

## Christian Education in Missio Dei

Welcome again to the Andrew CHIU and James RIMBACH Memorial Theological Conference, Co-organised by the Pastoral Conference of The Lutheran Church Hong Kong Synod and Concordia Theological Seminary. The goal of this conference presentation is to engage participants to describe Christian Education as a practice of God's mission, God's loving all people through Jesus Christ.

Permit this beginning, with an invocation. Many of you will recognise the words: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Many of you will recognise that frequently with these words someone will use the sign of the cross. I invite you do to that now with me either hand is OK, either shoulder first is fine, for this presentation. Are you ready? Let's try it; please say the words with me, on the count of three: one, two, three: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." That may have felt strange or uncomfortable for some people. Perhaps if we do it once more you can get a better sense of how it works. On the count of three: one, two, three: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

I realise that for many people that gesture is something done by Roman Catholics. I appreciate the willingness of people to try it here, now. It can be mentioned also that Martin Luther encourages us to use the sign of the cross. In his Small Catechism he teaches a prayer for mornings and another for evenings. For both, he includes this, making the sign of the cross while saying God's name, the invocation.

As we continue into this presentation, we will explore each of the terms in the title, Christian Education in Missio Dei. Let me invite you to have handy, in print or online, the conference brochure, or at least paper or screen on which you can do a little writing and perhaps some notetaking. I encourage such engagement, such participation, to use more than your ears for learning. Your eyes and your handwriting can help your learning.

### Christian Education in Missio Dei

The title for this conference has four important terms, Christian, Education, Missio, and Dei. Let me mention that those last two words are in the Latin language. I do not know how to pronounce the Cantonese. The English translation for those two Latin words is Mission of God. Missio Dei is the Latin way to say, Mission of God.

You have seen the posters and now in this video you have heard these words, Christian Education in Missio Dei. For a few moments, please for each of these four terms, think of your own definition or description. In the conference bulletin, if you have it in print or online, or on your own paper or screen, please take a moment to describe your understanding of each of the four words. Write out some of your ideas. Please note that writing in Chinese is fine. I am speaking in English, but writing your ideas in Chinese is fine. I will be quiet for a few moments while you write a little about one or all of the words. [[[Pause]]]

Thank you for taking some time to think and perhaps to write. I realise there may be some discomfort in trying this task. Likely you expected to listen to this conference without expecting to write. Perhaps you are concerned that your descriptions will not be correct. Please note, then: yes, I did ask you to write, to make a few notes about each of these terms. I appreciate your attempting to do that. But your success is guaranteed, because I am asking you to write your own thinking. You do not

have to worry about my thinking---I will give it in a few minutes, but what you have answered about each of these four terms, as your thinking, is exactly correct because I asked you to write your own impression. If your own impression is that you have none, that for one or more of these words, at this time, you have no ideas: write that down. That's excellent. You have given your impression of each of these terms at this time.

Please keep your notes handy. You might add or change something during our time together for this conference. Also, we will come back to what you have written later in this presentation. At that time you will be able to amend, or to affirm, what you have written just now.

This opening for the conference may have been a surprise, that you were invited to be engaged not just with your eyes and ears, but with writing. One important part of education, emphasised in Hong Kong, is listening and remembering, especially to past tests. This is a reason perhaps that many pastors leave Christian education to the teachers in schools. It is possible to understand education in different ways. One book title shows this: "Christian Education as Engagement."<sup>1</sup>---not just listening, but engaging.

The title for this conference is "Christian Education in Missio Dei." I will go into details. Here let me give a brief overall description. Missio Dei talks about God's mission, God's purpose. 1 Tim 2:4 says, "God wants all people to be saved."---that's God's mission. Christian Education is "in" God's mission, God's purpose. Christian education is the things believers do to engage people, believers and those who don't believe, in learning about God's mission, God's love for them. This Christian education is for pastors, for teachers, for parents, for friends. In different ways each of us can engage people in God's love for them.

