

## **DIVINE EVOLUTIONARY EDUCATION THEORY: A PROPOSAL FOR YOUTH MINISTRY IN AFRICA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The proposition of the divine evolutionary education theory for youth ministry in Africa is an attempt to formulate principles attuned to faith for an effective Christian youth education in Africa. It recognizes the existential communal and holistic African worldview as a means by which their education could be fostered. It also dovetails this reality into the theology of youth ministry; and subsequently into learning theories as well as philosophical principles that may be identical to the existential situation of the African youth. In the end, the ‘divine evolutionary education theory’ is proposed as a Christian theological principle that may guide youth education policies and approaches.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In this paper, an attempt is made to seek for a theory suitable for the youth in Africa to be educated as Christian disciples. It is to enable young people in Africa to enjoy an encountering of the triune God and nurturing their potentials as well as teaching them to know and fulfil their purposes in life. The divine evolutionary theory is obtained by evaluating the African reality<sup>2</sup> and its predicament as a whole. The African situation is analysed with the psychosocial context and a theology of youth ministry is done in a Trinitarian way. In addition, it engages the *munus triplex* because it justifies, sanctifies and calls young people to partner the passionate God passionately for God’s plan to be accomplished.

Furthermore, it links theology of ministry to behaviourist, cognitive, humanistic and social theories of learning. Again, the philosophical underpinnings of these theories are interpreted theologically. Hence the divine evolutionary theory as an education setting for youth, requires exposing African youth to more opportunities of encountering, nurturing and learning. The active and deliberate effort of the Community both Christian and non-Christian; holy and secular ought to be engaged. And the home, together with the fellowship, service, worship, teaching, preaching of the church provide these opportunities.

### **The Youth in Africa and the Essential Stages for the Divine Evolutionary Education Theory**

It is said that a definition of adolescence requires a consideration of age and socio-historical influences.<sup>3</sup> John Santrock defines adolescence [youth] as “the development period of transition between childhood and adulthood; it involves biological cognitive and socio-emotional changes.”<sup>4</sup> The African Youth Charter however, defines youth as those between the ages of 15 and 35.<sup>5</sup> The World Council of Churches and All Africa Conference of Churches define youth as the ages between 15 -25 and 15 -30 respectively.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, a myriad of factors including standards of living may have influenced the above understanding of who an

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<sup>2</sup> J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1969), 108.

<sup>3</sup> J. W. Santrock, *Adolescence* (New York: McGraw-Hill 2001), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Santrock, *Adolescence*, 17; Youth definition may be reduced to “any young person between the onset of puberty and fully individuated adulthood.” See K. C. Dean, C. Clark and D. Rahn, eds. *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 21.

<sup>5</sup> *Christian Home Week 2014: Youth Development in Ghana Today: Threats and Challenges* (Accra: Christian Council of Ghana, 2014), 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Christian Home Week 2014, Youth Development in Ghana*, 12.

African youth is. And in ministering to African youth, one ought to pay attention to the needed process that may ensure a good ministry.

The practice of youth ministry is made up of a cycle of four stages.<sup>7</sup> *These four stages form the crucial structure in proposing the divine evolutionary education theory.* The first is defining what specifically the task is within the particular context such as Africa. The second involves the use of scripture, Christian tradition, reason and sacred experience.<sup>8</sup> The third cycle also deals with reflection on what is being done under the situation.<sup>9</sup> It means detecting and evaluating what is being done using theological doctrines.<sup>10</sup> Fourthly, it also involves the deployment of strategies and other forms of persuasion pertinent to communicating the gospel in an effective manner.<sup>11</sup> The first stage, which is to identify the problems of the youth in Africa is examined in the following discussion.

### **The Multidimensional Problems of the Youth in Africa as Milieu of the Divine Evolutionary Theory**

The search for identity is so important for the youth and given enough space, they find hope because they can predict the future and pursue it vigorously. If such identity is not achieved then another situation, which Eric Erikson describes as ‘identity confusion’ sets in.<sup>12</sup> Another reason why adolescents need special attention and care is because of individuation. It involves the search for identity, autonomy and reconnection related to the questions “Who am I?”, “Do I matter?”, and “how do I relate to others?” respectively.<sup>13</sup>

At a stage like this, the young person in cognitive theory of Piaget is said to be experiencing hypothetical-deductive reasoning. It is a stage where young people develop hypotheses or best guesses about ways to solve problems. An intellectual balance is restored, as the adolescent accommodates the cognitive upheaval that had occurred.<sup>14</sup> As young people grow they tend to ask questions about who they are and what they are in this world as they look for logical answers.<sup>15</sup> Stage four of James Fowler’s developmental theory (Individuative-reflective faith) presents the youth as capable of taking full responsibility of their religious beliefs which may precipitate the leaving home experience etc.<sup>16</sup>

No one needs to be told about the African predicament which is the least in terms of socioeconomic development.<sup>17</sup> It is estimated that:

73 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 were unemployed in 2013. The rate of unemployment which had decreased from 12.7% in 2009 to 12.3% in 2011 saw an increase to 12.4% in 2012, and in 2013 increased to 12.6%. It is projected that by 2018 the unemployment rate will rise to 12.8%. In Africa today, young people account for 60% of all unemployed Africans.<sup>18</sup>

Adolescent development under such harsh and difficult situation is in need of a Redeeming God. What is the role of youth ministry in developing good cultural values which entrench Christian values into the society via the lives of young people? In Africa there are some good cultural values such as:

- a. A worldview in which the physical and spiritual cannot be separated.

