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JUSTICE, SPIRITUALITY, AND EDUCATION: WORKING DEFINITIONS FROM SECULAR, JUDEO-CHRISTIAN, AND BIBLICALLY-BASED PERSPECTIVES

BY JUNE HETZEL AND RACHEL BECK

ABSTRACT

The issue of justice and social justice has been and still is a controversial topic in society today. A struggle exists both to define and to enact it. The same can be said of the concepts of spirituality and education. The concepts of justice, spirituality, and education intersect in community responsibility, the topic of this journal. A brief examination of the secular, Judeo-Christian, and Biblical definitions of the terms *justice*, *spirituality*, and *education* lends insight, not only into how communities compare and contrast one another in their working definitions of these terms, but also serves to identify commonalities and points of agreement between diverse perspectives which can serve as a platform for further dialogue. Furthermore, this paper hopes to bring about a deeper understanding of God and His desire for humankind, bringing into sharper focus how we ought to conduct ourselves as a community of grace, in a fallen world, as we equip the next generation.

INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to define justice, spirituality, and education from secular and Judeo-Christian perspectives, with the intent of defining biblically-based community responsibilities for the body of Christ. As followers of Jesus and professionals who have dedicated our lives to the education field, we come to the intersection of justice, spirituality and education with the experiential pain of our own brokenness and the brokenness of the children, adolescents, and adults with whom we have worked in the North America, Asia, Africa, and Europe. As humans, we have limited, myopic vision, and so we ask that Jesus, through the work of His Holy Spirit, expand our vision beyond ourselves to see the pressing urban and global vision that will stretch us beyond our own capacities, humble us in the recognition and need of the Savior and the work of His Holy Spirit, and grow us into not just recognition of justice, spirituality, and educational needs all around us, but unrelentingly compel us to take up the banner of personal and community responsibilities, as we seek to bring together the body of Christ in providing an intersection of hope for the world that can only be found in Christ.

As we connect for change, we are reminded of a statement by Pastor Dan Crane of the First Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, California, who stated that the greatest injustice in the world is people not hearing the Gospel and knowing Jesus as Savior (2011, personal communication). The JSE Conference (pronounced "Jesse") echoes back to the root of where all hope lies, that is in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Isaiah tells us, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord," Isaiah 11:1-2. This is our hope and prayer – that we would intimately know our Savior, who sprang forth from the root of Jesse, and that we would be His hands and feet, demonstrating wisdom, understanding, counsel, and might as we serve our community in the fear of the Lord.

Isaiah also reminds us,

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound." - Isaiah 61:1

We, as a community, have important work to do in justice, spirituality and education. It is the authors' desire to build a definitional foundation for each of these terms upon which we can organize intellectual exchange and spiritual pursuit of knowing God and owning responsibilities in connecting for change in our communities so that we might introduce our brethren to the Lord Jesus Christ, the true arbiter of love and justice.

DEFINITIONS OF JUSTICE

In order to properly compare the contemporary secular and Judeo-Christian approach to the treatment of justice in education, it is first necessary to understand how the two groups define justice in the context of education. The categories "secular" and "Judeo-Christian" are extremely broad, but a literature review of articles and books in the last decade point to recurring themes in each of these groups.

Secular Definitions of Justice

The topic of justice in education is addressed in the literature primarily, though not exclusively, in terms of *social justice*. *Social justice* seems to be tacitly understood to mean an equality of rights between all people and people groups, regardless of their gender, ability, age, faith, ethnicity, cultural, or socioeconomic status.

Dixon, et al (2010) lists examples of social justice as, "equity of services, access to services, harmony in educational setting, and equitable participation" (p. 103). Dixon, et al (2010) also defines socially just schools as "environments in which all students receive equitable access to resources and services, resulting in educational settings with school professionals who advocate for the needs of individual students and the needs of the student population as a whole" (Dixon, et al., 2010, p. 103).

Gewirtz (2006) breaks down understanding of justice into three distinct types: *distributive*, *recognitional*, and *associational justice*. *Distributive justice* can be defined as, "the principles by which goods are distributed in society" (p. 74). *Distributive justice* can also be referred to as economic justice. *Recognitional justice* is "the absence of cultural domination, non-recognition, and disrespect" (Gewirtz, 2006, p. 74). Finally, *associational justice* is defined as "patterns of association amongst individuals and amongst groups which prevent some people from participating fully in decisions which affect the conditions within which they live and act" (Power & Gewirtz, 2001, p. 75).

Justice in education is also discussed in the literature in terms of *restorative justice*. *Restorative justice* is, "a distinctive philosophical approach that seeks to replace punitive, managerial structures of schooling with those that emphasize the building and repairing of relationships" (Vaandering, 2010, p. 145).

