

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE ON CHRISTIAN EDUCATION IN INDONESIAN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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INTRODUCTION:

This paper reflects the author's experiences and struggles in doing Christian education ministry in Indonesia. There were expressions of sadness and concern, but there were also hope and confidence. The author believes that Christian education is a highly effective service to serve the Lord. Therefore, it is very important to understand what the characteristics of Christian Education actually are so that every servant of God and Christian educators in Indonesia can truly believe that he or she is doing a real Christian education, not a Christian-labeled education. If every Christian educational institution is committed to implement Christian education as a basis for academic excellence, then it should also apply the principles and characters of Christian education. The Characteristics of Christian Education are the basis of reflection for us to do a self evaluation. Moreover, the writer hopes that this could be a reflection of our shared-life contemplation.

The author dedicates this paper to the Lord Jesus, because He has given the gift of immeasurable. He has called the author to serve children, the fruits of His heart, through education. It's how the love of God, and blessed be His name from everlasting to everlasting. May this paper be an inspiration for as many Christian educators as possible not just for Indonesian educators, but also for all who listen to this presentation. May the Lord bless us and may the name of the Lord be glorified. Maranatha.

BACKGROUND THEME

Most Christian schools in Indonesia has not shown any uniqueness when compared with the Indonesian government schools or other private schools. An understanding of excellence and quality of education, in general, still focused on the intellectual aspects only. While the currently condition of the people of Indonesia is experiencing a slump in many ways a sad, whom the declining quality of human resources as well as the moral and mental deterioration in the quality of young people as the next generation. Indonesian society expect the changing of the system and the process of education in schools and universities in Indonesia, which can meet the challenges and the need for the presence of the future generation who have a superior quality of life in all aspects not just from the aspect of achievement and intellect. What can a Christian educator in Indonesia do to address the needs of the nation and state of Indonesia and also fulfill the calling of God in Indonesia to the task of transforming society. The role of Christian educators are very important to interpret the responsibility of every Christian school with the goal of producing Christian

schools and colleges, which cover all aspects, and give new meaning for the academic excellence. For interpreting the true meaning of academic excellence, the writer look at it from a biblical perspective and call it the characteristics of Christian education.

Age changes so quickly. Many responsible Christian parents are confused thinking about how to educate and direct their children properly while young children grow rapidly and struggle against the systems and processes considered handcuffing their freedom. There is a need of agreed understanding about the design of children's life. Who actually has the right to design the life of these children? The parents? Or the children themselves? When they are toddlers, they give their dreams following the design of the parents. However, there are times when they start asking for transfer of rights. "It's our life", they said so. We are the ones having the right to determine the design of our own lives. Well, that's where the clash and conflict meet. The question has always focused on who has the right to determine the life design of the child? Parents? Or children being at their age of puberty and growing up?

How the Bible answers this fact? The Bible clearly states that only God is the only one who has the right to design our lives. He, God the Creator, who gave His life to man (Ephesians 2:10, Isaiah 43:7). When child is still a toddler, parents are responsible and committed to guide and direct the child's life fitting the design of God, the Great Designer. When the child starts growing up and asking his rights to design his own life, parents, with the authority of God, still have to guide their beloved children. Parents guide their children to be willing to surrender their lives according to God's design, and not doing rebellion against parents' authority in choosing his own destiny. This is a crucial issue.

This is a very crucial problem because many parents do not have clear limits of role and responsibility as a father and a mother. Parents need to instill these important principles in the lives of their children. Firstly, it is the fact that life is a gift from God. God has a perfect plan in the life of every child of His. He has a design and purpose for each of His creation. Second, it is the responsibility of every parent to build a firm foundation in the life of every child, so that they have a definite awareness that life is a purpose and in God's plan. The primary responsibility of Christian parents is to guide each child to receive Lord Jesus as his only Lord and Savior. Then, they should guide the child to understand the purpose of his life in this world, which is to fulfill God's plan. A child's whole life needs to be built on this important principle.

