

# ***African Journal for Transformational Scholarship***

An interdisciplinary journal of scientific and scholarly insights

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ISSN 1447 8846

Published for the Centre for the Promotion of Higher Education in Africa by  
Amani Educational Services Inc.

A non-profit body incorporated in Victoria, Australia

Registration No., A0053570H

Email: [africa@amani.org.au](mailto:africa@amani.org.au)

PO Box 214 Eltham Vic 3095 Australia

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# The Foundations of Christian Education

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Recent years have seen an upsurge in the development of Christian educational institutions, together with regional and international networks to support these institutions. While this is encouraging, there is an important question that needs to be addressed: Are sound foundations being laid for these endeavours?

These foundations are relevant not only to Christian higher education but to all levels of Christian educational endeavour. It is an issue of first importance since nothing we construct, whether it be buildings or institutions, can be sound if the foundations are faulty.

## **Bedrock : Love and Wisdom**

It may be wondered why Scripture is not specified as the bedrock. The answer is that there is a need to be more specific. We need to specify the precise qualities that Scripture shows to be needed on which to build sound foundations for our educational endeavours. It may be that there are more but there can be no doubt that these two are essential.

## **The Necessity of Love**

The Apostle, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit tells us "... if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."—1 Cor 13:2. James expands on the nature of this love when he says: "You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."—Jas 2:8. Paul again says: "...the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."—Gal 5:14 see also Rom 13:9.

The answer of our Lord to the lawyer's question "Who is my neighbour?" calls us to a searching reflection on the focus of our own endeavours. As he so often did, our Lord replied with a story of a man robbed and left half dead by the roadside. Three people came by: The first two, a priest and a Levite, kept walking on the other side of the road without helping him; the third, a Samaritan came, stopped, healed the man's wounds, took him to safety at an inn and paid inn-keeper for all the expenses of his care until he was well enough to resume his journey.

Having told the story Jesus asked the lawyer who he considered was neighbour to the injured man. The lawyer replied: "...The one who showed him mercy." Then Jesus said to the lawyer, "Go and do likewise." —Lk 10:29–37. The point of the story, of course, is that the priest and Levite were faithful to the letter of the law but lacked love, while the Samaritan was regarded by the Jews as unfaithful to the law, yet he showed love to an unknown man. The Jewish lawyer, who had questioned Jesus as a test, became entangled in his own net. Given what he had already said in his responses to Jesus, he could not do other than agree that the Samaritan was the one fulfilled God's law by his practice rather than the two who, in their teaching were faithful to the law, but lacked love.

As Paul says "...the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."—Rom 13:8 "...the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself.""—Gal 5:14. John admonishes us: "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action"—1 Jn 3:18.

The question we must ask ourselves is: Do we in our Christian institutions, by our teaching and writing map a distinctively Christian path of learning, while failing in our practice to show love to all our neighbours, including our opponents? Let us not be too hasty in our answer. How do we demonstrate love for our neighbours? In what ways do we show love "in truth and action"?

We certainly cannot do it if we remain detached from the wider world of learning, interacting with one another in a closed circle of Christian institutions, conferences and seminars. We can only demonstrate love for our neighbours unless we are engaged with our neighbours in the academic world, whether they be secularists, Muslim, Hindu or whatever.

It is relatively easy to live by a set of rules, because there are defined boundaries. To live by the law of love is much harder because there are no defined boundaries; there is no end to the giving. It cost our Lord the ultimate penalty for our sins. It will never cost us that. At the same time, the cost of love is not in the nature of a loss, a sacrifice of good things. It is like the cost of a valuable pearl (Mt 13:45,46); love brings its own priceless reward.

This love is not what the world calls "love", nor is it a love that is in us by nature. It is the love that only God can give and sustain by the agency of his Spirit. John tells us "...love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."—1 Jn 4:7.

It is significant that "love your neighbour as yourself" is found more frequently in Scripture than "you shall love the Lord your God". John also gives us the key to this when he tells us that we can only know that we truly love God, whom we do not see, if we do not love our fellow humans whom we do see. It is so easy to be caught up in raptures of "love" for God, singing and praising him as our Redeemer; it is a very different thing to act in love for a flesh and blood human who is hard to get on with or is even our open enemy. How we treat those who are our enemies is the ultimate test of the reality of our love.

