

Solidarity in Mission Strategy with an Emphasis on Redeeming Education, Engagement in Resolution of Conflicts and Empowerment of Target Population

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Introduction

Mr. Peder Jensen, the General Secretary of Danish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, has requested me to contribute to the eMissio journal. In his letter, Peder expressed his wish that I come up with the three most important needs of my church in its holistic approach. Paying careful attention to this suggestion, I decided to discuss these needs which I indicated in the subtitle of my presentation. I believe that these are current and burning needs to be addressed, and therefore present them as follow:

1. Redeeming Education for the Acknowledgement of God

Almost all great ideas like philosophy, religion, science, mythology, culture etc. have gateways to people's mind. In this regard, school curriculum/education is the main gateway for ideologies/views to our mind. When Creation is taken into account education becomes a main stream through which, information about the beginning and development of the universe and the emergence of life, flows into human mind and shapes its worldviews. The idea of education is so strong so that the slogan "Education is Power!" is used for promoting it to capture human attention all over the world. No one doubts that this slogan hit its target precisely for the whole world hastens to acquire education.

But, some adjustments must be made to this slogan, I believe. In contrast to this slogan, I argue that though education is invaluable and important tool to bring changes and advancement in human life, one should not undermine the fact that absolute power belongs to God. The Prophet Jeremiah who addresses this fact writes, "The Lord of hosts has sworn by himself... It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom and by his understanding stretched out the heavens" (Jer. 51; 14-15).

Nehemiah too, declares what God is and His mighty deeds [Power] are in his book 9:6, saying, "You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you." In many similar texts of the Bible, we

are told that power belongs to God who creates the heavens, the earth and preserves them. Arguing for the belongingness of power to God, therefore, I strongly suggest that we should refresh ourselves with what education is all about so that we may not make it our idol, but handle and use it for the glory of God and apply it as a tool to serve human beings and preserve the creation in the spirit of stewardship.

In the modern world, education is a macro environmental factor which cannot be escaped or avoided by any individual or society, for it is the only way through which one is skilled, empowered and equipped to engineer his/her future career. In the industrial and developed world, even chopping logs for firewood has become a profession which demands education and training. That is why it is said of course: “If you think education is expensive try ignorance.” It is true and understandable that education is an excellent means to prepare architects, builders, medics, lawyers, teachers, etc. to provide for public needs of services and materials.

However, education as a vital tool of change for better life does not stand on itself but needs an object of study on which it exerts researches to achieve the output that is needed by the consumers. The objects are things such as land, water, animals, plants and meteorological phenomena such as wind, fogs, and rains. If these objects are not already there in the creation, what can all these sophisticated laboratories examine? To conduct research, even the sophisticated scientific laboratory instruments need raw material from which they themselves are produced. Without raw material (an object) even the world-class mind scientists can do nothing. Therefore, objects which are already there in the creation are inevitably required for scientific research and its achievements.

Then, the question here must be where these objects of study come from. Without complicating the answer, objects of study as detailed above, come from the creation which has a Maker. As education studies these objects and acts on them, one can conclude that Creation as a whole is an object of education on which studies and researches are conducted. For this reason, education should acknowledge and give glory to the Maker and Owner of the Creation. Thus, both the one who educates and is educated should know and understand that “teaching should always seek, and learning should always involve, a response to God” (Greene, p. 40). But the way education has turned and is being spun under the influence of the Enlightenment since the 18th century has served purposes other than the meaning God intended for the world which He has made and has stood in contrary position to this fact.

While discussing education as a gateway into human worldview, it is good to ask what meaning education has been given. According to Atkinson, three meanings are suggested and detailed by myself as follow (Atkinson, p. 334):

- Education is rearing and nourishing a learner according to the potential and gifts he/she possesses
- Education deals with understanding learners as empty vessels that should be filled with knowledge

- Education includes a process by which a learner grows in knowledge, awareness and life skills.

Personally, it is palatable for me to understand education as a process by which a person develops in knowledge, awareness and life skills and their acquirements should lead a person to love God and his neighbor, not only him/herself. Love of God and neighbor which should govern knowledge, awareness and life skills cannot be realized unless someone individually or collectively shoulders a responsibility of attaching Facts to the purpose, meaning and values God intends for them.

