

ACLE 2008

Anthropology & childhood spirituality

**What do children say about their
Lutheran-educated 'self'?**

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Three research questions:

1. How does Lutheran Education impact on the child's construction of their 'spiritual self'?
2. How congruent is the child's perception of their Lutheran Education with key adult educators' expected outcomes for students?
3. How does a child negotiate the overlap between their religious education and their temporal/ earthly education?

1. Introduction & questionnaire/ discussion topics

2. Sacred signifiers of Lutheranism in 2008

- a. grace- yes please, sin- no thanks
- b. grace-full and sinful

3. Dinosaurs, dragons and demons

- a. creation/ evolution
- b. meaning systems
- c. forums

4. Two Kingdoms collide

- a. sacred and profane
- b. sacralization

5. Summary

- a. questions

My objectives

- to give voice to children in research
- to understand a topic that has personally enlightened and perplexed me for a long time- Lutheranism and Lutheran culture
- to provide an anthropological perspective by an 'outsider' that hopefully aids the 'insider'

Anthropology:

Anthropos-	human being
Logos-	reason (logic)

Ethnography:

Ethno-	group of people
Graphos-	writing

New Question:

How does Lutheran Education
impact on the child's
construction of their
'spiritual / religious self' ?

Sample questions from 2007 Questionnaire: #1

- Write down anything you know about **Martin Luther**
- Would you **call yourself a Lutheran**? Explain your reasons for answering 'YES' or 'NO'
- List **three most important** things about **God** that you would tell your friend.
- In what ways does **St Martin's** help you to think about your **faith/spirituality** (if it does at all)?

Sample questions from 2007 Questionnaire: #2

- Have you ever **disagreed** with what has been taught to you about God or religion at school? If YES, what did that person say when you disagreed?
- Scale of 1 - 10, circle whether you think your belief in God was your **own choice**. (1= no choice at all/ 10= my very own choice)
[Q only for those who said they had a belief in God]
- If you did feel you had a choice, **how** did it happen? Please tick box:
 - sudden decision
 - slow decision over time
 - choose the same as your friends
 - something unexplainable and can't put it into words
 - something else-please explain

Sample themes from 2007 discussion groups: #1

- Would you still be able to know God/ **connect with God** if you had never heard of God through school, family, friends etc? (*ie imagine yourself on a desert island...and no one has ever talked to you of God...*)
- Re your relationship with God...do you think **you chose God/ God chose you** / parents influence/ something else?
- Do you **pray**?

Sample themes from 2007 discussion groups: #2

- **Synonyms for Faith & Spirituality**

(Imagine you are describing someone who is developing their 'spirituality' or their 'faith', or is seen as 'faithful' or deeply 'spiritual'... what comes into your mind?)

- Is saying you are **spiritual** different/the same as saying you are a **Christian**?

- Do you feel that St Martin's has helped **prepare** you for secondary school?

Sample themes from 2007 discussion groups: #3

- If you needed to make an important **decision**, do you trust yourself to do this, or do you ask for God's help, other's help or something else...?
- Does your way of believing **help** you in your life? Or not much help?
- Do you believe you will **always feel** this way? Explain.
- Do you feel free to **ask Q's** about faith/spirituality etc if you don't understand? **Who** do you ask?

Sample themes 2007 audio-taped discussion groups: #1

- Do you feel **connected** to **God**? How? When most closely connected? When did you first notice God?
- What would **you like to discuss**? Anything from our meetings that you would like to talk more about?
- The **bible**. Do you need it to believe in God? What is its purpose? Do you read it? How has St Martin's regarded the bible?

Sample themes 2007 audio-taped discussion groups: #2

- **Grace**...big theme in Lutheranism. Do you know what Grace is? Where does it come from? Can you lose it? Where do you feel it in your body?
- **Baptism**. Are you baptized? Adult or infant baptism? What have you been taught at school? If you are not baptized, how has St Martin's responded to that?
- **Creation/Evolution**. This was brought up a few times by you in our discussion groups. What are your thoughts now? How did St Martin's discuss these issues? How do the dinosaurs, Adam & Eve etc fit in with your view of the world?

“He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand; and if only the will to walk is really there He is pleased even with their stumbles”

(Screwtape to Wormwood, Lewis, C.S., 1994)

Sample themes 2008 audio-taped discussions with adults

- What **theological principles are most significant** to you in Lutheran education, Lutheran ideology, Lutheran ethos?
- Are there **specifically ‘Lutheran’ aspects** to Lutheran Education? If so, what are they?
- Can you tell me what you would like non-Lutherans and non Christians to imagine when they hear the term ‘Lutheran’ in the phrase ‘St Martin’s Lutheran School’?
- Re your mission as a school (“agency of mission and ministry”)... is it important to see graduating **Christians or Lutherans?** What if **neither**...?

