

종교교육학연구 제34권. pp.1-15

서울: 한국종교교육학회, 2010. 12. 30.

The Role of Religion in Contemporary Education

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〈Abstract〉

Both classical philosophy and contemporary research suggest education should provide young people with opportunities to develop themselves in a well-balanced manner: Academic and intellectual advancement should take place in the context of spiritual and moral growth. This, however, is not happening in the national education system of any nation today. On the contrary, with the advancement of modern science and technology, materialism and consumerism are on the rise, and spirituality and character development have taken a back seat. Adult society is obsessed with the acquisition of things, rather than with questions of personal integrity and morality, and young people are taking their cues from the example of their elders.

For the large majority of humanity religion is compelling motive for leading a moral life. The precepts of all world religions have profound ethical implications. When people come in contact with the thought of great religious leaders and thinkers, their lives may be profoundly affected. Religion also plays a vital role in almost all dimensions of human life. In an increasingly globalized world, people will inevitably be confronted with others of different cultural, ethnic and of religious backgrounds. Being religiously literate is an essential prerequisite for participation in the international dialogue. Thus, there are compelling internal, spiritual and external, cultural reasons why religious education is important. Consequently, the teaching of religion at secondary and tertiary educational institutions should be a priority.

It is of particular importance to consider these realities in the context of contemporary Korean education. In secondary school, Korean students are supposed to absorb ethical lessons in their dodeok classes. However, since the parameters of modern Korean society have notably shifted, there is a significant shortfall in the ethical development of Korean young people.

This manifests itself in all manner of irresponsible and immoral practices in the lives of those of the younger generation. At Cheongshim International Academy, we are attempting to test the boundaries of what the establishment of a religious education program can mean for the development of Korean young people. The preliminary results of this enterprise seem to be promising.

Key words: Education, Religious Education, Character Education, Ethics, Morality

I. The original meaning of education

The age of technology provides a wealth of information but little sense of orientation. In modern society, students at the secondary and tertiary levels are inundated with data via the Internet but commonly lack a clear framework of reference to help them to give structure and meaning to the information their web searches turn up. Yet, as the well-known American character education expert Thomas Lickona said, “Education has had two great goals: To help young people to become smart and to become.”¹⁾ This contemporary perspective is corroborated by the classical philosophy of education. Plato wrote,

“Education begins in the first years of childhood. As soon as the child understands what is said, mother and father exert themselves to make the child as good as possible, at each word and action teaching and showing that this is right and that is wrong, this is honorable and that dishonorable, this allowed by God and that not allowed. At a later stage they send him to teachers and tell them to attend to his conduct far more than to his reading and writing.”²⁾

If intellectual brilliance is preferred to moral sensibility, a lopsided education and deformed character are almost inevitably the results. If professional performance is emphasized at the expense of ethical action, society is in danger of losing its moral bearings. If people are educated only intellectually but not spiritually, they may easily turn in brilliant criminals or murderous leaders. Vladimir Lenin and Osama Bin Laden

1) Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p.7.

2) *Protagoras* 325c-e

are some examples of such people. Former US President Theodore Roosevelt said, “If you educate a person in mind but not in morals, you educate a menace to society.” A principal from an American school used to send the following letter to all of his new teachers. He learned from his own experience that, without the right spiritual and moral education, terrible crimes can be committed even in the most technically advanced and culturally sophisticated societies.

“Dear teacher, I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw was no man should witness: Gas chambers built by learned engineers, children poisoned by learned physicians, infants killed by trained nurses, women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.”³⁾

The question is whether or not we are fulfilling this man’s request.

In our age, all people – teachers, professors, parents, students, politicians, and government officials – seem to have developed an increasing utilitarian view of education. In a materialistic society, students see the purpose of education as gaining the qualification to get a good job and make money. The emphasis is on passing exams rather than on genuine learning and self-improvement; the focus is on material prosperity rather than on living a meaningful life. Politicians see education merely as a means to improve the economy. The renowned British historian Arnold Toynbee said, “The greater our material power, the greater our need for spiritual insight and virtue to use our power for good and not for evil... We have never been adequate spiritually for handling our material power; and today the morality gap is greater than it has ever been in any previous age.”⁴⁾

II . The value of religion in education

For the large majority of humanity religion is compelling motive for leading a

3) Haim Ginott, *Between Teacher and Child* (New York: Avon, 1976), p.36

4) Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p.148

moral life. Though the doctrines and metaphysics of world religions vary greatly, their ethics are strikingly similar. The scriptures of most religions promise their adherents peace and prosperity in this life, and blessing in the hereafter if they conduct themselves in a moral manner. There is a great need for some of the ethical principles proscribed by the great world religions. In his farewell address of 1796, the first American president, George Washington, said, “Both reason and experience forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.” Some time later, the first vice-president under the new American Constitution, John Adams added, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people.”