Our Lord said in unmistakable terms: "...I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.

If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return."—Lk 6:27,28,32–35.

It is worth noting that, while Greek has more than one word for "love" Scripture uses the same term for loving your enemies (*ἀγαπάτε*) as it does for loving God. It is a love that God in Christ gives us that is as unconditional as his love for us.

Is this divine love deeply set in the foundations of all our endeavours in Christian education?

## **The Necessity of Wisdom**

The second essential ingredient in the foundations of our Christian endeavours in education is wisdom. Education is concerned with the development of human knowledge. In reality, the development of knowledge can and does occur outside the framework of our formal systems of education, but that is another story.

The process of acquiring knowledge without the guidance of wisdom is like a ship without a rudder. A person can know how to drive a car but, without wisdom guiding the practice of that knowledge, can do great harm.

Wisdom is about making the right decisions; it guides the discernment of what is the right thing to do, the making of sound judgements. There is an innate wisdom that humans can cultivate. However, this innate wisdom is guided by cultural values that can readily introduce a cultural bias in the judgements made. There is no better example of this than the judgements that Europeans, in their wisdom, made that Africans were a lawless people because the legal systems of African societies did not look like those of Western culture.

The wisdom that Christian educational institutions need to lay at the deepest level of their foundations is not a human wisdom. It is the wisdom of God that he freely gives to those who ask in faith without doubting—Jas 1:5–7. We must renounce all claim to an innate wisdom of our own

in order to embrace the wisdom of God that the Spirit freely gives—1 Cor 2:6–16. There is more hope for fools than for those who are wise in their own eyes—Prv 26:12

The priority of this wisdom is also made clear in the extended treatment in the book of Proverbs. “Happy are those who find wisdom, ...for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her.—Prv 3:13–15.

The voice of wisdom cries: “The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.

Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world’s first bits of soil.

When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”—Prv 8:22–31

There is no greater gift than wisdom, other than love, that we can receive through the agency of the Spirit. And none more valuable for Christian educational endeavours if they are to succeed as agents of the Kingdom of God in the world. To gain and keep this most precious gift we must walk humbly with our God, not only living by the Spirit of regeneration but guided by the Spirit of wisdom in all things—Mi 6:8; Gal 5:25

Is this divine wisdom mixed with divine love in the deepest foundations of all our endeavours in Christian education?

## **Second Level: World View as a Pattern of Living**

The collapse of the belief in the autonomy of human reason in the mid 20th century after 300 years of its unchallenged, if troubled, reign in the Western academic world brought with it the recognition that reason functions within the framework of a world view based on belief about the nature of the world we experience.

### **The 20th Century Revolution in Science**

A revolution in the science of physics during the first half of the century as a result of the work of Einstein, with his theories of relativity, quantum mechanics and what is commonly known as “chaos theory” overturned earlier certainties based on a mechanistic view of the universe. Penrose (1989) provides a detailed discussion of these developments.

The final nail was put in the coffin of rationalism by the collapse of the Logical Positivist agenda in the philosophy of science. The logical positivists attempted to develop logical proof that the “Scientific Method”—i.e. the logical processing of observed data—will yield results with absolute certainty. Suppe (1977, 6–118) gives a detailed account of the increasingly complex logical formulas developed in the attempt to provide the desired proof. In the end those involved, which included some of the world’s foremost logicians, had to admit that it is impossible to prove by logic that the logical processing of observed data yields results with absolute certainty.

The cumulative effect of these developments led to what we call the post-modern era. The distinctive feature of this era is that there is no universally recognised absolute authority in science or other forms of theoretical knowledge. It is still expected that a claim to such knowledge will have a rational quality but there is no rational basis for regarding it as absolute truth.

By theoretical knowledge is meant knowledge that maps universal patterns and relationships in human experience. It is not the knowledge of individual entities or events such as “I know the sun is shining at this minute” or “I know my wife is reading a book at present”. It is the knowledge of science and other academic disciplines, that is universal in scope.