Sample conversational & formal interview answers from adults:

‘What are the most significant principles of Lutheran Ed., Lutheran theology?’			
Grace (25+ comments)	Sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion (7+)	Distinctive worship style (crucifix, candles, very Catholic) 3	Caring, moderate 2
Word/Bible as truth 2	Justified by faith 2	God chose me 2	Forgiveness /sin 2
Jesus death 2	Confessional faith 2	Law and gospel 2	Law and grace 1
Jesus divinity 1	Jesus/messiah coming 1	Grounded in Christ 1	Jesus/ salvation 1
Catechism 1	Confirmation 1	Witnessing the gospel to the world 1	Luther & Reformation 1
Protestant, German, austere, conservative 1		Strong link to Lutheran church/ed system 1	

Adult's description of Grace

... the gift of God's love and forgiveness to an undeserved, sinful humanity in the form of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross for us, resulting in triumph over death, sin, and the devil

Adults characterised Grace as:

- we are saved by **Grace alone**, not by our personal works (7 people commented similarly)
- ‘we can **contribute nothing** to own salvation/ getting to heaven’ (6)
- ‘it **underpins our whole purpose** of being & belonging’ (1)
- ‘my kids are **really special**/they are God’s kids through grace’ (1)
- “what God is doing for me...**very comforting**...God has **chosen me**...in my baptism ...very important part of Lutheran faith. God shows me in holy communion...he **continues to choose me, to forgive me, to want me**...that is the emphasis I would like to see at St Martin’s” (Ms Ten, interview 2008)

Group #1

Cath: Can everyone think about the word 'Grace'? This is a big theme in Lutheranism, what do you know of it?

All: Silence

C: Have you heard of the 'Grace of God', through 'grace you are saved'?

All: No not really

B: No haven't heard of it

M: Through 'Christ you are saved', more about the word 'Christ', than grace

B: We'll probably learn about it in high school, maybe

Group #3

C: From kinder to Grade 6, Grace may have been discussed in a Lutheran school. Can you put the concept of 'Grace' into your own words?

M: Is it what you say before a meal?

L: At our old church that mum & I went to the man preached that we had Grace over our life

C: Did you ask your mum or the pastor what that meant?

L: No...

S: They usually say "Let the Grace and Spirit of God be with you" and stuff like that...is it something to do with Spirit?

Grace- yes please, sin- no thanks

“With the children, I think it is more important for us as a school to *demonstrate* grace, rather than it is to make sure they understand the concept of it”.

(Ms One, interview 2008)

Flipside of Grace as described by key adults...

- “there is always that **flipside** you know it’s **not all peaches and cream**”
(Mr Four, interview 2008)
- “I **never felt like I am worthy** of God’s grace, because by definition grace is a free gift. If I was worthy then it would be a payment in return for my goodness and would no longer be grace...
(Ms Ten, interview 2008)
- “the pure gift of love from God to us...so that we can be saved - not through action or deed, but through faith in this work of Jesus...**an undeserved gift** (Ms One, interview 2008)
- “To feel unworthy in yourself can only do one thing... push you back to God ...that’s when you appreciate the grace, this **undeserving** gift, you think...I’m **so sinful I don’t deserve** to be in God’s presence because I’m **this sinful**...that’s one of the things that I don’t think Lutherans teach very well...the fact that we are **actually sinful beings/ original sin**... you can’t have an appreciation of grace...until you actually **hear the truth about who we are**, that we are **sinful**...it **must be done gently**, unlike the old bible-bashers who said **you’re going to rot in hell**. But **gently**, you know”
(Mr Fourteen, interview 2008)

- “**self-directed**, insightful investigators and learners
- **discerning**, resourceful **problem solvers** and implementers
- adept, creative producers and **contributors**
- **open**, responsive communicators and facilitators
- principled, **resilient** leaders and **collaborators**
- **caring**, steadfast supporters and **advocates”**

(A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran Schools LEA 2005c:6)

- [if they are Christian] “have an appreciation of the impact of sin on them personally, on the community...and on...God
- [and, for all to] “acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses, their potential and limitations”

(LEA 2005c:5)

“Notions such as ‘my country’, ‘your country’, ‘my religion’, ‘your religion’ have become minor. We must, on the contrary, insist on the fact that the other person is as worthy as we are. This is humanity! This is why we must re-examine our educational system”

"I wonder if it [bible stories] was all just made up."

"We don't really know if dinosaurs existed"

"So how old is the earth really?"

"None of it fits in the bible!"

*"Is it a sin to watch...on TV?"
[supernatural content]*

"I am not a monkey inside"

"I've been told I'm a Christian"

"You don't have to be Christian to be spiritual"

"No parent asks 'who would you like to believe in?' "

"How did Adam's sperm do ALL THAT?"

