

The Quadrilateral of Holistic Child Development

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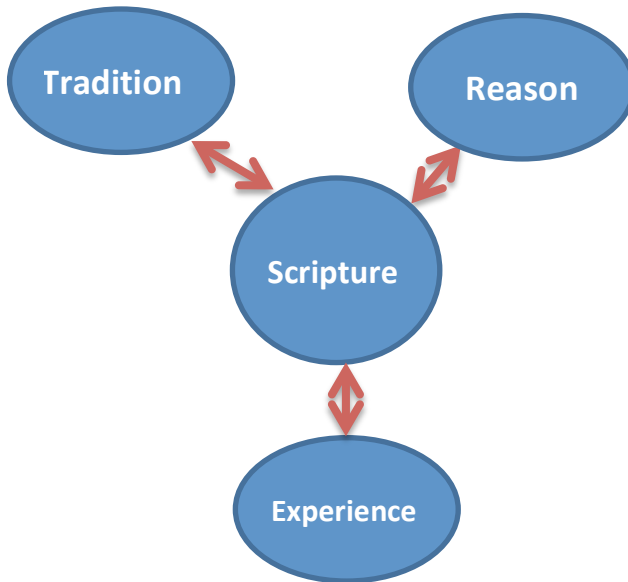
The word “quadrilateral” is not mine. And, no, holistic child development is not mine either. I borrowed the word “quadrilateral” from Albert Outler in his introduction to the 1964 collection *John Wesley*.¹ The term “Holistic Child Development,” I guess has been on earth since Adam and Eve had their first baby, although we know “Adam’s Family” was not really 100% successful in their practice of so-called holistic child development. Among other things, I will share with you how holistic child development fits into the life and ministry of Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary (APNTS). I believe that the seminary is an ideal setting for holistic child development training. The renowned child advocate, Dan Brewster, observed, “Seminaries are the ‘production line’ for developing leaders for the next generation.”² Why? For the main reason that the “best and the brightest” are sent here. Seminarians can influence church leaders and church leaders can influence the church on the necessity of raising godly children. We need the whole community of believers to engage in holistic child development.

Noted author and faculty member, Catherine Stonehouse, proposes in her book *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey* that as a community we need to look at four things so we can help children grow in spiritual ma-

¹ The “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” is a methodology for theological reflection that is credited to John Wesley, leader of the Methodist movement in the late 18th Century. The term itself was coined by 20th century American Methodist Albert C. Outler in his introduction to the 1964 collection *John Wesley*; see Albert C. Outler, ed. *John Wesley*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, Inc., 1964; see also Albert C. Outler, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 7-18.

² Daniel Brewster, “It’s Time to Open the 4/14 Window,” in *Emerging Missions Movement: Voices of Asia*, ed Bambang Budijanto (Colorado Springs, CO: Compassion International, 2010), 34.

turity: tradition, reason, scripture, and experience.³ Stonehouse uses the model of Melvin Dieter, professor emeritus of Asbury Theological Seminary.⁴ This model is called “Building a Dynamic Molecule of Truth.” In the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, Outler theorized that Wesley used four different sources in coming to theological conclusions. The four sources are: Scripture—the Holy Bible (Old and New Testaments), Tradition—the two millennia history of the Christian Church, Reason—rational thinking and sensible interpretation, and Experience—a Christian's personal and communal journey in Christ. Stonehouse uses tradition, reason, scripture, and experience as essential for the spiritual formation of children, and I believe we can use all four as a method or approach in doing holistic child development. The following is Dieter’s “Dynamic Molecule of Truth.”



Melvin Dieter’s diagram: “Building a Dynamic Molecule of Truth”⁵

This model is a method for doing the theological reflection needed to

³ Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 21.

⁴ Stonehouse, 16.

⁵ Cited in Stonehouse, 16.

guide our ministry with children. If we look at this model, Scripture is at the center. It is where the rest of the items are connected. Tradition, Reason, and Experience find their root in Scripture. Stonehouse explicates:

As Christian educators, our search for truth must engage us in an ongoing conversation with Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Scripture evaluates the other sources and integrates them with biblical insights into a harmonious understanding. Tradition, reason, and experience help interpret and point toward the application of scriptural perspectives.⁶

In this light, I would like to ask you to take a look at **Scripture** as we think about holistic child development. For John Wesley, Scriptures come first. He says, “I allow no other rule, whether faith or practice, than the Holy Scriptures.”⁷ The Bible, according to Stonehouse, “provides us with our most complete revelation of God.”⁸ God’s Word is filled with references on children: how we need to raise them and whether “to spank or not to spank.” (By the way, on August 23, 2010, my three-year-old daughter prayed, “Lord, can you spank the lightning and the thunder?”). The Bible also tells us *not* to exasperate our children and how can we formulate an understanding of the child’s spiritual development, among others (Deut 6:1-9).