Finally, Zaijda, et al (2006) chose to discuss the question of social justice in education by viewing it in terms of this question, "How can we contribute to the creation of a more equitable, respectful, and just society for everyone?" (p.13). Zaijda points out that this is a question not only of importing social justice values into education, but also of finding ways for education to export social justice into the culture. One of the fundamental exports should then be to make the knowledge produced and preserved by the university more accessible to society (Brennan & Naidoo, 2008).

Faith-Based Definitions of Justice

In the literature, religious groups do not speak of justice directly in terms of social justice as frequently as secular groups, but many of the same principles are assumed. Jorgenson (2010) defines justice in terms of righteousness. He states that, "righteousness and justice are about right relationships. Jesus is our justice because he demonstrates that a right relationship with God implies and entails a right relationship with our neighbors" (p. 22). This right relationship

then dictates the proper distribution of resources both in terms of the tangible, such as food and clothing, and the intangible such as respect and education (Jorgenson, 2010, p. 22). For example, the rich man who came to Jesus had maintained a right relationship with those around him in terms of the intangible but not the tangible. He had never murdered, committed adultery, stolen, lied to or defrauded anyone, and he had given proper honor and respect to his parents. In doing so, he had exercised proper “distribution” of human rights and dignity. He lacked, however, proper distribution of tangible resources, as he was wealthy and living among the poor (Mark 10:17-22).

A study conducted on a Jesuit school’s methods for bringing about an awareness for justice, in this case social justice in particular, defined justice as the belief that, “every student can positively contribute to the common good. It is vital, therefore, that no student be denied the opportunity or motivation to contribute to a just world (to do so would be unjust)” (Scibilia, Giamorio & Rogers, 2009, p. 57).

Justice in a Biblical Context

From the beginning, God’s plan for His people was to “live an ethic or lifestyle of doing what [is] right and just” (Hill and Walton, 2009; Gen. 18:19). Israel, it is noted, “is charged to practice righteousness and justice with each other as members of the covenant community” (Lev. 19:16-18). Righteousness and justice are the pillars of God’s throne (Hill and Walton, 2009; Psalm 89:14). As you read through the Old Testament, you see that God has a heart for certain people groups that are potentially vulnerable: widows (James 1:27, Mark 12:40), orphans (Exodus 22:22 – 24, Isaiah 1:17), poor (Jer 22:3, Prov 29:7), aliens (1 Peter 2:11, Exodus 22:21). Certain groups of individuals were singled out in the Old Testament because they were susceptible to being marginalized or oppressed.

In the call to social justice, Scriptures recognize poverty in terms of *material poverty*, *social poverty*, and *spiritual poverty*. In terms of *material poverty*, there are continued references to the poor and a large body of legislation in the Old Testament structured to serve the poor. For example, there were gleaning laws (Lev. 19:9-10), a tithe for the poor (Deut 14:28-29), and a sabbatical year where the poor could eat off the land (Lev. 25:1-7). Additionally, the poor were not to be charged interest (Ex. 22:25), and “the Year of Jubilee made provisions for redemption of property and the poor and the enslaved” (Lev. 25:8-55) (Hill and Walton, 2009, p. 737). These Old Testament laws reveal God’s heart for those in need. God’s heart is echoed again in the New Testament, linked to Jesus’ teaching on loving others – “whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

Social poverty relates to those in a social stratum where they are marginalized or disadvantaged. Scripture notes some of these social categories, such as the widow (Acts 6:1; 1 Tim 5:5), the orphan (Psalm 68:5, Jeremiah 49:11), the foreigner in the land (Deut 24:17 - 18), slaves (Deut 23:15 - 16), or those who are physically disabled (John 1:9 – 11, John 5:1-18). Our call, in both the Old and New Testaments, is to cross the social barriers as Jesus did, such as when he spoke about the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25 - 37), when he ate with tax collectors (Mark 2:15 - 16) and prostitutes (Luke 7:37 - 50), and spoke to women (John 4:4 - 42). As Christians we also seek to reach out toward those who would be the modern day tax collectors. We see modern examples, such as Kevin Blue and Richard Twiss, both Christian evangelicals and both working toward a just society for the poor and for all members of society.

A third category of poverty where social justice and action is required is *spiritual poverty*. *Spiritual poverty* calls out the need to know God and to invite the Lord of Lords to be King in one’s heart. To be spiritually poor is to be lacking in the knowledge of God. To be spiritually rich is to know God and know the Savior, that is, to be in right relationship. Jesus came to bring Good News and that same Good News was carried out by the words of His disciples who were rich in the knowledge of God and right in relationship to God. Jesus clearly taught that material riches are often an obstacle to

knowing God and that the calling of a true disciple involves a duty to give away what one has (i.e., spiritually and materially) in order to care for others. In fact, the litmus test of your faith is this: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27, ESV). Further clarity about remaining unstained by the world comes from Jesus’ teaching when he underscores repeatedly throughout the gospels the need for the heart to love God only, not mammon (i.e., material goods) (Matt 6: 21 – 24, Matt 9:13, Mark 10:23 – 27, Luke 12:15).