Missio Dei

When I paid attention to the title for this conference, to the four big words, I heard them in two parts, two words in each part: Christian Education, and Missio Dei. Permit me to turn first to the last two words, missio Dei. As a reminder, those two words are in the Latin language. They have become popular in theology in the last twenty or thirty years. Translated into English they mean Mission of God. Let me offer these descriptions as you think about these terms.

## **God**

God? . We can see that we have many organized religions in Hong Kong, and most represent one or more gods. Buddhism may be an example; Judaism as a religion and Islam talk about gods. I think also of Wong Tai Sin or Tin Hau temples: as I understand it there is some god or gods connected with each of these. What we see can fit with what Paul wrote in 1 Cor 8:5, "there are many gods and many lords." We could say that for some people in Hong Kong and many people around the world, there are gods without temples. That is, some people make wealth or success or saving face the most important thing in their lives. We can say there are many gods. Luther in his Large Catechism says that, the thing to whom we turn in trouble? That is our god.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Christian Education as Engagement," David R. Hunter (New York, The Seabury Press, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> Large Catechism, Martin Luther, Ten Commandments: line 2.

We can think about this word “god” by thinking about relationships with such gods. If I understand temple religions in Hong Kong, the relationship depends on what we do. If we buy more incense or if we burn more paper, we will get more blessings. There is also some fear: we have to do what the fortune teller said, to get the good future.

Now think about the relationship with the true God. Paul says in the same 1 Corinthians 8 passage, “for us there is but one God, the Father, from who all things came.” I understand that in Hong Kong the word Father may be a word of demand or fear: the relationship demands obedience. Paul uses the word Father to say not that the true God demands, but that He gives. The relationship with the true God, in Christ, is a relationship of His caring for us---God has made all things and shares them with us.

To be sure, we may be afraid of such a God. We would be vulnerable, at risk. We would not have the security of knowing that if we just do such and such, we will be loved. But it can be argued that such security is no security, since tomorrow again we have to do such and such. Security, safety, ---honour, even---can be found in the God who from all eternity has said, and has demonstrated on a cross and at an empty tomb, how far He goes to love us.

So, Paul says in the New Testament, there is one true God, one who really is God. This is the one who showed himself and his love in Jesus Christ. Here in this lecture, as in our seminary and church body, when we talk well about God we are talking about this God, the Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit who love us. You can come to seminary, you can earn a doctoral degree learning special words about this God, but as surely as an infant belongs to its parents before it can speak any words, we can belong to this God long before we know such special words. Indeed, we baptize infants, not because they are good but because God wants already to demonstrate his love for them also.

### Mission

So God is the one who loves us and gave himself for us. What is this God’s mission? You may know the word “mission” from business or personal development, personal growth books. The word mission is used to describe the purpose of a business or a person, the continual goal of their activity. We can use the same word---in Latin, *missio*, or in English, *mission*---to talk about God. Christian Education goes on in God’s mission. What is God’s mission?

You can see God’s mission already in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, God’s creating work. God’s purpose or mission was for people to live in fellowship with him, in friendship. Genesis says that humans were created in God’s image. The word image does not refer to our face or appearance, to look like God. Genesis is saying, instead, that people were created for a loving relationship with God.

We see God’s mission more clearly in Genesis chapter 3. Remember that Eve and Adam broke the relationship? Then God comes to meet them in the garden. It is easy to think simply that God punished them. When we listen, however, we hear God’s mission. God’s discipline was to begin to rescue Adam and Eve from the predicament they had created, indeed, to rescue us all, from eternal death. God’s mission was to reclaim them, and us, for a healthy relationship. Sometimes it takes God a long time to work something good. But in time, as God’s mission, Jesus came to open the door to a relationship with God again. If you have read and remember some of the NT you may remember that

many people didn't want the relationship. They had culture and rules and regulations; they preferred their own way to God's way of loving them. Still, God came, to the point of dying.