Why is attaching facts to the purpose of God and the meaning He intends for them and their values so important in our educational system? The reason is that education without love to God and neighbor can be deadly as witnessed by history. In this regard it is worth to remind ourselves about the:

- Holocaust acts perpetrated by the Nazi
- Past and present danger posed by Al-Qaeda and ISIS,
- Mass destructive (Chemical) weapons and merciless exploitations,
- Injustice, unfairness, nepotism, partiality, bribery, theft of human's organs by medics, global warming and nuclear arsenal.

It is worth noting that the unprecedented crimes and atrocities, are engineered and guided by people with a high level of education and knowledge. I, therefore, argue that it is not bare education/knowledge which avoids these atrocities, crimes and corruptions, but education that is polished and geared by the fear and love of God and neighbors. Therefore, education which embraces love to God and neighbor is an urgent need for our globe here and now.

In this discussion, the school curriculum must be addressed, I believe. School curriculum, as one understands, is composed of the Creation. The Enlightenment of the 18th century calls it "the study of mother nature." School curriculum, in addition to the study of creation touches three areas of study as discussed by Greene (Greene, p. 151):

- The study of humans in their individual and social life
- The study of humans' cultures
- The study of humans scientific and technological alterations to the original creation.

It is worth noting that the study of the original creation and the process of social, cultural, scientific and technological advancement are differently understood and handled by secular and Christian teachers. A secular teacher alleges to what is known as "modernity", a philosophical thinking which divorces facts from values and reduces perceptions of the world and school studies to a purposeless and meaningless collection of objective facts, as noted by Greene. For a Christian teacher, however, the school curriculum consists of things God has made, continues to maintain and redeem. Greene regrets that this difference is not seen by many Christian schools sometimes. Of course,

Christianity has no subject of studies of its own, but enjoys the same mathematics, the same science, the same geography, etc. as the secular worldview does. But it applies their methodology in reverence to the Creator of the universe and restores meaning to the creation. Christianity, therefore, lends its allegiance to the acknowledgement and reverence of the Creator of the universe. Accordingly, the right application of the school curriculum should keep to the conviction that (Ibid, p. 166):

- Neutral facts regarding anything do not exist
- Truth is not neutral information, but a person, Jesus Christ
- Jesus is not a mere spiritual truth, but the only truth that exists in any part of the created world. By His powerful words, He creates and maintains the World moment by moment
- Jesus' trademark is on everything both visible and invisible.

From these points one can conclude that the world has a purpose. That purpose is channeling Gods' self-revelation to humanity and humanity's friendship with God in which man serves God and humanity. As discussed above, education is the foundation of all professions. It can be a basis for Godless, purposeless and valueless types of lives. It can also be a fertile ground for lifestyle in which God is revered, honored, worshipped, feared and mankind is served in the spirit of godly love.

Our mandate and calling today, therefore, should be that education is polished and geared toward raising a generation who fears and honors God. Our effort should be, therefore, encouraging Churches, parents and educators, to go beyond planting Churches, to go beyond just having their kids at school, to go beyond doing business and offering good education to their children, and facilitate means and ways so that our children receive education which is redeemed and reclaimed for the purpose of revealing God in all His beauty, glory and serving human needs in the spirit of Christ-like mind and open morality.

To disseminate the idea of reverencing God in educational affairs, we need unity. Unity must be understood in this context as a state of relationship, a state of fellowship and a state of partnership as taught in the Bible so that they radiate the vertical and horizontal relationship. Biblically, the word relation indicates strained vertical and horizontal state of relationship of Man (Sin), Fellowship, shows the removal of jeopardy of relation and restoration of friendship (forgiveness and reconciliation), Partnership, the advancement of restored vertical and horizontal relation for the furtherance of divine purpose in education

Fellowship and Partnership are almost identical ideas in spiritual language which indicate, among other things, fellowship in the Gospel (Phil. 1:5, 7). This fellowship means:

1. Sharing common concern with Christ who gave the Great Commission. Christian Churches or Ministries engage in "...preaching, proclaiming and warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Col. 1: 28). Note that proclaiming, teaching and warning everyone demands laboring and striving according to the work of God which works in the gospel preachers (Col. 1; 29).