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, urged people to follow the Middle Way. He pointed out that ascetic self-denial is no better than a life of self-indulgence. He referred to the way to avoid either extreme as the Noble Eightfold Path. This path involves both personal, internal disciplines such as “right thinking” and “right concentration,” and practice which affects a person’s interactions with others such as “right speech,” and “right action.” Thinking rightly will result in responsible actions. A person should both treat himself and others with respect. He should not do anything that harms his own body such as smoking or taking drugs; he should not gossip about others and should be faithful to his spouse.

Interestingly, the Greek philosopher Aristotle affirmed the same through his formulation of the Golden Mean, a desirable center between two extremes—one being deprivation and the other excess. He said that good character requires right conduct in relation to both self and others. This means that a virtuous life consists of self-oriented values such as self-discipline and moderation, and other-oriented virtues, such as compassion and generosity. These are directly related to each other: We have to control our desires and passions if we want to be just and loving towards others.

Religions deal with very fundamental issues such as human existence, love and hate, good and evil, ethics, and social justice. Most people at some point in their life ask questions such as “Is there life after death?” “Does God exist?” “Why is there evil in the world?” “Is there really a heaven and hell?” “What is the purpose of life?” “How can I live a good life?” etc. These are serious matters that thoughtful and educated individuals have to at least think about. It is therefore of vital importance that young people learn to deal with these questions at an early stage in their development. Hence, religious education should be an integral part of a well-balanced

education program.

There are also practical reasons why the inclusion of religion into the school curriculum makes sense. Approximately 90 percent of mankind is religiously oriented. A thorough education must address all essential dimensions of human life, and as such, religion ought to get its fair share of attention. Thinking about and discussing religion is not only important to come to a deeper self-understanding, but also to learn to appreciate what is at the heart of various world cultures.

Such understanding, in turn, has deep significance for realizing a world of peaceful cooperation. If an American businessman does not know that his Muslim counterpart from Egypt is not allowed to eat pork, he may invite him for a delicious meal of cutlets at the local diner. Worse scenarios are possible, as was illustrated in 2007, when overzealous and rather naïve Korean Christian missionaries were taken hostage by the unscrupulous Afghan Taliban. In most wars in today's world there is at least an element of misunderstanding or intolerance between the adherents of different religions. Hence, the UN has considered the establishment of a council on religion in addition to the Security Council.

Some institutes of higher learning have begun to appreciate the value of religious education. A Harvard University committee, for example, recently urged that religion be returned to the University's core curriculum.

"Harvard University, founded 370 years ago to train Puritan ministers, should again require all undergraduates to study religion, along with U.S. history and ethics, a faculty committee recommended. These surprisingly bold recommendations came after years of rancorous internal debate over what courses should be required of all Harvard students."

The core curriculum has been criticized for focusing on narrow academic questions rather than real-world issues students would likely confront beyond the wrought-iron gates of Harvard Square. The report called for Harvard to require students to take a course in "reason and faith," which could include classes on topics such as religion and democracy, Charles Darwin, or a course called "Why Americans Love God and Europeans Don't."

Harvard is no longer an institution with a religious mission, but religion is a fact that Harvard's graduates will confront in their lives, the report said, noting 94 percent of incoming students reported discussing religion and 71 percent attended religious services. "As academics in a university we don't have to confront religion if we're not religious, but in the world, we will have to," said Alison Simmons, a philosophy professor who co-chaired the committee."⁵⁾

5) *The Harvard Crimson*, "Harvard Committee Recommends Returning Religion to Curriculum," Feb. 8, 2007.

One of the tasks of education is to awaken and cultivate the innate goodness of young people and provide them with a moral framework they can refer to throughout their lives in order to make responsible and ethical decisions. This is a reality that has been recognized by historical and contemporary scientists, philosophers, and spiritual leaders alike, both in the East and in the West. The great Christian theologian, St. Augustine of Hippo emphasized that a student has an indwelling capacity to learn with encouragement and love, and that moral reasoning is based on internal dynamics, introspection, and reasoning.