The words of Jesus are very important as stated in Matthew 7:24-27. How people build their life, has provided inspiration for all parents and educators. In this modern world, the result may be terrible if we allow our child to build his life on sand. We pay attention to the human's tendency in this global era. Apparently, so many things offered have conditioned our children in building their life on sand. What is building a life on sand? Briefly, a life built on sand is a life pursuit of pleasure and ease, not concerning firm life principles, values and fundamentals.

When a person decides to build a house on sand, it is certain that the choice was mainly because of the ease, speed and cost efficiency. He has the desire to enjoy life without doing and spending a lot of effort and cost. The main thing is to get immediate results and achieve goals. In this case, he is not at all concerned with how the process is, especially when the

process is very long and tiring. Building a house on sand does not require much time, effort and money. The orientation of building a house on sand focuses on things that are visible and instant. Elements of deep, rooted, important, essential and invisible, are no longer considerations. The main consideration is the benefits, fast and enjoyable.

The Lord Jesus said that such things are done by people who are not concerned with the Word of God upon their life. The Lord Jesus insisted that unless someone builds his life on a firm foundation, living by the Word of God, the Bible, then it will last in a storm and challenges of this age until the eternity. As Christian educators, along with the Christian parents we have the privilege to be responsible in helping our students to build their life according to God's Word.

Christian education. Starting from the statement of the Lord Jesus, holding Christian Education should aim to help people building their life on the firm foundation, which is the Bible, the Word of God. This is the mission of Christian education; organizing an educational process to help each of the student to be able to build the house of their life in order to stand firm in the midst of this era, and to last until the eternity.

What are the challenges of this era? A force of modern society being gathered to tell the world that there is no need of Personal existence of God. People are already feeling stronger and powerful. The development of human's ability to think has created an amazing science and technology, making people fly across the globe, making it possible to rule the world with the sophisticated technology. Even people dare to define what they can and should do. There is no authority limiting the ability of people to develop the technology. Man, arrogantly, develop his ratio with the assumption of freedom without limits. Human ensure themselves that they can replace God.

When our students are asked to choose between being rich or being a wise man, what will be their choice? When we ask our students about the purpose of their life, what will they answer? Being successful or living life pleasing to God? Where did they learn to define their values and life purposes? The question for us, ministers and Christian educators is whether we realize and see the threats coming to attack the life of our students, while the global community continues to overwhelm our young people with a wide range of bids ideologies, values and lifestyles increasingly against God. There is a threat to our students, when we as educators let them building life with a foundation on sand.

Christian education. It is our responsibility as Christian educators and the Lord's servants to think seriously about how to establish a Christian education assisting our students in their school hours in building their life on the strongly firm rock. Thus, when storms and flood of materialism, atheism, skepticism, hedonism, secularism and a wide range of ideologies as well as human free lifestyle against the Word of God come, our students are still able to stand firm in the faith, hope and love for God.

When we refer to the definition of Christian education according to Robert W. Pazmino¹, he defined it as follows:

"Christian education is divine and humane efforts carried out systematically and continuously, to transmit knowledge, values, attitudes and skills, and behaviors consistent with the Christian faith. Education seeks change, renewal and reformation of individuals, groups and structure, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that students live in accordance with God's will, as expressed by the Bible and by Jesus Himself. "

Implementation of a Christian education should help students to understand and obey God's design, the purposes why God created life. There is a serious commitment for Christian education organization to think correctly and in-depth regarding how to build all the students' life based on the Bible, the Word of God, the solid Rock. This is what is meant by the **Characteristics of Christian Education**.

MISSION OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

According to the Bible (Deuteronomy 6:6-9), mission or purpose of Christian education can be formulated. First, to help each child becomes a student who personally knows the true God in Jesus Christ. Secondly, being a committed disciple of Christ asserting that God is sovereign over his personal life covering all aspects. The third one, to equip every student to become a servant of Christ who is always following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and faithfully obeying the will of God according to the Bible which has the full of authority upon his life. Fourth, the student who belongs to God's favorite thinking just about holiness, pleasing and glorifying God for the whole life. Therefore, as servants of God and Christian educators, we are committed to help all students to undergo a learning process in accordance with the principles of the Bible and the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the true meaning of Academic excellence. How can we concretely translate this truth in our calling for Christian education? Because Christian education has a clear and definite purpose or direction, which is to know, love, be faithful to, obey, and serve God according to the will of God and for His glory.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