2. Individual Christians engage in teaching sciences, mathematics, history, geography, do other businesses and apply them in reverence to the Creator of the universe and for the benefit of humans. This happens when we Christians understand that school curriculum consists of things God has made and continue to maintain and redeem. Note that God is an original worker as the story of creation narrates, working now and will continue to work. A redeemed community is, therefore, God's "...workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

3. It is crystal clear that God values all professions, as long as they are genuine. This is to say that all genuine works, including education, are to be understood and exercised as viewed and valued by the Creator of the universe. This is beautifully penned by Nelson as follows:

He [God] values work that seeks to understand and oversee this world- for example, the work of the climatologist who studies the impact of humans on global ecology; the physicist who looks into the makeup of the atom and the application of that knowledge to humans, the publisher who helps distribute information and ideas to people. Jobs like these reflect God's work as Creator, and those who do them are actually partners with Christ in maintaining His creation (Nelson, p.696)

Nelson observes that good works are performed in partnership with Christ. This partnership demands sharing of the objectives of what we do. Our shared objective in teaching every man in all wisdom is to present mature people in Christ Jesus. To do this we need unity in which we have shared values.

To this end, every child must be taught that she/he is responsible to God and that, ultimately, she/he must give an account to Him "whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Every subject taught, every method applied, and every vocation desired must fall under the dominion to fear God and keep His commandments.

By doing this we defend Creation against the purposeless, meaningless and evolutionary thinking in education, reclaim it for God intended purpose, intent and values. In this regard partnership in strengthening the existing Christian schools and establishing new ones should be the area of focus. Here wider unity, partnership, consultation, joint actions and exchange of experiences are needed.

2.1. Engagement in Conflict Resolution

Unity is disrupted by the evils that are engulfing the world. Unfair distribution of wealth, unbalanced power accumulated in the hands of the few superpowers, unfair balance of World Trade, greed of the halves, unprecedented corruption and power abuse which is seen in governments, divisions and conflicts even among those who have the Word of Reconciliation, postelection violence and conflicts, are fatally choking our world. The existence of these mega problems indicates that Unity is at the stake of surging conflicts in every region.

Conflict is defined as, "competitive or opposing action of incompatibles, antagonizing state or action as of divergent ideas, interest, or persons." The incompatible attitude and

action which manifests itself in a form of conflict”, according to Augsburger, is a universal phenomenon, with cultural pathways and patterns which shape the behaviors of individuals in dispute (Augsburger, p 275). From this explanation of Augsburger, two conclusions can be drawn:

- Conflict is a universal behavior, because it affects and involves all human beings and other natural world as well as heavenly beings (Note satanic rebellion happened in the heavenly place, Isa 14: 12)
- Conflict is cultural, because it is exercised and handled congruent with culture’s views and values (resolution involves and honors cultural expectations)

Augsberger goes on and says further that conflict is ineradicable from and inevitable in human life and its understanding and handling varies from culture to culture. For conflict is universal, ineradicable and inevitable, one should not think that conflicts should be eliminated, and stability must rule always, because from ordinary observation of human behavior one can see frequent incompatibles, antagonizing state or action, divergent ideas and interest of individuals. These incompatibles can be driven by a number of factors. As witnessed by history, conflicts have been exerted between different individuals, groups and nations and inflicted immeasurable miseries, claimed lives and destroyed massive resources.

One of the arenas of conflict is the concept and application of nationalism. Nationalism, as political and social expression, emerged in the 18th century. In the twentieth century, the idea of nationalism took ground among formerly colonized nations with an aim of achieving and consolidating their political self-determination. In parallel with former colonized nations, it has been also advanced among well-established nations, as asserted by Marger, “Where diverse ethnic groups asserted their identity and sought greater social and political autonomy.” (Marger, p. 577)

In modern time, nationalism is divided into two categories: civic and ethnic. Civic nationalism asserts that a nation should be understood politically regardless of race, color, creed, gender, language and ethnicity. It is exercised, according to Marger, when “people possess equal political and social rights and choose to be members of a nation, along with others, regardless of ethnicity, who share broadly similar beliefs and values” (Marger, p. 577). Ethnic nationalism, on the other hand, favors people’s allegiance to an ethnic group or nationality in which they have been born or are belonging. Here a larger political entity which encompasses many ethnic groups/nationalities, is unacceptable.

World events show that in the 1980s and 1990s, the level of ethnic nationalism increasingly heightened and stirred political conflicts in different parts of the world. As Marger notes, the eruption of ethnic conflict in Canada was handled with peaceful political means whereas in Rwanda, Srilanka and Russia, violent means were used with regrettable consequences.