Feyerabend (1975/1978, 298-299) argues that the continuing belief in the supreme authority of science is nothing but a form of dogmatism. He says: "'Primitive' thinkers showed greater insight into the nature of knowledge than their 'enlightened' philosophical rivals. Of special interest to Africa, he devotes a whole page to a scathing condemnation of the Western invasion which brought with it the loss of intellectual independence replacing it with an intellectual slavery to 'Western Rationalism and its peak – Western Science.'"

Yet, to this day African patterns of education follow those of the Western invaders, with rare exceptions. One notable exception is the Sage Philosophy developed by the late H. Odera Oruka, Professor of Philosophy at The University of Nairobi (Oruka 1991). His work even rates extended treatment in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy published by Stanford University, California: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>. Unfortunately, although some beginnings are emerging, there seems to be some distance yet to go so far as African Christian institutions are concerned. While not blindly rejecting all that comes from the West, African Christian institutions should be leading the way in the enrichment to be gained from Africa's own history of education, in the process contributing to the existing educational patterns of the Western world are badly in need of a major overhaul.

## **World Views, Religion and Life**

### ***World Views***

With the collapse of the foundations of claim the scientific knowledge has absolute authority, the idea of world views emerged. While we can write about world views a world view is not a conceptual system. It is a way of experiencing the world demonstrated by the patterns of our activities in the world.

The challenge for Christian educational institutions is not the formulation of some kind of statement of a Christian world view. That is easy, but it is only a start. More difficult, and also more important, is to demonstrate such a world view in every area of educational practice.

### ***Religion and Being Religious***

At the core of every world view is a religious belief of some kind. As Wentz (1987, 13–14) puts it being religious is about having "a sense of ultimate order and meaning"; humans are more than biological organisms but need to find ways to transcend their biological existence with a belief that their lives have meaning "as part of a story that gives everything its place, its time and its sense of worth....To be human is to be religious."

Nord and Haynes (1998, 4) in a similar way, point out that "...religion can't be compartmentalized; it isn't simply a matter of what one affirms or does on Friday evening or Sunday morning. The implications of God's existence extend to all of life—to how we act the rest of the week, and to how we make sense of the world." On this basis, they argue that U.S. court rulings that the Constitution prohibits the teaching of religion in public schools actually violates the constitution by establishing a secular faith as the national faith.

Wentz (1987,19-21) makes an important distinction between religion and being religious. Religion he defines, as most would understand the word, as an organised, clearly defined expression of religiousness. But he gives powerful arguments for recognising that many people who have no religion are nevertheless deeply religious. That is, they find some kind of meaning in the secular world.

He cites a colleague who was a geology professor writing an attack on creationism who is quoted as saying: "Science offers truth without certainty Religion offers certainty without truth... people like to live in a fantasy. They want final truths but science is tentative." Wentz comments that these words show the professor's own unrecognised religious commitment to science by his dogmatic assertion that science alone offers "truth"; in his failure to recognise his own religious nature he "...is a victim of the modern attempt to suppress religiousness by confining it to what John Dewey called religion."

This raises an important issues for we who are Christians: What is the nature of truth? When Jesus said to Pilate “Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice”. Pilate responded “What is truth?” Jn 18:37-38. Just the evening before this Jesus answered a question from Thomas by saying: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life”. Truth stood before Pilate but his Graeco-Roman culture did not allow him to recognise Truth embodied in a human person. In that culture the question of truth was a conceptual one to be handled by philosophers who argued among themselves about the answer.

This Graeco-Roman view of truth has had a powerful influence on Christian thought with conceptual statements of faith based on human interpretation of Scripture being regarded as biblical truths. Yet throughout Scripture the plural “truths” is never used. Except in the context of human discourse, it is associated with the person of God. As such it does not consist of words on paper but is an active power closely associated with God’s word that is incarnate in the living Word of God. By his redemptive act in the cross, this truth is in us as the living power of the Spirit of truth.

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”—Jn 14:16-17 See also Pss 119:160; 147:15–18; Jn 1:14; 1 Jn 5:6.

When Christians insist that their particular formulations of doctrine have the status of being truths of God’s word, with those who differ having, at best, a flawed faith, they go beyond the bounds of human knowledge. All human knowledge is relative, including what Christians write—and that includes me. Absolute truth is found only in God. Jesus said: “I am the way, and the truth and the life”—Jn 14.6.