Many centuries later, the Catholic philosopher Thomas Aquinas came to more or less the same conclusions, emphasizing reason and intellect, and insisting that knowing the good precedes doing the good. Martin Luther, the religious reformer, insisted that classical learning be used to foster moral character and spiritual growth. In other words, these men asserted that man must be guided to moral decisions by his own conscience and that this conscience is an internal agency that can and must be educated.

The recognition that God should have a voice in the affairs of man is not limited to theologians and religious scholars of bygone days but includes great, modern scientists such as Albert Einstein. He said, “To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom... this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness. In this sense, I belong in the ranks of the devoutly religious men.”⁶⁾

In the Orient, developing individual spirituality has been acknowledged as a precondition for the development of a healthy and functioning society. Buddha said, “Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one’s mind-this is the teaching of the Buddhas.”⁷⁾ In the biblical Old Testament we read, “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all and his compassion is over all He has made.”⁸⁾ Ronald Green, professor of Religion at Dartmouth College, said, “Ritual moments are thus a pedagogy in ethics. They embody and reflect the key elements of the moral point of view, and they impart the information and skills needed for its successful application.”⁹⁾

6) Quoted in Philipp Frank *Einstein: His Life and Times* (Frank Press, 2008), p.195.

7) *Dhammapada* 183.

8) Psalm 145:89.

9) Ronald M. Green, *Religion and Moral Reason: A New Method for Comparative Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.129.

A relationship with a loving God creates order out of chaos (mathematicians, from ancient Greece until today, have asserted that God is a mathematical being; the creation story of the Bible explains that God's first action was to create order in the void); provides a model for moral development; provides moral authority; can provide strength in adversity; and can be a source of unconditional love. Modern statistics invariably show that children from religious homes do better at school, have a smaller chance to become involved in substance (alcohol and drugs) abuse, are less likely to violate the law, have a greater chance of success in marriage, have lower divorce and suicide rates, and have a better chance of being materially successful.

Equally, the potential significance of belief in the afterlife (i.e. life after death, in whatever form) can enhance moral development; provides motivation to check one's actions; encourages less attachment to the body and material things; and establishes priority on loving relationships. As such, including religious education to aid in students' character development and spiritual maturation is highly to be recommended.

It must be emphasized that religion, theology was traditionally a part of the core curriculum in advanced western societies. During the High Middle Ages, theology was the ultimate subject at universities and was known as the 'queen of sciences.' Scholars understood that the study of God, by definition the source of all truth, informed and illuminated all other branches of knowledge, and hence was the foundation of civilization. In other words, religious education was considered the bedrock of all other types of education.

We may distinguish between three dimensions of education: religious and character education, education in ethics and civics, and professional education. Religious and character education help a person develop a mature character and a clear value system. This spiritual groundwork is the basis for education in ethics and civics through which the individual builds loving relationships in the family and beyond. This in turn is the foundation for professional education through which a person pursues a fulfilling career, generates income, and makes a meaningful contribution to society.

It was not until the French Revolution and the Enlightenment that atheism came to the fore and subsequently made inroads into the European educational system. This is at the great detriment of the development of the student. In today's education there is a lopsided relationship between the acquisition of technical and intellectual skills and the development of a well-rounded human character. This results in an overemphasis, if not an exclusive insistence on professional education at the expense

of religious and character education, and education in ethics and civics. As a result, we see graduates who are technically skilled and academically alert, but who are often incapable of sustaining positive human relationships, lack a sense of compassion for the less fortunate, have a poorly developed sense of responsibility to society, are spiritually disoriented, and lack a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives.

Religious education and character education must jointly address this shortcoming and reverse the tide that was set in motion since the Enlightenment. This should not be an abstract, scholarly concern, but something that must immediately and directly benefit individual students.¹⁰⁾ In the West, there are signs that some advanced countries are heeding this call. In Great Britain religious education is a required part of education at all public schools. In the United States, character education enjoys an unprecedented popularity and is increasingly included in the curriculum of many private schools. Yet, although character education can make a valuable contribution to the ethical formation of students, it lacks the moral imperative that only religious education can provide. Indeed, all the moral and ethical assumptions that are at the heart of character education are based on religious precepts. Unfortunately, the much-vaunted “separation of church and state,” as defined by the US Constitution has been abused by liberal interest group to drive a wedge between religion and (public) education.¹¹⁾ Thus, character educators are required to artfully skirt religious issues, whereas openly discussing we be both increase the student’s religious and philosophical literacy, and further empower him to live a moral life.