SUMMARY OF JUSTICE DEFINITIONS

Overall, the secular and Judeo-Christian beliefs concerning justice appear similar with a few subtle, but important differences. Both agree that justice is in large part comprised of a proper distribution of power and resources, and it could also be argued that both parties view justice in terms of proper relationships. The difference lies in how those relationships are defined.

Secular literature seems largely to view relationships in terms of equality. Resources ought to be divided evenly because no individual has any more intrinsic value than another, thus equal distribution is “fair”. Likewise, everyone ought to respect one another because everyone is of equal worth.

The Judeo-Christian community, on the other hand, though it would not necessarily dispute the concept of equality of value, finds its basis in right relationships, not equal ones. The difference is that under the Judeo-Christian definition, if there are right relationships, then there can also be wrong relationships; whereas, the only “wrong” relationship under the secular definition would be one that did not assign equivocal value to all walks of life.

Those coming from a biblically-based ideology would argue that justice in both the Old Testament teachings of the covenant community of Israel, as well as the New Testament teachings of Jesus, comprises a consistent calling to social justice in terms of serving those who are materially, socially, and spiritually poor. Hence, this is our calling as believers. “Social concern across the Old and New Testament [are] rooted in God’s character, especially His compassion, generosity, hospitality, and acceptance. At one level, the practice of social justice is the basis for separating the wicked from the righteous in the divine judgment at the end of the age” (Matt. 25:31-46; Hill and Walton, 2009, p. 738); this is the ultimate judgment of God as He judges the heart of each person in the final day. While true justice would be for all to pay for the penalty of their sins, the wages which would be death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23), Jesus modeled the ultimate sacrifice of love for all humankind by giving Himself completely to others, providing the gift of grace or undeserved favor (Ephesians 2:8,9). And then what do we do with this grace offered so freely by Jesus? We give it away as “we were created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph. 2:10). We were created to serve others, love others, and do good works (Ephesians 2:10). Hence, followers of Jesus should be at the front lines of social justice.

SPIRITUALITY DEFINITIONS

The term *spirituality* has a wide array of definitions in secular and sacred literature, its meaning more often assumed than stated. In order to promote a conversation on spirituality, it is necessary to examine secular and sacred definitions of the word *spirituality*. The literature review that follows considers the last decade of conversation.

Secular Definitions of Spirituality

The definition of spirituality in secular conversations is varied and vague, yet generally pertains to people’s engagement in the world, especially their search for meaning in life. Some in the secular conversation advise divorcing spirituality from religion or statements of specific belief, especially when pertaining to a Higher Power. Everyone has spirituality;

whereas, the choice to have religious affiliations or beliefs associated with that spirituality is considered a personal one.

Many definitions emphasize depth of meaning and purpose, such as Wright (2000), who suggests that spirituality is “our concern for the ultimate meaning and purpose of life” (p. 7), and Starratt (2004), who claims spirituality is “a way of being present to the most profound realities of one’s world” (p. 67). For Kumar (2000), however, spirituality is the concept of connection that is central to his definition. He states that, “People think that spirituality means that you have to be a Christian or a Hindu or a Buddhist or have a blind faith in God. That is not spirituality. Spirituality is a deep feeling of compassion and unity and relatedness and connection with all of existence” (p. 4). Others in the field, such as Emmons (2000), include morals and values in their definitions, as inextricably linked to spirituality, such as “the capacity to engage in virtuous behavior (to show forgiveness, to express gratitude, to be humble, to display compassion)” (p. 3). Still others (e.g., Claxton, 2002; Piechowski, 2003) argue that the moral dimension is not associated with spirituality at all. Instead of attempting to define what spirituality is, they focus more on the psychology of the spiritual experience, which includes “a sense of belonging, awe, timelessness, vitality, and bliss” (Fraser, 2007, p. 291).

In examining a study by Alexander and McLaughlin (2003), “McLaughlin and Alexander have identified interrelated strands which they argue, characterize the ‘spiritual domain’. They are: (i) a search for meaning; (ii) the cultivation of ‘inner space’; (iii) the manifestations of spirituality in life; (iv) distinctive responses to the natural and human world; and (v) collective and communal aspects” (2003, pp. 359-360). Radford (2011) discusses McLaughlin and Alexander’s distinction of spirituality being “either ‘tethered’ to, or ‘untethered’ from religion” (p. 328).