There are four presuppositions based on the Bible, fundamentally underlying the characteristics of Christian education. *First presupposition is the living God*. God is alive and He is the source of all life. Based on this, we can interpret education as a process of communicating real life, from the living to the living. This statement is based on Christian education rooted in the living God. Thus, Christians should be the provision for education to understand the PROCESS of human life based on God's Personal. Education started since man is still in the womb and until he goes back to God, must be a continuous process and

¹Robert W. Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1988, p.81, as quoted by Samuel Sidjabat in *Strategi Pendidikan Kristen*, Yogyakarta; Andi, 1994,p.106.

never stop. This is the process to understand the meaning and purpose of human life; the process to embody the quality of life as intended by God who gave life to man. As Christian educators, we are called to educate our students by implementing an educational process in consistence with this first presupposition. According to the Bible, there is a three-dimensional process that must be developed in the whole organization of Christian education, *Scripture: Proverbs 6.2 For the Lord gives wisdom, From His mouth come knowledge and understanding (NKJV)*

Therefore, the first process is Knowledge, the second, Understanding, and the third, Wisdom. According to the Bible it becomes for us, every Christian educator, that the FOCUS in the process of learning is not knowledge, but *wisdom*.² Knowledge is the beginning of a process, which describes the information, data and facts, while Understanding is the ability more to interpret science and its application, utilize relevantly in contexts and needs of the community. Through a process of understanding going beyond the dimension of knowledge, the students are helped to enter the committing process to implement those values in their personal life. This process helps them to grow in understanding and appreciation of the learning period in the family, church and school. This is a time of preparation for them to fulfill God's calling in life, to serve others.

Christian parents, educators, and servants of the Lord, are together called by God to organize the educational process which is not stopped only at the level of Knowledge. Beyond all that important knowledge is the sharing of life, sharing the new life Christ has given to us. Therefore, to realize this commitment, the ideal is the operation of the whole learning process enabling interactive dialogue between us and the students we educate. The sharing of life process is very effective to help our students reaching the stage of Understanding. At this stage, they are able to make sense of the knowledge gained by the attitude of the heart, which eventually makes them to commit to implement the values of God in life. That is a real sense of knowledge, the knowledge that relate to God, which leads people to experience the love of God through Christ. They realize that their life have meaning and purpose that have been specially designed by God the Creator and Savior.

Furthermore, based on the first presupposition of the living God, the first **Characteristics of Christian Education**.³ is:

Education that helps every child to believe and accept Jesus as the Lord and personal Savior.

The important question that must be answered by every Christian education is : **One**, is the whole process of learning we organized has the focus and commitment to help every student to believe and accept the Lord Jesus personally in his life? Making a kid smart is not the focus of Christian education. Instead, making a child knows Jesus and experience His love is.

² -----*Wisdom – A Philosophy for Educational Reform, Accelerated Christian Education, USA, 1995,p.3*

³Donald R.Howard, seminar : *Eight Characters of Truly Christian School, School of Tomorrow training, for Supervisors, Singapore, May, 2003.*

The third dimension in the learning process is Wisdom, the highest dimension in the stage of Knowledge. Wisdom is one's commitment to implement Knowledge in the perspective of God's truth values and then become a value of his personal life. Wisdom is a concrete life commitment applied consistently covering all aspects of life. That is, when the student has gained knowledge (=science) and has correct understanding (=concept) about the application of science based on the Christian values as well as a lifetime commitment to run the values of God as the principle of life, it is Wisdom. One who has wisdom, would radiate the beauty of Christ's character and hold firmly to the values of God's truth. A person who has a Christ-like character, honors God by living a more Christ-like.

Wisdom as the focus of Christian education becomes the basis for the second **Characteristics of Christian Education**. namely:

*Education that imparts every child to have a heart with fear of God
as the Lord and personal Savior.*

The important question then: **Two**, has the learning process we do instilled in the hearts of our students, the fear of God? The Bible clearly states that "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7). If we seek for Him like people who are looking for gold and silver, we will get the understanding and knowledge of God, as well as receive the wisdom of God (Proverbs 2:5-6). Have we as Christian educators, and God's servants imparted hearts that fear God in every student we educate? Does the education of students in homes, schools and churches, seriously focus on instilling the fear-of-God heart? For only with such processes, our students have got the wisdom of God.

