Michael A. Milton, PhD

A Philosophy of Teaching Statement

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Introduction

Following John Milton (1608-1674), we propose that teaching and learning are "to repair the ruines of our first Parents" *(Of Education,* 1644). Five core commitments support my philosophy of teaching.

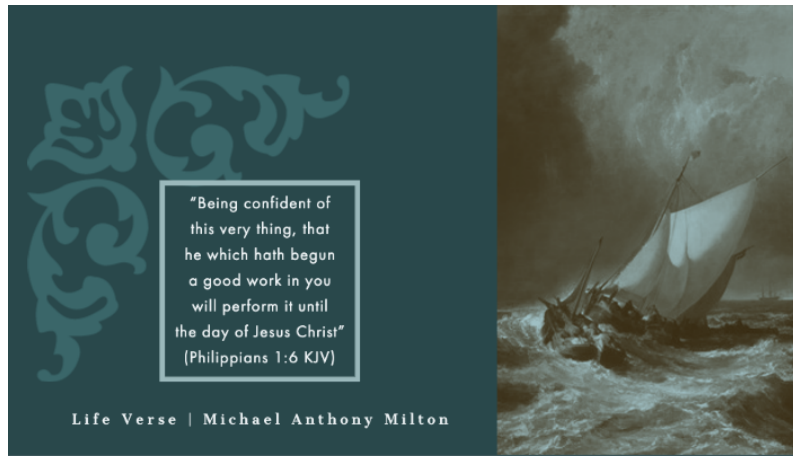
My philosophy of life is primary and is, thus, the source of any subsidiary statements such as this one. My philosophy of life is best summarized in the famous question and answer one of the Westminster Larger Catechism (1647):

> **Question 1: What is the chief and highest end of man?**
>
> Answer: Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.

Life Verse: “Being confi dent of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6 King James Version of the Holy Bible).

Teaching as One Sacred Moment

Education is a sacred moment that unlocks and unleashes the heart and mind for the glory of God and the blessing of humanity. Teaching in any subject, and especially in my discipline of theology, is a witness to the Lordship—life, death, resurrection, ascension, and Second Coming—of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. The Holy Scriptures declare the Truth about Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Renewal.



The process and dynamic of educating a person are far more than a mere act of transfer of information. Education is a nexus in which the spirit of the educator moves past the boundaries of self-protection and self-interest to bring about an expansion of the student's humanity. In this, the Triune God is glorified.

My faith is summarized in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), with its Larger and Shorter Catechisms (1647).

Teaching as Dialogue

Teaching is a dialogue. The Socratic method of teaching—guiding a student to self-discovery through questions—facilitates dialogue. This dialogue happens formally and informally but always intentionally.

The dialogical method occurs through the traditional classroom as well as reflection and critical thinking over assigned readings. It also occurs as the student begins to "follow the footnote trail." Nor does this dialogue happen hurriedly. The interchange that leads to self-revelation happens across a plain of time. A fruitful discussion that leads to learning cannot be restricted to a classroom but rather to the growing relationship between teacher and student. Nor is dialogue always conducted with words. Silence is a powerful resource in learning. Thus, I seek "cultivating students' comfort with silence and reflective listening" (Contemplative Approach, Lobely, 2019).

Teaching as Incarnation

The means of instruction for such an educational philosophy begins and ends with the essential material: a dedicated, inspiring professor of knowledge who desires to lead students to not only acquire that knowledge but in some way to experience that knowledge themselves.

Incarnational teaching requires empathy, understanding; in short, a commitment to "I and Thou" (Buber, 1958) as a framework for teaching and learning.

Teaching with Goals

I am committed to the goal of "deep learning." Deep learning happens when the teacher's guidance leads to the student's self-discovery and "following the footnote trail" to arrive at a synthesis of ideas (Bloom's Taxonomy, 1956), and synthesis unleashes creativity.

I am committed to the goal of teaching that imparts *a license to learn*. I hope to teach so that students receive knowledge, not as a commodity, but as a gift to cultivate and apply through their lives.

Teaching with Clarity

Teaching happens within the context of well-articulated parameters. A learning contract is needed to ensure that both teachers and students understand the parameters that will bring about success. I am committed to teaching as a process of providing students with expectations, outcomes, and learning resources (e.g., readings, assignments) that are clear. To these ends, I provide rubrics, prompts for self-reflection, and weekly encouragement to the student, allowing further clarity. Finally, I teach to improve transparency. Thus, I ask students to provide measurable feedback on their learning experience.

Conclusion

In summary, I have advocated for a philosophy of education that is devoted to a deeply spiritual moment in which teachers and students meet at the intersection of common humanity. This end is supported by teaching as dialogue, teaching as an incarnation, teaching with goals, and teaching with clarity.

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Doctrina De Deo, est scire in finem