

Mission, Ministry, and Theological Foundations for Christian Education

キリスト教教育の使命とミニストリーの神学的基盤

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要 約

本稿は、キリスト教教育の使命とミニストリー(奉仕・伝導活動等を含む)における、一つの聖書的・神学的視点の考察を試みるものであるが、特にキリスト教系学校の建学の精神、理念、目的に焦点をおいている。そのような教育へのアプローチを理解し、そして協力するということはどういう意味をもつかが中心テーマである。この視点において、学校の使命と目的とは神の性質に発する。神の使命(人間をよりキリストに似たものとする、すなわち一般社会にも信徒の群れにもふさわしい人間とすることによって世を御自分と和解させること)から学校の使命が出る。学校の具体的な役割、ミニストリーは神のミニストリーによって形成され、そして導かれる。神のミニストリーはイエス・キリスト(人間となりたる神の言葉として)の生涯によって表わされ、そして実現される。イエス・キリストは今日も聖霊と信徒を通して御自分のミニストリーを続けている。キリスト教系学校では教職員と学生が神の継続的な営みに参加することを通して自分の存在の意味と使命を達成する力を見出すことができる。

ABSTRACT

This paper articulates one biblical-based Christian theological perspective on mission and ministry (including service, evangelism, and other activities), giving particular consideration to the ideals and purposes of Christian educational institutions. A central theme is what it means to understand and cooperate in such a system of education. In this perspective, the mission and purposes of the school issue out of the nature of God. They flow from his own mission to reconcile the world to himself through formation of human beings into Christlikeness, that is, into people equipped to be members both of society and of the family of God. The specific function or ministry of the organization is formed and informed by the ministry of God, as exemplified and actualized in Jesus and his living in human form as the Word of God. Christ continues this ministry through his people, and Christian educational institutions find their meaning and empowerment to accomplish their mission through the participation of staff members and students in the ongoing work of God.

キーワード: mission, ministry, incarnational, worldview, Christlikeness

INTRODUCTION

Christian schools in Japan typically require faculty members either to be Christians or, if not, to “understand” the identity of the institution or “cooperate” in fulfilling its commitments and purposes. The educational ideals of Hokusei Gakuen are representative of many institutions. Sarah C. Smith (1887-1909), the school system’s founder, embraced the following ideal:

The fundamental idea of a school is to educate in the various branches of useful knowledge and thus fit the pupils for the various duties and responsibilities of active life. The religious and spiritual influence brought to bear on the pupils is the most important thing in the school. Both of these ideas may and should be realized in a good school (p.1).

The mission of Hokusei Gakuen Women’s Junior College (Hokusei Constitution, 1999) reflects the same essential values:

This college, established on the foundation of Christianity, takes as its purpose the formation of free human beings who live in love and service, together with the purpose of conducting junior college education of women, in which learning is cultivated and knowledge and technical skills acquired [author’s translation] (p.1).

At the time of employment, faculty members agree to these terms; however, as years pass it becomes apparent that “understanding” the nature of a Christian educational institution means quite different things to different individuals. For some, it may mean a heart-felt commitment of one’s life to Jesus Christ, to others intellectual assent to the principles for which the school stands, and for still others basically *tatemaie*, an outward acceptance (shown for example by attending a yearly Christmas worship), which may be accompanied by inward resistance.

In the light of this perception gap, the need becomes apparent to examine in greater depth the purposes to which these institutions and individual faculty members pledge themselves. For those who even take the mission of Christian education seriously—aside from whether or not they actually believe in it—a more thorough understanding of its nature and foundations holds the possibility for more fully accomplishing their institutions’ stated purpose and goals. This paper will be an attempt to provide such an understanding and, hopefully, help Christian educators and administrators avoid being guilty of expecting understanding of something which has not been adequately explained. This work will deal with Christian education not only in terms of religious studies but as something which incorporates all academic disciplines and experiences of student life as components of human development. Although as biblical theology which takes the God of the Bible as its standard of objectivity and source of authority, it also (as is true with theology in general) reflects the author’s personal theological stance.