Other authors support this idea of religious context within the discussion of spirituality. Walker and McPhail (2009) state that academicians have an interest in spirituality because “they are seeking meaning in their lives” (Walker & McPhail, 2009, p. 323). Some researchers prefer to make a more generalized statement about spirituality that includes the concept of a deity or higher power. “Spirituality is often understood to be a highly individualized, ongoing, and integrative process of the self (body, mind, and soul) and, ultimately, a way to gain communion with a Higher Being (as cited in, Livingston & Cummings, 2009, p. 224).

Though not directly pertaining to the definition of spirituality, but to the *telos* (end goal) of spirituality, a recurring theme that surfaced in the secular literature was the tendency to treat spirituality as a method for coping with life. For example, “In spirituality, we find ways to understand and work through our fundamental human limitations to deal with those things that may be beyond our control, such as accidents, abuse, environmental disaster, and death” (as cited in, Dobmeier, 2011, para. 6). In other words, there seems to be the recognition that humans are fundamentally limited in their understanding and that spirituality is reaching out to something or someone beyond finite humans for assistance, understanding, and healing.

Judeo-Christian Perspectives on the Definition of Spirituality

Some authors coming from a Judeo-Christian background also draw the distinction between spirituality and religion; others assume their theology in the definition. Fredrick (2008), in exploring discipleship and spirituality from a Christian perspective, states that, “Spirituality considers how an individual lives and practices transcendent beliefs at its most basic and generic form. Spirituality may be concerned with a particular religious affiliation, but it need not to” (p. 553). Fredrick goes on to state, however, that Christian spirituality “concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving the bringing together of the fundamental ideas of Christianity and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of the Christian faith . . . religious life determines the ways in which one practices spirituality” (Fredrick, 2008, p. 556). Fredrick (2008) concludes that, “Christian spirituality is in stark contrast

with secular spirituality . . . [Christian discipleship] provides a belief set, a narrative framework for understanding spiritual experiences, and most importantly, a community outside of oneself that may confront and support one to develop a deeper, more complete relationship with the Divine” (p. 559).

Many Christian writers currently define spirituality in terms of *spiritual formation*. For example, Ma (2003) stated that, “Spiritual formation is defined as the process of becoming conformed to the image of Christ, for the purpose of fellowship with God and the community of believers” (p. 325).

Dallas Willard, philosophy professor at the University of Southern California and evangelical believer, states that, “Spiritual formation in Christ is the process through which disciples or apprentices of Jesus take on the qualities or characteristics of Christ himself, in every essential dimension of human personality. The overall orientation of their will, the kinds of thoughts and feelings that occupy them, the ‘automatic’ inclinations and ‘readinesses’ of their body in action, the prevailing posture of their relations toward others, and the harmonious wholeness of their soul--these all, through the formative processes undergone by his disciples, increasingly come to resemble the personal dimensions of their Master” (Willard, 2008, p. 79).

Steve Porter (2008), professor at Talbot Seminary and Rosemead School of Psychology, as well as co-director of the Center for Christian Thought at Biola University in Los Angeles County, defines spiritual formation in a similar way, but also acknowledges that it is a contended term within the Christian community. He states that, “the topic of spiritual formation within evangelicalism is simply the Protestant doctrine of sanctification in a new key. (1) The Protestant theological category of ‘sanctification’ has traditionally referred to the process of the believer being made holy, which is ‘to be conformed to the image of Christ’ (Rom 8:29). (2) While there have been various conceptions of this sanctification process within Protestantism, the underlying unity to these divergent views has been the attempt to spell out the nature and dynamics of growth in holiness (cf. 1 Pet 1:14-16). (3) Partly due to distorted treatments of sanctification, alternative terms such as ‘spiritual formation,’ ‘spiritual theology,’ and ‘Christian spirituality’ have become common within evangelical circles. While these terms and the plethora of viewpoints which accompany them often sound much different than typical evangelical presentations of sanctification, this should not detract us from the realization that what is being discussed under the heading of ‘spiritual formation’ (at least within evangelical Protestantism) is none other than views regarding the nature and dynamics of growth in Christian holiness” (Porter, 2008, p. 129).

Spiritual theology is the study of the lived out experiences in the lives of believers as they become more conformed to the image of Christ. John Coe, Professor at Talbot Theological Seminary and co-founder of Biola University’s Institute for Spiritual Formation, defines spiritual theology as, “a theological discipline in its own right which attempts to integrate (1) the Scriptural teaching and sanctification grown from a Biblical and Systematic theology perspective with (2) observations and reflections (an empirical study) of the Spirit’s actual work in the believer’s spirit and experience. It encompasses the more general and minimal task . . . in bringing out the spiritual implications and applications of theology in real life but goes beyond this in terms of scope and rigor” (Coe, 2009, p. 7).