Perhaps you begin to see that what God did in Jesus---God's mission to demonstrate His love---he continues today. Some of you recognize that for Lutherans this is an emphasis. Preaching and reading God's Word?---God is speaking, "I love you." Baptism? God is demonstrating his love, touching you with water, even if you are an infant. The Lord's Supper: taste and see, says a Psalm verse, that the Lord is good. The things we do together as believers are the things God has given us, even if we change the arrangement from time to time, so that God can clearly demonstrate God's love.

Often believers use the word "mission" to describe going overseas somewhere ---the Philippines or Singapore, perhaps--- to talk about Jesus. In the history of the LCHKS we can look to missionaries in the Mainland already in 1913, and then to missionaries who came from the Mainland to Hong Kong in 1949. It is better to talk about all believers as missionaries. God works on God's mission of loving people certainly when we teach or preach or do a VBS; but also when we care for our neighbours in our building or help someone at the office. God's mission is God demonstrating His love, beginning with Jesus on the cross.

We can use other words to talk about God's mission. The Lutheran Church Hong Kong Synod talks about commitment, compassion, and community. Yes. God works through the Synod to do these things. The same thing is true in the work of the seminary, when students and faculty use big, complex words---or words in Hebrew or Greek or Aramaic. The centre and purpose of such studies is not just to get a job in the church, but to be a leader, helping believers in God's mission, helping them to love as God first loves us. We study those words to use them as tools by which God is showing love

Likely you know already this summary of God's mission: God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Christian Education engages people in that mission.

Before we take a look at the words "Christian Education" I will pause for a couple minutes. Think about what you have heard. Think about what you wrote at the beginning, if you made some notes. What might you add to what you wrote? What would you underline because you really like what you wrote? I will be quiet for a couple minutes while you think, and perhaps write something.  
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Thank you. We turn now to the words Christian and Education.

Christian

As I begin to look at the two words Christian and education I want to start with a special meaning of the word Christian I have heard in Hong Kong. I hear "Christian" used to talk about Protestant believers, different than Roman Catholic believers. Perhaps that use is helpful to you. For this presentation, I will use the word "Christian" for all people who believe in Jesus as their Saviour. I can say, then, that everything we believers do to show God's love in Jesus can be Christian education---believer education. When I hear the word Christian Education I think easily of Christian schools. Since primary five I have been connected with Christian schools. The LCHKS runs secondary and primary schools, kindergartens and nurseries---and the seminary and PLII. Congregations of the Synod offer

Vacation Bible Schools, Sunday Schools, small groups, etc. It is quite possible to think about Christian education by thinking about our schools and classes. That is a good beginning---but we might do even more thinking.

It can be Christian education when we teach people new songs for worship; on a Sunday morning or with the elderly on Thursday afternoons, as Professor Gene Fung might do. We can do Christian education when we do a baptism; not just instruction for the ones who will be baptized. but also at the ceremony. Let the pastor comment to all who are there, describing why we use a white robe, as they do for example at Abiding Grace in North Point. Think of what Christian Education your congregation can do. It can be Christian education when we teach people to use the sign of the cross.

We can say that all Christian Education begins in God's Word.<sup>3</sup> Certainly, that means that the Bible is a part of Christian education. Using Bible passages would be a natural part of Christian education. If we have not used the Bible, especially if we have not shown God's love in Jesus in the Bible, then perhaps we should amend our work.

Let me discuss this a little more. If the education---if anything we are doing in the Church, in our lives---is not connected to Christ, we have missed. What part of life and Church is not connected to Christ? The sermon didn't point us to Jesus? It's not yet Christian. The Bible story not connected to Jesus? Not yet Christian. A good beginning, but we should get to Christian Education.

Let me be careful here. For example, perhaps you are a teacher of maths in one of our Synod schools---thank you for doing that work. This point about Christian does not mean that you have teach 2 plus 2 plus Jesus equals 4. But you might have some opportunity to talk personally about Jesus with a student---good. Does your classroom---each classroom---, have a cross or a picture of Jesus? Are there devotions for all, connected with Jesus? And again, this is not just about Jesus, some information. This is about Jesus, God showing His love, freely, for us.