Michael Leunig, (1998) famous for his cartoons providing satirical social comment, defines the human soul as the place within the human person “...where there is a sense of the eternal, that we are more than this body and this gathering of perceptions...”. Commenting, in this context, on contemporary society he observes:

“The success of our political and corporate life has been at the expense and neglect of the soul. As a result very sick souls are making important decisions.”

### ***Christian secularism.***

Modern societies, in general, respect religion with participation in the beliefs and practices of religion being regarded as a personal choice fundamental to a free society. On the other hand, daily life outside the boundaries of the practice of a religion is secular and as such religiously neutral.

In this situation, if we fail to recognise the distinction between “religion” and “religiousness” we will easily be seduced by the powerful commercial interests of today’s world into adopting a way of life that is inconsistent with our stated world view beliefs. This way of life is the social norm, the mark of a “developed” society. It is “the good life”. But is it? Remember Paul’s warning:

“ Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness.”—2 Cor 11:14,15

The “good life” that is today’s social norm is measured by the value of things we own and consume. It is driven by commercial interests that bombard us on every side with enticing messages proclaiming the desirability of their products. There is no escape from their influence.

But we can resist that influence. As Christians we must resist if we are to be faithful and enjoy the truly good life of the God’s kingdom.

“...do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. ...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”.—Lk 12:29–31.34

The Indian theologian, Dhyanchand Carr (1991, 965–966) recounts how he slowly learned from the poor around him the reality of a life that is lived, not for money, but “...out of a sense of voca-

tion and out of an urge to be partners with God". It is easy to say the words of faith, but the reality of faith is shown in our actions.

Fundamental to Christian resistance must be actions that resist the national and international inequities generated by today's global economy. Lipman (2002, 385) spotlights this issue:

"At the heart of economic globalization is the technological capacity to generate knowledge and process information at increasing speeds and efficiencies, a highly integrated and flexible system of production of goods and services built on the global reorganization of the labor process and transnational circuits of labor, and the worldwide primacy of finance and speculative capital (Castells, 1989, 1998; Korten, 1995; Sasson, 1994). Under the global regime of capitalist accumulation, these developments magnify existing inequalities and create new ones."

It should be a major priority of Christian educational institutions to educate the youth of today's generation in the reality of these ugly inequities that lie behind the glossy facade of today's global economy. As always it is our actions that will show where we really stand on this issue; do we just talk about the inequities to a student body drawn from the middle and upper economic levels of society, or do we make it our goal to build an equitable student body?

Further, do we produce graduates with a passion for social justice and equity in accordance with the clear principles enunciated in Scripture? The great reformer, John Calvin, was not only a reformer of church life; he was passionate in exhorting his congregation to act in everyday affairs in accordance with the law of love. We have space only for one of his challenges on wage justice taken from Graham (1971, 84):

'Calvin did not try to find some mathematical basis for the just wage, for the problem is first of all a spiritual one—because men in paying wages are dealing with the grace of God which goes from person to person within the human community. Human solidarity, especially in Christ, provides the clue to management—labor relations. He imagines from the pulpit a master withholding wages and saying, "He is my subject; I will command him as I wish." But, says Calvin, the master should remember who is the real Master, and say instead: "I am master, but not in tyranny; I am master, but on this condition, that I am also brother; I am master, but there is a common Master in heaven, both for me and for those who are subject to me. We are all here like one family.'"

Are we sending out servants of Christ from our educational institutions to follow in the steps of Calvin as "constructive revolutionaries" challenging the social inequities and injustices that are greater than ever in today's world?

### **Third Level: A Servant Community**

Although the word is common enough, the reality of community is largely lost in the mire of individualism in today's Western culture. Sadly, the impact of a global commercially driven culture is eroding the reality of community also in Africa.

God created us in community: "Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner."

God redeemed us in community: "...we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love."—Eph 4:15,16.

It should be clear that we can only find fulfilment in community; and can only be effective in our Christian educational endeavours if they are solidly grounded in community. A real community is not an organisation but a living organism. Paul's analogy of the human body in Eph 4 makes this clear. A hand is useless if it is severed from the body. Yet it is itself severely handicapped without a thumb.

