

Lutheran schools - alternative education for parents and the state

With the rapid expansion of Lutheran schools during the past few decades, there has been as necessary focus on the nature and purpose of Lutheran schools. The major emphasis has been on maintaining the gospel orientation so that the 'gospel of Jesus Christ informs all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities in the school' (*The Lutheran Church of Australia and its schools*). While this is an essential emphasis for Lutheran schools, has the focus been too narrow? Is the theological basis for Lutheran schools broader than this? What does the Lutheran school have to offer parents and the state? What theological insights are relevant as we try to think through these questions?

1. Who is responsible for education?

- parents - education is a gift of God the creator for all people: an aspect of the orders of creation
- the state - to support parents and prepare individuals for their role in society
- the church - responsible for the nurture of those who have been / will be baptised: 'catechesis' – education in the faith for those who share in that faith

2. Why is the LCA involved in schooling?

- the school is first and foremost an educational institution and is funded by the government for that purpose
- as a service for parents and the state - providing an alternative option in education for parents and society, based on a Christian worldview
- as a bridge into the community for outreach through the school
- to assist with catechesis ('instruction of the faithful') on behalf of the church

3. What emphases are particular to a Lutheran approach to schooling?

- these emphases may not be unique to Lutheran schools, but they are necessary and are based on Scripture
 - a biblical epistemology - how we understand knowledge, teaching, learning [this also impacts on pedagogy]
 - a biblical anthropology - how we understand the individual person
 - the centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ

4. A biblical epistemology - the theory of knowledge

- if we believe in God as creator, then it means that there is truth which has its origin in the creator: truth is not simply relative or a personal construct
 - all truth is part of a whole
 - Jesus Christ is 'the truth' - all truth relates ultimately to him
 - truth is relational - it has its origin in the relationship within the triune God

- if we believe in God as creator, there is an ultimate pattern or design in creation
 - all creation belongs to God - there is no 'sacred' and 'secular'
 - the pattern of creation is protected by God's law ('political use'): its purpose is to help creation to function in the way God planned it
- 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov 9:10)
 - 'wisdom' is living in harmony with the creator recognising the boundaries which he has set and appreciating the insights learned from life
- the Lutheran school operates with a coherent and consistent worldview which integrates all teaching and learning in the school
 - counter-cultural in a postmodern context
 - provides focus and direction and security for students in the current context of rapid change
 - enables students to accept, question, modify or reject the worldview and know why they are doing so
- Christian Studies provides the unifying framework for all students, whether they have a personal faith in God or not
 - an integrating framework for the whole school curriculum - all 'truth' is part of God's truth

5. A biblical anthropology

- each person has value as a unique individual
 - gifted for the benefit of others
- each person is created 'in the image of God' (Gen 1:26)
 - 'stewards' of God's creation
- each person is in a broken relationship with God, him/herself, other people, creation - the impact of original sin
- each person is part of God's 'continuing creation'
 - serving God by serving others (theology of the cross)
 - in 'vocation' as 'masks of God'
 - involved in creativity in response to God's creativity

6. The centrality of the gospel of Jesus Christ

- the gospel shows us God reaching out in love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ
- the gospel provides the motivation for all that happens in the school – sharing the love of God in Jesus Christ with those who know Jesus Christ and with those who are yet to come to a faith relationship with him