MISSION, EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY, AND THE NATURE OF GOD

The mission of an organization such as a church or school is, simply stated, the purpose which God has given it, what it exists to be and do in the surrounding community and larger culture. The mission of the Church, and institutions such as Christian schools which come under its umbrella, is to live in such a way as to please and give praise to God. Essential to this type of life is living in loving relationship first with God and, through this, with other people. In order for such a life to become a reality, God must redeem humans from their fallen and broken state. Provision for this was made through the death and resurrection of Christ, and this salvation will ultimately be actualized and realized historically at the end of time. In the meantime, however, God's people are to live with eyes fixed not merely on his work in the past or the promise of future glory but also in the present world, participating in the process of his restoration of humanity (and all his creation) to himself.¹

Therefore, experiencing, modeling, and proclaiming this life-transforming love of God, in teacher-student relationships for instance, are essential aspects of living in accordance with the purposes for which God created people, for carrying out the mission he gives. Education is not the primary vocation of a Christian teacher, with Christian faith an appendage to this or even a means to achieving it. Life in union with God is the vocation, and education serves as a means to this type of life. To live for the sake of Christ is to abandon the search for accomplishment, acquisition, fulfillment, and success as they are understood in other vocations (Neuhaus, 1979, p.60).

The New Testament term most commonly translated "ministry" is *diakonia*, which is also rendered "service" and "mission" in various contexts and in various versions of the Bible. The service to which the word referred in common Greek usage was, for example, that of waiting tables or working as the servant of a king. However, though the same word is used to convey it, *diakonia* in some cases refers not only to specific actions of service but a God-given role to play, a commission such as "the ministry of reconciliation" (II Corinthians 5 : 18) or "the ministry of the word" (Acts 6 : 4).² In many English translations and in the following discussion, "mission" is used to communicate this meaning.

In a Christian context, both mission and ministry derive from the person and nature of God, who grants to each person and group appropriate roles to play which are unique, yet consonant with his own character and overarching purposes. Ministry grows out of the mission which God gives. Ministry is narrower in focus than mission and involves a specific set of people, circumstances, and needs. Those who establish a school, for example, may view college education of the women of their region as the particular means by which God calls and equips the staff to accomplish his redemptive and life-fulfilling purposes in the context of their culture and community.

The roles God assigns people, whether corporately or individually, also align with the

gifts, abilities, personality and potential of those who receive them, thus providing the greatest ultimate fulfillment for them in performing their appointed function in the course of their lives. However, the primary significance and relevance of ministry is neither the personal satisfaction of those who perform ministry, nor in the amount of work accomplished for the betterment of society. Rather, ministry takes on meaning and is "successful" to the extent to which it reflects the nature of the God who inspires it and to the extent to which it transcends mere human efforts at goodness or social progress. It actually becomes God's working in and through people who embrace his purposes and commit themselves to his work in this world. ". . . Obedient response to God's ministry becomes our ministry . . ." (Anderson, 1997, p.3).

There is first the downward motion of God's revelation of himself and his will to believing people. This enables a horizontal movement, the word of God going throughout the world, touching human need as those who have received his redeeming love interact with those who have not yet done so. This results, finally, in a motion back upward, ministry *to God* on behalf of the world (Anderson, 1997, pp.78-86). Praise to God for the liberation of suffering people is an example.

In this sense, Christian ministry (educational and other forms) differs fundamentally from secular types or other religious activity in that it consists essentially not of service to people but to God. The opinions, beliefs, and worldviews of all within the organization take on minor importance in comparison with those of God. Ray Anderson (paraphrasing Robert Greenleaf) states that one inside such an institution in a position of leading others ". . . is not subservient to the desires and goals of the organization, but is a servant of the mission of the organization (Anderson, 1997, p.198)."

Thus the personal views and interpretations of the individuals who happen at a given point in time to be staffing the institution are not to be the organization's driving force. Neither are students' preferences to be given supreme importance. Rather, authority lies in the mission to which it has committed itself.

