1. The two ways God cares

Lutherans make a distinction between the way God sustains the created order on the one hand and the redeemed community on the other. As one writer says, 'it is a way of seeing one and the same reality from two perspectives' (Truemper, 1991: p.128). The Lord is over his entire universe, and watches over both created and redeemed people. Lutheran theology identifies two ways in which God cares for the world:

- the general care of God for the whole world (the 'left hand' over all of creation); there is also
- God's specific care for redeemed believers, Christians (right hand).

All humans are in God's creation care; those who are saved are also in God's specific covenant care. God created the universe and sustains it. God's general care is for the people of the whole creation. God is in each part of nature and in each person. 'The earth and its fullness is the Lord's', says the Bible. The created people bear the image of God though sin blurs this image. God's specific care is for the people of the new covenant. All Christians are members of the new covenant. The old covenant was God's gracious 'contract' with the people of Israel. It existed within the context of law (e.g. circumcision, Sabbath) and the promised land. God promised that he would sustain and rule his people if the Israelites would obey and worship him. The new covenant is God's offer of gracious mercy through Christ. It is based on the cross and resurrection of Christ, and is for all Christians. The covenant people additionally bear the image of Christ though sin blurs this image.

The apparent separation of church and state in this doctrine has some people suggesting that Christianity should be only about the church, salvation, individual faith, conversion and discipleship and should not get involved in 'worldly' things like political parties and social issues. Unless an issue is directly related to matters of faith, the church should keep out of it and say nothing.

Luther developed this doctrine however as a reaction to a widespread belief at the time of the reformation that Christians should retreat from the world' (Lookwood, 1993: p.10). Some Christians regarded anything secular as under Satan's domain and the physical world and body as negative. They said that human affairs were worldly and therefore not 'of God'. Some fifteenth century Protestants even felt that, because their rulers were secular they should be violently overthrown, that the only righteous government is a Christian one, ordained and ruled by the church (a theocracy). This extreme approach was not peaceful but hostile and violent.

Two radical and theologically false views of the world emerged. Both reflected the belief that the world was evil.

- One advocated a retreat from this evil world;
- The other advocated that this evil world and Satan be overthrown.

Luther objected to both extremes. He emphasised the scriptural message that God is Lord of the whole world and that Christ identified with all people. All rulers are able to be God's servants and do God's will. Christians are

- not only citizens of the covenant church (a holy nation, God's own people);
- but they are also citizens of creation with a servant role in the whole world.

Politicians, teachers, parents, grounds-keepers and laboratory assistants are all servants in this sense. All school staff regardless of their faith background are God's servants. Christians express this servanthood in ways that are made possible by their relationship with God. For example, a grounds-keeper who 'tends God's creation' on the campus is serving God even if he or she doesn't accept the existence of God. If that same person operates out of an understanding that this is God's creation that is being tended and perhaps articulates this at times, then this too is servanthood but on another level.

(a) The general care for the creation of its people

Luther called this the 'left hand' of God. In this hand are all people - agnostics, atheists, Christians, Buddhists, all people. The person who rapes and murders, the politician who acts corruptly - all are human beings made in God's image. God's love extends to each created person, and to each creature and atom of creation. The weather and all its effects extend to all. In this area belong all aspects of social law and order, including the punishments, rewards and penalties which promote peace, harmony, justice and goodness in all civilisations and societies. These natural laws are 'written' on the consciences and hearts of all people. God's gift of reason and commonsense is available for all. God not only creates, but recreates, renews and sustains creation.

Luther described four 'institutions' or 'estates' within this area of God's general care:

1. Government. This is God's gift for the general wellbeing of humanity.
2. Marriage. God's gift for the mutual and lifelong care of each partner and for the nurturing of
children for the future.

3. Work. This gift is for the economic welfare and fair treatment of all people. It is never work for work's sake, but for the service of humanity as a whole.

4. Religion. Religion is a universal phenomenon. Each believer of whatever religion has rights and responsibilities towards their daily and fellow humans. In so far as religions reflect justice, goodness and peace, they are acting in God's service.

It would be reasonable to propose the inclusion of a fifth institution: the creation. Creation is a gift of God which serves people by providing them with things such as food and shelter. All people are called to serve the creation, a call which is becoming stronger with greater environmental awareness.