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<sup>7</sup> R. W. Pasmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction n Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 57 – 82; Kenda Creasy Dean, ‘Theological Rocks – First Things First’ in Dean *et al. Starting Right*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Dean, ‘Theological Rocks – First Things First’ in Dean *et al. Starting Right*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Dean, ‘Theological Rocks – First Things First’ in Dean *et al. Starting Right*, 20 – 21.

<sup>10</sup> Dean, ‘Theological Rocks – First Things First’ in Dean *et al. Starting Right*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Dean, ‘Theological Rocks – First Things First’ in Dean *et al. Starting Right*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Santrock, *Adolescence*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> Chap Clark ‘The Changing Face of Adolescence: A Theological View of Human Development’ in Dean *et al. Starting Right*, 47 – 59.

<sup>14</sup> Pasmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 204 – 213; Santrock, *Adolescence*, 44

<sup>15</sup> E. H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crises* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968): 127 quoted in Santrock, *Adolescence*, 43.

<sup>16</sup> J. W. Fowler, *Faithful Change* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996) quoted in Santrock, *Adolescence*, 416.

<sup>17</sup> The Ghanaian situation shows that in 2010, on 39.5% of population were in school out which 46% are in primary, 18% in Junior High School and 9% in Senior High School. In the year 2011/12 there were only 261962 tertiary students. See *Education Sector Performance Report* (Accra: Ministry of Education, July, 2013), 77 quoted in *Christian Home Week 2014: Youth Development in Ghana Today: Threats and Challenges* (Accra: Christian Council of Ghana, 2014), 16.

<sup>18</sup> See *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2013: A generation at risk* (International Labour Office-Geneva: ILO, 2013) quoted in *Youth Development in Ghana Today*, 21.

- b. The principle of community which John Mbiti captures beautifully as “I am because we are and because we are I am”<sup>19</sup>
- c. A religion and culture which had the holistic development of the youth at heart. This holistic development is based on an informal training system for boys and girls to reach adulthood. At the peak of puberty a final training program together with religious rites are made to integrate them into the main stream life of independence and responsibility. The result is that many young people stay physically and psychosocially healthy. This is the responsibility of the whole community which includes all groups and classes of persons. Thus it really makes these young women and men fit into the society. They are trained as farmers, hunters, warriors, smiths, traders, housekeepers, and also in cooking, personal hygiene, manners, and public speaking and so on and so forth.<sup>20</sup>

Postmodernism is an incredulous culture pervading every society in the world today. This kind of life is a global culture because of advancements in Information Communication Technology (ICT) which connects people instantly. The global culture has made everybody suspicious of respected structures such as traditions of both religion and culture. The habit of deconstructing what is and relativizing it into a pluralistic world system is the order of the day.<sup>21</sup>

In postmodernist societies, the search for identity and autonomy may be rife among young people. This had led to very poor human relationship among young people as they tend to be individualistic or tend to follow popular culture which has many negative repercussions. Theology should be able to address issues like family systems and shifting cultural values in the wake of postmodernism.<sup>22</sup>

Consequently, practical theology and Christian education should be able to address all these needs of the young people in question. So that through Christ they may reject the cultural values which are inimical to their wellbeing and embrace those good values which are amenable to their holistic development to the glory of God and as disciples of Jesus. Moreover, other secular ideas such as postmodernism may be addressed in similar ways. A theory of Christian education such as the divine evolutionary education theory certainly factors in the realities of young people described above.

The second item for consideration in the process of practical youth ministry is a theology of ministry for young people within the context and experience of African youth. In the following discussion we will try to understand how a Trinitarian theology of God’s work of redemption is attained for the youth via the *munus triplex* of Jesus Christ.

### **Theology of Ministry in the Multidimensional Experience of African Youth**

One scripture of great importance when it comes to the youth in our contemporary world is Ezekiel 34. As Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster had shown, although the word ‘pastor’ may be against postmodernity, it seems most appropriate in handling the needs of the youth.<sup>23</sup> The shepherds of God and the flock are in the picture. Responsibility is on the shepherd just as it is on the sheep in this scripture. We adopt from both Christian tradition<sup>24</sup> and African Christian theology, the idea of the *Munus triplex* or the Threefold Office of Jesus Christ which shows the function of Christ as the Redeemer of the whole universe. Jesus being the only good shepherd works in the Threefold Office of Prophet, King and Priest.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 108.

<sup>20</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 108.

<sup>21</sup> J. Blanchard, *Does God believe in Atheist?* (Evangelical Press, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> D. C. Richter, ‘Growing Up Postmodern: Theological Uses of Culture’ in Dean *et al. Starting Right*, 63 – 76.

<sup>23</sup> K. C. Dean and R. Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1998) 57- 68.