The education is Christian when we are making God's love visible, connected with Jesus. This point shows up in John's Gospel, in the first chapter. John writes about the Word of God, the Word working already in Genesis. Then John writes, the Word became flesh. God did what God said. We are doing Christian education when we offer information about God, and especially when that information points people to trust God's love in Jesus.

## Education

But what, then, is education---connected to Christ or otherwise? The following can be a definition or description of education: engaging these people with this material. Back to maths class? Getting the student to practice the addition, multiplication or other tasks---engaged, these people active with this information. Perhaps it is clear that this a way for pastors, for teachers, for small group leaders to think about their work; and to recognize that a school service learning project or a congregational celebration of Mid-Autumn Festival can be done as Christian education. The word "engaged" is used to contradict a common assumption, that education means teaching, that teaching means telling. Now it

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<sup>3</sup> The Teaching Ministry of the Church: An Examination of the Basic Principles of Christian Education, James D. Smart (1954), p 25.

may be that at some point telling can be engaging. I am trying that here. Jesus did not simply lecture, he told stories, he drew in the dust to engage people.

To be clear, to engage people does not mean they all agree, as in getting the right answers for a test. It is clear that many people understood Jesus---they were engaged---but disagreed.

I said that education engages “these people.” Perhaps you recognise that different people need different kinds of education. Primary one students can’t do algebra. I need more education in Cantonese. To do education well means thinking about what “these people” need. In the United States, people understand the word “sin” as anything you do that is bad, in thought, word, or deed. But perhaps in Hong Kong the word “sin” means crime. In Hong Kong, for these people, we need words they can use and understand. We do our Christian education better when we assess, when we think what we can do for particular people because of their language, or their social setting, etc.

Christian education, then, means that people are engaged with God’s good work in Jesus. To engage these people with what material? With the Good News of God’s work in Jesus. The Synod can do that, in schools, kindergartens, nurseries, Sunday Schools, VBS, small groups, seminary, etc. If we---if any believers--- simply tell information, that may be a beginning of Christian education but only a beginning. The “material” of Christian education is God loving people. We want to engage them with that.

One author who emphasises doing God’s mission according to St. Paul’s pattern also talks about learning as more than listening. If the goal of education is simply information, what happens to children so that they get jobs, then he says, that goal is “exceedingly partial and dangerous....the converts of St. Paul are seen to have ...heard...understood, acted [and] lived by the light given to them.”<sup>4</sup> This is something like the current programme of Pastoral Leadership Institute International modules offered by LCHKS pastors here in Hong Kong. Already in the first night’s programme this last July, participants could not just sit and listen. Congregational teams had to discuss and demonstrate leadership in their teams.

The work of Dr. Benjamin Bloom<sup>5</sup> may illustrate this point of engagement. In his professional research, already in the last century, Dr. Bloom pointed out three “sides” to learning. His technical terms were cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. It can be simpler to remember head, heart, and hands. Learning is better---education is better---when all three are engaged, head, heart and hands, the whole person

Perhaps a short video clip, part of learning to dive, will illustrate this sense of education, this bigger meaning that just taking notes on lectures [video]. We can see an infant learning---getting an education, this person engaged with this material---learning to sit up [video]. A small tree, growing in a pot from a seed from an apple [photo]---this can be learning, can be education in Hong Kong. You may recognise that the disciple Thomas experienced Christian education when he was engaged, when Jesus

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<sup>4</sup> Educational Principles and Missionary Methods; The Application of Educational Principles to Missionary Evangelism, Roland Allen, London (Robert Scott, 1919), p 33, 43.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html> retrieved, 28 Dec 2013 4:33

said after his resurrection, put your finger here, your hand here. Thomas was engaged by the teacher--- Jesus- with the material, and learned that Jesus was alive, and was His Lord.

In the year that I first came to Hong Kong I met an old friend from the US, the old Rev. Daniel Lee, who died just this last year. (I realise that some in Hong Kong are afraid to use the word death, are afraid of death. Certainly, death can be fearful, but our confidence is that Christ is greater.) I think we were at a congregational outing when he talked about what we had learned in Concordia University near Chicago. He said it simply, ASK, A-S-K. ASK was to be the goal of every learning, of all learning. ASK? Attitude, Skill, Knowledge. Heart, Hand, Head.