Lutheran theology teaches that wherever there are movements and actions which protect and care for people in particular and the creation in general, God is at work caring for creation. This includes people’s consciences, customs, traditions, codes of behaviour within organisations and institutions, various moral codes. God's care can also be reflected in contemporary movements which show concern for the world such as, feminism, trade unionism, environmentalism, and support for the indigenous people. As these people work for justice, goodness and peace, they are also instruments of God's general care.

(b) The specific care for the covenant people Luther called this the 'right hand' of God's care. This is the community of Christians. A legitimate question may be, how do Lutherans define 'Christian'? It is consistent with Lutheran theology to speak of Christians as 'those who believe in Jesus and have received the Holy Spirit through baptism'. However, a definition which excludes the many students and staff in Lutheran schools who have faith in Christ but have not been baptised would be both insensitive and bibliically questionable.

God's specific care for the redeemed community has distinctive features. In God's specific care:
- Christians are sustained by the sacrament;
- They pray, worship and study the Word;
- They constantly celebrate the life, death and resurrection of their Lord and Saviour;
- Their sins are confessed and for Christ's sake, forgiven;
- They suffer and struggle as servants of God and ambassadors of Christ.

In this area of care, the gospel is truly defined. It is the good news that through Jesus there is justification. Faith alone recognises and accepts this act of God's mercy. Christ is truly the sacrificed shepherd and servant of this community and calls the community to a life of sacrifice and service. The people are justified, yet sinful. They are saved and therefore they serve others. The solution to guilt and sin is provided. The emphasis is not on what's fair or just from the human perspective, as in the area of God's general care, but on mercy and grace. All are children of the new covenant. There is no discrimination or class distinction; all are invited into this covenant of grace.

(c) The school experiences both the general and specific care of God

Formal education, as occurs in Lutheran schools, belongs to the general area of God's care. A school serves both the community, society and world in general and the church in particular. Teachers in their work, their relationships and religion, are working as servants of God in this general area of God's care. Not all teachers are Christians. Not all students are Christians. The students learn things in common with their state school peers. State authorities determine the criteria for qualification and graduation and the conditions that apply. Staff may join a union, be paid award wages and meet registration requirements. A Lutheran school is one way God cares for all his people in the world.

In a Lutheran school, the covenant community is strongly present, and its light shines on all that happens. There are specific things, such as the content of Christian Studies, worship and prayers that are signs that the Christian community is active, but 'the gospel of Jesus Christ informs all learning and teaching, all human relationships and all activities in the school' (The LCA and its schools, LCA, 1999: #1.2). Christ is the light of the world and his disciples let their light shine before all, and God the Father receives the credit.

Core Content

2. Implications for education of the two ways God cares

(a) All contributions to the life of the school are valued as elements of Christ working through the school community

There is no aspect of school life which can be regarded as unimportant or lacking value or not really Christian. Consider each of these activities:
- a child care assistant changes a nappy;
- a maths teacher marks a test paper;
- a preschool director interviews a prospective parent;
- a principal informs a student that he has been expelled;
• a secondary student helps a Year One ‘buddy’ to tie a shoelace;
• a netball coach supervises a practice drill;
• a teacher introduces a new unit of work in Geography;
• a receptionist reassures a concerned parent.
All of these activities are within God’s general care for the world through the school. All of them have value. God uses all contributions and all contributors to care for his world. The same can be said of what happens in a government school.

This teaching can be very affirming for members of staff and students who consider their contribution to the life of the school to be of relatively little value. It can also help staff to experience a strong unity of purpose.

(b) The Gospel is the heart of the school
On the other hand, Lutheran schools should not be shy about God’s specific care for his covenant people and affirm and strengthen ways in which it is carried out. Schools need to ensure that budgets reflect the importance of the Christian education program of the school. The amounts allocated to worship and Christian Studies should not be minimal when compared to information technology or sporting facilities.

All staff can be affirmed in their contribution to God’s general care through the school and it is important for all staff to hear the invitation to join God’s covenant people and to participate in God’s specific care through the school.

(c) These two ways in which God cares are to be held in creative tension in the school
Lutheran schools as schools need to be places through which God expresses his general care for the world. Lutheran schools as schools of the LCA also need to be instruments of God’s specific care.

To maintain the balance is not easy, but the governing body and staff must give constant attention to it. Mission statements, budgets, staffing policies, curriculum, professional development programs are all indicators of how well the two ways God cares are being fulfilled.