Affirming that the school's ministry (including all aspects of academic and student life) is ministry *to God* also sets the direction for specifically religious and moral education. If based on a relationship with the living God, these need not focus merely on "values clarification," which is ultimately dependent on the assumption that the student knows (or will discover) a good path for life. This form of education often serves merely to actively support the student in selecting an approach to life which is ultimately damaging and destructive. Eugene Peterson (1997) states,

The truth of the gospel is that God in Christ rules and saves. The reality of the human condition is that we are determined to rule and save and that we make a thorough mess of it every time we do. We want to rule ourselves and save ourselves. We want to rule others and save others.

Even at our best, we can't do it—no matter how much we know, no matter how well-intentioned we are (p.89).

In light of God's ideals for human development which the Bible sets forth, limiting moral and *spiritual education to values clarification constitutes, in effect, a rejection of his educational ideals and an abdication of authority entrusted to those who teach.* Authentic Christian education enables learners not only to clarify values but have them transformed in ways which make possible full human development (becoming "mature, attaining the full measure of perfection found in Christ" as Ephesians 4:13 describes it).

GOD AS THE SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

If mission and ministry stem from the nature of God, it then becomes imperative to gain as full a grasp as possible of his character and worldview: his attitudes, allegiances, assumptions, and values. Jesus Christ indicates one quality of God's way of being in John 4:24 when he states, "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." Keeping in mind that worship, from a biblical standpoint (see I Corinthians 10:31), is not limited to programmed religious services but extends to all aspects of a life which is honoring to God (including education), these words of Christ shed much light on the type of formative experience a school ought to provide for its students. In this perspective, authentic spirituality is not unrelated to but is actually an integral part of academics and other aspects of student life.

Thus in order to perform the type of ministry which God has given it, an educational institution needs to place a high value on spiritual formation as a part of developing the student's *total humanity*. This entails the growth of students into adults who spend their time, invest their energies, utilize their abilities, develop their intellects, manage their material resources, and relate to others in ways which reflect the teaching and training work of God through his Spirit in their lives. This type of education stands in opposition to, for example, merely ensuring that students accurately understand information and gain intellectual skills (which then may become useless once they have passed entrance exams or secured employment). A key goal of Christian education is for students to order their lives and function in the "real world" of society so as to actually live according to the principles and understanding they have acquired. Christian education aims at development of the *whole person for a whole life*, with heavy stress placed on spiritual formation.

This emphasis reflects a key aspect of the biblical worldview: that human beings are, more than anything, spiritual in nature. It also reflects the viewpoint that knowledge, as opposed to being accessible *only* through scientific investigation, is broader in scope and more free-flowing in nature, residing in and made possible by the faith-based relationship between God and his people. In other words, not only is seeing believing, but in another (just as real) sense, believing is seeing. Knowledge is not purely objective in nature.

intrinsically unrelated to opinion, viewpoint, or faith. It also is inevitably subjective in one vital sense, in that the human will plays a significant role in the way an individual views the world and interprets external stimuli.

Spiritual formation (like worship, as noted above) is not limited to formal Christianity-related classes or religious activities, but extends to all aspects of student and school life. Infusing them with a spiritual element gives their reason for being and power to actually contribute to the development of the student into maturity. Each policy, decision, plan, and class finds its meaning as it aligns with the overall purposes of the institution, including spiritual formation. Teaching economics, for instance, rather than approaching the subject matter as purely secular, may also appropriately include references to the teachings of Christ on the role money ought to play in life (not to mention the instructor's teaching students in a manner reflecting the spirit of Christ).

In a biblical worldview, developing authentic spirituality, "the presence and activity of God the Spirit" (Peterson, 1997, p. 34), is growth into Christlikeness. This differs, of course, from attempting to do everything Christ did, yet it is an attempt "to live my life as he would live my life if he were I" (Willard, 1998, p. 283). With this spiritual aspect the defining characteristic of the ideal student whom the educational institution would send into society, guiding students into maturity as human beings cannot, therefore, be limited to "human formation." It must extend to "human formation into Christlikeness," which can prepare the student to serve both society and God.