Thus, there are compelling internal, spiritual reasons why religious education is important. Yet, as mentioned, there is also a more external, pragmatic reason why such education is urgently needed. In a progressively interconnected world, the much vaunted “global village,” the frequency of contact between people from different races, religions, and cultures has tremendously increased. Consequently, the opportunities for international and interreligious communication and cooperation have increased, but so have the chances of misunderstanding and conflict. For people in this internationalized community it is of vital importance that they understand the tenets of faith of different world religions so that they can show proper mutual respect and appreciation for those of other backgrounds. In addition, such education is much needed to help solve old conflicts

10) <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/subjects/re/guidance/legalframework/curriculum/>

11) James Q. Whitman, “Separating Church and State: The Atlantic Divide”, *Historical Reflections*, Vol. 34 Issue 3, Winter 2008, p.87.

plaguing various regions of the world – the Middle East, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, and Northern Ireland, to name a few.

III. The morality gap in Korean education

Korean students are supposed to absorb a number of ethical lessons in their *dodeok* classes. The fundamental ethical framework upon which the moral instructions in these classes are based comes from Confucius' *Analects*. The idea of a "Way of Virtue" originated with the Chinese sage Lao-Tzu, but was effectively formulated by his contemporary Confucius. This "Road of True Humanity" was a comprehensive view of life based on the Chinese classics and covered ethics, morality, sociology, politics, civics, and economics.¹²⁾ Indeed, Confucius and his disciple Mencius were, or at least aspired to be, government officials and prescribed a certain political course of action.

Their ideas are at the root of all original East Asian values and for centuries determined educational content and methodology in Korea, China, and Japan. However, with the ascent of the modern era in Korea, during the final phase of the Joseon Dynasty, these traditional views came to be considered as applicable only to the teaching of ethics and morality. In the teaching of social sciences, politics, and economics they were no longer thought of as useful and were displaced by predominantly western perspectives. Some time after the conclusion of the Japanese colonial period, *dodeok* was established as a separate academic subject. This resulted in a type of hybrid curriculum, with *dodeok* surviving a lone Confucian-ethical island in an ocean of western educational disciplines.

In principle, *dodeok* emphasizes something that could be called scope expansion. The student is required to gradually expand his intellectual and moral grasp, from the stage of the individual, through the stages of the family, neighbors, school, and society, to ultimately encompass the nation. The understanding of reality as a series of concentric circles, expanding from the individual to the world, is a quintessentially Confucian worldview. However, in the aftermath of the Korean War, the teaching of *dodeok* was complicated as a result of the radical political North-South division of the Korean peninsula. Thus, *dodeok* came to embody two distinct subject areas: traditional

12) *Tao-te ching*

ethics and morality, most notably, family ethics; and highly politicized civics dealing with the peculiar challenges involved in the national reunification process.

Not only the political but also the moral and ethical ideas advocated in current dodeok teaching have their limitations. Despite the superficial modernization of Korea, many cultural and social assumptions remain firmly rooted in the original Confucian heritage, virtually unaffected by principles of democratic governance. These assumptions are reflected in Korean education. Dodeok describes the requirements for maintaining group harmony in the areas defined by *samgang-oryun*. Students learn how they are to conduct themselves within the family, maintain the peace with neighbors, and adjust to school life. Individual character development and self-actualization are largely considered the fruits of such relational ethics. Personal achievement is a side-effect of group effort: A family successfully launches their son or daughter into an orbit of career success and social recognition; and the son or daughter responds by living up to the expectations of parents and other close relatives.

In the western ethical system things are exactly reversed. Individual morality and character development are considered primary and social harmony, civic virtue, and national peace are resultant. Character is thought of as something that should be autonomous: The individual should unchangingly uphold a certain set of fundamental values, independent of the social context he finds himself in. Such impartiality is the basis for democratic political principles and a fair and transparent justice system. In this ethical worldview, whether a person is a relative, fellow university alumnus, colleague working at the same company, a countryman on the one hand, or a competitor, a foreigner, complete stranger on the other hand should make no difference. From the traditional Korean perspective the demand for equal treatment of friends and acquaintances on the one hand and strangers on the other seems legalistic and impersonal at best or heartless at worst. After all, those with whom one shares a personal bond, or *jeong*, are naturally closer and hence, should receive some special treatment.

