Christian School Education: Ideology and Practice

LO Wai Shing Vincent MH

The Meaning of Christian School Education:

What is meant by Christian School Education (CSE)? Simply speaking, it is the kind of school education practiced according to will of God.

As the Bible is the Word of God, CSE should take the biblical view as the highest authority. Therefore, any education ideologies, theories and research findings adopted need to be evaluated through the lens of the biblical principles. The Bible reminds us, “Knowledge gives pride, but love gives true strength.” (1 Corinthians) Therefore Christian schools should always remain humble before God and see carefully whether their practices really follow the will of God.

The Composition of Christian School Education:

Jesus said,” And you are to have love for the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Have love for your neighbour as for yourself. There is no other law greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31) As there is no other law greater than these two commandments, the ideology and practice of CSE should be built on them.

CSE sticks closely to biblical view.

Jesus said, “He who has my laws and keeps them, he it is who has love for me; and he who has love for me will be loved by my Father, and I will have love for him and will let myself be seen clearly by him.”(John 14:21) Therefore CSE should teach children loving God by keeping His laws. Christian schools should intensively and extensively infuse the biblical principles in all areas of work of CSE so as to create a holistic CSE environment for the children. CSE
environment is essential for helping children to understand the Bible and learn how to be kind and faithful servants of God.

**CSE provides all-round development and extends potentials.**

The notion of “with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” implies that there are four different kinds of potentials for development in children. CSE should aim at extending such potentials to fullness so as to well prepare children to love God and people.

**CSE prepares children with strong “heart”**.

“Heart” refers to the “inner self” or “self-concept” of children. It deals with questions like: Who am I? What am I living for? How should I live?

Once, Jesus spoke to His disciples in Capernaum, “Truly I say to you: If you do not take the flesh of the Son of man for food, and if you do not take his blood for drink, you have no life in you.” (John 6:53) “Hearing this, a number of his disciples said: This is a hard saying. Who is able to take in such teaching?” (John 6:60) " Because of what he said, a number of the disciples went back and would no longer go with him.” (John 6:66)” So Jesus said to the twelve: Have you a desire to go away? Then Simon Peter gave this answer: Lord, to whom are we to go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 67-68) Peter obviously knew - from his heart - who Jesus was. He then knew what he should do and was able to stick to his choice in challenge.

The Bible says, “Keep watch over your heart with all care and so you will have life.” (Proverbs 4:23) CSE should shape the heart of children, help them know their roles and missions and train them up “in the right way – even when he is old, he will not be turned away from it.” (Proverbs 22:6)

**CSE prepares children with strong “soul”**.

“Soul” refers to the “emotion of people”. It associates with the emotional
responses of people towards God, people and things. In Chinese, the word for “emotion” is made up of two parts: “heart” and “green”. “Green” means “the most beautiful”. Ancient Chinese thought that emotion is the most beautiful part of the heart. Indeed, it is like the flowers - the outward manifestation - of the heart. It touches people and can be a strong driving force. CSE should therefore help children develop EQ and the kind of sensitivity to things, people and God so that they might use their emotion properly to create their “love stories” – with God and people – in their lives.

**CSE prepares children with strong “mind”**.

“Mind” refers to the “centre of rationality” of people. It is related to thinking and cognitive ability like learning, critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, mathematics and languages, etc.

Jesus said, “Make a request, and it will be answered; what you are searching for you will get; give the sign, and the door will be open to you. Because to everyone who makes a request, it will be given; and he who is searching will get his desire, and to him who gives the sign, the door will be open.” (Mathew 7:7-8) Therefore, development of mind certainly helps children search for the truth.

God can make use of our intellectual learning to fulfill His will. Take Apostle Paul as an example: Paul was an intellectual person. After his conversion, God inspired him to write letters to the New Testament churches that had paramount influence to the world.

CSE should provide high quality teaching service, helping children learn with enthusiasm and engaged minds. CSE should aim at producing graduates with knowledge, thinking ability and learning capacity so that they are able to pursue truth and contribute to the church, the society, the nation and the world.
Yet, intellectual pursuit could be a risky thing. The Bible says, “Knowledge gives pride, but love gives true strength.” (1 Corinthians 8:1) Therefore CSE should teach children to be humble to protect their foot from being slipped or stumbled.

**CSE prepares children with “strength”**.

“Strength” refers to physical strength, mental strength and character, etc. The Bible described Jesus was increasing in wisdom and stature in years and in grace before God and men.” (Luke 2:52) Therefore, CSE should help children develop good health and character so as to prepare them for sailing to deep water and combating against all sorts of challenges in their future.

**CSE prepares children who “love” God and people.**

CSE should aim at shaping children's heart, helping them learn to love - from their hearts and with all their gifts - God and people. Christian schools should build campus of love as reflected by infusing love in school policies, programs, processes, places and relationship. CSE should definitely help children learn the source of love; in other words, help them understand “We have the power of loving, because He (God) first had love for us.” (1 John 4:19)

Love and care help children feel safe in their relationship with Christian schools. On feeling safe, children are more willing open their hearts for exploration, reflection and hence renewal. As a matter of fact, the first three most important things to foster change in children are: 1. Love. 2. Love them more. 3. Love them more and more.

