

DIMENSIONS OF LIFELONG LEARNING: AN EXPLORATORY ESSAY

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Introduction

This brief treatise is meant to initiate and encourage discourse and writings on a critical aspect of our Christian life. “Lifelong Learning” is fundamental to Christian perspective and thinking, for the Christian thinking is concerned with the present and future based on faith (Phil. 3: 13,14). More so having the fundamental Word of knowledge, the Bible, and not exploring its enduring richness and depth, relevance, currency and applicability to learning in all branches of knowledge will be a travesty. It is the very essence of lifelong learning and must be explored for insights into all branches of knowledge regarding our lives in this world of Humanity and the world of Eternity.

Lifelong learning in its mundane sense is a process of knowledge acquisition and sharing so as to remain relevant and build adaptive capacity in different times, “seasons” or changing contexts in God’s creation. Most notably, Christ, our Lord, expresses emphatically in Matt. (4:4) that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. In essence, this indicates that two things we consume for living: that which constitutes bread, and the Word of God. The former is for the satisfaction of the physical and material needs of mankind; the latter for the satisfaction of the mind and spirit. However, there is a level of interdependence expressed through works on one hand and faith on the other, respectively. The Word is for life and the basis of our learning of and for life.

It is also quite noteworthy that contending with ideas was recorded as part of the early life of Christ our Savior during His sojourn on earth when he spent time in the synagogue, which was the seat of intellectual ferment. He made His first visit to declare knowledge and thereafter the gospels recorded His capacity as “Great Teacher,” the lifelong teacher. Christ is the source, epitome and essence of lifelong learning. Matt. 7:29 records that “He taught them as one **having authority**, and not as the scribes.” More so He is concerned with transformation which can only occur by the renewing of the mind. (Rom 12: 2). Lifelong learning therefore is about continual renewing of the mind for adaptability and consistency.

Indeed a careful study of the New Testament records of the life of Christ provides insightful dimensions of the psychological understanding and pedagogy/androgogy of Christ. Christ delineates the essential domains of man (effectively superseding and contradicting the three domains educational psychologists will often emphasize i.e. affective, cognitive and psychomotor) as affective (heart/emotive), spiritual (soul), physical/psychomotor (strength), cognitive (mind/intellect) and social (relational) as He collapses the ten commandments into the “great commandment” underpinned by love. Additionally, he utilizes meditation or deep study, his parables (or scenarios, as we may call them in our time), “field visits” practicum and mentorship of twelve as exemplars for the process of lifelong teaching and learning.

Christ is the embodiment of learning and His life remains the essence of holistic, enduring and everlasting learning proceeding out of the old through the new era marked by His prophesied advent, His advent, temporary exit and expected return. All learning is associated with Him from the beginning of Creation to the contention of evolutionist through to that of faith (intuitive mind) and science (the rational mind). It is noteworthy that the famous scientist, Albert Einstein, recognized that: “the intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.”

Critical Elements

Lifelong Learning is holistic and inclusive. It involves all of the person, all persons, all ages and all branches of knowledge. Lifelong learning for clergy, laity and whoever wants to know Christ as the fountain of blessed/divinely inspired knowledge will find that their learning never comes to a halt.

Lifelong learning comprises “**life start**” and “**life wide**” learning. Learning is in and of Christ since it represents a genuine change of behavior. For when we come into contact with Him we learn, we are transformed behaviorally. Learn of me He says – “Life start learning”. Life is **Christ** (Matt.7:14), who is the basis of our “life start”, applied in “life wide” and ever present in “lifelong” learning. On the other hand “life wide” learning enables continuous participation in the process of one’s family, church and community (people’s) development and by extension one’s self development.

However, there can be no lifelong learning without **lifelong teaching** since lifelong learning is not about unstructured learning throughout life. It is about adding, renewing and enhancing one’s stock of knowledge, wisdom and understanding in a structured way to the end of the age. Thus Matt. 28:19, 20: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations....teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I (Jesus Christ) have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* Thus, lifelong learners are being prepared as lifelong teachers or “lead learners” with Christ always beside to mentor and guide.

Critical Processes

Lifelong learning caters for various focal points: resumption or consolidation; remediation and advancement of learning in a context. Lifelong learning cannot be interpreted, albeit banally, as learning about life or that anything is lifelong learning. It is about upgrading, remaining relevant and current regarding knowledge and skills to navigate the various issues pertaining to one’s vocation and life. Thus, the process allows the participant to engage the process at any focal point based on need. The focal points are not successive stages but represent the focus of learning.

The Resumption focal point of the process caters for those who have been away from the process of learning for some time and therefore need some re-orientation and re-introduction to content

and competency as well as character realities in order to progress. This should be aimed at whetting the appetites of the participants as they see what they have been missing. Thus, delivery of material is crucial to promote self-paced participatory learning.

The Consolidation focal point can be pursued as the resumption since the intention is to build on previous learning/knowledge/competence/character realities in preparation for advancement.

The Remediation focal point is aimed at corrective learning viz. addressing misconceptions and misrepresentation of critical knowledge whether doctrinal, social, scientific, environmental, technological etc. This requires effective delivery to ensure clarity, comfort and confidence in participants.

The Advancement focal point is aimed at upgrading knowledge/competence/character realities through certification/credentialing. It is important that the servant mind of Christ be the hall-mark of qualification confirmed by certification.

Conclusion: Challenges of Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is exciting and re-invigorating to the entire being. It awakens in us new dimensions to our understanding of reality as well as the truth of God's Word. Renewed ideas, models, understandings and explanations are constantly uncovered to make way for new discoveries in knowledge. It provides a real appreciation of edification as the ultimate purpose of learning where one remains current but yet consistent and committed to an enriched life in Christ, which is intellectually enhancing and morally rewarding.

However, there are various challenges of all knowledge and learning let alone lifelong learning. Those challenges in their broadest sense are consummated in one essential challenge which is to confirm or refute the Christ in our knowledge i.e. the Christian perspective on reality as a valid perspective among other perspectives. Thus, lifelong learning will constantly face the following challenges, of:

- Engaging and contending with newness – new generations, new technologies, new perspectives and new circumstances/challenges
- Opening of doors of institutions of learning where “people” of diverse abilities learn to learn with each other
- Narrowing the gap between the formal and non-formal systems of learning; and
- Ensuring that focused learning does not end but continues throughout life itself.

There is no “Life end” Learning. May God continue to bless and direct our minds to Lifelong Learning in and through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord!!