There is much to say in defense of the both the Korean and western approach. The Korean strength is that people are more keenly sensitive to the needs, moods, and personal circumstances of people they know and care about. The western approach provides stricter objective standards for human conduct, which is of value when a person finds himself in the company of people with different backgrounds or conflicting interests. To a considerable degree, Koreans still uphold the social patterns established

by their forefathers, and move freely only within the narrowly defined social circles. This will continue to negatively affect people's interactions with those "outside the circle" and the much-advertised Korean aspiration to become a "globalized nation" unless students receive adequate education.

Character is based on *operative values*. A person may have an impressive educational background and be well-versed in philosophy and ethics. But if he does not act based upon his understanding, his values are meaningless. Unfortunately, the wise lessons of many masters of Korean ethics do not bear fruit in improved behavior of students. There seems to be a great divide between word and deed in Korean society. Although the teaching of traditional Korean ethics is of great value-and should be reappraised for new applications in modern society—it should at a minimum be supplemented by the teaching of tenets of faith of the major world religions and clearly communicating their universal ethical appeal. This calls for the implementation of an in-depth religious education and character education program.

This is important for three reasons. Firstly, Koreans with increasing frequency find themselves interacting, either at home or abroad, with non-Koreans who do not understand the social parameters of Korean communal life. Secondly, the individual within Korean society is becoming increasingly isolated from others as is evidenced by the decline of the three-generation family and the anonymity of life in modern high-rise apartments. Consequently, people have to make decisions on their own, mentally unaided by Confucian values that do not apply to the new situations and socially unaided by their now emotionally—or geographically—distant "support group." Thirdly, democracy can only thrive when individual citizens take responsibility for good governance of the nation and have real access to the democratic process. This clearly has not been the case, as is illustrated by the general corruption of Korean politics and by the top-down, short-sighted education reform attempts of past governments.

Another factor undermining effective character formation and ethical action of Korean students is that dodeok is not one of the four *suneung* subjects. Therefore, it is considered "notimportant," at least in the mind of many school administrators. Principals and vice-principals would never think of compromising the math or English education of their students; however, they do take liberties with the ethics education program. When there is a teacher shortage, we may find people who received no special training in the subject—such as a social science or even economics teacher—teach dodeok. Clearly the subject is not a priority.

IV. Openings for religion curriculum at Korean secondary education

Dr. Moon Sun Myung, the most prominent living Korean religious leader and social reformer, has recognized the central role of spirituality in human affairs. He is responsible for numerous initiatives in the education, the arts, and politics that have contributed to interpersonal understanding, international cooperation, social and economic development, and peace. He established Cheongshim International Academy (CSIA) with the set purpose of graduating students who not only are intellectually brilliant and well-equipped to achieve outstanding career goals, but who are also good, loving, and altruistic human beings who are capable of building enduring relationships, harmonious friendships, a peaceful society, and finding lasting happiness.

I introduce new students at CSIA to religion classes by emphasizing the centrality of religion in human affairs.

“Fully 90 percent of humanity is religious, in one form or another. An all-round education should include all central dimensions of human endeavor, and religion is definitely one of them. At Cheongshim International Academy we understand the educational requirements for global citizenship. Hence, we provide a thorough review of the world’s major religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and others—and deal with each one in an equal, academic, and engaging manner. Through such a comparative approach our graduates will be able to grasp the essence of each religion and be able to interact with people of all backgrounds in an intelligent, informed, and respectful manner. Students are not expected to uncritically accept the tenets of any religion, but are encouraged to ask questions and engage in group discussion. They will also learn to apply their knowledge to intelligently challenge practical ethical issues, such as marriage & sexuality, adoption, abortion, euthanasia, and the death penalty.”¹³⁾

In order to assure that there is real, living interaction between the students and the educational staff, I invariably ask incoming students to express their views concerning the existing religion curriculum at Cheongshim International Academy. Students are asked to share their views in the “Religion Class Surveys.” This feedback mechanism yields surprising new data every year, as the following compilations makes clear.