<sup>24</sup> J. Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*. 2/XV ed. John T. McNeil, trans., Ford Lewis Battles, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 2. 15. 1- 6. See also Dean Kenda Creasy, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 253 – 257. Dean emphasizes the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ particularly but also the connection with the entire Christ Event as Jürgen Moltmann espouses. More concrete effect may be obtained using Calvin’s idea because of the concreteness of the Priest, King and Prophet Threefold Office of Christ and also the total reliance on Christ alone by the youth and those who minister to them.

<sup>25</sup> C. Amarkwei, *Jesus the Okpelejen Wulormor: Doing African Christology within the Ga of Ghana Context* (Th.M. Thesis; Hanil University and Presbyterian Theological Seminary, South Korea, 2013).

Through the office of the priest, Jesus reveals the Self in the ministry of offering the ultimate sacrifice and mediation for the satisfaction of the Father. By offering his blood and body as a lamb to the Father, He takes the death penalty and guilt for all young people who are sinners, rejected, suffering, sick, differently abled, minority, drug addicts, social deviants, and those young people struggling with their sexuality.<sup>26</sup> By this, young people experience the passion of the God of love who sends the only begotten Son in the power of the Holy Spirit to die for them.<sup>27</sup>

This is the ministry of Christ in which young people are justified by grace before God and receive the righteousness of God. It is the time that through the work of Jesus Christ young people are reconciled to God Almighty and develop relationship with the Father who created them and loves them through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This kind of ministry which emphasizes the work of Jesus in his death for young people has the power to resolve their individuation problems and give them stability and focus in life. This is a time that young people experience the grace of faith,<sup>28</sup> repentance<sup>29</sup> and forgiveness for their sins which sins are very huge burdens in their lives. The ministry of Jesus in this hostile world and the ultimate prize Jesus paid on the cross where He died describes this ministry.<sup>30</sup>

Christ the King is the ruler and moderator of the souls and lives of the young people. Through the ministry of Christ as the King, - resurrection, and ascension; He reigns and rules the heart of these young people whom he has chosen to redeem. As Christ reigns in the hearts of the young people in the power of the Holy Spirit in place of the Father, they are sanctified. The thoughts of young people are renewed and filled with Kingdom values which are at variance with the worldly values. Here young people identify with God in God's righteousness and endeavour to be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit from glory to glory into the image of Christ. This requires the mortification of the flesh and the vivification of the spiritual life. This means young people will have to deny themselves and carry their crosses after their Lord.

It is the King who is ready to defend them from all their enemies and grant them victory. Yes it is the Lord who protects them so they do not stumble and fall. The King is able to resolve every social, psychological, economic, political and intellectual need. The King is able to sustain them through their suffering by giving them hope<sup>31</sup> of the better Kingdom. And the King is able to provide their needs.<sup>32</sup>

By Jesus' Prophetic Office we learn from the preaching of repentance and the Kingdom.<sup>33</sup> The ministry is what is known as vocation where the young believer is called to be a disciple of Jesus and a witness of what God has done in him or her in deed and in word. This ministry involves God the Father from whom proceeds the power and passion of the Holy Spirit who does the calling through Jesus Christ. It is based upon the work which Jesus did in His proclamation, His resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost of the Christ Event. Again, it rests on the grace of the Lord Jesus from the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This kind of ministry enables the shepherd to understand the work of youth ministry as sharing the Father's love and the sacrifice of the Son in the convicting, comforting and empowering Holy Spirit. It concerns the educational process in which young people are given the opportunity to encounter Jesus, to learn more about Him through teaching and for young people to be nurtured to discover their gifts and talents through Him. It is allowing young people to be empowered by the ministry of the Holy Spirit who leads them into all truth and comforts them.

It is important that young people will get to know the Holy Spirit who calls them into different occupations and abilities both in church and society. In other words the Holy Spirit calls these young people

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<sup>26</sup> See K. C. Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 6 -10.

<sup>27</sup> Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*, 63 – 64.

<sup>28</sup> R. Nishioka, 'Theological Framework for Youth Ministry: Grace' in Dean *et al. Starting Right*, 247 – 249.

<sup>29</sup> R. Maas, 'Theological Framework for Youth Ministry: Repentance' in Dean *et al. Starting Right*, 234 – 244.

<sup>30</sup> Dean *et al.*, *Starting Right*,

<sup>31</sup> E. Parker, 'Theological Framework for Youth Ministry: Hope' in Dean *et al. Starting Right*, 265 – 276.

<sup>32</sup> B. J. Mahan, 'Advanced Placement and the Kingdom of God' in J. B. Mahan, M. Warren & D. F. White eds. *Awakening Youth Discipleship: Christian Resistance in a Consumer Culture* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008), 77 – 91. See also T. Campolo, 'Reflections on Youth Ministry in a Global Context: Taking Seriously the Least of These' in Dean *et al. Starting Right*, 91- 101.

