

RELEVANCE OF WESLEYAN HERITAGE TO CHANGING GLOBAL EDUCATION
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Introduction

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by His Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the universe .” Hebrews. 1:1-2.

These verses point to the relevance of the holiness message even in our present day. Yes, our message must not change. As what John Wesley said: “In Christian faith whatever is true is not new, whatever is new is not true.” We have to admit that the world is changing and our refusal to adapt with wisdom to these changes makes us aliens to our own generation. Though our message must not change the way to package it has to be prophetically relevant with the language and the changing culture of our time.

The Heritage: Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Our great heritage in the Wesleyan tradition has the reputation of being Biblical, rational, traditional and experiential. This is where, I think John Wesley championed in modern Biblical scholarship. Not that we can be Wesleyan in a fanatic way, but we can be Wesleyan according to the principles that John Wesley laid before us. First, one must be faithful to the Scriptures. Not to be faithful to Wesley himself but to be faithful to what the Bible really says. I think John Wesley had in mind that, great as he was as a leader, his followers must learn not to follow him blindly but to see the light for themselves in the revealed written Word. Second, to exhaust our reason in search for truth. Being rational is not being worldly but rational in the light of what God reveals to us particularly through the Scriptures. John Wesley regards reason not as another source of revelation but a logical faculty enabling us to require proof of revelation guarding against the dangers of unbridled interpretation of Scripture (Williams). Mankind’s search for knowledge, wisdom, truth and all his efforts have always a dead end. When reason is exhausted and has come almost to the end point that is where God meets our longing for Him. The story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 somehow illustrates that eagerness to subject reason to proof of revelation, a point in the search for truth that captures God’s attention . Why from among many people Jesus singled out Zacchaeus? I think He saw a searching heart in Zacchaeus that He did not see in any of the crowd present. That’s where the Lord met him. Third, one must qualify the

truth on the basis of tradition. John Wesley did not look at all traditions as evil, in contrast with John Calvin and Erasmus who opted to discontinue traditional practices not specifically prescribed in the Bible. John Wesley was more lenient with any tradition be it a symbol or a ritual that may lead anybody to a fresh divine encounter. To him tradition is not without regard for Scripture but the continuing task of reinterpreting the biblical message (Dunning). Under the sought-after guidance of the Holy Spirit it guards against the irresponsible interpretation of the Bible (Aulen). His view of the prevenient grace tends to respect men of any religion or tradition in their search for the divine. For him the fact that in man himself is an inner craving for what is supernatural is already a sign of God's grace at work. Our task is to lead that craving in man to the truth. Fourth, we must ascertain the truth through experience. After all the ideological and spiritual aspects in our knowledge, are these things experiential? Has anybody testified to have experienced this claimed truth? Of course this is assuming that the claimed doctrine, idea, or tenet have already gone through a process of searching for the truth in the Scriptures, reason and tradition. This fourth principle makes the truth of the Word alive as it is applied in our day to day living. Whatever has no point of contact with our experience means absolutely nothing to us...thus what is accepted in faith is understood in terms of analogies from our experience (Dunning).

The principles mentioned above make up the seed bed of our theology making it relevant in our time, particularly in the education sector. We educators have to carefully and critically evaluate our ways and means to see whether or not our message of holiness is still making sense in our generation. Are we understood with our message, or are we just talking to walls and not to men because our packaging of the message has become outdated and irrelevant? This paper is just a challenge for us to consider and a reminder to take heed.

The Context: Education and the Changing Global Culture

We are well aware of the fast changing global culture today. What used to be taboos twenty years ago are now considered art or beauty in the name of freedom. You go to the normal person outside and ask what he thinks sin is. Is not the normal answer is, "sin is sin because we make it sinful?" That is saying that anyone can exercise his own judgment for what is sinful and what is not. For example, abortion is sin because society says so. But legalize it and it ceases to be a crime. Same is true with same-sex marriage, extra-marital sex, drugs and the like. Society can make them right simply by declaring them legal.

This is one of the biggest challenges we face today in the preservation of God's message: to faithfully proclaim the message of Christian holiness wherever God positions us. The message has got to be made visible through unquestionable experience. In our case as educators we face the challenge of relevance and demand. If we tend to be more conservative, then we tend to lose audience too soon. If we tend to be liberal, then we participate in eroding our own distinctives and sense of calling. This is a constant tug-of-war in the education sector. We can be reminded that most of the leading universities and colleges in the world today started as centers of Biblical studies. One might mention a few, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, even Oxford. These were centers where most of our great leaders studied, not to mention that some of these universities were Bible Colleges to begin with established to train pastors? Today, they may have maintained their fame and standards, but are they operating within the relevance of their original calling?

