment of proper priorities in an individual's life. Here the individual must examine what he requires to do. Ninth, it must be based on the sovereignty of God in all the affairs of mankind. Tenth, the creation of man in the image of God, this creation brings value, purpose and meaning to life. Eleventh, it is based on the moral principles in the teachings of the Bible. In this way, godly values should permeate all aspects of life and human beings live ethically. Twelfth, a Christian education must meet the needs of all people as they grow and develop physically, mentally and spiritually as believers. Finally, philosophy of education incorporates Christian teachers who understand these basic principles of Christian education, who are personally committed to, and demonstrate effectiveness in their ability to communicate them. These theological bases help us to think about education that relates to our Christian or religious commitment.

Philosophical Bases in Biblical Perspective

Everyone has a philosophy of life which begins from the ideas we hold and what we believe. These ideas matter a lot because they determine the kind of person we are and shall become. There is no option regarding this apart from the adequacy of one's philosophy of life. Philosophy explores life's most important ideas, ideas that concern reality, God, the soul, knowledge and truth, goodness and evil, and all that there is in the world of nature.

Metaphysics: is concerned with what is beyond the physical; what actually exists in reality. My view of what reality is incorporates both elements of realism and idealism. That is, reality consists of God as the creator and the world or universe and all that therein as

his creation, in terms of what is seen in the materials things that God has created and also in our minds. This is because as human kind, we are rational beings. We can think and imagine things. In line with John A. Comenius, as quoted by C. B. Eavey [3], we can rightly state that our "primary dependence is on God's revelation, [then we use] "reason to arrive at an understanding of that revelation". The Bible is the base to our understanding of reality, we believe that there is heaven, and eternal life after death. The aim of education then is to teach people these truths with the hope that they shall grasp them for eternity.

In addition to the idea of creation, the fact is that human beings are God's creatures and totally dependent on him for their being and sustenance. Therefore, the goal of education as the idealists uphold is "the development of the person, especially the spiritual self and personality" [4]. Mark 8: 36, emphasizes this spiritual development when it says, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeits his soul." For sure, there is no profit if a man gains the whole world and loses his life.

Epistemology: has to do with questions of knowledge, truth and their sources. For this philosophy of Christian education, God is the source of all knowledge and truth. The biblical view of man starts from the fact that he is a creature, finite, fallible and perishable being. Despite these qualities, man is created in God's image (Gen. 1: 26 – 27). Although this image was distorted by man's fall in Genesis 3, the personhood of man still reflects God's nature, which in turn is defined in terms of powers of reason, feeling, emotion and the ability to choose. In comparison, "God's knowledge is total, perfect and impeccable" as Peterson [5] implies. Human knowledge is by far incomplete, faulty and imperfect. The image of God in man enables him to think, judge, and know though not fully. The world is real with genuine knowledge. Man's knowledge, however, is not free from error though he has the capacity to gain some knowledge about reality. In his complete view of knowledge, man recognizes that reality is complex, and there is no single way to discover different truths.

As such we reject the idea that knowledge comes only through the senses because knowledge is both innate and acquired. Some knowledge is gained through sensory perception, and some through exposure. Because all truth is God's truth, and the centre of this truth is Christ, the Word of God.

Logic: focuses on what is sensible. As a normative science of thought, logic, in a systematic way, investigates the fundamental process by which thought becomes either verified or confirmed as true or falsified by inconsistency or for lack of evidence. This investigation touches on principles of right reasoning, arriving at conclusions to questions drawn from

premises with reasons as to why. The five sub-divisions of logic (*deductive logic*, *metaphysical logic*, symbolic logic, *inductive logic*, *methodology or applied logic*, and *experiential logic*) become handy in this process [6].

Axiology: this deals with what is valuable, desirable and ethical – the morally good and preferable in terms of conduct and character. Axiology underlies all aspects of education. As such, God who is a moral person exhibits a moral structure and design in the universe. In objection to idealism, the reality of physical things and the God-given ability to understand them is an affirmed truth. A common moral perception among people is seen in most basic values, for example goodness, love. *Aesthetics:* is the appreciation of what is beautiful, the work of art.