<sup>33</sup> Mahan, *et al.*, *Awakening Youth Discipleship*, 86 – 87.

to bear the witness of God in the church and in the world at large. In a world where pain and suffering is rife due to a postmodern culture, the discipleship process should help young people to connect or reconcile to God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. The discipleship process should hence help young people discover their gifts and also give them enough space for exercising their gifts so they may develop in the house of God and in the world. The discipleship should end in creating in these young people a fervent zeal and a genuine relationship for God the Father who loves them through His Son who died in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hence from the prophetic ministry arises the denunciation of all dehumanizing situation and the call to respond to God's plan of salvation. The issues of poverty, death, oppression, discrimination and degradation will be the burden of these young people who now become instruments of God's righteousness.<sup>34</sup> They do all these things looking unto Jesus who for the sake of the redemption of the world died a shameful death on the cross. These young people who witness to the King draws them by the Holy Spirit's power through Self-denial and Cross bearing and sanctifies them perpetually. That by the reign of Christ in their hearts they extend by their advocacy and conduct in church and society the Kingdom of God which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. The experience of this triune grace of justification, sanctification and vocation which occurs in their lives through the Self-revelation of God the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier is revealed in the work of Christ in the Office of the Priest, King and Prophet.<sup>35</sup>

African theologies are the articulation of the Christian faith by African Christian theologians who theologize in the context of Africa.<sup>36</sup> The Christian youth who is an African ought to learn Christian values but when these values are integrated with the natural flow of the beliefs and the traditions of their local context, there is much that is gained. For example being aware of the prophetic call of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to be in a community of faith where Jesus unites everybody is welcoming. Building a theology on the community of faith where all including pastors, parents, adults and friends all help to bring the youth into a responsible people<sup>37</sup> is what is needed. Therefore recognizing the community help associated with the holistic youth development in African societies;<sup>38</sup> makes the role of the community in shaping the youth paramount.

As a matter of principle, youth ministry mobilises the community of faith and even those outside of it who have direct or indirect influence on the lives of the youth. They include schools, hospitals, local authorities, traditional authorities and other neighbours. Thus youth ministry is an ecumenical endeavour.<sup>39</sup>

### **Theories of Learning and the Divine Evolutionary Education Theory**

There are four main theories of learning which comprise of behavioral, cognitive, humanistic, and social theories.<sup>40</sup>

Firstly, the behavioral theory is a learning process by which the learner is taken through a stimulus response process. For instance a regular feeding of a baby at a specific time over time will cause the baby to have an inbuilt knowledge of being fed at such a time. The indication of learning may be the crying of the baby if there is a little delay in the feeding. This type of learning is unconditioned. The feeding of the baby at a particular time may be conditioned by a sound or scent of the presence of the one who feeds it. Hence anytime the baby hears the sound of the car, it knows mummy for example has come to feed it and it will respond by fidgeting or throwing the legs and arms frantically in anticipation. This is classical conditioned learning because it is conditioned by the sound of the car but operated by mother.<sup>41</sup> There is

<sup>34</sup> Mahan, et al., *Awakening Youth Discipleship*, 86 – 87.

<sup>35</sup> D. W. Johnson, 'Theological Framework for Youth Ministry: Redemption' in Dean et al. *Starting Right*,

<sup>36</sup> J. Mbiti, s.v. "Theology," in Nicholas Lossley et al, (eds.) *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> E. F. Caldwell, *Leaving Home with Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of our Youth* (Cleveland: The Pilgrims Press, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> Refer to previous discussion on the religio-cultural values of African societies.

<sup>39</sup> See Dean et al., *Starting Right*,

<sup>40</sup> S. B. Merriam, and R. S. Caffarella, (1991). 'Four Fundamental Orientations (Perspectives) for Learning Theories' <http://www.lifecircles-inc.com/Learningtheories/orientations.html> Retrieved February 16, 2015; Pasmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 176ff.

<sup>41</sup> R. F. Biehler, Jack Snowman, *Psychology applied to Teaching* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), 324 -328.

the operant conditioning<sup>42</sup> whereby the sound of the car may cause the baby to crawl out of the court into the feeding area and feeding itself with a bottle. This theory is based upon external observation, learning is shaped by the environment and contiguity and reinforcement are needed to ensure effective learning. Proponents believe that the right environment is important in shaping the learning process and that teachers have a role to structure the learning process to achieve correct responses and behaviors.<sup>43</sup>

Secondly, in contrast to the behaviorists, the cognitive theorists think that the learner does not just learn from environmental observation. Rather, the mind of the learner is equipped to take in information, organize, store and retrieve the information. This form of activity enables the learner to compare and contrast and make analysis for understanding and insight which is crucial for knowledge. The individual is capable of achieving this and that the mind ought to be ready to do this.<sup>44</sup> It rests upon the individual internal mental process of perception, interpretation and meaning. Thus, “making sense of events and phenomena was a driving concept. The learner makes sense of things by thinking about them. For [cognitive theorists], the individuality of the learner and his internal mental processes is paramount.”<sup>45</sup> This area of learning has diverse fields such as information processing, memory, computer simulations, artificial learning models, transfer models, mathematical learning models and metacognition.<sup>46</sup>

Thirdly, there is also the humanistic theory which upholds the principle that individuals are endowed with the ability and motivation to think about the common good. It opens the door for people to be seen as capable of moral good which moral good engenders mental processes for the attainment of the common good. Humanists encourage openness, honesty, self-disclosure, and authenticity. The humanistic theory was critiqued as being unscientific and merely philosophical.<sup>47</sup>