The American missionary to the Maasai people says (1978/1985, 141): "The strange, changing, mobile, temporary, disappearing communities of America can leave one without any experience

of what a community is." He goes on (142) to refute the common view that the traditional African communal life suppressed the individuality of its members:

"When I came in contact with African communities for the first time, one of the things I noticed about them was the lack of competition within a community. No one really tried to stand out in a community. perhaps did not even want to. There was no particular value attached to standing out, as an individual, that is. The most beautiful girl was simply recognized as such, and was a mark of pride for the community which produced her. Everyone would point out the greatest athlete, or the best dancer and rested hopes on such gifted people to bring honor to the village or the community. All warriors were glad they had the bravest warrior in their midst in troubled times. The very notion of being chief or legwanan of an age group was not a sought after honor, even though it implied a nobility of character and personality. The ones on whom such an honor fell were invariably sad at the choice. Talents that people possessed and displayed were accepted and recognized by the community and put to good use by the community. People with lesser talents were accepted as such and were expected to contribute according to their ability. No one was rejected for lack of talent.

This system does not prohibit striving for excellence in the context of community. It does preclude, however, competitive striving for individual aggrandizement, at the expense of the community. It also insures communitarian well-being. Flocks are herded in common, fields are tilled in common, and a family dwelling is built by the community. It is hard to go hungry in a community when food is available in the village, and hard to go uncared for when there is medicine available there. Old people have important functions in a community which makes them very valuable and wanted. And there is no orphans in a community"

These observations come from a man who in his passion to bring the Gospel to these people went and lived with them for extended periods, sharing their way of life, eating their food, sleeping as they slept.

And, to our shame, it fits the biblical view of human relations much more closely than the individualism of Western culture that we have so widely embraced as Christians. But if our educational endeavours are to have their full impact as Christian endeavours, this recognition of authentic community must be at the foundations of our institutions.

"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another.

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it".—1 Cor 12:12–27

The qualification "servant community" is important. It is already implicit in the reality of community, but the cultural power of hierarchic systems of organisation in every area of life, including education, is so strong that it needs to be heavily underlined.

Our Lord himself made this crystal clear in his discussion with his disciples when they disputed over who would have the highest place in his kingdom: "...whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."—Mt 20:28–28.

As someone has said, the kingdom of God is the upside-down kingdom, turning the kingdoms and republics of this world on their head. The reality of the Gospel is that it is the organisations of this world, in politics, in business, in education and, all too often even in church organisations, that distort human life by the way they are structured. Our calling as a servant community is to put things the right way up.

An educational institution that is founded on the basis of a servant community will reflect this in the way it's organisation is structured. It must have an organisational structure with clear patterns of authority and leadership; but these will be collaborative rather than hierarchic in nature.

Those who teach will regard themselves as the servants of those they teach; those in administration will see themselves as the servants of teachers and students; those who are taught will teach one another and see themselves as training for more effectively serving their neighbours in love. The organisational structures will be purpose-built to facilitate the interactions of this servant community.

People will not be expected to fit into an organisational structure, but the structured will be designed to fit the people. Just as we design a house to fit the needs of people so we should organise educational institutions to fit the needs of people.

The educational practice of servant community

Ball (2009, 47–48) adds an important dimension in ensuring an effective servant community by what she calls "generativity":

"I use the term generativity to refer to the teachers' ability to continually add to their understanding by connecting their personal and professional knowledge with the knowledge that they gain from their students to produce or originate knowledge that is useful to them in pedagogical problem solving and in meeting the educational needs of their students.

...as the teachers assumed the stance of learners, they began to talk to and listen to their students so that they could learn from them and use that knowledge in their student-teacher interactions and in their instructional problem solving to figure out how to meet the students' needs. This required the teachers to engage in generative change on an ongoing basis."

Applying this to the reality of a servant community in learning, teachers will not only teach their students but will learn from them the realities of their lives in order to serve them. In the process, the students serve their teachers bringing generative change to their teaching practice. Any structured programme of learning must have goals, but the way in which these goals are achieved should be flexible in order to meet the varying life contexts of those concerned, especially the students.