As for non-aesthetic values, the Bible states clearly that the whole universe is filled with God's glory. From the outset, the truth is that the world is charged with value. Values of friendship, knowledge, pleasure, etc, are all God's gracious gifts that manifest His love in creation. In addition, beauty in an object is an excellence, and it includes elements of unity, proportion and clarity. Standards of beauty differ but the fact remains that what God made, he saw and was 'very good' (Gen. 1:31). This idea concurs with what realists believe that "values exist in things whether we actually appreciate it or not" [4].

If God is the ultimate reality in what lies beyond, in truth and value, then, what is the view of man? The Bible views man as a sinner who tries to discover reality using his own effort (Isa. 53:6). Therefore, there is need for man to have an encounter with God through his Word, so as to enable him allows the Holy Spirit break into his thought patterns, attitudes, and make him right in his eyes. This view agrees with Comenius' perspective that, "Education [is] a means for bringing men to the place where they would accept Jesus Christ and by accepting would become able to fulfill God's purposes for their lives; education is not a direct agent in conversion, [but] it is only a means whereby conversion may be brought about" [3]. In all these spheres, education must be done for the glory of God. Because it would be wrong to assume that all secular education is worldly knowledge and all church education is spiritual knowledge.

A sound philosophy of Christian education must consider the aims of Christian education. First, is regular search of the Scriptures for growth in order to know the purposes and plans of God for a person's life? Second, it deals with objectives of conduct, for example, after conversion there must be development of Christian life alongside character. Third, are attitudes and awareness of God's providence and his presence as real in daily life? Fourth, that of social action, so that Christian values of life pervade all of life [1]. The

question tackled in all these is to relate Christian faith to Christian living, Christian truth to life experiences of the learner. In light of Christian world and life view its metaphysics, epistemology and axiology determine the methods of instruction and curriculum.

Instructional Methodology and Curriculum

The kind of principles followed or set in the philosophy of Christian education should be as follows: In the content and materials learned, emphasis should be put on educational process that is stimulating and guiding into search after truth; the learner must experience what he/she is learning in everyday life; and he/she must also participate as well as listen, and together with the teacher discover and evaluate what is learned. This method, then, enables the learner to be at the centre of the learning process. The learner too, must be motivated through creative learning situations; and creative method that guides and aids right living; must be life-centered so that learning takes place from an experience that leads to knowledge. Such learning also take into account the total surrounding of the learner [7]. These principles incorporate most of the elements of the pietists' education; Dewey's centering around child and from life experience); and also Comenius' methodology.

In the broader sense, the curriculum should cover the sum total of all of life of the individual as seen in the following principles given by Eavey; that the content and aim should be Christian; the materials presented should be vital, concrete and practical; the needs of learners should be considered, and should provide growth of the individual in matters spiritual; should be experience – centered, creative and dynamic; finally, should be Christ-controlled through the home, community and make use of Christian heritage [3].

The last point above is very important because the home as the centre of learning, especially for children from birth to six years of their lives, is a valuable context. The parents are or can be the best teachers in this stage because they know and understand the child better. To build a better society, the home should be primary, and serve as a training ground of the individual from birth, especially in ways of holiness, "right living [and] right thinking [8].

Again, as Christians, and if we are to instill the importance of God's Word in children's lives, we need to start training as early as possible, while the child is still in the womb and more so as soon as the child is born. Deuteronomy 6: 6 – 9 provides some guidelines for parents to teach and train children formally and informally. That is, under all circumstances, be prepared to teach. This as Akinpelu [4] states in his discussion of the aim of education for the realists, is that the specific objective "is to help the individual learner to form habits, dispositions and tendencies to search for the truth, to grasp it, enjoy it and use it in

every aspect” of their lives. This is the transmission of inherited culture which Paul points out to in II Timothy 2:2 – which “the things you learned from me pass them on onto the next generation of believers”. What is transmitted is the value and importance of the principles so as to develop ability for further learning. This, as in Dewey’s case, should centre on the learner in terms of immediate present, needs and interests, though interests here should go alongside good moral habits.