Fourthly, regarding the social theory of learning, there is a borrowing of the behaviorist’s concept of observation. However, this learning by observation is focused on sociology. Learning by focusing attention, retaining, rehearsal and motivation in a social setting is thus the key in social learning concept. Hence in a community or society individuals may learn or pass on learning information so long as there is an observation, retention, rehearsal and motivation to do so. This system of observation may be very true in the sense of passing on traditions verbally and non -verbally. It also justifies the role of adult behavior in the shaping of the character of younger ones.<sup>48</sup>

In view of the above discussion, all the theories of learning from the field of psychology may be analyzed philosophically<sup>49</sup> when we look at the works of say, Plato, Aristotle, Rene Descartes and John Locke. As Boehlke had said, it may be true that learning theories may be divided into two principal families which are stimulus-response and the cognitive.<sup>50</sup> These two families of learning have their underpinnings in the Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, then later in Descartes and Locke respectively.<sup>51</sup> The epistemology of Plato shows us, that, it is impossible for one to know anything without the prior knowledge of the same in abstract terms. For Plato, since sense perception and the material world may provide false knowledge it is really unreliable. One ought to have a measure of prior knowledge or capacity to be able to comprehend what is in the world.<sup>52</sup> The soul is a tripartite being which provides a center for *reason*, *spirit*, and *appetite*. The rational component of the soul is connected to forms or ideas of matter. Information from the senses is rationalized by the comparison of what already exists and hence pure knowledge can be obtained.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, for Plato the human being is endowed with the capacity to reason abstractly or

<sup>42</sup> Biehler and Snowman, *Psychology applied to Teaching*, 324 -328.

<sup>43</sup> Merriam and Cafferella, ‘Four Fundamental Orientations for Learning Theories.’

<sup>44</sup> Merriam and Cafferella, ‘Four Fundamental Orientations for Learning Theories.’

<sup>45</sup> Merriam and Cafferella, ‘Four Fundamental Orientations for Learning Theories.’

<sup>46</sup> Merriam and Cafferella, ‘Four Fundamental Orientations for Learning Theories.’

<sup>47</sup> Merriam and Cafferella, ‘Four Fundamental Orientations for Learning Theories,’ see also D. Krebs and R. Blackman, *Psychology: A First Encounter*, (Florida: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1988), 15-16.

<sup>48</sup> Merriam and Cafferella, ‘Four Fundamental Orientations for Learning Theories.’

<sup>49</sup> Pasmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 85ff.

<sup>50</sup> R. R. Boehlke, *Theories of Learning in Christian Education*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 11.

<sup>51</sup> F. Thilly and L. Wood, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc, 1957), 76-82, 85-87; 112-117; 312-314; 333-337.

<sup>52</sup> S. E. Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems* (United States of America: McGraw Hill, Inc., 1986), 56-57.

<sup>53</sup> Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 58-61.

internally howbeit that ability may be according to levels.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast, Aristotle had taught that the forms and matter were not separated as in the case of Plato. They were bound together in the materials in the world, such that one could abstract knowledge directly from them. Hence a scientific study of matter could yield authentic knowledge.<sup>55</sup> The human soul described by Aristotle shows that the soul itself is capable of rationality through the common sense, active reason and passive reason.<sup>56</sup> All the faculties of the senses such as pleasure or pain are mainly worked upon in the common sense of the soul. The faculty of thinking has the power of conceptual thought, the universal and the necessary essence of all things including sensible objects.<sup>57</sup> All these take place in the active and passive reason. The passive reason is the potential upon which the active or creative reason acts. However, creative reason is a spark from the divine mind coming to the soul from without.<sup>58</sup> Thus although rationality is ascertained in humans, it is not particularly resident as in the case of Plato's pure soul which interacts with the forms. We may surmise that the passive reason is the perception, imagination and memory.

It is evidently clear that Rene Descartes followed the pattern of Plato by teaching in the modern period of rationality the concept of innate ideas; thus capacity of the individual to apprehend and rationalize independently of the environment with which it may choose to rationalize.<sup>59</sup> Locke following the rationalism of Descartes thought that the knowledge of God is not found in the heathen and in many people and if that were the case, it should be based upon the knowledge obtained from the external world. Hence the mind of a baby is a *tabula rasa*, which is to mean a clean slate, plain paper or empty cabinet. Ideas are formed as the senses collect information and store them for use at another time.<sup>60</sup> This philosophy follows closely the thought of Aristotle.

We therefore, conclude that, there are two main philosophies behind the theories of learning in psychology. They are first, the Platonic and Cartesian philosophy of pure soul of forms and innate ideas respectively. The second is the Aristotelian, Lockean philosophy of passive reason and *tabula rasa*.<sup>61</sup> The differences for me are the place of emphasis since they all agree that there ought to be rationalism or thinking of a sort in the mind for real knowledge to be obtained. In fact both agree that information is needed from the external environment for rationalization to take place. Two things are therefore needed in the learning process. The first is the mind that is ready to perceive, imagine and memorize or in other words "internal mental processes include inputting, organizing, storing, retrieving, and finding relationships between information. New information is linked to old knowledge, schema and scripts."<sup>62</sup> This is necessary for the Lockean formation of ideas needed for rationalism. The second is an external environment from which data is collected into the faculties of the mind. There may be two kinds of external environments which are spiritual and physical.

