

LUTHERAN SCHOOLS: A PIECE OF THE AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION PUZZLE

(A paper given at the 1999 Australian Conference on Lutheran Education by Adrienne Jericho, National Director for Lutheran Schools)

Although there has generally been a tight relationship between church and school during the 160 years of Lutheran schooling in this country, what has happened beyond the church has always had an impact on its schools. Thus as the Education Acts of the late nineteenth century retarded the growth of Lutheran schooling, the establishment of the Schools Commission and resultant increased funding of non-government schools in the 1970s were catalysts for the significant recent growth. Consequently the Lutheran church has always played a role, and taken a keen interest, in wider educational policies and issues.

The significant growth of Lutheran schooling since 1975, for which there are no signs of abatement, is part of what has been happening across the non-government school sector in the last three decades of this century. As the nature of Australian education, both government and non-government, changes where do Lutheran schools fit, and what role should they play, nationally?

This paper will:

- (a) examine the growth of the non-government education sector, including Lutheran schooling, over the last decades of this century
- (b) consider how Lutheran schooling relates both to other areas in the non-government sector and also to the public schooling sector
- (c) suggest a role for Lutheran schooling in the contemporary Australian educational scene.

A. NON-GOVERNMENT SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA

An examination of the graphs and tables in the Appendix to this paper reveals, from a Lutheran perspective, the following characteristics of non-government schooling in Australia:

- the proportion of Australian children educated in non-government schools has increased over the last thirty years to 30% of total student enrolments and will reach an estimated 32% in 2006
- the fastest growth in the non-government sector is found in the non-Catholic component as reflected in Lutheran schools, low fee Anglican schools and 'Christian' schools, with the latter having the most dynamic growth
- the recent growth in Lutheran schools is thus mirrored in other areas of the church and 'Christian' schooling sector
- non-government schooling in Australia presents a diverse and dynamic scene

The growth of low fee schools, such as ours, is changing the nature of the non-government sector in Australia. How then do Lutheran schools relate to this emerging educational scene?

B. LUTHERAN SCHOOLS IN THE NON-GOVERNMENT SECTOR

1. Christian or Church Schools?

Lutheran educators have always talked about Christian education and deliberated on what it means to be both a Christian and Lutheran school. Whilst the Lutheran distinctiveness is celebrated, Lutheran schools assert strongly that they are Christian schools. Thus Lutheran educators are surprised to learn that there are many who believe that the first Australian Christian school was Calvin College which opened in 1962 at Kingston in Tasmania. This school was the birth of what is known as 'the Christian school movement'.

The early Christian schools were strongly supported by Dutch Reformed parents, who had migrated to Australia from the Netherlands where 80% of students were educated in non-government schools. They found that Australian church schools were beyond their means and more like grammar schools, and that state schools were becoming increasingly secular in orientation. Interestingly in South Australia many of these families found their way into Lutheran schools and the major growth of these schools has been in such non-Lutheran areas as NSW and Tasmania. Today the Christian school movement is the fastest growing school movement in Australia. *The Bulletin (August 24 1999)* captured the reason for this growth under the heading 'Values added education'. Whilst some of these schools are 'parent controlled', many are attached to churches, particularly Baptist and Assemblies of God.

Total Christian school enrolments are three times that of Lutheran school enrolments. These organisations are represented nationally by the Australian Association of Christian Schools, which is comprised of (a) Christian Parent Controlled Schools, (b) Christian Community Schools, and (c) independent Christian schools. In the near future these will all come together as Christian Schools Australia. Not only have they been successful in attracting enrolments but they also have been very successful politically at the national level. They were very influential in lobbying for the abolition of the New Schools Policy and the replacement of the ERI. Together with the National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) and the National Council of Independent Schools Associations (NCISA) they have in many ways become a third force in Australian non-government education.

Traditionally Lutheran schools have tended to separate themselves from this movement because of concerns about:

- Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) educational methodology
- fundamentalism and charismatic elements of their programs
- an emphasis on indoctrination in the faith over education, which was seen to be a confusion of the Lutheran doctrine of the two kingdoms
- these schools often adopted a separatist approach to such bodies as the state Associations of Independent Schools (AISs).