"I know that I feel God's presence"

"If no one told me God's name, it might be Zeus talking to me"

- “individuals, who are aware of their humanity, [and] open to the influence of the Holy Spirit...**self directed, insightful investigators**,...who frame questions that guide exploration of issues and help **form deeper understandings**”
- ”discerning, resourceful **problem solvers**,...who...through reflective discussion consider elements of issues and problems...**ask** relevant questions...**analyse** options for consequences and implications – ethical, social, economic, political, cultural and environmental”
- ”adept, creative producers and **contributors**”
- “caring, steadfast supporters and advocates, who...actively demonstrate **sensitivity to self** and others, **respecting differences in beliefs**, attributes and circumstances”
- ”can understand a Christian world whilst developing their **own worldview** so that they can act with integrity”
- ”a strong and positive sense of their **own identity** and **worth**. They know who they are...”

(LEA 2005c :2-9,15 my emphasis)

Learning Outcomes, Band C, CSCF

'...that students know:'	'...that students can:'
the influence of the other on self (own self construct)	discuss the limitations of human language to describe God
the ' other ' is precious and sacred and deserving of respect	debate the relevance of Jesus' life death and resurrection for today
all people have the right to thrive ...free to speak and act according to their conscience and beliefs	analyse how different translations of the same passages can broaden, narrow or enlighten meaning
philosophical questions about the existence of God and the origins of the universe	experience stillness and meditative methods
applying logic and reason to religious truth-claims	gather information on the gifts and abilities they possess, using surveys, personality tests, questionnaires, and reflect on how this contributes to their self-concept ...
wisdom literature (e.g. Proverbs, writings of Mohammed)	research and investigate the key features of Islam
cultural frameworks (e.g. humanism , greatest good, indigenous)	formulate and present procedures for helping refugees and other marginalized people based on compassion and justice (e.g. design a manual for the Immigration Department)

- broader variations of cosmology
- moments of contemplation
- a forum with which to question, compare, make decisions
- a sense of an education for the mind, body, and spirit

- creationism being taught and evolution theory discussed at St Martin's

- their thoughts on meaning systems/ world religions being discussed at St Martin's

- their opinion on an open forum where children could deliberate on these concepts

Forum ideas from discussions and interviews with adults:

- A place and **time for contemplation**
- A **suggestion box** to be dipped into monthly
- Regular **guest speakers**
- Small group **presentations/projects**
- **Christian meditation**
- A trip to the local **mosque, synagogue, temple**
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- A **panel of diverse spiritual leaders**
- A **parent, teacher, student, church round table**

“primary teachers are possibly not that well equipped to actually handle this topic” [evolution, Adam and Eve, other world religions, dinosaurs, age of the earth]

(Ms Eight, interview 2008)

“The Lutheran distinctive theological worldview is being maintained that’s for sure but it’s been given a new framework of thinking: a new world view from the old world view”

- how the left and right kingdoms relates to other dialectics such as sacred/profane, spiritual/temporal etc
- how humanity balance their daily lives within this juxtaposition
- what occurs in the blurred perimeters of where these two spheres overlap
- are children prepared for life in both realms

Left Kingdom	Right Kingdom
Earthly Law	Heavenly
Secular government	Church domain
Civil law	Canon law
Utilises sword/force	Utilises Grace/ God's word
Earthly City	City of God (Augustinian)
Temporal	Spiritual
Reason	God's Word
Coercion	Grace, Mercy
Law	Gospel
Profane	Sacred
'Strange work'	'Proper work'

(LCA, 2001b; Witte, 2002)

“despite their strong adherence to the theme of *sola Scriptura*, the Evangelical reformers regarded biblical instruction alone as insufficient for any curriculum. Education, after all, was as much a matter of the earthly kingdom as the heavenly kingdom; it depended upon the texts of both reason and revelation to be successful”

(Witte, 2002:272)

“...the philosophy which shapes them [Lutheran schools] grows out of Lutheran theology. One example is the influence of the doctrine of two kingdoms...two dispensations, the spiritual and the civil. Lutheran schools prepare people for a life in both these worlds: for a role in society, and for faith in God”... (Hauser 1990:16 in Jennings, 2004:5)

“...The twofold emphasis of Lutheran schooling – for church and society...”

(Jennings, 2004:5)

LEFT KINGDOM

Academically solid
General knowledge
Physical sciences
Temporal/ 'secular'
Earthly Law

OVERLAP

confusion

Bible doesn't
explain
Dinosaurs
Age of Earth
Evolution
Other world
beliefs
How do I fit in?
Cosmos
Metaphysics
Existentialism

RIGHT KINGDOM

Spiritually solid
Know God
Sense of choice
Church
Biblically led
Ecclesiastical Law