As we are in the second decade of the twenty-first century, we must realize that ethnic nationalism has exhibited to be a driving force across the world. As shown by current political development, according to Marger, “ethnic nationalism appears to be the most

ubiquitous, interactable, and devastating global force” (Ibid. P. 576), at the risk of civic nationalism. One can just look at what is recently going on in Spain where Catalonia is striving to be an independent nation in Europe. As we hear every day, the Catalans are demanding independence and their leaders are arrested for this cause. If such an arrest is taking place in the Third World, the western governments and Human Rights organizations would have aired too loud in condemnation and criminalized the act of arrest. But when it happens amongst themselves, they are too silent.

Multiethnicity society is featured by inherent conflicts and changes where, (Ibid. p.594):

1. Significant economic, political and social inequalities are prevalent among the people
2. Cultural differences are not wisely handled and respected
3. Increasing diversity and ethnic nationalism is the condition of the contemporary world

To these can be added the global immigration of people from developing nations to the developed and industrialized world (West- and North-ward movement.) Due to language and a number of cultural barriers, immigrants have difficulties to integrate into the society to which they migrate and to learn the skills they need to cope at their new homes and get discriminated to take up jobs. As the result they get frustrated and fall prey for undesired behaviors, including terrorism.

2.1 Negative effects of resurging Ethnic nationalism

The resurgence of ethnic nationalism does not come only with good outcome, as preached by its proponents, but with evil and regrettable consequences. Although it is widely believed and accepted that ethnic nationalism protects ethnic groups, their language, culture and other values, it is susceptible to political actions on the basis of the claims of superiority of a dominant ethnic group over others, especially over a group that is marked as potentially dangerous. When such is the case, the majority group seeks to engulf, subordinate, expel and even goes to the extent of exterminate the rival group. The unprecedented example in this case is the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 which was inflicted by the majority Hutus on the minority Tutsi. God forbid what would happen if the current situation in my country Ethiopia is not handled wisely and intervened by churches and the government. It is worth noting that in the Rwandan deadly conflict, people who lived in the same area and spoke the same language, people who often intermarried and practiced the same faith as Christians, massacred each other.

Here we see that nominal sharing of the same faith cannot be a safe exit when ethnic nationalism takes the wrong direction. Even if we are Christians who are guided by a conviction that “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5: 9) are ransomed and redeemed by the blood of the slain Lamb and destined for the same Kingdom, the sentiment of ethnic nationalism can engulf us, as it did elsewhere, and make us potential victims as Tutsis and Hutus who opposed the massacre on one hand or become victims of post conflict retributive justice as the perpetrators of the Rwandan Genocide.

The Rwandan atrocity is history, of course, unless it relapses because of wrong handling by the Rwandan people and international community. But still there are volatile situations which can invite deadly conflict in Africa, Asia, Europe, etc, where people are fighting to realize their ethnic national demands. The conflict in Darfur, hostility in South Sudanese, ethnocratic demands here and there (including total separation), polarized situations in the middle east, north and east Africa are current potential bottlenecks for the peace of Africa and Asia in particular and the rest of the world in general. Peace concern is thus our Christian calling. How can we respond to this calling? How can multiethnic conflicts and conflicts of other natures be warded off before they unleash irreversible negative consequences? Partnership, consultation, sharing of experience and prayers are the answers.

3. Strategy of Empowering Target Population before Exit

Mission organizations came to a continent which was called “Dark Africa”, because of its lack of infrastructure. The missionaries opened schools, clinics, hospitals, colleges and centers for people with disabilities. In their commitments to the African people, they trained medical doctors, nurses, university professors, teachers, government heads, including individuals who later became presidents and prime ministers in some countries, army and police chiefs, etc. In the service of the general public, they healed millions of patients, maintained health, raised sanitary awareness and contributed much in the battle against harmful practices like Female Genital Mutilation, rape and kidnapping of women.

In the spiritual field, they preached the gospel, helped in the establishment of national churches, Bible schools, Seminaries and colleges to train evangelists, pastors and even sent indigenous people abroad for higher education. In these instances, we are highly indebted to mission organizations and their staff for what is offered in Human Resources financial and material support.

As the time went on, however, the mission organization themselves are in shortage of resources as interest in the young generation is shifting. On the top of this, mission organizations tend to look elsewhere to reach the unreached people. Thus, they are showing an inclination of withdrawing their financial and material support. Here comes the need of a good exit strategy. The exit strategy should include training people who shoulder responsibility in administrative affairs and creating Income Generating Sources for the churches that they midwived and raised so that these churches become self-reliant, in the need of their economic affairs and continue to be witnesses in their locations and beyond.

Literature

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