However these are stereotypes that are changing quickly as the reasons for the growth of these schools (see *The Bulletin* article above) appear similar to what is happening in Lutheran schools. Certainly the composition of these schools has also changed. It could well be asked if Lutheran schools are de facto 'Christian schools'?

Since the foundation of Australia there have always been church schools. The Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian and Lutheran churches all took the lead in providing education in colonial Australia. Following the 'free, compulsory and secular' Acts of the 1870s the Catholic church became more determined than ever to maintain its schools. The other churches either allowed their schools to fold or become elitist by charging high fees to survive. Lutheran schools either closed or followed the Catholic model. As a result of this, the term *church school* has tended to have mixed connotations. The Christian school movement often says that there are two types of schools: "Christian" and "church" and that "church" means *in name only*. There is of course a point to this, as many of these church schools have tended to become elitist and somewhat distant from their founding church.

It is now clear, however, that the Anglican and Uniting Churches are looking at their schools and questioning their relevance to the mission of the church, whose name they bear. In the Anglican dioceses of Brisbane and Adelaide the bishops have taken a high profile in working with their schools to ensure that they operate as agencies of the church. The growth of low fee Anglican schools is a reflection of this. The Sydney Anglican Schools Commission now requires all members of school governing bodies to identify with the creeds of the church.

Similarly the Uniting Church with its strong social justice conscience has examined its high fee schools and asked how they relate to the mission of the church. Again new low fee schools are being established. The Uniting Church today talks of faith communities emerging from their schools.

Both of these denominations look at their declining youth and children numbers and seek ways of relating to them and their families. The church school is seen as an effective way of doing this. One of the joys of my work is working and sharing with such church school leaders. Thus I would assert that it is increasingly difficult to talk of schools being 'church in name only'.

Although the use of the terms 'Christian' and 'Church' are loaded terms in Australian education circles they do describe Lutheran schools and we should not shrink from using them. Furthermore we should seek good relationships with both Christian schools and other church schools. This of course includes Catholic schools who are a major force in Australian education and from whom we have too often operated separately. This is despite the fact that the Catholic school probably best mirrors the Lutheran school.

2. Independent or Interdependent?

In the 1970s government divided the non-government education sector into the Catholic and non-Catholic sectors. This has now been replaced by the less sectarian description of Catholic and independent and it is in the latter sector that the government places Lutheran schools.

Traditional independent schools will emphasise the importance of independence. However Lutheran schools will struggle with this term since they are not fundamentally independent. They are dependent on their church and the congregation(s) that own and govern them. There is a common Lutheran ethos and culture, a dependence on one another for the development of leadership and staffing generally, and a reliance on the church's tertiary institutions for teacher

education. It seems to me that a better description of Lutheran schools is *interdependence*.

Interdependence is best seen in the fact that Lutheran schools have opted to operate wherever possible as systems and system schools are not member schools but constituent schools. Lutheran schools act systematically in policies and procedures and there are numerous examples of where schools put themselves out to help one another. Thus the term independent is an uneasy descriptor of Lutheran schools. It is as non-Catholic systemic schools that we fit uneasily into the independent sector.

3. Private or Public Schools?

A traditional description of non-government schools is that they are private schools. A lot has been made about public schools being fundamental for the public good and for building local community. There has thus been concern about the drift of enrolments to private schools with a claim that the wealthy and gifted are deserting public schooling with a resultant residuality in public schools. The experience of Lutheran schools is that this is not the case since their enrolments reflect a cross section of the community with a fair share of students with special needs.

Furthermore the differentiation between public and private schooling is undergoing significant change:

- state schools are charging fees – on average \$500 per person in some states
- private schools are receiving increased public funds: for some Lutheran schools it is close to 80% of recurrent funding
- public schools have school councils which have given local ownership and seen them operate very much as private schools
- private schools are operating with increased accountability to the government.