The Freedom Writers (2009) also demonstrate the potential of interactive learning following the pathway pioneered by Erin Gruwell with great success with a class of "unteachable" students. They argue (2009, 309) that: "In the end, the sole end of teaching is to empower students to excel and learn on their own."

So far we have stressed the importance of interaction and relevance in learning; factors that are largely cultural in nature. But Gardner's work (2006) introduces another issue that is relevant to all humans in every social and cultural context. This factor is the nature of human intelligence as an inherent feature of being human. Gardner first raised this issue in 1983. A Harvard psychologist his work created a stir among psychologists, but was seen as liberating by many educators. He has continued to refine his work since then.

1. In his latest work he refers to the widely, if not universally, used IQ or SAT, tests for measuring human intelligence as based on a one-dimensional view of intelligence. He proceeds to say (2006, 4–5):

“Along with this one-dimensional view of how to assess people’s minds comes a corresponding view of school, which I will call the “uniform view”. A uniform school features a core curriculum—a set of facts that everyone should know—and very few electives. The better students, perhaps those with higher IQs, are allowed to take courses that call on critical reading, calculation, and thinking skills. In the uniform school, there are regular assessments, using paper and pencil instruments, of the IQ or SAT variety. These assessments yield reliable rankings of people; the best and the brightest get into the better colleges and perhaps—but only perhaps—they will also get better rankings in life. There is no question that this approach works well for certain people....

The uniform school sounds fair—after all, everyone is treated in the same way. But some years ago it occurred to me that this supposed rationale was completely unfair. The uniform school picks out and is addressed to a certain kind of mind—we might call it provisionally the IQ or SAT mind.... But to the extent that your mind works differently... school is certainly not fair to you.

I would like to present an alternative vision—one based on a radically different view of the mind, and one that yields a very different view of school. It is a pluralistic view of mind, recognizing many different and discrete facets of cognition, acknowledging that people have different cognitive strengths and contrasting cognitive styles.”

Personal experience over more than two decades confirms the massive disadvantages for many students when the pluralistic nature of intelligence is not recognised. This recognition needs to extend to the way in which learning is assessed as well as taught. Assessment using “paper and pencil instruments” will result in students whose minds work well this way being regarded as the “bright” students, and those whose minds work differently will be seen as “low achievers” or even “non-achievers”. More flexible and varied assessment instruments will give significantly different results.

To summarise, while there may well be more than one pathway to effective learning, there should be no doubt that there must be three ingredients if we are to optimise learning for all:

- Achieving learning goals through an interactive or generative pattern of teaching and learning;
1. Learning that is perceived by students as relevant to their life situation and culture;
  2. Flexibility to provide for the diversity of ways in which people learn.
  3. Christian education serving the Christian community

Especially when it comes to so-called “higher education” we must take care that we do not produce graduates who see themselves as the authorities to whom the Christian community must look for the correct understanding of Scripture. The church needs theologians and philosophers as servants contributing to the understanding of Scripture but not as authorities that the masses must follow.

Christian faith and life does not consist in believing and following theological formulas. It consists in faith in God revealed in the Christ to whom Scripture testifies (Jn 5:37–40) and following a way of life as his disciple in accordance with the testimony of Scripture. We must be ready to listen to one another if we are to take the path of discipleship. The ultimate guide for all of us must be Scripture illuminated by the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:5–17)

The absolute authority of Scripture, transcending all human authority, including that of the Christian theologian is not only clear in Scripture itself, as already stressed, but was basic to the Reformation. The Westminster Confession of Faith that emerged from that Reformation puts it most clearly when it says (Hodge 1869/1964, 42):

“The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we ‘are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”

The Second Helvetic Confession of the Swiss church, which was widely used beyond the borders of Switzerland, states to similar, if less concise, effect (Cochrane 1966, 250):

'Of the Spirit and the Letter. That same preaching of the Gospel is also called by the apostle "the spirit" and "the ministry of the spirit" because by faith it becomes effectual and living in the ears, nay more, in the hearts of believers through the illumination of the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 3:6). For the letter, which is opposed to the Spirit, signifies everything external, but especially the doctrine of the law which, without the Spirit and faith, works wrath and provokes sin in the minds of those who do not have a living faith. For this reason the apostle calls it "the ministry of death." In this connection the saying of the apostle is pertinent: "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