To mention Pastor Lee is to recognise that so much of our learning is community engagement. In the US I can use a cup of coffee as a reminder that as we talk together over a cup of coffee, we learn. In Hong Kong perhaps it should be tea, or better, dim sum. After worship at Abiding Grace in North Point, on our first Sunday in Hong Kong, the fellowship went to dim sum. I learned! In particular it was in the Christian fellowship that I learned how to eat a chicken foot with chopsticks. But so much more than "eating education," how we care for each other, study and hear God's Word together, and practice it, that is Christian education. I know, for example, that it is easy for people to badmouth each other, to gossip or suspect that others have bad motives. Those things destroy community, even wound the body of Christ. How much better, then, when our fellowship helps us hear and practice God's love for each other.

Perhaps you recognise, then, that the opening of this lecture could have been Christian Education in *missio Dei*, in God's mission. You were invited to engage---to make the sign of the cross, a skill, a use of the hands. To use your head, the words go with the sign. And then you could note--your affect, your feelings---discomfort, disagreement, interest. All of that was connected to God's Word in Christ---indeed, to God's name. Do you see that the head and the heart can be connected with God's name? To have God's name, perhaps to have been given God's name in baptism, is something similar to being born into a family. As you grow, you learn how the family does things, but you grow in the family, in the Father's love for you.

If I have understood it correctly, this point might be a significant difference between Confucian education and Christian education. Both are concerned that people learn to behave well, learn good behaviour. And, again, good behaviour can be head, heart, and hands, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. As I understand it, however, Confucian education says that after you have achieved the good behaviours, you will be a human being. When your filial piety is complete, then your father can love you. Christian education is an entirely different thing. Your father already loves you---remember God's mission? You were created a human being, you were created a new human being in Christ (2 Cor 5:8). You can choose to practice good behaviour because you are loved, not in order to earn love.

Likely this pattern also appears in a difference between Christian worship and temple worship. As I understand it, you burn incense or paper things, you bring fruit, to get the god or gods to like you, to give you blessings. That's a lot of pressure; so also, having heard your fortune, to do just the right things, to get blessings. Christian worship? Yes, bring your money. The activities of the church, and God's mission around the globe, need financial support. But you can bring your money because God is already blessing you, not in order to get blessings.

To talk about worship this way is to begin to recognise that all kinds of Christian activities can be connected to Christ, can be Christian education. As mentioned before, when the school conducts itself with songs or devotions or things on the walls that talk about Christ, then also the math class is Christian education. But more directly in the worship service: every song, every Bible read can be Christian education. The Pastor and worship leaders are all part of a Christian education team; as each one of us can be in different times and places.

Christian Education in Missio Dei?

Take a few moments now to look over any notes you have made, or perhaps to make some notes. What have you heard about education and about Christian that was helpful or confusing? Did comments about God's mission surprise you or affirm what you thought already. I will be quiet for a moment to let you think and write---and, again, your writing can perhaps be better in Chinese than in English. Your writing your thoughts is important, in whichever language. Perhaps even you will list a couple things you could be doing for Christian Education in God's Mission. [[[PAUSE]]]

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Thank you for your efforts, your thinking and working with the terms in the conference title. Also I want to thank Dr. Hudson WONG; I have seen and appreciate his excellent response working with these terms. I want to thank all at CTS and in the pastoral conference who work to make these events possible. And, finally, I want to thank Dr. Evangeline RIMBACH, sister of Dr. James RIMBACH, for financial support for this event, including the gift of books for students from Myanmar.

I have offered you some understanding of these terms, of Christian Education in Missio Dei. Education means engaging some person or group of people with some material, math or a Bible verse or serving in the community. It is Christian education when the material shows people God's mission, God's love working in Christ for them and for the world. That is Christian Education in Missio Dei. May God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Thank you.