Next important questions: **Three**, is the learning process in Christian education has motivated us to live holy? This is the third **Characteristics of Christian Education**.

*Education hold onto the standards of holy living and Godly life values
as values taught and applied to every child.*

In the age offering free life full of sin and impurity, has the organization of Christian education helped the students to learn to love the truth of God and commit to a holy life? How we as Christian educators do our roles and responsibilities in encouraging God's values to become the value of our students life? What is now the value of our students' life? Has the world directed their hearts and given worldly values in contrary with the values of God's truth? Tragic! Can our students say NO to a world full of snares and traps dragged the younger generation today to destruction? To keep our students not to be misled by the values of a world of sin and damage, it is important to provide a faithful Christian education clinging to biblical principles.

The crucial question: **Four**, when the world defines the excellence of education in general, what are their definitions? How does the community normally define excellence, virtue and achievement? How do most parents make sense of success, superior performance and

achievement of their children? What is the indicator used by most people to judge what is called goodness and truth? How is the biblical perspective on that reality? This is the fourth **Characteristics of Christian Education**, stating:

Help and educate every child having life perspective based on the Bible.

Organizing Christian education aims to help every learner to be educated to understand and be able to apply a biblical perspective (Christian Worldview) as a worldview, paradigm, value system, and the foundation in all aspects of life. This will enable every learner to look at and live all his life by just holding or guided by the principles in the Bible becoming the paradigm mindset, style and value of life.

The second presupposition underlying characteristics of Christian education is the Living God is a God who reveals Himself. If God did not reveal Himself and declare His righteousness, then there will be no knowledge to be known, studied and understood by humans. The source of all knowledge is the Living God and the God of righteousness. God reveals His truth in the natural and supernatural languages. The truth of God in the language of nature is understood by humans through the process of reasoning or rationalization producing science. In supernatural one, His truth is beyond human ratio. If God does not give His grace, humans will have very limited ratio, will never be able to understand His truth expressed in the language of supernatural. Therefore, God gives His grace and based on His grace, by faith people may understand the supernatural truth through the work of the Holy Spirit.

- God communicates with man using His body language, through natural, non-verbal language, which is the work of His creation in the universe. Humans understand natural language through the ratio given by God. Through the process of reasoning using ratio, humans can recognize and find the truth revealed by God in the universe, giving rise to science.
- God communicates with man through the supernatural/verbal language. He declares that His supernatural truth that cannot be understood through the ratio-using reasoning. God speaks revealing His truth through the Holy Spirit working in the hearts of men. By the grace of God, humans can respond, accept, and understand His supernatural truth. That's faith.

