

GLOBAL PEDAGOGY

A Table Conversation

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Nazarene educators, serving in over fifty academic institutions worldwide and a host of regional ministry efforts, must have a “means” to both guide and articulate the global efforts of countless teachers and ministers. This theological framework must address “globalization” yet also attend to the particular community known as the Church. This essay attempts to sketch a Wesleyan global pedagogy as a table conversation that is Christian, global, and sufficient to face the dangerous obstacles of commercialization and tribalism

Defining Terms

Globalization has roots in the middle of the previous century though the concept is much older (Osmer 2001), describing international economic interplay, but also suggesting multiple social implications. Roland Robertson (2000) defines globalization as the compression of the world, a centuries-long process where the interdependence of economic, political, cultural, and moral positions reveal a global “density.” Different teachers bring different national assumptions to the meaning of global education (Hampson and Whalen 1991; Pike, 2000, para. 1). For this paper, “global pedagogy” acknowledges Robertson’s “density,” so teaching is conditioned by global consciousness (Osmer 2001, 46). “Pedagogy” provides an alternative educational term; one with an older, more aesthetic understanding of teaching and learning. Christian pedagogy theologically describes a participation in the rhythms of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14.26), seeking faithful discipleship in a complex world.

Obstacles to Global Pedagogy

Benjamin Barber (1995) defines two specific obstacles to Christian pedagogy: the opposing forces of “McWorld” and “Jihad.” Barber defines McWorld as a standardization of global culture primarily through commodification and commercialism. Companies portray products as “generic,” but they contain cultural and theological assumptions. Marketing these “goods” persuasively educates persons (often non-formally) that obtaining products determine the consumers’ lives. Images and slogans reduce persons and values into passive, consumable objects (Barber 67). Anyone surveying the field of ministry education and training observe workshops, handbooks and “formulas” for successful ministry bearing this homogenized view of McWorld. Ministry products with a “one size fits all” mentality reduce ministers and parishioners into consumer “objects” rather than persons.

Barber sees “Jihad” as a logical, interdependent, reaction to McWorld. Barber believes this extreme term accurately describes various, often violent, responses shaped by tribalism and radical nationalism. The political implications of Jihad are obvious and horrendous internationally, but tribalism takes different manifestations in pedagogical endeavors. If proponents of McWorld educate through commodification, proponents within Jihad educate through coercion. Jihad educators react to any outside influence, rejecting positive contributions while restricting student reflection and critique. Educational tribalism refuses diversity, adopting a peculiar and often intimidating fundamentalism by insisting on a particular discipleship. Teachers compel students to adopt one vision of ministry while trivializing other approaches. Since Jihad and McWorld are

interdependent forces in our contemporary world, any theological global pedagogy must respond to both challenges.

Global Pedagogy as Table Conversation

The theological metaphor of global pedagogy as table conversation provides a Wesleyan vision as it reveals two images. The first image reminisces upon family gatherings around a common meal. The second “table” vision reveals the sacramental meal of communion. Global pedagogy lives in the intersection of these images. Drawing upon these images, a “familial” and sacramental vision of global pedagogy emerges to guide conversations of teaching and educational administration.

First, global pedagogy resides both in the intersections of our common humanity and in a doxological vision of worship. Any Wesleyan educational endeavor includes both our common human bonds and our transforming vision of God. Doxological worship unites us toward God, then forms, shapes, and ultimately transforms us into a particular “family” of God. But worship, while unitive and transforming, need not be uniform...or a commodity. “Family resemblances” may give some distinctives to guide the formative process but one brand of tribalistic discipleship need not dominate educational efforts. Nazarenes will be a family, not clones, shaped by a particular (but not packaged), worshipful, eschatological, vision of heaven in our midst. Education efforts will be guided by a focus upon God and a faithful shaping of Christians. Educators will do so, however, as equal members of the family; bearing resemblances, but unique in each contribution to the family “tree.”

Second, global pedagogy lives through the sacrificial memory of Jesus Christ and a common care for each other. Family meals are times of story telling: catching up with the events of the day, and reliving our familial past. These “conversations” are expressions of love for each other. When Nazarenes gather at the Lord’s Table to “do this” in remembrance of Him, they are required to remember, to relive, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus through formation. Memory, however, is not enough unless teachers and students are willing to imitate the self-sacrificial Christ through a humble, vulnerable pedagogy, which negates tribal tendencies toward coercion. Re-living this sacrificial memory through pedagogical practice subverts any tendency to reduce students into “commodities” or resort to “violent” pedagogical practices.

Finally, global pedagogy lives in the “gathering” and “dispersal” of persons through the power of the Holy Spirit. Family members arrive and leave the table to a fragmented life. Nazarenes need something to hold us together for family gatherings, and “bless” our departure. The Eucharistic invocation of the Holy Spirit binds persons together in worship and education, but also “disperses” us into the world to critically discern God’s ongoing activity. Our pedagogical task will be to critically investigate the activity of the Holy Spirit in our educational gatherings and our ministry toward the world. As the Spirit of God was active in creation, our discernment is also an imaginative, “creative,” activity. Both critical discernment and creative imagination mark this pedagogical endeavor.

Conclusion

Jokes concerning a Nazarene tendency toward fellowship and food may prove truer than we realize. A “table conversation” defines Global pedagogy, first, as formative and transformative practices; second, as sacrificial exchanges between teacher and student, and finally as creative, mutual,

discernment of the activity of God in the world. These images encourage a discussion of our various educational endeavors. In a rapidly condensing world, this image guides us between the dangers of Jihad and McWorld. A doxological vision of the self-sacrificial Lord guides us by the Holy Spirit's power. The result is a true celebration through our combined pedagogical efforts as Nazarenes around the globe become "one at the table with our Lord."

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