To depict Christian education as Christ-centered is to distinguish it from merely teaching what an individual teacher thinks to be true (an instructor of any subject, including and perhaps especially, a religious one). A certain amount of varying interpretations of Christian teachings is obviously inevitable. However, if an educator models or overtly teaches concepts or values which contradict those of God as revealed in the Bible, though that teacher's right to do so may be protected by the ideals of "academic freedom," such teaching is clearly out of step with the direction which God has laid down for education under his leadership. It is a move away from authentic freedom, which the Bible, paradoxically but quite inseparably, links to obedient acceptance of the presence and teachings of God. II Corinthians 3:17 asserts that ". . . where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom," and in John 8:31-32 Christ promises, "If you hold to my teaching, . . . you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Adherence to Christian educational principles at this point may require non-Christian educators to restrain themselves from teaching some of their most deeply held beliefs, which they cherish just as deeply as Christians do the teachings of Christ. It also requires educators to insist on moving school life in a Christian direction at points on which they would remain silent were the institution a secular one.

CHRIST AS THE MODEL TEACHER

Every teacher has some concept (however vague, complex, or novel) of what characterizes an ideal instructor. Whatever that person conceives the ideal to be, that conception influences the type of teaching one seeks to provide. Educators in Christian institutions may look to Christ as the model for the teaching ministry.

First, Christ represents the model for mission and ministry in that, as he had a God-given mission, teachers also are to perform their function not on their own initiative but in response to the One who calls individuals into such a ministry. I John 4:14 describes Christ's mission: ". . . The Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world." Though the objectives involved in Christ's calling and personal mission were unique, Christian faith affirms that God continues to call, equip, and work through people who allow him the freedom to do so.

This is not to suggest that following Christ's model of ministry means Christian educators must attempt to "save" students. Christians have no call to save anyone, and cannot, even if such a mission is undertaken. Yet *Christ* chooses through his grace to save through human instruments. This includes not only "evangelists" or teachers of religious subjects but all Christians, who inevitably lead others in some sense either to Christ or away from him, both through the way they tell the gospel verbally (or fail to do so) and by how much their daily lives reflect the spirit of Christ's love. In this respect, Christ continues the work he began in his life as a human (the eternal work of God his Father, of redeeming and fulfilling all creation).

Second, Christ constitutes the model for ministry in the sense that a king serves as a model for those of his kingdom who look to him for direction and authority. ". . . Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God" (Luke 8:1), in so doing revealing the central theme of his teaching. This royal metaphor indicates that he (as the Son of God and, therefore, one with God) plays the roles in the lives of his people which a king ideally plays in a kingdom, including: assigning tasks, granting authority to complete the missions on which he sends his messengers, and guaranteeing their success (though on his terms and in his time).

Third, Christ, in overcoming sin and death, set the tone and gave inspiration for ministry. Not only did his death, burial, and resurrection make authentic ministry possible by atoning for the sin which distorts and cripples each person's humanity and capacity for ministry. Jesus also revealed ministry's true nature and spirit, providing examples to be emulated. A theme which runs throughout these events is the grace of God. Deliberately rejecting the power, success, and popularity which he had the ability to make his own, Christ chose to obey the Father's will and be in a position of total powerlessness, submitting himself to shame and rejection (Philippians 2:5-8). This same passage (2:5) also holds the life

of Christ up as the standard to which all, including educators, must attain: "Your attitude should be the same as that of (him)."

A genuine recognition of the gift of Christ to each person, who otherwise would rightfully receive God's wrath, can yield an attitude of humility, even to the highest ranking professor or administrator. It can form a bridge between them and those who learn. The unworthiness of every sinful human before a righteous God—the need to live by grace—results in an equality which places all, including staff and students, on a level plane. Acceptance of this reality gives birth to the potential for education to actually become a form of worship, as the Bible indicates God expects it to be.

