

A PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION FOR THE WESLEYAN-ARMINIUS THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

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Introduction

This is a pleasant honor for me to have an opportunity to speak and have a dialogue on the assigned subject with you who are seriously concerned about higher education in the Church of the Nazarene. For the sake of a more efficient outcome from this session, first, I would like to try to present a few thoughts such as a brief description on the philosophy of education in a general sense and a constructive educational principle for the Wesleyan- Arminian theological tradition for opening dialogue. While doing this, global and cross-cultural perspectives have been relatively taken into consideration. Since this is not a theological but a philosophical approach, Biblical quotations and references from the related sources will be minimized.

A Philosophy of Education

The purpose of education, as Pestalozzi believed, is the development of each person. John Dewey understands education in a similar way that it is an application of the result of inquiry for development of each individual and he emphasizes on the individual development as future oriented education. For him the inquiry as problem-solving begins in situations, which are indeterminate, disturbed, obscure, and full of conflict, and the object of inquiry is to transform

them into determinate, undisturbed, ordered, and clarified situations. Education is an application of the result of inquiry of problem solving for development in the needs of each individual.

Rousseau insists that education must utilize natural principle, such as the relations of cause and effect and discard artificial and impractical elements. This has, in a certain aspect, an affinity with the East Asian philosophy of education. East Asian philosophy and practice of education includes inquiring about the principle of nature, reading the classics, quiet meditation for reflections on things at hand, self cultivation, detachment of human desires, etc. [1] The precise goal of educational practice is to become a sage by investigation of principle or to acquire the Heavenly Principle, the Great Ultimate, or the Tao by abiding in reverence. [2]

Christian perspective on educational philosophy might be categorized into three areas: the inquiry of truth, the life of holiness, and the practice of love.

1. The inquiry of truth aims three categorical schemes of equipment for students: The creative academic learning, the specialized practical knowledge and the ability of adjustment to the future as a future oriented education.
2. The life of holiness pursues a dedicated devotional life, the mature spiritual formation, and the life of sanctification.
3. The practice of love emphasizes the dedicated life of service, the practice of social justice, and the realization of human welfare. [3]

The three categories are actually the areas of intellectual, spiritual, and personal development, which are the needs of each individual in Christian educational context. In addition to these

elements, cross-cultural development is necessary for students to prepare global ministry in 21st century.

Spiritual Development

The development of spirituality is the prime focus of education in a Christian university. The process of spiritual development takes a route to seek enriching faith and endowing spiritual empowerment. The spiritual development proceeds from a clumsy and premature level up to the point of mature and the level of entire sanctification. It attempts to let students experience Christian *numinous*, *mysterium tremendum*, and fascination. [4] Let the students have real experience of the Holy Spirit. These experiences are to be obtained by willfully participating in sincere and vigorous religious activities, persistently trying to listen to the Word of God, and inquiring the Divine matters in nature. Let the Holy Spirit come down and have students experience sudden and crisis enlightenment of neo-life as a proper relationship with God, gradual cultivation with spiritual guidance, detachment of the egoistic nature, and eventually the sanctification. Let them have a pure intention in their ordinary activities. Let the student seek and develop entirely to the teleological echelon (*teleios*) of Christian perfection.

Inner-spiritual experience could be the fundamental basis for discretion of application and finding of adequacy in theological exercise. However, spiritual development itself is not sufficient for obtaining public authenticity to be recognized as a spiritually cultivated self, if it is without intellectual justification. This means that intellectual development is required for identification, justification and authentication of religion experience. In Wesleyan-Arminium tradition, the experience implies not only inner spiritual experience but also outer social experiences, which entails personal development in education because those experiences will be the subjects not only of inquiry and interpretations but also of praxis of responsible

consciousness. And above all, the spiritual experience would be the initial foundation for the subsequent developments [5]

Intellectual Development

Wesleyan- Arminius theological tradition takes reason as a tool for effective understanding of spiritual experience and reaching theological certitude. Intellectual development is an advancement of rational specialty in academia for questing and inquiring endeavors. In order to engage intellectually in the inquiry of problem solving in scholarships using rational specialty, Christian undergraduate curriculum ought to be intended to enable students to think consistently, coherently, analytically, and critically and to develop multi-functional creativity. Intellectual development demands improvement of the capacity to assemble and order information, interpret it to have content meaning, and invent new ideas for better communication and application of the truth.

Rational specialty in academia is not only for effective, inquiring, understanding, and construction of theological certitude, but also for rational justification and adequate defense of religious ideas from the various attacks and challenges of secular spirits. The function of rational specialty in Christian academia is to authenticate the integrity of Christianity. The rational justification and authentication of Christian ideas are so important for the defense of Christian identity from the challenges from the global secular important spirits and for effective Christian mission and evangelism.