This may be true looking at firstly, the pure soul of Plato and the spark of the divine mind (Aristotle) into the soul as active reason and secondly the physical world of data. The differences between Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy of learning is the emphasis each group places on the mind and the physical world as sources of knowledge and reason. Platonism believes pure knowledge could be obtained when the mind is applied because the information in the physical world may be misleading: While Aristotelians think that the physical world is enough for all the information needed. They nonetheless agree that they need both. This leads to the conclusion that learning should be seen as both internal mental processes as well as empirical. Rationalism and empiricism are both needed in learning. This rationalism and empiricism put together may be found in every individual in different shades.

We ought to be reminded at this point that the humanistic theory falls under the remit of Platonic and Cartesian epistemology. Plato had thought that true knowledge is the basis for human good and ethics.

<sup>54</sup> Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 52-61.

<sup>55</sup> Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 89-90, 93; Thilly and Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, 95-96.

<sup>56</sup> Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 232-235; Thilly and Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, 112.

<sup>57</sup> Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 257-258; Thilly and Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, 112-113.

<sup>58</sup> Thilly and Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, 113.

<sup>59</sup> Thilly and Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, 312-314.

<sup>60</sup> Thilly and Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, 333-337.

<sup>61</sup> Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 258.

<sup>62</sup> Merriam and Cafferella, 'Four Fundamental Orientations for Learning Theories.

Hence since the pure soul is resident in the body of the individual the individual is endowed with the prowess for working for the common good. This drive for the common good in the individual is a sense of motivation or a learning process in it itself because there has to be a comparison of the ideals in the mind with that of the external environment.<sup>63</sup>

In a similar way Aristotelian and Lockean epistemology support the social theory of learning in that within the external physical environment or spiritual environment, there are cultural, political, economic and social entities.<sup>64</sup> However, external physical environment is animate and inanimate. For example, the work of Dewey shows how social interaction affect learning and vice versa.<sup>65</sup> Within the faith of Christianity it is important to underscore that the first point for the means of grace is the Church which is the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is made up of people who form a community. This community of faith is socio-spiritual and there is the need to employ both internal and external learning theories. It implies that both rational and empirical ways of learning should be applied hand in hand. Furthermore, both behavioral and social theories on one hand and cognitive and humanistic theories on the other hand ought to be woven together in the faith community of Christ.<sup>66</sup>

It is also important to consider the philosophical climate of the African mind in order to aid the inculturation of the theory of learning now so devised. In most African societies like the Ga of Ghana, many words may be used to describe the nature of knowledge and the variants including learning. The two basic words employed in the communication about the subject of learning are *nilee* (knowledge) and *hiershikamor* (wisdom).<sup>67</sup> Basically, knowledge is acquired from the external environment both spiritual and physical. Knowledge which is obtained is used for day to day practical purposes. Further, since there is also a spiritual source of acquiring knowledge from the external environment the pursuit of scientific empiricism is not given priority. Knowledge is needed for survival and wellbeing for the present and the future (sense of pragmatism).<sup>68</sup>

Spiritual sources of this knowledge are provided by members of the community who are gifted in visions and dreams and prophecies. In addition, it is the custodian of the priests and priestesses to foretell or forth tell. A child is expected to learn from the sociological set up of the community as she or he observes and imbibes lessons impacted from others. The engagement of young people to do in practical ways certain duties and the allowance given them to explore and discover by themselves in the external environment are the basic forms of knowledge acquisition. Many young people discover secrets; develop skills and values as they encounter the external environment.

Wisdom in the African setting may be acquired through the accumulation of knowledge. This has resulted in the admiration of the elderly in the society as the custodian of wisdom in the communities.<sup>69</sup> We should not hesitate to state that Africans believe that knowledge is not a repository of one person. Young people who show high levels of practical insight in solving problems in the community are also highly regarded and allowed to make contributions to the community freely.<sup>70</sup> Wisdom is different from knowledge in the sense that it has the power to make sense and utility of knowledge for the common good. So wisdom is not merely the accumulation of knowledge although it is needed rather it is the ability to show intelligence. It is also the ability to reflect or meditate soberly on problems in order to find clues and solutions which are sound. Wisdom seems to be more of giftedness therefore, individuals who have wisdom in the community are considered to be gifted by God, the deities or the ancestors.

Inferring from the above may lead us to the conclusion that African philosophies may have a theory of learning which emphasizes equally the importance of knowledge and wisdom. In the African mind therefore, wisdom corresponds to rationality which is emphasized by Plato; while knowledge corresponds

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<sup>63</sup> Thilly and Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, 90-91.

<sup>64</sup> Thilly and Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, 114-115.

<sup>65</sup> Neil, J. (2005) John Dewey, 'The Modern Father of Experiential Education' Wilderdom.com. Retrieved 6/12/07.

<sup>66</sup> E. F. Caldwell, *Leaving Home with Faith* (Ohio: Pilgrim Press, 2002).

<sup>67</sup> K. Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996), 137.

<sup>68</sup> Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, 137; See C. Cunningham, *Darwin's Pious Mind: Why the Ultra-Darwinist and Creationist Both Get it Wrong*, (Grand Rapids: Wm Eerdmans, 2010), 138-140.

<sup>69</sup> Cunningham, *Darwin's Pious Mind*, 143.