Spirituality in a Biblical Context

While the term *spirituality* is not used in the Old or New Testament Scriptures, a plethora of passages throughout the Scriptures explain and illustrate what it means to live a *Spirit-filled life*. Jesus taught His disciples that when He left a Comforter would come, the Holy Spirit, who would teach them all things (John 14:25 - 27). This Spirit, the third member of the triune God (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) would abide in them, the disciples of Jesus, and teach them. And, reciprocally, the disciples of Jesus were to abide in Him, the True Vine, that is Jesus (John

15). Jesus said, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5, ESV). Scriptures are clear on the essential nature of living the Christian life in conformity to Christ, not the world. Romans 12:2 (NIV) tells us, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Spirituality would then be the lived out experiences of disciples of Christ following after the leading of the Spirit in their lives, nesting their lives in the One who is greater, their Lord, Savior, Creator, YHWH. Educators, who are believers, then, walk in the Spirit and live lives characterized by love (I Corinthians 13). Their lives emanate a variety of fruit, nourished by the cultivation of the Spirit in their lives, as described in Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV), “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Biblical spirituality then has in its root meaning, the Spirit of God, the imitation of God, the abiding in His Spirit, the living out of the Spirit-led life. Biblical spirituality is indeed the sanctification process whereby we become conformed to the image of Christ through obedience (Romans 12:1-2; John 15; Galatians 5:22-23; I Peter 1:14-16), and serve others (Eph. 2:10) in imitation of the Master and from the rich storehouse of grace and love of which we are recipients.

Summary of Spirituality Definitions

There seems to be no single definition for spirituality that is agreed upon in either secular or Judeo-Christian academia. Secular academia tends more towards a definition involving some form of introspection, often leading to a feeling of unity of connectedness with the world at large. Secular perspectives emphasize a search for meaning in life. Secular viewpoints often seek to divorce the term *spirituality* from any religion, deity, or metaphysical power. In some cases, however, spirituality is implied or treated directly as a coping mechanism. In the Judeo-Christian conversation, however, there is much more ready application to theological implications to the term *spirituality*. Definitions of spirituality in large part relate to the relationship a person holds with the Divine, and, in some perspectives, also dictates relationships with other people.

Though both sets of definitions obviously differ from one another, especially in their relation to a Higher Power, it is interesting to note that the stated logical outcome of both sets of definitions seems to involve an increase in community, unity, or healthy relationship with self and the world at large. Additionally, both sacred and secular definitions appear to recognize human limitations and seek to reach out to metaphysical aspects of one’s spiritual world that go beyond what one can see and measure in the “scientific” realm.

Finally, the biblical perspective of spirituality is firmly rooted in relationship to the Spirit of God (John 15) and the working out of the Spirit-led life in the sanctification process of becoming more like Him (Romans 12:1-2), walking in obedience (I Peter 1:14-16) and leading a Spirit-led life (John 15) in the pursuit of holiness and service to others (Eph. 2:10).

DEFINITIONS OF EDUCATION

Education is nearly a universal value, but what societies mean by *education* dramatically differs. For some, education is the preparation for vocation, while for others, education is the study of the liberal arts. Still for others, education is the pursuit of truth – or a combination thereof. To refine dialogue in the area of education, a literature review sheds light on the broad perspectives of secular, Judeo-Christian, and biblical perspectives of education.

Secular Definitions of Education

Education as an isolated term is rarely defined within secular academic journals. Terms such as *special education*, *gifted education*, *higher education*, and so forth are defined, but the stand-alone term, *education*, is rarely explicated. Historically, education in the liberal arts was considered *education*. However, “across many advanced industrial economies, there is a shift in the emphasis within university programs towards those that are primarily concerned with the preparation for specific occupations, and away from the liberal arts” (Billet, 2009, p. 827). This transition has led to descriptions, sometimes pejorative, of universities now primarily being involved in ‘higher vocational education’” (Billet, 2009, p. 827). One author states that, “All education is broadly vocational, and, where the educational purposes are about occupational preparation, then these purposes and those of specific vocational education are one and the same” (Billet, 2009, p. 828).

Debra Humphreys, a Vice President of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, when, stating her own views, defines liberal education as including, among other achievements, “creative thinking, teamwork and problem solving, civic knowledge and engagement, ethical reasoning and action, and synthesis and advanced accomplishment across general and specialized studies” (Mulcahy, 2010, p. 203). She goes on to speak about Newman and his “cultivation of the intellect” which, “recognizes the importance of practical knowledge and education for action, accommodates the view that education of the whole person brings into play emotional, moral, and spiritual formation; and adopts a pedagogical stance that gives full recognition to the experience, capacities, and interests of the individual” (Mulcahy, 2010, p. 212).