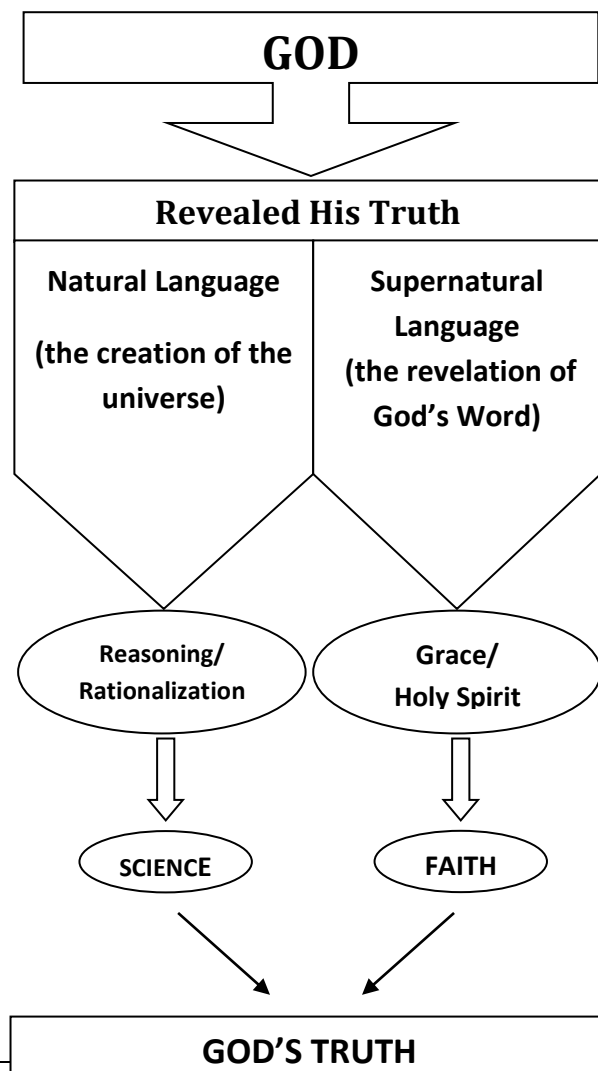
Augustine (354-430), the pious bishop of Hippo, North Africa, believes that God works through human ratio, but He first worked in the human's heart. A person who has faith, will have his ratio enlightened by God, eventually able to capture the true sense of the divine revelation. According to Augustine, faith and reason all rooted in the truth of God⁴. Francis A. Schaeffer also insists that true science will not be in contrary to the Christian faith based

⁴See: Linda Smith and William Raepier, *A Beginner's Guide to Ideas Religion and Philosophy past and present*, (Oxford: A Lion Book, 1991),p 20.

on the Bible. From the biblical perspective, there is a unity (integration) in all fields of knowledge revealed by God: the truth about God, man, and the history of the universe⁵.

Christian Worldview believes that all truths in nature are God's truths, because He created and established the law of nature. God has led the ratio of men to find the truth of nature through science and faith. However, the main thing is the focus of the whole world of God's creation is in the Lord Jesus Christ since He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life⁶. The final unity of all knowledge is the Lord Jesus Christ, the True and Living God. That is why Christian education is an education essentially implements the integration of Christian faith and science. Thus, providing education that does not integrate the Christian faith with science is not the real Christian education. This is the basis for the preparation and design of the Christian education curriculum in the Christian family, church, school and university.

Education CURRICULUM applied by every Christian educational institution must be God's-truth curriculum. This is a curriculum leading each child, pupil, and student to learn and discover the truth of God. That is the truth revealed in the laws of nature, and the truth revealed directly by revelation, the Word of God. The curriculum is based on God's truth, which is integrative rather than a dichotomy. For details, see the following chart:



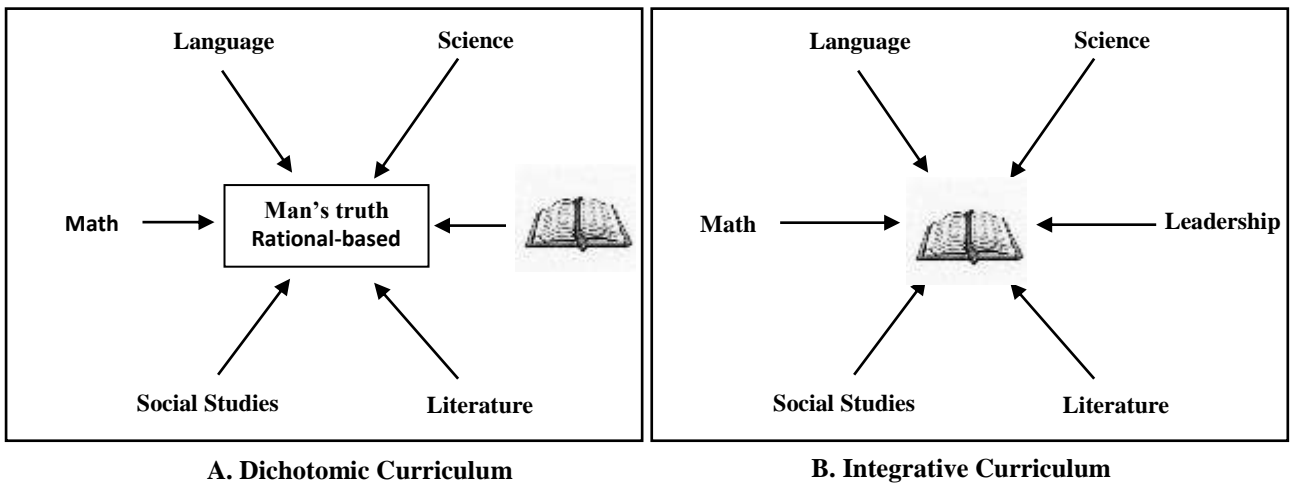
⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Bible: John 14:6,