Fourth, Christ provides a model for instructors in demonstrating how to link students with truth and understanding. He does this by providing a way for them to be joined with God and live in the light of this relationship. The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer, including the tenet that all people have equal access to God through faith in Christ, has received heavy emphasis in Protestant tradition. This belief has historically played a vital role in the formation of Western societies' concepts and values regarding equality and freedom (despite the more recent erosion of Christian influence in many areas). However, in Japan, though many schools were founded through Protestant missions, the society has embraced equality and freedom in the post-war years as *secular* ideals, absent their Christian roots. The fact that egalitarian and libertarian values entered Japan from the outside and were to some extent forced on the Japanese (particularly by post-war governments and, in some cases, missionaries) may have contributed to this response.

Nevertheless, at the heart of Christian faith is the conviction that equality and freedom come through the cross of Jesus Christ. Going far deeper than movements in Japanese history or international politics, the belief is that his death made provision for all people of all times to become free from the bondage of sin. It is sin which damages and ultimately destroys the humanity of individuals—the very thing which educational institutions commit themselves to developing. An awareness of the meaning of the cross can guide students throughout the course of their lives as they seek to create an egalitarian society.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AS THE POWER TO ENLIGHTEN

God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, comes to live in the heart and life of each who willingly receives his presence there. With this acceptance comes liberation from the ignorance, self-will, and other forces which had prevented a personal and accurate knowledge of him and the world he created. This enlightenment, or perhaps more accurately, the transformation which this indwelling presence of God brings into an individual's life is not a change from a bad person to one who is better than others. Neither is it necessarily a change from intellectual dullness to brilliance.

Rather, according to New Testament teaching, it is a change from being dead to being

alive. Ephesians 2:1-2 addresses those who have found life through faith in Christ: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the course of this world" As this life in Christ is essentially spiritual in nature, being born into it is obviously not merely a transformation from physical death to life. It is the development of an empty, ultimately meaningless life into one which is filled by the presence of God, who alone is able to grant fulfillment, satisfaction, and meaning to human existence. One key aspect of this transformed existence is intellectual development. Genuine life consists in an ability to live in relationship with, in the presence of, God himself.

Thus God's ministry is a ministry of presence—not one primarily of information, advice, or even activity. The God who makes understanding possible also walks beside the learner in the events of each day (actually, though obviously not normally in a physical sense). In the same way, he calls those who choose to join in his work (for example in an institution operating under his name) not merely to work hard, operate many programs, communicate concepts accurately, or even to care deeply about the welfare of others, but beyond all these to participate in his own ministry of presence. The power for Christian ministry lies in the presence of God in the lives of those who minister. Through them, those who receive ministry can, in turn, discover the presence and activity of God in their lives.

In an educational context, this involves the teacher's modeling faith and encouraging students in their development into Christlike maturity. It entails the teacher's living in God's presence, in a personal relationship of interaction and dialogue with God. When this relationship is intact and functioning, serving as an educator in a Christlike manner is not simply a task to perform, a duty, or an ideal—but an ontological necessity, an outgrowth of the educator's identity as a child of God.

The difference between this type of ministry and those not based on the presence of God is the difference between organization and organism. The biblical model for a human institution such as a church or school is not primarily that of a chain of authority which reflects a written constitution, maintains traditions, and operates programs through departments and committees. Rather, it is a living entity, a group of people whom God has gathered for specific purposes, whom he has also gifted and equipped to play the roles his will requires.

This gifting involves not only human talents and abilities but gifts of the Spirit (see Romans 12:1-8, I Corinthians 12:1-31, and Ephesians 4:1-16), including the gifts of teaching and administration. Through these individuals, God performs the ministry of raising up people to live in loving relationship with himself and each other. He makes it possible, for example, for teachers to effectively aid students in developing a truly enlightened view of the world. As his people discover, develop, and utilize their gifts, his mission and ministry are actualized and fulfilled.

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

As God's people respond to him in faith and obedience, engaging in the ministry which they receive from him, churches form. Communities of faith emerge as people seek to live out together the faith which God has born in their lives. The church aims at reconciliation and restoration—breaking down through the gospel of Christ the barriers which divide people from God and from each other, destroying the quality of their lives.