Duderstadt (2009) believes that education is about an accumulation of skill sets or vocational knowledge. He states “To provide our citizens with the knowledge and skills to compete on the global level, the nation must broaden access to world-class educational opportunities at all levels: K–12, higher education, workplace training, and lifelong learning. It must also build and sustain world-class universities capable of conducting cutting-edge research and innovation; producing outstanding scientists, engineers, physicians, teachers, and other knowledge professionals; and building the advanced learning and research infrastructure necessary for the nation to sustain its leadership in the century ahead” (p. 347). Education, from Duderstadt’s perspective, entails readying people to serve in their chosen vocations and to be useful to their immediate and global communities.

Others educators consider education to be more about collaborative inquiry learning in a democratic environment, rather than accumulation of knowledge. For example, one author states that, “Democratic education... is characterized by children and teachers working together to make better sense of themselves and their world by listening to, challenging, testing and critiquing each other’s ideas. He argued that this freedom and ability to democratically inquire has far more educative value than the accumulation of any body of knowledge” (Webster, 2009, p. 93).

Other researchers point to education as a somewhat fluid idea. Barnett (2004) points to the ambiguity concerning the definition of *education* and states that, “We have moved into an age of supercomplexity, which is characterized essentially by conceptual turmoil. We have no sure grip on who we are, how we relate to the world and, indeed, what the world is like” (p. 72). He adds, however, that, “under these conditions, the world needs the university more than ever and large purposes open up for it. These are the purposes of compounding our conceptual turmoil, enabling us internally (ontologically) to handle the uncertain state of being that results and assisting the world in living purposively amid that turmoil” (Barnett, 2004, p. 72). Others agree. Another article asserts, “that rapid social and technological change can or should necessarily be paralleled by radical change within the education system” (Pirrie & Lowden, 2004, p. 526) . . . but to what type of change and to what end?

Judeo-Christian Definitions of Education

Spears and Loomis (2009), educational philosophers at Biola University (California) and Wheaton College (Illinois), identify education as “a pursuit of truth” (p. 31). Spears and Loomis (2009) state that “... as adults, we find we are not well equipped to wrestle with some of the more difficult questions of parenting, life, death and our own fragile existence . . . the formal activity of education can better equip us to deal with such questions when grounded in a theological and philosophical foundation that is integrated with the Christian faith. Only then can we better understand (for ourselves and to teach others) who we are within God’s created universe” (Spears & Loomis, 2009, p. 30). Furthermore, Spears and Loomis (2009) also state that in order for “learning to contribute to human development and flourishing, including important dimensions of freedom, education as an institution requires conditions of knowledge and practice that are grounded in the Christian liberal arts tradition (p. 35).

Other authors seem to agree. Love (2001) defines education as, “the process of providing the knowledge and experience for persons to acquire the skills and information needed to become truly committed disciples, working to make other disciples for Christ” (p. 15). The Biola University website (2012) states, in regard to education, that, “Our business is to inspire students’ learning so that they are empowered to think and practice from a Christian worldview in their fields of service.”

Biblically-based Definitions of Education

Education from a biblical perspective begins and ends with God. Teachers, from a biblical perspective, are mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers (Deuteronomy 6:6-8; Psalm 78:4-6), and those who are given the gift of teaching to assist the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:10-12). Jesus was called Teacher and Lord (John 13:13-15), and the ultimate teacher that resides in each believer is the Holy Spirit who leads all His children into truth (John 14:25-27). The outcome of receiving His grace is good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). The curriculum and standards are His Word (Psalm 119) and the context is life.

Education Begins and Ends with God

Education begins and ends with God. A true education is about life; a true education is not about arbitrary standards, scatter knowledge (Barzun, 1992), or skillful responses to multiple-choice questions on standardized exams. Education is about knowing God and walking in His precepts (Psalm 119: 1, 9 – 16, 33 – 40). Education is about loving God and loving others (Luke 10:27, Matt 22:37). Education is about living the life God intended you to live and walking the path He prepared for you before the foundations of the earth (Psalm 139: 13 - 16).

Psalm 25:8-10 tells us “Good and upright is the LORD; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way. All the paths of the LORD are loving-kindness and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies,” (NASB). God is good and He loves His children. He desires for His children to intimately know Him and walk in His way. God’s plan is a path of loving-kindness, not suffering, pain, and death.