The essence of the curriculum in Christian education is the process by which human beings undergo to understand the whole truth of God revealed Himself. That is, in order to understand the purpose and meaning of human life according to the will of God, there is one curriculum that must be learned by man in his life, the curriculum centered in the truth of God, the Bible, God's Word. This is the fifth **Characteristics of Christian Education**.

Establishing education process applying curriculum based on God's truths:
The Bible, God's Word.

The important question: **Five**, Does designing Bible-based curriculum become a high priority for the implementation of Christian education? Bible-based curriculum is the basic foundation of a comprehensive and integrative Christian education implementation. The design of curriculum develops all aspects of students' intelligence, such as the intelligence aspects of spiritual, moral, cognitive/ratio, social, emotional, and cultural. Also, this design establishes and develops the mental and personality of students. This is the true academic excellence. There are two designs of education curriculum, first is Dichotomic Curriculum centered on human rational truth, and secondly, Integrative Curriculum centered on the truth of God based on the Bible, the Word of God.



The third presupposition underlying characteristics of Christian Education is God is the Creator of Heaven Earth and everything in it. This means everything done by humans should be directed to the glory of God the Creator since everything comes from Him, through Him and for Him⁷. Consequently, all that life can continue living only if they depend on God and rely on His sovereign protection. Therefore, the implementation of Christian education should pay attention to how the learning process can build MOTIVATION in the life of students because the fundamental problem in human beings determining the direction of their life is their life motivation. The learning process encouraged and developed the spirit of selfishness, self-interest and enjoyment will lead to a self-centered life.

The important question, **Six**: As Christian educators, what is our concern in the learning process joined by our students in school? Do we feel it is important to direct our students

⁷ Bible, Romans 11:36

being educated with the right learning process of learning the truth that is a learning process that builds motivation in the hearts of our students to live to fulfill the purpose of life according to the will of God? Do we want our students to grow bigger and have a heart to give their best life pleasing God and for His glory? When we reflect on things happened around the school in general; being smart student, excellence, reaching the highest rank, graduating as cum laude, being first and foremost? This question is a reflection of the sixth **Characteristics of Christian Education.**, which is:

Helping every student to have motivation in life
to please God's heart and to fulfill His plans in his life.

Reflecting on the writer's serving experiences in the world of Christian education, writer sadly witnessed over the years, from time to time, how many students and college students studying with motivation of life centered on the purpose of pleasure and self-gratification. Their life are mostly directed to pursue the dream of being successful, rich and famous people. They pursue pleasures of the world and live to satisfy worldly desires. Where is the place of God in their life? After completing education and graduated with a degree, the focus and purpose of their life is to fulfill a personal dream. How many young people today who are willing and committed to apply Christian faith in the workplace and professions? How many of the higher education graduates who are ready and committed to bring the Lord Jesus in the world of work, profession and their marriage life? How many of them willing to give life for the glory of God, fulfilling the purpose and plan of God in their life? Who among those are committed to live with integrity and fear of God? A question with no answer, just silence..... The answer is in the prayer and yearning hearts of the parents, and teachers/Christian educators who are called to love Him.

Based on the third presupposition, the **Seventh** important question, is How Christian educational institutions have helped the learners to take responsibility in life as men who had received the cultural mandate, a co-worker of God⁸? At the end of the world, Lord Jesus Christ, the Fair Judge, will come to judge all people and ask for responsibilities of their life. Anyone who believes should be accountable for the talent, potential and skills God has given him. Each of us will be responsible for the use of time, treasure and all the blessings God has entrusted. God will require the responsibility of every human being in accordance with the role and mission in life the Lord has set. How can Christian educators help students we serve so that they can take responsibility to live righteously before Him? How can they be stewards of life living according to God? Implementation of Christian education should help each learner to be able to equip himself with the stewardship of life. It is **Characteristics of Christian Education.** the seventh, named:

Establishing education process which helps every learner
to develop talents and God's gifts in his life, according to His plans.