The church's mission as it enters the new millennium involves breaching ethnic, economic, ideological, and political barriers, which continue to divide people as other issues did in past generations. Whereas the Bible often refers to the religious divisions between Jews and Gentiles as a crucial issue in the first century, followers of Christ in Japan at the beginning of the twenty-first century focus not on delivering people from false *religion* so much as standing in opposition to *worldviews* which oppress and serve to deny rather than enrich humanity. Secular humanism, for instance, despite its attempts at freedom and enlightenment, is one belief system which falls into this category.

The ministry of followers of Christ consists of following him as he goes ahead of them. That is, they are to live in a relationship of love with God and relate lovingly to those who have not yet encountered him, in order to lead them into a personal, saving, life-fulfilling, ongoing relationship with him. Christian faith only takes on authenticity in history, in the context of space, time, and real people's lives. This implies a cultural setting and all the complexities which accompany living in any human society while at the same time seeking to live in the kingdom of God, that is, in "the effective range of God's will" (Willard, 1998, p. 21). The need arises at times for excruciatingly difficult decisions between obeying God and conforming to cultural norms. Ultimate priority is clearly given to God's will above any human custom or practice; however, the clear witness which the Bible gives is that God is not the enemy of culture. He does stand against the evil aspects of every culture; however, one vital role he gives the church is to support culture through introducing it to the God who transcends, fulfills, and redeems it.

Christian educational institutions have unique roles and goals within the larger framework of the church. Both church and school clearly exist within the larger category of God's creation; however, the church encompasses a variety of ministries (medical, agricultural, or preaching for example), of which education is only one. Though an educational institution serves purposes which, by definition, differ from those of a local church (a school's being specifically academic in nature) a Christian school's mission and goals, biblically speaking, must not differ *essentially* from those of the larger institution, of which it is a part.

Many Christian mission schools in Japan and other countries have become independent financially and organizationally from the church mission agencies which once funded and operated them. Indeed, development of the strength to become independent from outside

support is *one vital stage of maturity for Christian organizations*. However, though they no longer are mission schools in that overseas organizations no longer operate them, they continue to be missionary in a more crucial sense—that of having a clear-cut mission, a reason for being which comes not from Western churches but from God himself. These institutions exist not as the master of their own universe but in commitment to the same purposes as that of the worldwide church, including the formation of human beings into wholeness, wellness, Christlikeness.

For development into full personhood, the student needs human relationships which are based on a deeper relationship with the living God. In the context of *these* human relationships, each student may grow toward fullness and the realization of potential. These relationships can only be found within the church, that is, not merely the institutional church but within the family of God, in relationships with others who have entered into covenant life, a life of communion with God.

Without strong ties to the church and the unique support it can provide through human relationships empowered by the grace of God, Christian schools strongly tend to degenerate into institutions in which religious and spiritual education are seen as accessories—essentially irrelevant to the rest of the learning process. This contributes to the common perception in Japan that the educational process as a whole (in both religious and secular schools) lacks relevancy to students' lives. While such education may achieve the often-stated goal of "*deepening understanding*," it clearly falls short of the goal of development of the whole person into maturity. It deprives Christian schools, in particular, of a key distinctive—the capacity for being contexts in which students' learning takes place through human relationships rooted in a living relationship with the source of knowledge.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AS INCARNATIONAL MINISTRY OF THE WORD

The preceding has emphasized that, as the continuation of the ministry which God performed through Christ, the entire Christian church (including the educational organizations within the realm of its work) seeks to pattern its theory and practice on the life and work of Christ. One key biblical term referring to Jesus—"the Word"—holds vital implications as to the type of ministry this is and how Christ's followers are to pursue it. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1-3).

By the term "Word" it indicates not merely the written or spoken language by which classes are conducted and assignments completed. God speaks, not merely by the mental process of communicating in soul-less linguistic constructs but through the living Word. The presence of words in real-life contexts suggests their relational nature. Someone who speaks is present, along with someone who listens. Words hold meaning not so much in

themselves as in conveying something of the life of those interacting verbally (ideas, feelings, or character, for example). By their nature they invite the listener into a relationship with the speaker (even if only that of a simple conversation).