I was so encouraged to know that George Muller read the Bible 100 times in his entire life.⁹ So let us turn to 1 Thess 2:7. Paul says, “But were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children” (NKJV). In here, Paul does not exhort nursing mothers to cherish their own children; he simply assumes that they do so. Morita Dialing in her report for an APNTS class, “Early Childhood Christian Education,” quotes James Dobson (who is a Nazarene!) in the following:

It has been known for several decades that an infant who is not loved, touched, and caressed will often die. Evidence of this fact was observed as early as the thirteenth century, when Frederick II conducted an experiment with fifty infants. He wanted to see what

⁶ Stonehouse, 20.

⁷ John Wesley, cited in Outler, *John Wesley*, 72.

⁸ Stonehouse, 17.

⁹ Jay Carty, *Counter Attack: Taking Back Ground Lost to Sin* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1988), 155.

language the children would speak if they never had the opportunity to hear the spoken word. To accomplish this dubious research project, he assigned foster mothers to bathe and suckle the children, but forbade them to fondle, pet, or talk to their charges. The experiment failed because all fifty infants died. Hundreds of more recent studies indicate that the mother-child relationship during the first year of life is apparently vital to the infant's survival. An unloved child is truly the saddest phenomenon in all of nature.¹⁰

And of course, with that, I should add that the father's love is as important as the mother's love. I bought a book for my husband on Father's Day entitled, *Fatherneed*. The book urges fathers to take part in the growth of their children. Paul wrote in 1 Thess 2:11–12, "As you know we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (NKJV). In this verse, Paul similarly simply assumes that fathers exhort, comfort, and charges.

John Chrysostom spoke of children as statues to be fashioned for God by parents.¹¹ I do not know how he came up with this philosophy, but according to tradition, Chrysostom lived with extreme asceticism and became a hermit in about 375; he spent the next two years continually standing, scarcely sleeping, and committing the Bible to memory. As a consequence of these practices, his stomach and kidneys were permanently damaged and poor health forced him to return to Antioch.¹² Perhaps this lifestyle influenced how Chrysostom viewed children.

However, any parent can tell you that children are not totally statues, especially a child beyond two years of age! Well, maybe they are statues that can be molded. But they are also statues that talk, reason, and defy you in many ways—trust me! Lawrence Richards explains that the Bible seems to assume that each person has a wide-ranging freedom, which

¹⁰ James Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1970), 33.

¹¹ Cited in Lawrence Richards, *A Theology of Children's Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983), 74.

¹² "John Chrysostom," Wikipedia; available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Chrysostom; accessed 23 August 2010.

brings with it personal responsibility for every act.¹³ And children do have their own different attitudes as they relate to parents and other people who surround them.

A scene from “The Passion of the Christ” offers an interesting perspective on how Mary nurtured Jesus. In the scene, Mary was strong and courageous—especially during the time when Jesus was hanging on the cross. I think as a young woman, she was not strong and courageous at the beginning. But when the angel appeared to her telling her not to be afraid, I think something has changed inside her. Ralph Wilson observes that Mary took the angel’s “Fear not” at face value.¹⁴ She was able to be the handmaid that God had planned her to be. According to Jane Schaberg, Mary the Mother of Jesus is often considered Luke’s model of obedient, contemplative discipleship (1:38; 2:19, 51).¹⁵ As leaders in the local churches, preschools, or other ministries with children, youth, and adults, we need to learn from Mary: her strength and courage in not only nurturing the only-begotten Son of God in her womb, but also raising him in her own home and letting the Heavenly Father accomplish his purpose.

The next item in our quadrilateral of holistic child development is *tradition*. As Christians in the 21st century, I believe what the Christians have done in the past in nurturing their children is worth noting. Stonehouse writes that within the Christian faith, tradition refers to the story of what God has done in the past among and through the people of God, both in biblical times and through church history.¹⁶ There are areas in the Christian tradition that have not edified the work of the Lord. As wise ministers of the Gospel, whatever our contexts might be, we need to distinguish which part of tradition we can employ in our ministries with children, youth, or adults.

For Albert Outler, writing on the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, tradition would refer to the two-millennia history of the Christian Church. Deuter-

¹³ Richards, 74.

¹⁴ Ralph F. Wilson, “Mary’s First Lesson in Discipleship (Luke 1:26-38),” available from http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/1_26-38.htm; accessed 24 August 2010.

¹⁵ Jane Schaberg, “Luke,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharaon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1992), 279.

¹⁶ Stonehouse, 18.

onomy 6:1–2 says, “These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life” (NIV).