13) “Introduction to Religion Class,” a reference for parents of newly enrolled CSIA students; the data on religious affiliation come from <http://www.gallup-international.com/ContentFiles/millennium15.asp>

“Cultural background is important in diplomacy. (...) It is not awkward to me since I had a “Religious Education and Philosophy” class when I was studying abroad. (...) We need to understand human diversity. (...) Knowing about religion is part of the process of becoming a global leader. (...) It seems that knowing about others is necessary in order to respect them. (...) I think it is a good idea to have a religion class. When I was living in England, RE was a compulsory part of the school curriculum. I enjoy studying about religion because it allows me to look into diverse cultures. (...) As I have not had any religion class so far, it is a little strange for me. However, it might be a good opportunity to know and understand the world. (...) I couldn’t understand religion, e.g. the difference between Protestantism and Catholicism. But I can learn it from this class and solve my confusion. (...) Necessary; one of the most important subjects in school. Most wars throughout history were caused by religion. Religion has the power to change people, thus changing the world. In order to understand culture and not cause war we have to learn various aspects of religion right away. I am interested in everything in this class. (...) It is important to know many people’s religion or beliefs to understand their culture and have peace. (...) Through religion we can find out more about ourselves. (...) I think it is great that we have religion at CSIA. Not only can we learn about religion, but we can also learn to become a person with great characteristics. (...) I always wanted to know who I am through my religion. (...) I love it!”¹⁴⁾

“Psychology. How do people from different religious backgrounds think, act, and talk. (...) I want to know who I really am. (...) How does religion affect the human mind, make it peaceful and stable, etc.? (...) I want to learn about religion through foreigners’ eyes. (...) Why do people care about religions so much? I don’t criticize those who have religions, but I just wonder why people become religious. (...) Why are there so many conflicts? (...) I am interested in learning why there are so many religions, each claiming to be right. (...) I want to talk about the differences in culture that are caused by different religions. (...) I am interested in the taboos of each religion. (...) Religious etiquette. (...) I really want to study philosophy and theology. They are a bit related. (...) I know mainly about Christianity and Buddhism, and I want to learn about the other religions. (...) I want to learn about the original story of the Unification Church. (...) I want to learn about unusual, uncommon religions. (...) I want to learn about Buddhism and Christianity. I want to know whether the soul exists, God exists, good and evil exist or not. (...) I want to learn about God. (...) I hope I can get a feeling and something special that shows me what religion is, what god is, why we need a god and religion and so on. (...) I want to get close to God. (...) Spiritual phenomena. (...) I am interested in whether there are spirits around us. (...) Reincarnation. (...) Moral life. (...) I want to know why there is good and evil, and how to overcome evil attitudes. (...) I want to know whether people are born good and become evil; or people are

14) “Religion Class Survey: What do you think of the fact that we have religion class at CSIA?” Survey of Cheongshim International Academy students; the survey was conducted 2006-2009, once annually, among a total 400 newly enrolled students

born evil and become good; or people are born with nothing and learn both good and evil. (...) Social issues. (...) Stem cell research. (...) Current affairs related to religion. (...) I am interested in social issues concerning the regional conflicts and terrorism (e.g. in Iraq and Israel). (...) I like to share my opinion with my friends about social issues, for example, the conflict about euthanasia. (...) I prefer to talk. Also, I want to talk about social issues like capital punishment. (...) I want to talk with my friends about “The DaVinci Code.” (...) Provide information about international volunteering. (...) Talk about creating a peaceful or ideal society.”¹⁵⁾

These responses show that there is room and a need for a well-thought-out religious education program at Korean schools. The obstacles to implement such a program seem immense, but not doing so will incur a long-term educational, spiritual, intellectual, ethical, and social deficit that will harm Korea’s national interest and its ability to become a well-integrated member of the international community and make a viable contribution to global development. Some people may have initial difficulty to appreciate the profound impact that religious education may have on individual and national growth and development. But as the Muslim scholar Muzammil Siddiqi summarized so well, “I believe that religious dialogue is a supremely ethical enterprise. The objective of such a dialogue is not only to learn the facts about other people but also to clear the world community of prejudice and misunderstanding and to establish human fellowship.”¹⁶⁾ When students become deeply and meaningfully engaged in this enterprise, the results will be worth the expended efforts.

15) “Religion Class Survey: What would you like to study/ talk about during the religion classes?”
Survey of Cheongshim International Academy students

16) *Ethics, Religion, and the Good Society: New Directions in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Joseph Runzo (Louisville Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), Muzammil H. Siddiqi, “Global Ethics and Dialogue among World Religions: An Islamic Viewpoint,” p.180

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원고접수: 2010년 11월 15일 1차심사: 12월 3일 게재승인일: 12월 10일

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① 전공: Theology, Russian literature/소속: Cheongshim International Academy

② 관심영역: World religions, ethics, family morality, philosophy, psychology, literature

③ 주요논저: *Guus Hiddink-Going Dutch, Dick Advocaat-the Ultimate Biography, What's So Good about Korea, Maarten? Education War.*

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