⁸ Bible, Genesis 1:28

Some Christian schools in Christian Higher education in Indonesia have started to implement the characteristics of Christian education as the basis for education at school and in the university. But in reality considerable difficulty, because the Indonesian government has set a national education evaluation system that causes the freedom to design the curriculum of every school and college, eventually clash. That is sad. Even with the passage of time the writer saw a good development, because of the leader for national education system in Indonesia continue making improvements and changing are more comprehensive. For example, the government continues to provide opportunities for private Christian schools to develop a better curriculum and more effective way to produce graduates who have the quality and potential of life covering all aspects. Similarly, the Indonesian government has given an opportunity to organize a free home school curriculum.

The obstacle to efforts to bring the young generation who have academic excellence in the perspective of the Bible is still the implementation of a national education evaluation system centralized with the indicators set by the government. For this evaluation system ultimately limit the freedom of the implementation of the uniqueness of the school curriculum and the students' learning process in schools. This opportunity is still more open for private universities in Indonesia, because they are not tied to the government evaluation system, with the only exception of a standardized accreditation by the government. So compare with a Christian school, most Christian universities are more consistent with the competency-based curriculum to produce and provide graduates students with academic excellence based on Bible's principles.

The fourth presupposition underlying characteristics of Christian education is: God the Creator created man in His image. This presupposition contains the meaning that humans were created by nature and spirit of conservation, received a privilege to be able to relate to God, to accept the authority and mandate of the gospel as God's fellow workers. Now we are facing the last crucial question, the **Eight**: How the process of Christian education help the students who have received reconciliation which is redemption in Christ, to be saved to eternal life, to have the motivation and desire to carry out the mandate of the gospel, the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to make all nations His disciples.⁹ Because the only reason why after being forgiven and saved by the Lord Jesus we still continue living in this world is to carry out the mandate of the Gospel, the peacekeeping mission to bring souls to the Lord. This is the prayer of the Lord Jesus when He sent His disciples, the people and His redemption, into the world, according to John 17: 18-20.¹⁰

Let us as Christian educators called to educate our students in accordance with the principles of the word of God, answer these questions. Is it important for us to take, help, support, and direct our students to experience learning in their study, according to the characteristics of Christian education? Do we believe that our students today are being prepared and processed for living life, reaching their life-goals and living the calling as the will of God? Are our students learning by doing curriculum and school programs directing,

⁹Bible, Matthew 28:18-20.

¹⁰*As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,*

motivating, inspiring our students to honor the great commission of Christ and with a heart full of love obeying God's mission? Do we yearn and pray that our students will complete their learning in the age of studying as school and university graduates having a loving and enthusiastic missionary spirit about winning souls for Christ wherever they are and in whatever profession they pursue? Therefore, **Characteristics of Christian Education**, the eighth is:

Helping every student to become a missionary carrying
the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in his daily and professional life.

We are called by God to serve the younger generation to live for Christ. It's just how serious and noble responsibility God has entrusted to us. We are here, right now, for this generation. Let us direct our hearts and lives to Him, dedicating our entire lives in its best for the glory of God, the Creator and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. As Christian educators who are called to deliver His beloved children, we should live for the glory of God. Since our students were little, helping and educating them to learn to know Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator and Redeemer, are our job so that they can live a life with purposes according to His plans. Furthermore, it is also for our students to be ready and willing to commit for life adhering to the values of God, the truth of God's love in their life. What a happy and joyous heart the Father in Heaven has and we, as educators, are His faithful servants, who later watch our students ready to complete the process of learning, having academic excellence and be ready to be sent into the world. Our prayer is that our students may be young people who live for the glory of Christ, who is able to stand firm in faith, hope and love for God, until Jesus comes back. Maranatha.

I present this for the glory of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

His servant,

Magdalena Pranata S.