True Education Nourishes Souls

True education nourishes souls. Parents and educators who teach God’s Word nourish children’s souls with the life-giving Word, pointing them to God. Their teaching, because it is infused with God’s Word, is like drops of rain that water the earth or dew that moistens the grass. The Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:13 states, “Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as the droplets on the fresh grass and as the showers on the herb. For I proclaim the name of the LORD: ascribe greatness to our God!”

When parents and educators teach from the Word of God and infuse His principles into all that they teach, their teaching is life-giving because human souls thirst for the Living Water that can only be found in God Himself. When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well (John 4: 1 - 42), He told her that He could give her water where she would never thirst again. While, observations of children and adolescents would tell us that the nature of humankind is curious and thirsts for knowledge (Lewis, *Our English Syllabus*), a biblical perspective underscores that the thirst extends beyond simply knowledge curiosity to a desire for knowledge that extends into the deep of the soul, a thirst to fill the vacuum that exists in all of us, that is to know God and all the truth, beauty, and goodness that He has for us (2 Thess. 1:11; Romans 15:13). To know God, to be one with God, to live in the complete fullness for which He designed us is the purpose of humankind (Genesis 1:26, Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Parents are the First Educators

Parents are the first educators. *Our responsibility as parents and educators is to teach God's Word on a daily basis.* In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:6-8 states, "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead" (NASB). God's Word is to be reflected in parents' and educators' words and actions throughout the day, influencing children and adolescents in the daily activities of life.

Our responsibility as parents and educators is to tell the generations to come of God's wondrous works. Psalm 78:4-6 describes "We will . . . tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should teach them to their children, that the generation to come might know, *even* the children yet to be born, *that* they may arise and tell *them* to their children," (NASB).

The Holy Spirit is Comforter and Teacher

The Holy Spirit is the Comforter and Teacher. In the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verses 25- 27, Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful," (NASB).

Jesus Calls Us to Lay Down Our Lives

Jesus, our Savior, was called Teacher and Lord (John 13:13-15). He stated, " You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you," (NASB). So as we consider where justice, spirituality, and education meet, we find this intersection in the Person and work of Christ Jesus who humbly laid down His life as a ransom for sin. As believers, we are to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, humbly laying down our lives for others as we live a Spirit-filled life and fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

Discipleship is costly. As Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 16:24-26 (NASB), "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Conclusion of Definitions of Education

Both the secular and Christian communities define education in terms of learning and the accrual of knowledge and skill sets. Both believe that education should in some way equip its students for the world, be that vocationally or otherwise.

Secular and sacred definitions of education differ in that secular literature seems to treat the definition of education in a more fluid or evolving way. Faith-based communities, on the other hand, view education in the context of an unchanging Christian worldview, grounded in biblical theology.

Biblical perspectives on education are primarily non-institutionalized descriptions. Biblical perspectives on education involve: the heightened importance of parents 1) training their children (Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 6:4), 2) passing along Scriptural truths and precepts to the next generation whether through home or church teaching (Deut. 6:7, Psalm 34:11), 3) utilizing one's intelligence for the needs of the community (e.g., artisans building the Temple), and 4) utilizing one's gifts (e.g., teaching, administration) for the building up of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4: 25-32; Acts 6:1-3), and living the Spirit-led life (John 15; Romans 8).

THE INTERSECTION OF JUSTICE, SPIRITUALITY, AND EDUCATION

As educators, we are to love our students, acknowledge their giftedness, and cultivate just educational practices that assist all students in human flourishing, virtuous living, and bringing glory to God. A just education, from a biblical perspective, supports a Spirit-led life, grounded in biblical theology, assisting and equipping students to fulfill the purpose for which they are created. As students fulfill their purpose, parents, educators, and community members encourage students to love and good deeds through service to their community. In this process, students learn to be givers of all that they are, becoming sensitized to the needs of the poor, the hurting, the disenfranchised . . . being led by the Spirit in service to others . . . in the same way that Jesus, the Master Teacher, served the world. To consider the intersection of justice, spirituality, and education, one must reframe one's thinking and place the Spirit-led life at the center (Romans 8; John 15). This "connection for change" necessitates a paradigm shift, placing Christ at the center of all we do in educational arenas, rather than being driven by secular agendas.