Intellectually unfolding trans-contextual truth or trans-cultural truth could also be one of the major tasks of Christian education in a pluralistic world. Truth within perspective or context may not be real truth if it changes its inner content meaning. Truth, if it is really to be the truth, must

be trans-cultural, and intellectual development of the rational specialty encourages students to pay heed to unfolding the trans-cultural truth in pluralistic surroundings.

Personal Development

The towering aspect of personal development is to let students engage in the practice of love, indeed, ultimately the perfect love. The beginning ground of this educational process is the basis of obtaining personal integrity. [6] It must be true that one of the most difficult subjects of education to take into practice is the education of integrity. But a possible way to implement the education of integrity could be found in association with spiritual experience. Sincere spiritual being entails authentic ethical being. No serious ethics exist without the transcendental moral governor. Faith in the transcendental Holy God and a spiritual experience of sanctification provide a fertile soil for growing pure intention of integrity for being a responsible self. Wesleyan- Arminius tradition takes human freedom, responsibility for dynamics of humanity more seriously than the totally deterministic understandings of the human destiny. The development of personal integrity pertains to the enlargement of a portion of responsibility based on the religious experience of the dynamics of humanity. To have the pure intention and integrity for being a responsible self become the prime point of personal development. [7]

Religious activity and praxis in compassionate engagement in the harmonization of disorder in community require rediscovered integrity and responsibility for the sake of the serious compassionate ministry, conscientization on social conflicts by the experience of sanctification is demanded for social justice and harmony. Educational institutions need to let the students practically engage in social services such as orphanage, welfare center, shelter for the homeless and the handicapped, special schools, and the church to engage in social services. Higher education of personal development also peruses leadership development, and acquires for the

students the image of a shepherd and at the same time the image of a servant as Christian leadership style. Education of personal development exercises an edifying integrity, maximization of the responsible self, and leadership development.

Cross-cultural Development

Education must be exercised within a given context of time and space. Past oriented education would emphasize history and tradition and learning the lessons from the past, while future oriented education would emphasize the possibility of a better life and applicability of known principle for improvement in the future. Education to conserve the tradition of Wesleyan-Arminius theology may be positive in the future, but it may need also a new cloth to be friendly toward a postmodern era. We have to find out and justify the positive merits and conservable elements of our tradition and invent new cloth for taking an innovative ministry toward a new emerging epoch.

Several theologians and religious scholars claim that there is no peace in the world without inter-religious dialogue in the 21st century, and I agree with a great sympathy on that there is no world peace without religious peace. [8] Inter-religious dialogue is the key, but here is implicated that the presupposition of the claim is that peace is prior to salvation, external prior to internal, or collective harmony prior to individual wellbeing. Yet, we cannot ignore the peace of the world.

The courses of comparative religion, phenomenology of religion, and world religions are necessary to understand other religions and cultures for implementation of the mission in a more realistic way. [9] The standpoint need not necessarily to be exclusive toward other religions, but inclusive if not pluralistic. Because we presuppose that the ground of Divine matters includes special and natural revelations for inquiring truth and theological exercise. Inclusive, exclusive,

or pluralistic could be a matter but dialogue is necessary at least for understanding each other. The comparative approach seeks affinities and overlaps for complementarily, contrasts for articulation of identify, and alternatives for the advancement and refinement of Christian ideas. At the international-denominational level it demands to go beyond an exclusive system toward a comparative quest for Christian theological certitude and effective missions.

Education for a citizen of the global community emphasizes acquiring cross-cultural communication skills, understanding of other standards of life and value, and participating in effective Christian evangelism in the diverse modes of life. [10] New York and L.A. would be the prime example for experiencing an immanent global community and cross-cultural conflicts. Truth always wears cultural clothes, and preparation of new clothes are necessary for a new emerging epoch of a global community. Indeed, international or cross-cultural experiences and understandings for students are highly demanded in education for the 21st century.

For cross-cultural education of the Bible, hermeneutics need to take an innovative step in the relationship between the text and context. Here, three ways of hermeneutics would be recommended in education for the coming pluralistic era: apologetic defensive hermeneutics, mediational hermeneutics, imaginative-constructive hermeneutics. Apologetic defensive hermeneutics is to defend the truth of the Bible from the attacks of modern and postmodern ideas to demonstrate the trans-cultural truth. In terms of the mediational hermeneutics the activity of mediation process takes first to find out matching ideas and images in a given contextual realm with the Biblical truth, then tries to make a bridge with those categories, concepts, images, or symbols between the Biblical text and the contemporary context. Imaginative-constructive hermeneutics aim to mediate the text to context when there are no adequate images or symbols for innovative communication. New images and symbols, yet appropriate and acceptable for the cross-cultural missions need to be constructed such as a church for the 21st century as a “green

church” would be employed for better communication of the concept of the Biblical church in the 21st century. [\[11\]](#)

Closing Word

Education as a development of each individual has been described as spiritual, intellectual, personal, and cross-cultural developments specially in association with the Wesleyan- Arminius theological tradition. This essay has intended to take a theoretical feature as a philosophy of education rather than a feature of the reality in educational settings we may begin to have critiques, comments, and suggestions, corrections as refining endeavors.