To help Christian schools practice love, I would give love the operational definitions as follows:
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<tr>
<th><strong>Characteristics</strong></th>
<th><strong>Operational Definitions</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patient</td>
<td>Willing to wait in difficult times.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>Give attention, appreciate and care for the needs of others.</td>
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<td>Not envy</td>
<td>Do not feel bad when other people achieve or gain.</td>
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<td>Not boast</td>
<td>Do not emphasize personal strength and achievement.</td>
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<td>Not proud</td>
<td>Do not consider being superior but be humble to others.</td>
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<td>Not rude</td>
<td>Refuse to do anything shameful to oneself or others.</td>
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<td>Not self-seeking</td>
<td>Do not put personal needs first.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not easily angered</td>
<td>Give up resentment when wronged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeps no records of wrong</td>
<td>Do not emphasize the faults of others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not delight in evil</td>
<td>Reflect upon and give up improper ways of thinking and doing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rejoices with the truth</td>
<td>Learn to think and practise in the right ways.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Always protects</td>
<td>Be willing to accept in difficult times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always trusts</td>
<td>Walk in faith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always hopes</td>
<td>Put hope in God and expect for His leading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always perseveres</td>
<td>Keep on going in difficult times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never fails</td>
<td>Stick to own choices all the times.</td>
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The Leading and Management of Christian School Education

Since love is the greatest commandment, CSE should also practise love in leadership and management. The Bible says, “Do not let our love be in word and in tongue, but let it be in act and in good faith.” (1 John 3:18) To practise genuine CSE, Christian schools need to address two major concerns:

1. “Where there is no vision, the people are uncontrolled; but he who keeps the law will be happy.” (Proverbs 29:18) CSE should pursue unity in Christ and exert great effort to build shared values, directions, visions, missions and strategies among all stake-holders – school managers, principals, teachers, staff, church members and parents.

2. “(Love) takes no pleasure in wrongdoing, but has joy in what is true.” (1 Corinthians 13:6) Christian schools need to foster all stake-holders to reflect upon what might be improper and learn actively to renew their heart, improve and be faithful their work.

Among all the leadership and management theories, I recommend Christian schools to adopt the Learning Organization Theory – originated from the System Management Theory. Learning Organization approach emphasizes 5 concerns:

1. Shared vision
2. Mental model
3. Personal mastery
4. Group learning
5. System thinking

**Shared Vision:**

“The fear of the Lord is the start of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One gives a wise mind.” (Proverbs 9:10)
Christian schools should be separated for God, exalting God as the Lord of the school. Christian schools should stick closely to the biblical view regarding purpose, process and success criteria of education. Christian schools should hold a clear view about purpose, direction, vision, missions and strategies of CSE for sharing and gathering proper co-labours – school managers, principal, teachers, non-teaching staff and church members. Christian schools should set up channels for all stake-holders to get convenient access to their CSE ideology. Christian schools should also supervise if the schools have significantly responded to CSE in their planning, implementation and evaluation.

**Mental Models**

The Bible reminds us, “Let not your behaviour be like that of this world, but be changed and made new in mind, so that by experience you may have knowledge of the good and pleasing and complete purpose of God.” (Romans 12:2)

Christian schools should foster their stake-holders to review and reflect upon their mental models - how they perceive CSE. And see if their mental models are compatible to the requirement of CSE. Christian schools should watch closely to their practice and give feedback to stake-holders if necessary for their reflection and renewal of mental models if necessary.

**Personal Mastery**

The Bible described how David used a stone and leather band to defeat the Philistine. (1 Samuel 17:49) Indeed, when David was sent to look after sheep, he started to practise using stone and leather band to drive away fierce animals. Therefore, the victory of David against Philistine was not due to luck but his faith and faithful learning.
God is generous. He is willing to give people gifts. We however need to “let that grace of God which is in (us), given to (us) by (His) hands, have living power. “(1 Timothy 1:6) Christian schools should therefore need to urge their staff to consider every challenge as learning opportunity as well as learn to use their gift to solve problems and better their services.

**Group Learning**

“For this reason, as we are circled by so great a cloud of witnesses, putting off every weight, and the sin into which we come so readily, let us keep on running in the way which is marked out for us.” (Hebrews 12:1) Yes, life stimulates life – in particular, those who are able to persevere in difficult times and learn to overcome their difficulties. The Bible also reminds us, “Let us be moving one another at all times to love and good works.” (Hebrews 10:24) Christian schools therefore should strive for building collegial learning environment for mutual learning, sharing and collaboration among staff. Indeed professional learning is a integral part of Christian schools in their pursuit of truth.

**System Thinking**

“O death, where is your power? O death, where are your pains? The pain of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law.” (1 Corinthians 15:55-56) As Apostle Paul explained the relationship between sin and death, he pointed out that the problem was sin but not death itself. To tackle the issue of death, God addressed directly the source of death – sin. “Because, as numbers of men became sinners through the wrongdoing of one man, even so will great numbers get righteousness through the keeping of the word of God by one man.” (Romans 5:19) Both examples stated above can illustrate the meaning of system thinking. System thinking means seeing the whole picture by:
1. Identify the major factors concerned.
2. See how one factor might affect the others.
3. See how the factors interact and drive the system into equilibrium or corruption.

By so doing, Christian schools will be able to construct a holistic and dynamic view about the issues concerned. Such awareness is important for Christian schools to acquire a clear mind of the state of the school and hence know how to pray for them and respond with wise actions.

**Summary**

In sum, CSE is the kind of school education that follows the will of God regarding purpose, process and outcome. CSE builds its ways of thinking and doing on biblical view. The ultimate goal of CSE is to develop children loving God and people with all their hearts, soul, mind and strength which under a strong CSE environment are significantly developed.

Christian schools should be strong learning organizations in which all stake-holders have shared CSE vision, CSE mental models, personal mastery and group learning of CSE competencies as well as culture of system thinking to watch out for the schools.