According to Peterson [1], “human beings are a unity of rational, emotional, moral and practical persons,” as such, the curriculum should be based mainly on “the rational and practical aspects which confirm to the structure of reality and nature of humanity.” Therefore, education should not only cater for the world of the child but also the world of decisions, conflicts, work and leisure, success and failure, and triumph. The methodology of such learning should comprise memorization, use of visual aids, imagery, illustrations, repetitions; dialectical with suitable questions that draw the child’s present knowledge and leads him or her to new knowledge; project method and lecture method – in this the teacher should point clearly, logically and systematically the content of the lesson so as to enable the learner understand the inter-relation of the parts presented. The ideal situation in this is the imitation of a model in which the teacher must be. In first Timothy 4: 12, Timothy is asked to set an example in speech, life, love, faith and purity. Therefore, as the idealists emphasize, self learning activity is emphasized based on the model of the teacher.

Since the actual curriculum should feature themes about God, human and the world, and also meet the needs of the whole person, clear realities need to be sought, and the kind of human potentials should be developed. Therefore, the curriculum distinctive should emphasize the words of God, integrate all truth, and develop the learner’s Christian world and life view so as to develop awareness that in whatever he/she does, it must issue from a heart committed to the Almighty God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The base of all these is the Bible as had been cited under biblical bases. In addition, subjects like natural sciences, the social and human sciences, mathematics, history, literature and philosophy should be taught. Aim and form of training should depend on what is emphasized – practical, content or skill. But it should be remembered that education in and of itself is not redemptive. Therefore, a theocentric philosophy of education requires biblical truth to permeate the entire programme and every subject in it [5].

Again, concurring with Comenius’ idea education should be a means for bringing men and women to the place where they can accept Christ and by accepting Him can become able to fulfill God’s purposes in their lives [9]. Therefore, the school set-up

advocated in this personal philosophy of education should be as follows: birth to six years, home teaching and training (at age four to six, the nursery school, but this should not substitute for the home training, especially in the word of God and elements of a Christian worldview). Ages six to twelve is primary school; ages thirteen to twenty one, secondary and university / vocational training. In all these, the aims and objectives of education should fall under these categories as set out by Paul Kienel [10]; spiritual and moral; personal and social; academic and practical service in the home, church, community and society at large. In all these areas, the Scriptures become the authority that shape life view, aims and objectives, types of education, content, methods and agencies. What, then, is the role of the teacher and learner in the teaching and learning processes?

Teaching and Learning Processes

According to the idealists, the teacher is inevitable because he has to influence the child in the positive direction as the child is engaged in self-learning activity. Education for the realists is discipline centered as well as teacher-centered because the teacher is believed to have basic truths and knowledge or facts about these truths which he/she has to transmit to the child. For pragmatists, the teacher is an “organizer and moderator of the child’s learning. He guide the child’s learning activities because of their superior cultural experiences and expert training” [4]. The best teacher according to the existentialists is the parent. Even if the parent does not know how to read and write, he/she has wisdom and knowledge from life experience to impart to the child. As it is necessary, the teacher must accept the child as a unique individual with his/her own personality so as to enable him/her acquire knowledge from what is being learned.

In view of the different ideologies above with concern to the role of the teacher, Mortimer Adler’s proposal of three basic modes of teaching and learning need to be borne in mind, 1) the acquisition of organized knowledge; 2) the development of intellectual skills and 3) the enlargement of understanding, insight and appreciation. These three modes need to interact at all levels of teach [5]. So in the delivery of content in various fundamental courses the teacher needs to adopt some didactic methods, while in others, must develop basic skills. Therefore, the teacher must guide and correct the learners to achieve some measure of proficiency. To increase understanding, the teacher must integrate imagination and interrogative as well as discussion format. This, therefore, requires the teacher to be wise in order to incorporate these elements of learning so as to “stimulate and guide and not to dominate and to pass out knowledge,” as Comenious points out. The teacher’s role is that of a model. This modeling responsibility concurs with what Gangel and Benson [7] state that the teacher plays “an integral part of

educational system Therefore must be careful that his/her [learners] should not notice anything wicked in him" [or her]. This setting of an exemplary life should not be seen as an hypocritical element on the part of the teacher. But the school system should emphasize the character of the teacher – should be a Christian whose quality of spiritual life needs to be emulated by those he/she teaches. Such a teacher can only win his/her students to Christ if he/she him/herself has already experienced a new life in Christ.