Jerome, who was best known for his new translation of the Bible into Latin, said of children, “Thus, a soul must be educated which is to be the temple of God. It must learn to hear nothing and say nothing but what belongs to the fear of God.”¹⁷ Wow, what a tall order to follow! Comenius, considered the “last bishop of the Unity of the Brethren” in the 1700s and known as the father of modern education, said, “Soft wax can be molded and remolded, hard wax will crumble. The young tree can be planted, replanted, trimmed, and bent to any shape; not so the grown. So also the hands and limbs of [people] can be trained for an art and craft only during [their] childhood.”¹⁸ Jerome did not get married while Comenius did—but both of them shared the same passion for molding souls for the Kingdom of God. Mother Teresa, one of the major advocates for children, gave a speech at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. on February 3, 1994:

Because I talk so much of giving with a smile, once a professor from the United States asked me: “Are you married?” And I said: “Yes, and I find it sometimes very difficult to smile at my spouse, Jesus, because He can be very demanding—sometimes.” This is really something true. And this is where love comes in—when it is demanding, and yet we can give it with joy.¹⁹

Now I am beginning to be convinced that singleness is compatible with holistic child development with the work and statements of Mother Teresa and Jerome. Anyway, in the history of the early church, we find in Ephesians 6:1-4 commands to children, fathers and mothers. I can imagine when the church was reading that letter both children and parents

¹⁷ Jerome, *Letter to Laerta*, 17:164; cited in Richards, 89.

¹⁸ Cited in Richards, 90.

¹⁹ Mother Teresa, “Whatever You Did Unto One of the Least, You Did Unto Me,” available from <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/augustine/arch/teresa94.html>; accessed 30 August 2010.

were there. This gives the intergenerational setting for worship. I think we can learn from this setting as part of our Christian tradition.

Another lesson we can learn from the stories of early Christianity is found in Acts 20:7-12. This passage relates the account of Eutychus, whom some historians say was probably between 7 and 14 years old when this event happened. Paul preached and “continued his speech until midnight” (v. 7 KJV). Verse 9 says, “And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead” (KJV). Thank God Eutychus was alive (vv. 10)! Lesson to our preachers: keep it short when there are children listening to your sermon.

Now, we go to the third element of our quadrilateral, **reason**. Reason is rational thinking and sensible interpretation. Stonehouse writes, “Christian educators need to develop Bible-study skills for the task of sound interpretation.”²⁰ Deuteronomy 6:6-9 says, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (NIV). When we do this, we need to have a good grasp of Scriptures so we can influence our children in a godly way. In reference to Dieter’s “Dynamic Molecule of Truth,” Stonehouse writes, “Reason also represents knowledge discovered in many fields of study, such as education, psychology, or medicine.”²¹ If you notice in our MA-RE and Ph.D. in Holistic Child Development curriculum, these degrees aim to be inter-disciplinary. The program committee sees to it that students touch base with other disciplines to have a comprehensive perspective on child development.

Now we go to the final part of our quadrilateral, namely, **experience**. According to John Wesley, experience is the “faithful [person’s] awareness of God’s gracious disposition toward *him* [or *her*].”²² For Stonehouse, in

²⁰ Stonehouse, 18.

²¹ Stonehouse, 18.

²² Wesley, cited in Outler, *John Wesley*, 29.

application to our ministry with children, we need to be attentive to the experiences of children and their parents. Deuteronomy 6:3 says, “Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you” (NIV). Some parents are simply lucky; their children grow up to be doctors, lawyers, nurses, pastors, etc. They “increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey.” We rejoice with them. And my prayer is that we will experience the same. May our children here at APNTS grow up and become the persons that God wants them to be.

In our ministries with children, and even with youth and adults, we need to be sensitive to their needs. Abraham Maslow, considered the father of humanistic psychology, categorized the first level of his hierarchy as physiological needs. This means that as we teach spiritual truths to children, we also cater to their physical needs. We need to check why they are misbehaving. Maybe they wanted to go to the bathroom. Maybe they are sleepy. Maybe they are too tired and too bored. Maybe the environment contributes to their sense of uneasiness. That is one of our roles: to be sensitive to these needs.

Conclusion

Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience—these are basic elements in approaching holistic child development. One of the greatest lessons I have learned in the area of holistic child development is the experience I had with Kuya Willie, a pastor who has worked with street kids in Mindanao. Interacting with him has challenged me and I hope it will challenge you, too.

Pastor Willie Abrao, one of the staunchest child advocates in Mindanao died of lung cancer in July 2010. He practically lived, and I guess, died for the street children of Butuan. He contracted the disease in some way after working in the dump for so long. I suppose there is no street child in Butuan who does not know Kuya Willie. Last summer, Stella Bokare and I taught in the Light and Life Graduate School of Theology, and I was able to talk with Kuya Willie, this “staunchest” child advocate in the whole wide world. When I think about his life and what he did, I can never compare to him. He is the real deal in holistic child development. Though he

was already skin-and-bones, blind—much like the pictures we see on the Internet on dying people—holistic child development was still perfectly flowing in what little life he had. I visited him almost every day when we were there. I wanted to learn from this guru. One of the things that I will never ever forget from those “classes” was when he said, “The children in the streets, when they say, they are hungry, THEY ARE HUNGRY.” He said, “A lot of people think that these children are not really hungry because some evil adult is using them for money.” And I think I am one of those people. But for Pastor Willy, every street child who says he is hungry is really hungry. Hungry for food, hungry for attention, hungry for love. I think in one way or another, this is the essence of holistic child development—meeting the needs of children, be they physical, spiritual, psychological, intellectual, or socio-emotional. Jesus Christ wants us to be his hands and feet to the “least of these.” He wants us to share the abundant life he has given us to his children!

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