A key role of teachers is to give the creating word of God to students through the various academic disciplines and personal interaction with students. However, to assert this is not to imply that God presents a rigid, preset pattern of thinking and behaving which teachers then must attempt to reproduce in the lives of students. Rather, in the biblical model, an outstanding characteristic of "the Word" is that with it, God creates *ex nihilo*—brings into existence something which *did not* exist before. (See John 1:1 above, a reference to the Genesis 1 account of creation, including "And God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light" [1:3].) The human development which education under God's direction yields will thus be as diverse and unique as are the individuals in the learning process.

This approach to ministry is analogous to the "dynamic equivalent" techniques which translators use, not assuming that a given word has a static nature and its meaning can be conveyed so that the listener/reader will understand it with exactly the same mental images as the speaker/writer. Rather, realizing the pervasive influence which culture has on the communication process, they seek to create a corresponding *meaning*, not reproduction of an identical *form*. In the same way, Christians following Christ's model seek communication of the *spirit* of the message of God's redeeming love, realizing that it will naturally take varying and unique shapes as it enters the hearts of people. As it transforms their lives, widely differing customs and expressions of the faith will develop, yet all reflecting a firm understanding of the message which God has spoken.

"The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). This "Word" entered human history and continues to relate to humans on the level of *daily life experiences such as studying, teaching, or playing, as well as believing*. This relationship involves encountering God, receiving the call to life in *communion* with him, responding in faith to that call, and (as an outgrowth of this faith) living in *community* with other people.

Relying not only on spoken or written human words but on the living "Word" for direction and empowerment yields a depth and richness to the learning process which is not accessible outside this context. John indicates that in Christ resides a power for imparting understanding. This creates possibilities for teaching which transcend mere human ability. "No man has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18).

Jesus Christ embodied the word of God, the message of God to humanity, through his life. Though sent from heaven by God the Father, he became a human being with his own cultural background, family life, and personality traits. As a premonition or concept takes

shape in the form of a spoken or written word, the eternal message of God's redeeming and life-fulfilling love took human form, incarnated as Jesus of Nazareth. The Apostle Paul writes of:

Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8)

Similarly, teachers who aspire to follow Christ must not minister only on the level of *words* (abstract principles and concepts) but the *Word* (living out the life which Jesus taught and demonstrated). Those who ally themselves with the cause of Christian education are to give the gospel of Christ human form, modeling the type of life which Christ embodied and continues to live through his people. "The Gospel . . . does not exhort us simply to be like Christ—ministering to the needy 'as Jesus would'—(which implies that he is not actively present but merely serves as a model for our social action) We must be where Christ is, and act where he acts" (Speidell, 1997, p. 146).

Those who cross cultural barriers to perform educational ministry find the pattern for cross-cultural understanding, communication, and cooperation in the person of Christ. He did not attempt to deliver his message alone but sought to empower and equip his disciples, who could then take the gospel into their native culture and beyond. Similarly, a key function of Christians who seek to bring the gospel across cultural barriers is not so much to undertake the task of doing ministry by themselves as to empower and support cultural insiders in order that they become the people God has created them to be. These people can, in turn, more effectively and with greater cultural awareness, take to others the gospel message.

Jesus' approach to "cross-cultural" ministry through the incarnation provides the supreme model after which today's ministers are to pattern themselves. The Son of God, existing in heaven with the Father, in the Christmas event, began the life of a first-century Jewish child. He apparently spent nearly thirty years out of the thirty-three in his life acquiring the culture, in a sense: learning the language, eating the food, becoming intimately acquainted with the customs, forming deep family ties and close friendships. Finally, the spirit of willingness to invest himself in the lives of people led him to give his life for them in order to redeem them. That level of commitment to the people to whom one is sent to minister is the standard which Christ continues to call educators (cultural insiders and outsiders alike) to uphold.

Some educators welcome such a call, others resist it, and perhaps all find it an intimidating challenge. However, all do carry with them into their work some worldview, including some belief (however ill-defined or ambiguous) regarding the trustworthiness of Jesus Christ as a guide to one's life. Regardless of what the instructor's worldview may be, it is

obvious that it wields significant influence over the lives of students. Even if unvoiced, the beliefs and perspectives which the educator holds speak powerfully to students who are looking for role models.