<sup>70</sup> Cunningham, *Darwin's Pious Mind*, 144.

to the acquisition of empirical knowledge which is endorsed by Aristotle. An understanding should also be gained that African empiricism is less scientific because of the priority placed on the knowledge provided by the spiritual external sources.<sup>71</sup> There is the need to place a lot of balance on both rational and empirical knowledge to enhance better learning among African young people.

It is heartwarming to note that Jean Piaget “was influenced by both the behaviorist and the [cognitive] schools, and proposed that one’s internal cognitive structures change as a result of developmental changes in the nervous system and as a result of being exposed to variety of experiences and the environments that contain them.”<sup>72</sup> Consequently we may have different shades (evolutionary variation) of people based upon their ability to rationalize and be empirical; and thus affirming the Multiple Intelligence (MI) theory of Howard Gardner.<sup>73</sup> The variation found among people may be ascribable to evolution according to proximate causes.<sup>74</sup> Although in time past evolution had been rejected by orthodoxy of the church, it currently has been widely accepted scientifically and theologically.<sup>75</sup> In evolution, it has become very difficult for scientists to know how the variation in creatures comes to be.<sup>76</sup> And for that reason it has become probably acceptable to know that there is a determinacy as well as indeterminacy of the variation at the molecular or particle level of life.

This determinacy and indeterminacy brings about the evolutionary process in living creatures.<sup>77</sup> Determinacy supports the Christian idea of obtaining knowledge by grace upon one hand; and upon the other hand, indeterminacy, understood as the spiritual external environmental source of learning. We may describe Aristotle’s spark from the divine mind into the soul and Plato’s pure soul which had access to the forms or ideas as determinacy.<sup>78</sup> This is very important for understanding the way in which Christians learn about God.<sup>79</sup> Hence, the concept of *divine evolutionary learning theory* is proposed.

### **The Theology of the Divine Evolutionary Education Theory**

The theology for the education of the Christian person is based upon the work of Jesus Christ as revealed in the salvific event. John Calvin has outlined this work of Christ within the Threefold Office of Priesthood, Prophetism and Kingship.<sup>80</sup> It signifies the work done to accomplish the justification, sanctification and vocation of the believer through God’s revelation through the Son by the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. The revelation which is the knowledge of God is orchestrated by the Triune God by the illumination of the Holy Spirit of the Word of the Father which is the Divine Reason. This illumination may be parallel to the ‘spark from the divine mind’ or interaction of the pure soul with the ideas of Aristotle and Plato respectively. It is an encountering process whereby the believer experiences the triune God. In this sense the initiative is taken by God alone and God rejects but employs also the free action of the individual for the acquisition of the special knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.

We have to state that the encountering process which is paramount in Christian education is akin to the sacraments of Baptism and Lord’s Supper. For example, in Baptism, there is external washing by water which is corresponded with an inward cleansing of the soul. It has an outward expression and an inward grace. The inward spiritual grace brings meaning to the outward expression and vice versa. What it clearly means is that the illumination for faith, repentance, regeneration and conversion is an internal mental

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<sup>71</sup> Cunningham, *Darwin’s Pious Mind*, 138-139.

<sup>72</sup> Merriam and Cafferella, ‘Four Fundamental Orientations for Learning Theories’.

<sup>73</sup> H. Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, Inc., 1993), 8-11; 31-58; see also Thomas Armstrong, *Multiple Intelligence in the Classroom* 3rd Edition (Alexandria, Virginia: ASCD, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> Krebs and Blackman, *Psychology*, 55. Note that in the Christian sense one may wish to engage ultimate causes hence both proximate and distal causes may be employed when learning is an act of grace specially designed by the Triune God.

<sup>75</sup> See C. Cunningham, *Darwin’s Pious Mind: Why the Ultra-Darwinist and Creationist Both Get it Wrong*, (Grand Rapids: Wm Eerdmans, 2010).

<sup>76</sup> Cunningham, *Darwin’s Pious Mind*.

<sup>77</sup> Cunningham, *Darwin’s Pious Mind*.

<sup>78</sup> Thilly and Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, 86-87; 113.

<sup>79</sup> J. R. Estep, “Christian Anthropology: Humanity as the Imago Dei” in James R. Estep & Jonathan H. Kim eds., *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology & Human Development* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 10 -11; James R. Estep, “Developmental Theories: Foe, Friend, or Folly?” in Estep & Kim, *Christian Formation*, 37 -57.

<sup>80</sup> For the treatment of this topic see the theology section of this paper.

or soul issue and yet it is based upon the Word of God proclaimed in word or deed externally.<sup>81</sup> It is rationalism and empiricism amalgamated or an existential experience.<sup>82</sup> In developing this theory however one should consider that there are hierarchies of rationalism as taught by Plato and hierarchies of empiricism shown by Aristotle and others. It is supported by both behavioral and cognitive theories.

We should also not forget the idea that nurturing which as the second step of Christian education holds an assumption that the new believer is endowed with much knowledge within the soul. This corroborates well with the idea of rationalism or of cognitive theory. The assumption is upheld since during the encountering process so much is revealed and achieved for the soul of the believer. This implies that teaching methods need to engage cognitive theories such as Maria Montessori which involves exposing the believer to wide range of experiences which will make young people discover themselves<sup>83</sup>. Again in addition the critical method of Paulo Freire is needed most especially in a youthful context of Africa<sup>84</sup>. This is crucial for the discipleship program.