Consequently some are challenging the use of the terms public / private with Caldwell and Hayward (1998, pp. 149-152) suggesting that all schools receiving public funding be called public schools. The narrowing of the gulf between public and private schools is most strikingly seen in the increased competition from state schools in the market place. Public schools now promote themselves in such ways as TV commercials, letter box drops and glossy brochures. Indeed Commonwealth policy is for increased competition and absolute choice in the market place.

The Lutheran Church has stated clearly that it believes that public schools are important for Australian society and need ongoing government support. It has recognised the importance of public schools whilst seeking government support for the right to operate Lutheran schools.

I remember a discussion in the mid 1980s, when the proportion of students in non-government schools reached 25%, where it was suggested that a proportion of 30% was a natural limit to this growth for the public good of Australian society. Well that figure has now been exceeded as the face of education in this country continues to change. Would it matter if 50% of Australian children were educated outside of publicly owned and operated schools. The critical criteria for answering this question are quality education for all Australian children and good use of limited resources. On the basis of these criteria I would argue that the

movement from 25% to 30% of children educated in non-government schools has not been detrimental.

I would furthermore assert that all Australian schools are about providing quality education for Australian children and any disputes between public and private schools are needless and divisive.

C. IS THERE A NATIONAL LUTHERAN VIEW ON NATIONAL ISSUES AND HOW SHOULD IT BE PROMOTED?

The Lutheran Church has always formed views on national educational issues. In the 1800s it was opposition to state aid and in the late 1970s Lutherans played a significant role in defending the constitutional validity of state aid in the High Court. The issues that specifically concern us today are:

- the right for our systems to operate
- the right to choose teachers who reflect the ethos of our schools
- the ability to operate schools that are accessible to a wide cross section of our community
- access to our fair share of the educational funding cake
- accessibility and equity for Rural and Remote education
- Indigenous Education

As national views are formed the church and its schools need to determine the most effective way and the most appropriate alliances to promote these views. Most of our schools (98% of enrolments) belong to their state AISs. What role should Lutheran schools therefore take nationally? If we believe that there are distinctive Lutheran views we will want to promote them to ensure an environment that enables Lutheran schools to operate effectively.

The Department of Employment and Youth Affairs (DETYA) see NCISA as the national peak body of the independent non-government sector on many issues. For other issues DETYA consults widely with a number of other national educational interest groups, including Lutheran schools. It is my observation that there has been a strengthening of this diversity of national interest groups and greater consultation with them on the part of government.

Lutheran schools seek a genuine peak body through which to promote their views. The NCISA is structured in a way that makes its views a composite of those of state AISs and it will thus need to continue to wrestle with this structural issue if it is to be a truly inclusive national peak body. If the NCISA can not be restructured to be more inclusive, groups, which wish to promote national views, will need to encourage the development of alternate structures. One proposal is that an umbrella organisation, something like the Council of Private Education in the USA, be developed in Australia.

D. CONCLUSION

It is argued that Lutheran schools, who value membership of their state AIS and whose church has good relations with other churches and their schools, are well placed to be more pro-active in working towards greater focus in the non-government school sector. It is in everybody's interest that this occurs and we can assist this by more confidently asserting our views.

A church which has run schools for 160 years and whose schools are known for the quality of their education has every right to speak on national educational issues. There has been enough of Lutheran quietism on these issues. We are proud of our schools and will want to speak for them and in their interests in the changing non-government scene.

Whether Lutheran schools are church, Christian, private, public, independent or interdependent is really beside the point. We are part of the diversity of education provision that makes this a great country.

References

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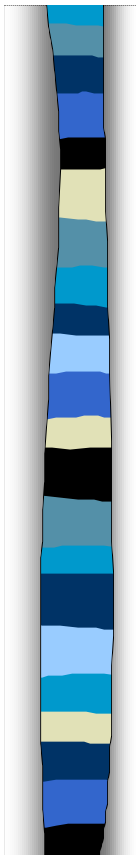
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Appendix A

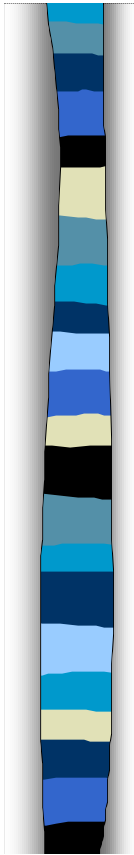


Proportion of students enrolled in Government, Catholic and Independent schools 1991, 1997