What a challenge to our Nazarene schools and universities around the world. I think this is where we have excelled compared with other denominational schools that have gone way beyond the borders of liberty. We need to hold on to our mission without compromising our core values as Nazarene educational entities.

The Message: Relevance of Holiness in a World that only Hears Evil

If we will ask somebody from the media or showbiz or maybe anyone involved in politics about holiness, I think two reactions can be expected: either they will shun the topic treating it as taboo or think that it is only for nuns and church leaders, or they will think that the one speaking is just a classic example of Pharisee, for who can be righteous in this generation? The message of holiness should be proclaimed with no compromise or apologies. God is holy and therefore his people must reflect that same holiness to the world. But how are we going to say it? Can we expect people to listen to our message? I think John Wesley himself has met the same challenge during his generation. He was born during the time when many thought they were Christians and therefore had the assurance of salvation. One may be good or bad and that did not really matter. The popular mind during that time was saying that you are saved and nothing can take that away from you. If you are not saved it is simply because you are doomed to damnation and was not among the elected. John Wesley with fire in his heart rose to proclaim the message of holiness. Was it relevant during his time? Probably many thought it was really a message out of tune or out of date. But John Wesley faithfully proclaimed the message from the Word.

The world must not dictate the relevance of our message for in no period of time does the world has accepted the relevance of the Christian message. The holiness message is relevant, be it acceptable or not, be it listened to or not, the message of the full gospel unto full salvation is what the world needs today.

Will this make us old fashioned and conservative? By no means! The message of holiness can be proclaimed not only by preaching or theological teaching but by simply being Christ-like in all our ways and relationships. John Wesley at one point declared: there is no such thing as holiness apart from social holiness. In other words, we cannot just be holy by separating ourselves from the world but we can better articulate holiness by showing the Christ in us in the workplace, in politics, business and in all sectors of society. Holiness is applied in all disciplines. In Education, theological or general in a given context, it is not only fearing God that should be taught, but allowing that fear to produce excellence in the pursuit of wisdom; making people mature, professional and right with God and men. Is this not what the proverb says, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom?”

The Messenger: Gaining the Right to be Heard

In a world that listens only to what people think is true or “in” or within their fashion, who can probably be an effective messenger of the time? The “zeitgeist” or the spirit of the time makes everybody deaf to hear God’s Word. Religions, including Christianity, is just becoming an alternative voice that probably some will listen to when they already have no one to turn to, or when they fail with their secular endeavors.

This is where the basic education factor plays a very important role. Remember the philosophy of “tabula-rasa”, the theory that the mind of a child is almost like a piece of blank paper, whatever you write will determine who he or she will be. This is where most communists succeeded in brainwashing children’s mind until they became hardliner communists in their adulthood.

The education sector occupies a huge chunk of influence in our world today. One may recall that in democratic elections, social issues, political and economic issues, academicians are normally asked to say their opinions. In the country where I belong (Philippines) the Education sector goes hand in hand with politics, religion, business as pillars of influence that make the country what it is. You take one out, and the country simply ceases to be a healthy country. This

is why I strongly believe that the Christian community should seize every opportunity to aggressively pursue Christian education alongside secular education.

This is where I think our task of educating the new generation takes a greater challenge. We have a message, we have a calling, but how can we deliver this to the world? This is where theology and education need to work hand in hand to accomplish our calling as a denomination and as a church in fulfilling the great commission. I am not saying that this is the only way but I am saying that this could be one effective way. The education sector can be one powerful arm in propagating the message of salvation and holiness as taught by the Scriptures.

Our educational institutions have to come up with some degree of influence or level of authority to gain the right to be heard. It may take numbers of students, highly qualified professors or instructors, world class facilities, until the world will care to listen to us. We don't have to remain isolated as schools and institutions and struggle to survive, but we can be a voice to represent God's Word in our time.

Conclusion

Today just like in any time in history the world needs to hear the message of the Gospel that can make real sense to life. Just like in biblical times the world today needs prophets who can faithfully proclaim the message of Christian holiness without apology and tolerance but with boldness and truthfulness. Let our churches and educational institutions be the venues for training of post-modern prophets who will bring the message of the Gospel to their respective areas of influence, be it in business, politics, religion, education and with the pillars of the government.

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