Implications of the intersection of justice, spirituality, and education are many:

- Sacrificial love for our students and others in our community
- Biblically-based training in righteousness and what it is to live a Spirit-led life
- Pursuit of truth
- Full acknowledgement of, respect for, and accommodations for individual differences
- Openness to multiple paths of education to meet the needs of individual learners (e.g., public, private, mission, homeschool, magnets, charters, etc.)
- Compassion projects integrated throughout the curriculum
- Full inclusion of students and parents in the educational process
- Compassionate education for those with special needs
- Equitable distribution of educational resources
- Home, church, and schools working hand-in-hand to create coherency in students' lives
- Training in how to think, read, write, debate, listen, and serve one's community well
- Training in virtuous living
- Serious gatekeeping in the Schools of Education at the university to allow only the best, brightest, most compassionate loving and insightful teachers into the profession

- Well-rounded, robust curriculum that acknowledges all areas of giftedness including the visual and performing arts, as expressions of beauty
- Serious inclusion of physical fitness and health at every level, acknowledging our bodies as the temples of God
- Shedding practices that harm children and youth, such as the overemphasis on testing and assessment and the scatter approach to knowledge and truth
- Shedding ineffective employees and programs and use of funds that dilute equitable services to support the educational needs of students and families
- Ensuring safe procedures are in place at all schools to protect our most valuable resources, our youth

While the preceding list is not comprehensive, we must acknowledge that as we put on the new, we must also shed the old ways of doing things. This means shedding practices that are self-serving and acknowledging that God is at the center of all. To promote justice and spirituality in the educational setting, one must be an imitator of God and, at the core, God is love (Corinthians 13:11; John 14:31; Matthew 3:17).

Erickson (1988) describes four dimensions of God's love including: *benevolence*, *grace*, *mercy*, and *persistence*. "*Benevolence* is simply the idea that God does not seek his own good, but rather that of others" (p. 321; Matt. 5:45; Romans 5:6-10). He seeks out the "lost sheep," "the lost coin," and the "prodigal son." Whereas, *grace* is that dimension of love where "God supplies us with undeserved favors" (p. 321; Eph. 2:8-9). In that while we were sinners, Christ died for us. His act on the cross was the greatest form of love.

Mercy is God's "tenderhearted compassion for His people" (p. 322; Psalm 103:13). He sees both our physical and spiritual needs (Matt. 9:35-36) and responds. And, the *persistence* dimension of God's love is how Erickson (1988) describes God's "withholding judgment and continuing to offer salvation and grace over long periods of time" (pp. 322-323; Psalm 86:15; Romans 2:4; 9:22; I Peter 3:20; II Peter 3:15). It is amazing that God may actually have delayed the flood (I Peter 3:20) and continues to delay His return (II Peter 3:9) so that more might come to repentance and knowledge of salvation.

God's love is not fully understood, however, without examining God's attribute of *justice*. "The justice of God means that he administers his law fairly, not showing favoritism or partiality" (Erickson, 1988, p. 315). In the Old Testament, God condemned judges who took bribes or showed partiality (I Sam. 8:3; Amos 5:12). However, sometimes God does not seem to be acting out His just nature in this world. For example, sometimes the wicked flourish while the righteous suffer. Sometimes crime does pay - at least it *appears* to pay for some in this life. The important thing about God's nature and His attribute of justice is to remember that God is not on a human timeline, nor does He work exclusively within human dimensions and understanding. "But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:7-9) (ESV). This patience, or persistence, is an aspect of love in tension with how many perceive God's justice.

The justice of God must be examined with an eternal perspective. God is working out His will over time. He desires for all to come to repentance. The wicked will ultimately be destroyed (Ps. 73:17-20, 27); however, God, being loving, desires for *all* to come to repentance. In time, judgment and justice will ultimately come.

In considering the ultimate purposes (*telos*) of our lives here on earth, undeniably we are here to give God glory, to serve Him, to serve others, and to fulfill our intended purpose, living a life of virtue. Educators and community

members must be wary of what Pastor Ken Bemis calls *humanitarian distraction* (2012). We are to be about our Father's business, which is to serve others. However, when Jesus served the poor and disenfranchised, He served them by meeting, not just physical needs, but most importantly spiritual needs. Jesus Himself asked, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses his soul?" (Mark 8:36) Is our purpose as Christian educators to relieve suffering and pain alone? Or, is our purpose to relieve spiritual suffering and pain that is far greater with more eternal consequences than momentary affliction on this earth. Our response is that we are called to do both. Jesus healed the sick and fed the hungry (Mark 12:15 – 21, John 6:1 - 14), but He also brought the living water so that people would never thirst again (John 4:1 - 26).

As we consider the intersection of justice, spirituality, and education, we consider Christ as the Center and Christ as the Savior. Our role is to be about His business every day, serving Him, serving others, and pointing to the Way. There should be no humanitarian distraction, no economic distraction, no sin distraction, no self-centered distraction, but serving Him alone. Ultimately, the role of the Christian educator is to live a Spirit-led life in right relationship with God and others, serving each parent and child assigned to us whether we serve in public, charter, private, mission, or homeschool.

May God bless each of you in this journey as you continue to explore personal and collective responsibility as it relates to the intersection of justice, spirituality, and education.

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