Abraham Kuyper of the Netherlands was a great example of the servant theologian. When he went to his first parish as pastor he had achieved a doctorate in theology with high honour. However, as deVries (1931/1970, vi-vii) writes:

"...under God, it was the simple country folk of his first parish that were instrumental in leading him into that fullness of spiritual life toward which his former experiences had pointed. As he ministered to them, they admired his talents; and soon they learned to love him for what he was; but they set themselves earnestly to united and individual prayer for his entire conversion to Christ. "And," as Kuyper writes afterward, "their faithful loyalty became a blessing to my heart, the rise of the morning star of my life. I had been apprehended, but I had not yet found the Word of reconciliation. In their simple language they brought me this in the absolute form in which alone my soul can rest. I discovered that the Holy Scripture does not only cause us to find justification by faith, but also discloses the foundation of all human life, the holy ordinances which must govern all human existence in Society and State."

Thus began his Christian life. At the Cross he made the great surrender of himself to his Savior and to His service. "To bear witness for Christ" became the passion of his life. That Christ is King in every department of human life and activity was the keynote which he kept ringing in all his writings, addresses and labors, whether as theologian or as statesman, as a leader in politics, as president of the Christian labor union, as promoter of Christian education, it was all done from the burning conviction, that: "Christ rules not merely by the tradition of what He once was, spake, did and endured; but by a living power which even now, seated as He is at the right hand of God, He exercises over lands and nations, generations, families and individuals."

"The fellowship of being near unto God must become reality, in the full and vigorous prosecution of our life. It must permeate and give color to our feeling, our perceptions, our sensations, our thinking, our imagining, our willing, our acting, our speaking. It must not stand as a foreign factor in our life but it must be the passion that breathes throughout our whole existence."

Note that he went to that first church with an extensive theological knowledge of Scripture and a belief in the Saviour revealed there, but only as he listened to "the simple country folk of his first parish" did he find the living reality of the living Word of reconciliation.

As a result, his Spirit filled life of discipleship that followed took him on paths that he did not anticipate when he embarked on his theological studies. He remained a theologian writing more than 2000 devotional meditations during his life time, but when he entered the path of political, social and educational life it was not his theological studies that guided him but the "Word of reconciliation" as it applied to these areas of life.

## **The Christian educational community in the world**

Finally, an authentic Christian education will be neither apart from the world around us nor shaped by that world. It will not be an enclosure that isolates us from the world, but will engage with the world around us following the path of our Lord who says "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:16). We return here to the bedrock foundation of the unconditional love that is the one commandment of the Gospel.

While we should never disguise our faith, and the impact it has on our scholarly and scientific endeavours, we will not truly engage with the world unless we use the common language of the academic world.

In this engagement with the world, we need to be open to learn as well as to share our own learning. In our endeavours to develop distinctively African path of education, for example, we might learn much from the “Sage Philosophy” pioneered by Henry Odera Oruka (1991), referred to earlier.

We need to be discerning in this engagement with the wider world, but we dare not avoid it if we wish to be faithful to the Gospel we profess. Though we are not of the world we are sent into the world in the footsteps of the Master whom we follow.

## **Postscript: (Donovan 1978/1985, 200)**

### **An African Creed**

We believe in the one High God, who out of love created the beautiful world and everything good in it. He created man and wanted man to be happy in the world. God loves the world and every nation and tribe on the earth. We have known this High God in the darkness, and now we know him in the light. God promised in the book of his word, the bible. that he would save the world and all the nations and tribes.

We believe that God, made good his promise by sending his son, Jesus Christ, a man in the flesh, a Jew by tribe, born poor in a little village, who left his home and was always on safari doing good, curing people by the power of God, teaching about God and man, showing that the meaning of religion is love. He was rejected by his people, tortured and nailed hands and feet to a cross, and died. He lay buried in the grave, but the hyenas did not touch him, and on the third day. he rose from the grave. He ascended to the skies. He is the Lord.

We believe that all our sins are forgiven through him. All who have faith in him must be sorry for their sins, be baptized in the Holy Spirit of God, live the rules of love and share the bread together in love, to announce the good news to others until Jesus comes again. We are waiting for him. He is alive. He lives. This we believe. Amen.

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