Thus, in one crucial sense, the messenger *is* the message. The word is not only form but content as well. If teachers do not embody the message which God intends to convey, they will present a different message, one founded on a different set of values and representing a different belief system. Non-involvement and neutrality are no more possible than it is possible to speak orally without using one's voice. Christ describes this reality in Luke 11:23: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters."

Those who choose to hold other worldviews do not exist in a philosophical and theological vacuum, a world in which their personal viewpoints have no impact upon their teaching, research, and relationships with others in school life. Even those who espouse no formal religion have some worldview, some approach to life which *functions* as religion, or substitutes for it, in the sense that it guides their lives, shaping their identity as they help shape the identity of their students. On the other hand, a teacher's life which demonstrates the presence of the living Christ can offer students and others invaluable insight and guidance not from that person but from the Lord himself.

This is the testimony of Scripture and part of the theological/biblical foundation on which typical Christian educational institutions have been built. However, it calls into question the role which these schools are actually playing in society. With Christians currently staffing no more than ten to twenty percent of faculties in many Christian colleges and universities, for instance, the assertion may well be made that the overall influence on the lives of the students is more toward a secular than biblical worldview and lifestyle.

In order to accomplish the mission to which they have committed themselves, it appears that far more is called for than realigning administrative structures or more vigorous repetition of schools' Christian ideals. These must also lead to a more deep-seated, internal transformation, which goes to the level of the identity and worldviews of staff members and students. Judging from the biblical model, nothing short of the incarnation of Christ in the lives of those who teach and learn will make possible the achieving of Christian schools' stated goals.

CONCLUSION

The God revealed in the Bible will continue with his mission of reconciling the world to himself. A key component of his plan will always be Christian education, the formation of Christlike human beings, equipped to live as members of society and his family. The ultimate accomplishment of this mission has never been in doubt and remains as certain through faith now as it will be when actualized as historical fact in the future.

Yet despite the certain triumph of the all-knowing, all-powerful, God in all the world, he also continues to call fallible human beings to participate with him in the task of ministry. It is a task which, to human eyes, appears far from guaranteed success, fraught with uncertainty, even doomed to failure. Still, on what seems a remarkably shaky foundation, he constructs a plan which includes educators willing to look to him as the source of understanding, to be led by him as they lead students, to grow in relationship with him and each other as they encourage growth in their students.

The call of the God of the Bible always requires a response. To those who join with him, he guarantees his personal presence and the constant empowering necessary to accomplish the task. Those who choose another plan or wander ahead without one, exercise their freedom to do so, yet ultimately can only offer education which is severed from its roots, from God, the source of knowledge itself. Not only does their approach to teaching fail to develop in students a rich spiritual life, but it eventually damages the quality of education as a whole, rendering it, *incapable of preparing students for the fullest life ahead*. According to Christ (John 3:36) those who insist on such a course also invite God's judgment on themselves, if not also on the institution they have committed themselves to serving.

Phrased in such language, the teachings of Christ may well appear brusque and offensive, more of an indictment or threat than a word of encouragement. With current demographic and cultural changes in Japan presenting unprecedented challenges to the very *existence of many educational institutions, nothing would seem as needed as a basis for optimism*. Paradoxical though it may be, however, a reason for hope is precisely what Christ's call represents. His invitation to participate with him in accomplishing his mission through the ministry of Christian education is, in fact, the only hope Christian schools possess if they intend to live up to their education ideals and realize their stated goals. For those who choose to conduct education in the name of Christ, entrusted with the *responsibility of preparing young lives for the future, his word—lived out through the lives of his people—is the only authority on which anyone can stand with assurance in facing the demands and uncertainties of the years ahead*.

NOTES

¹References to God appear in masculine form, following the use of gender-related language which appears in the Bible. An underlying assumption, however, is that God's nature transcends both masculinity and femininity. God chooses to use language which, though clearly limited, conveys the intended meaning to culture-bound, finite human minds.

²Scriptural references come from the New International Version of the Bible.

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