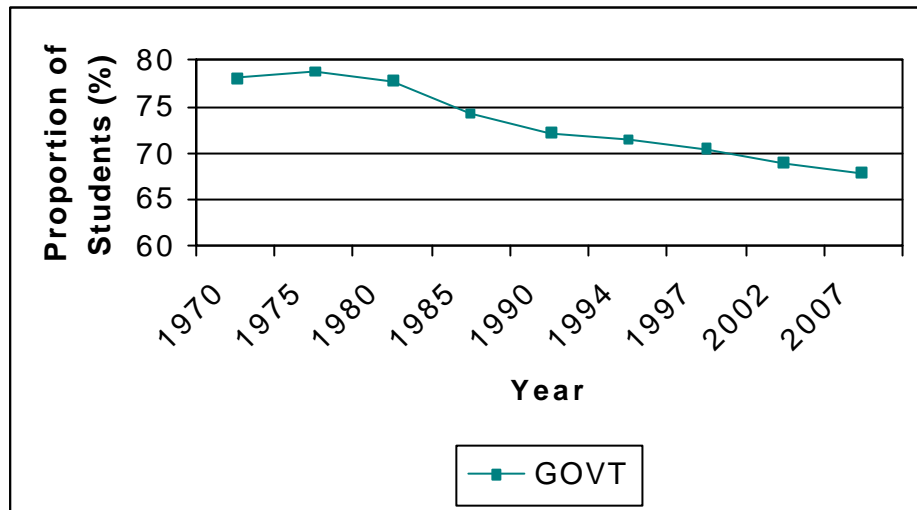
| YEAR | GOVERNMENT | CATHOLIC | INDEPENDENT |
|------|------------|----------|-------------|
| 1997 | 70.3 | 19.6 | 10.0 |
| 1991 | 72.1 | 19.5 | 8.4 |
| 1986 | 73.6 | 19.4 | 7.1 |
| 1981 | 77.0 | 17.9 | 5.1 |
| 1976 | 78.8 | 16.9 | 4.3 |
| 1971 | 78.2 | 17.6 | 4.1 |

Source: Australian Education Council and Curriculum Corporation, 'National Report on Schooling in Australia' 1992 and 1997

Appendix B

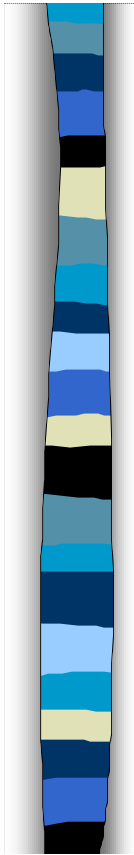


Proportion of students in Government schools 1970, 75, 80, 85, 90, 94, 97 and projections 2002, 2007



Source: Figures from 'Discussion Paper, Review of the New School Policy', July 1995 and 'National Report on Schooling in Australia', 1997

Appendix C

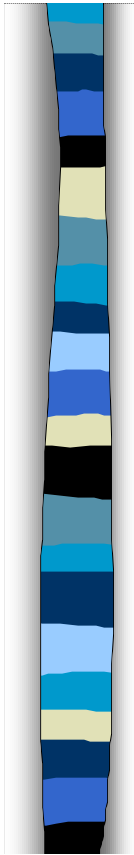


Non-Government school enrolments by affiliation 1986, 1994, 1998. Annual growth from 1994 to 1998 for Catholic, Anglican, "Christian", Uniting, Lutheran, Baptist, Jewish, and Adventist