The last portion needed in Christian education is teaching. In teaching, the teacher ought to employ both cognitive and behavioral techniques to achieve the goal. Further, as said in the foregone, it should also include both humanistic and social theories of learning. What should be noted is that rationality or pure reason should not be reduced to mere mental work. The usage of rationalism is in consonance with the Platonic teaching that there are levels of knowing. The four levels of knowing are the conjecture, belief, discursive intellect or understanding and final highest level is the rational insight which interacts with forms or ideas and where dialectics takes place.<sup>85</sup> This gives rise to the variants of learning capabilities and also in the Christian sense the necessity of encountering as the backbone of Christian education. The encountering itself as an act is a pure dialectic. It is an encounter with pure reason, the Logos, the Word of God which brings about an incomprehensible and indescribable knowing and effect on the individual (John 1). This is known at the first encounter as conversion. It is exactly what happened to Jacob (Genesis 32:24-32) in a shadowy sense and culminated in the conversion experience of Paul (Acts 26: 10-18).

The subsequent encountering process is known in the Christian life as the transformation from glory to glory in the likeness of the Word. The dialectic is also used by the Apostle in the analogy of looking into a mirror (James 1:23); and akin to Reformed thought.<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless the other levels may be employed based upon the determination of the divine. And that is the basis for an evolutionary theory of learning because of the variants and levels of learning abilities. This position is supported by the fact that what Christians know about God and conformity into God's image is purely a determination of God like evolution. This idea of God's way of saving people means that individuals or members of the faith community should have variety of encountering by engaging wide range of learning activities.<sup>87</sup> It further strengthens the role of the proclamation, teaching, service, worship and fellowship which are the primary practices of the church and means of grace. All these array of practices provide encountering, nurturing and teaching opportunities for the determination of God in each person to be brought to bear. This determination is not discriminatory because it is not based on social status or class of persons and not in a random manner but in an 'evolutionary' indeterminacy.

<sup>81</sup> See S. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942), 5-13; Calvin, *Institutes*, Bk. 3.1-4; See also Calvin, *Instruction in Faith*, 43; Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, 120-139; Calvin without mincing words calls the divine-human encounter as "blessed experience."

<sup>82</sup> P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 53.

<sup>83</sup> M. Montessori, transl. Bentley R. *The Montessori Method: Scientific Pedagogy as Applied to Child Education in the Children's Houses* (1912); Armstrong, *Multiple Intelligence*, 5ff; Tillich, *ST.*, III (1963): 194.

<sup>84</sup> See P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2000).

<sup>85</sup> Thilly and Wood, *A History of Philosophy*, 78.

<sup>86</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.1.1.

<sup>87</sup> See T. Groome, "Shared Christian Praxis: A possible Theory/Method of Religious Education" in J. Astley and L. J. Francis, *Critical Perspectives on Christian Education: A Reader on the Aims, Principles and Philosophy of Christian Education* (England: Gracewing Publishing, 1994), 218 – 234.

## CONCLUSION

The divine evolutionary education theory, therefore, states that, in a learning scenario, expose the learners to the widest range of learning opportunities. It entails from the foregoing discussions that, firstly, there is a need to provide learning opportunities from the external and internal, social and psychological, spiritual and physical, intangible and tangible etc. Also, it is striking to note that since in evolution unfavorable environments exposed to some species lead to their elimination, it is important to provide all ranges of learning theoretical positions.<sup>88</sup> This is important to avoid some of the varied number of people in the community of faith from becoming victims of elimination. And this is why the Holy Spirit is paramount in every learning session from the preparatory stage to period of delivery. Again in the encountering, nurturing and teaching process the passion, victory and calling (*power*) of Jesus Christ should continuously be ingrained within the evolutionary theory. Consequently, the passion of Jesus Christ should be found in stimulus-response, cognitive, humanistic and social theories simultaneously or individually deployed or deployed in combinations. This theory is particularly related to young people who are very rational, empirical and both sensual and spiritual.

Secondly, there is the need to involve as many church people in the learning process. For example, in a youth situation, they should be given the freedom to plan their programs and implement them. The third is to involve parents, home and the entire adult community of the church. If possible the use of schools, state laws, societal laws and leadership. Fourthly there is the need to deploy the scientific use of learning skills as well as the spiritual or inner deep levels of meditation. The question is what stimulant-response and cognitive learning principle should be applied for the individual youth to gain knowledge, insight, value, skill, motive, attitude and change in self?<sup>89</sup> These questions should be asked while acknowledging that the Christian education endeavor is based upon encountering, nurturing and teaching within the practices<sup>90</sup> of the church to achieve the seven learning concerns listed above.

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<sup>88</sup> Armstrong, *Multiple Intelligence*, Chapter 1, 5 and 6; P. D. Spears & S. R. Loomis, *Education for Human Flourishing: A Christian Perspective Series* Preface by F. J. Beckwith and J. P. Moreland (Downer Groove: IVP, 2009), 9 – 27; E. Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind* (Alexandria: ASCD, 2005).

<sup>89</sup> Boehlke, *Theories of Learning*, 31-61.

<sup>90</sup> D. I. Smith and J. K. A. Smith eds., *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* Foreword by Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011).

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