As for learning, it should not be limited only to the upper class or the privileged few, but should be made compulsory for all; with an aim of reaching many for Christ and honoring God. In quoting John Calvin, Peter van Lierop [11] rightly states that "learning must take place at home (given by parents) . . . training in sound learning and doctrine as well as in manners, good morals and common sense." The child must learn by example, instruction conforming to his/her ability and freedom. Learning too should be through observation, participation and doing.

In concurring with Kienel, discipline as it concerns training and nurturing is the firm foundation for the teaching process. Since the goal is to encourage and train for more self-control, the process of disciplining is positive challenge and responsibility. Though negatively, it deals with punishment, the idea of punishment should not overshadow positive discipline. Of course this explanation on discipline agrees with the biblical teaching that if we spare the rod, we spoil the child again the Lord disciplines those whom he loves (Hebrews 12: 8 -11). In commenting on J.H. Pestalozzi's educational philosophy, Eavey [3] rightly observes that discipline should be administered mingled with love and compassion. How, then, do we integrate faith and learning?

Integration of Faith and Learning

As discussed in the biblical and theological bases' section above, Christ is the centre of truth. Therefore, our motivation in intellectual inquiry is Christ the truth. He becomes the unifying focus of the Christian worldview. In emphasizing truth then, it must be seen in our education, arts and society [12]. The reason for this is that God created different kinds of reality about which there are whole domains of truth. All belong to him. First, integration of faith and learning is with knowledge. This integration must be shown or found in the metaphysical, epistemological and axiological assumptions. Second, faith is integrated with knowledge and insights in addition to conclusions of what God has provided in learning about him and about the world that he has created. Third, integration must occur in the values and convictions of Christian life in order that it might incorporate learning within the things that are used for God's service. And also incorporate information and insights that help refine our understanding [1].

This concept of integration has to do with making a whole by bringing parts together because as F. E. Gaebelien observes it, "Learning unrelated to life is as good as faith without works. Christ is the measure and unifying force of all things and must completely commit themselves to the Bible as the primary source of truth, for example, special revelation should be the centre of integrating truth; the next circumference filled with natural revelation with its sciences and humanities and the outer circle filled with vocational and cultural skills and behavior – which includes self-concept, interpersonal relations, family life, job skills and citizenship. Real life situation results from the centre – the Bible [10].

In quoting Kenneth O. Gangel, Kienel [13] discusses six processes that should comprise the practice of integrating faith and learning as follows: First, he states that the teacher who practices integration of faith and learning should constantly be about the all important task of theological sieve-building. This role identifies what is good and bad by means of the scriptures so that all other disciplines go through biblical process of filtering system. Second, this process only takes off if every teacher is at least an amateur "theologian." Third, the teacher must help the learners 'get it all together' in a Christian world and life view. This process calls for a holistic Christian thinking and Christian mind-set.

Fourth, teachers involved in the integration process must differentiate between integration of truth and classroom devotions. Integration of faith is more than classroom devotions which in most cases include prayer, sharing of biblical thoughts and spiritual quotations. Full integration according to Robert H. Roller, of Mount Vernon University, takes place when it is done naturally with teacher being a Christian with a biblical worldview and one living a highly integrated [Christian] life. The fifth process is learning to walk a carefully balanced line between open-mindedness and unchallengeable doctrine. Finally, the task of integration should be approached with reverence, relevance and relaxation. These processes, in addition to the biblical bases help integrate faith and learning. Such integration should go beyond the classroom and promote Christian education in the student's life within his/her context of work and life.

In conclusion, a Christian philosophy of education as James W. Braley [14] observes, "affect the curriculum, methods, the person of the teacher, the interpersonal relationships with the school setting and the discipline in Christian [institutions]". As has been cited and discussed above, a good philosophy of Christian education in my perspective is one that is based on the Bible as God's revelation to man; whose philosophical bases are biblical; incorporates some of the good elements and as well modifies some of the methods of instruction, curriculum, school set up,

teaching and learning process. Finally, it should integrate faith and learning so that the ultimate worth of education is in the service of Christ. Such service deserves the best in us, as Peterson [1] clearly captures it through our “stewardship of talents, excellence in . . . performances, honest and rigor in . . . [critical] thinking” [14].

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