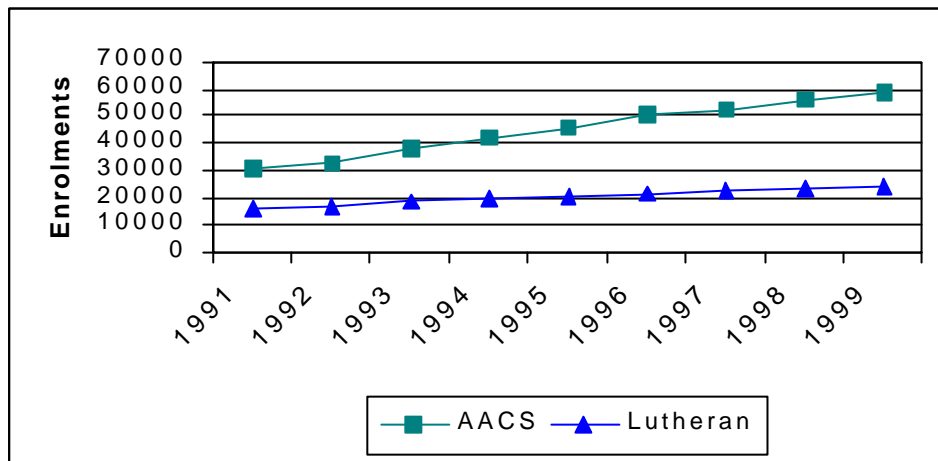
| Denomination | 1986 | 1994 | 1998 | 1994 to 1998 |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------------|
| Catholic | 581847 | 602149 | 636763 | 1.44% |
| Anglican | 71739 | 86184 | 98909 | 3.69% |
| "Christian" | 44531 | 65197 | 87016 | 8.37% |
| Uniting | 35784 | 39666 | 41349 | 1.06% |
| Lutheran | 12845 | 19252 | 22824 | 4.64% |
| Baptist | 5683 | 12626 | 12473 | -0.30% |
| Jewish | 7008 | 8734 | 9471 | 2.11% |
| Seventh Day Adventist | 6405 | 6560 | 7274 | 2.72% |

Source: DETYA

Appendix D

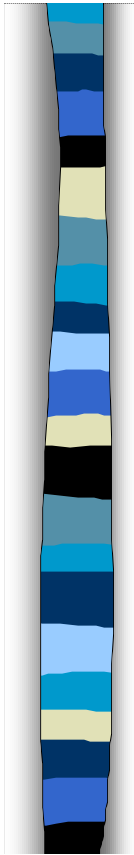


Enrolment graph AACS and Lutheran 1991 to 1999

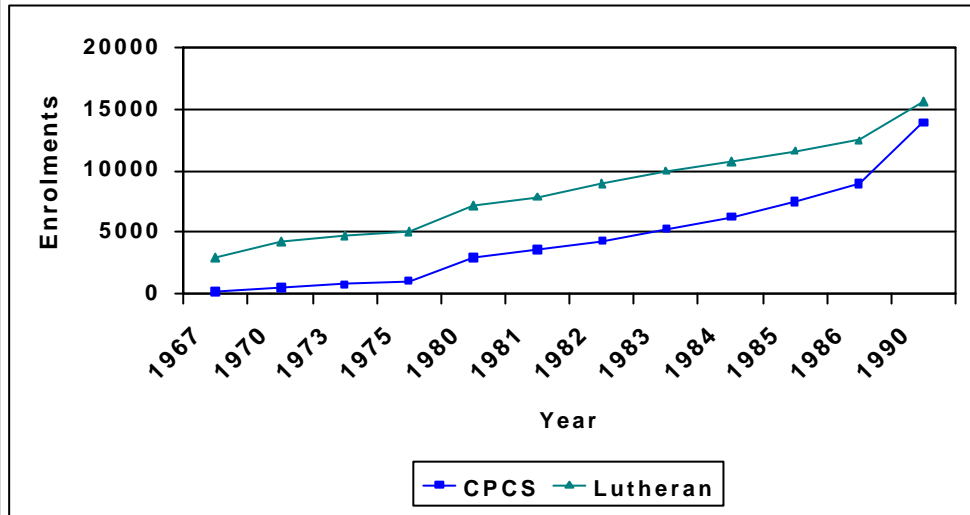


Source: AACS data supplied by P Crimmins of AACS

Appendix E



Enrolment graph CPCS and Lutheran 1967, 1999



Source: CPCS data from *Nurture 25:1* (p. 5)