Endnotes

[\[1\]](#) It seems that there is no distinction between the religious and the secular, the spiritual and the intellectual in Confucian culture. And in Korean Christian circles, citing the words of Confucius or Lao-tzu in a sermon would be acceptable as long as minister does not claim that there could be a type of salvation in those religions. If s/he claims any possibility of salvation in those religions, then the trouble storm from the churches will overflow to the preacher. It is not too bad for the Church to use the concepts or categories of Confucianism and Taoism, because they are rather regarded as wisdom of philosophy and ethics. But the Korean church does not get along with Buddhism, because Buddhism is regarded as a religion, particularly because of it’s practice of bowing head down and kneeling down to the artificially handmade statue of Buddha as a most obvious violation against the First Commandment.

[2] This is mainly a Neo-Confucian understanding of education; however, in a certain aspect it would be adequate to represent a philosophy of East Asian education because the Neo-Confucianism has been regarded as a synthesis of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism in general.

[3] This is basically the ideology of education of Korean Nazarene University, which contains those core substances of the Christian perspective for education.

[4] Rudolf Otto, *The Ideas of Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969, 12-40; William Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ; Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1998), 13.

[5] The concrete and practical methods of spiritual improvement at KNU can be delineated as follows: 1) Early morning prayer and devotional meeting at six o'clock for those who live in the campus dormitory. 2) Revival meeting for three days without classes once a semester for all students and faculty members except staffs. (3) The University chapel service for one hour of Thursdays for all students and faculty members, and theology student have an additional devotional chapel service for one hour on Tuesdays. 4) Faculty and staff have devotional service on Tuesday morning at 8:15 AM, and staff have devotional meetings on Thursday mornings as well. 5) For those who are identified as non-Christian, there is a cell group educational system, "Vision Academy", specially for new students. Each cell group is composed of 5 to 6 students to be lead by the selected faithful professors and the dedicated graduate theological students for becoming Christian. There are 27 groups operating at the moment, in the regular curriculum, all students regardless of their majors, must take a minimum of 6 hours in Christian courses such as Christian Bible, Christian Thought, and Christian Culture. The spiritual atmosphere of the university enhances development of students to understand Christian spirituality and experience

it in a concrete and practical way. Also, there are various student activities to help students in spiritual development; these include Praise-Singing Nazarene, Nazarene Pioneer Mission Group, Loving Jesus Group (a ministry group for the disabled), Theological Research Group, Christian Education of Children Group, and Little Jesus Group (Prayer group). These groups are not only theology students but include students from other departments. There are non-theologically oriented groups such as English Drama Group, Computer and Advanced Technology Exercise Group, Martial Arts Group, etc. But they have a Christian spirit in their activities as well.

[6] Integrity includes the categories of humanity, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom, which are the interpretation of integrity in Confucian tradition.

[7] In Korean context, the Presbyterian church is predominantly larger than any other denomination. The major reason for this seems to be that the Calvinistic doctrinal scheme spheres with Korean traditional mind set such as determinism and predestination. However, I suspect that the dynamics of humanity have the potential to attract the younger generation who has a flexible understanding of human destiny in the contemporary Korean culture.

[8] Hans Kung, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Continuum, 1993), 75.

[9] When I teach theology of holiness, sometimes I use Korean traditional concepts, which match with the concepts of Biblical understanding. Though the terms do not exactly identify with the Biblical concepts, it conveys efficiency to help students understand the content meaning of holiness and sanctification. To become a sage in Confucianism seems to be more difficult than to be entirely sanctified in Wesleyan Arminius tradition.

[10] It is recommended to practice a critical contextualization in the cross-cultural evangelism rather than indiginazation or just contextualization, because the former has been recognized as a better form to serve effectively to carry out the sheer purpose of the cross-cultural evangelism.

[11] At the fundamental level the Biblical or Christian language has been relatively well settled down in Korea by now, and there seems to be no serious terminological conflicts any longer within the Korean Christian community. However, as I observe the formation and establishment of Christian language within the Korean Christian community gradually detaches and isolates the church from the secular world, again accordingly, the church is loosing its members. This may be not only a phenomenon in Korea, but advanced Christianized countries have similar appearance. Some of contemporary American theologians claim that in order to avoid those conflicts it is necessary for theologians to construct new Christian concepts to assimilate the Biblical truth with a new contextual era.