Core Content

3. The school and creation (the theology of creation)

It can be helpful to see the theology of creation as located within the general care of God. To grasp this theology of creation is, among other things, to understand something of how God provides for all people through the creation and how people are to respond to that gift. In the context of ecological crisis, the theology of creation can play an important role in educating students for an increased awareness and appreciation of the Christian views about creation and an increased commitment to caring for it.

The human domination and management of creation is a burning issue. The Christian Church has probably deserved some of the criticism it has received for its part in environmental destruction.

We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man (White quoted in Crabb, 1991: p.33).

The Church over the past centuries has often
• openly or tacitly supported an abusive exploitation of the environment, as if it were what God commanded when he told the first man and woman to ‘subdue the earth and fill it’ (Genesis 2:28);
• neglected to promote the full implications of the doctrine of creation by focusing on the salvation of the individual and the Christian community.

The medieval churches seemed to be more aware of the relationship between faith and nature. Cathedrals and art often illustrated God’s total work of creating, saving and sustaining the earth.

TCPS encourages the development of a strong awareness of Christian responsibility towards the cosmos, based on a theological foundation rather than a political, cultural or social demand. The main motivation for a Christian response to the environment is the gospel, not the law. If people have no understanding of the gospel, then probably only a legal or moral imperative will promote their active involvement in care for the world.

A Lutheran theology of creation can be described in the following points.

(a) The whole universe belongs to God, who created and sustains it
Creation is good and all humans are created in God’s image. The Bible states that people can clearly observe God’s existence through the processes of nature. Creation, therefore, has a theological context, and our response to it needs to be not only a moral, but also a theological issue.

The fact that God is creator and sustainer is not a concept unique to Christianity. Other religions, and especially Aboriginal religions, are deeply spiritual in their attitude toward and teaching about the universe. The Greek and Christian understanding of
creation have often been too closely associated with mechanistic world views. The theist idea was that God created the universe and then retreated while the universe sustained itself in predictable and absolute ways. This view which puts God 'at a distance' and 'above all' was sometimes a feature in Christian education. Post-Newtonian science has generally viewed the universe in a more relative, and less deterministic, way. Christian theologians now speak of God being totally and actively involved in all of creation.

The creator relationship between God and the universe means that there is meaning as well as mechanism. The universe is going somewhere. There is a purpose (Alexander, 1972: p.147).

(b) There is a difference between the creature and the Creator

Lutheran theology teaches that God made the tree, but the tree is not God; God is in humans, but the humans are not God. Humans and their Creator are different. Being made 'in God's image' does not make me God. Humans were given management of God's creation. This is:

- not to be a tyrannical or despotic relationship,
- but one of service and careful stewardship.

The Bible teaches that care and conservation are to be exercised when dealing with God's creatures in both cosmos and universe. God cares through us. Exploitation is forbidden. As stated earlier, responsible stewardship and service has often been disregarded by many religions including Christianity, where too often the management has been seen in terms of domination and exploitation. God's command in Genesis 1:28 to 'rule' and 'subdue' involves careful use (Genesis 2:15) which will conserve nature for all the people for future generations.

(c) There is a difference between humans and other creatures

Making nature an idol is a flawed approach to creation. Pantheism, God is in all things but also separate from it, is idolatry. Creation is sacred because God is its Creator, not because it is in itself divine. 'God made the tree' can too easily become 'The tree is god'. Idolatry is a subtle trend in some creation theology and psychology.

Jesus taught respect and care for all creatures. No sparrow falls without God's knowledge (Matthew 10:29). Yet the Bible informs us that humans have a value in God's eyes which is on a different level from the value God places on all his creatures. Creatures are not the same as humans in every way and such an emphasis is not biblical and can lead to narrow sectional pressures being exerted. There is a teaching called 'creation spirituality' which has a tendency to blur the distinction between creature and Creator. Eastern religious mysticism and some medieval Christian mysticism seem to display elements of this form of pantheism (cf New Age philosophy). Meditation and reflection are important, but pantheism and idolatry are not approved by biblical teaching (Rankin, 1992: pp. 98-105).

There is also a tendency in this kind of spirituality to idolise the potentialities of the human being. While self-esteem and self-confidence are valuable and vital for affirming and encouraging individuals, we must be careful not to make a god of the self. Many self-help programs are on offer in the community, some are supported by Christian organisations. People need to be cautious about the dangers of human centred emphases in personal spirituality. Philosophies of self-actualisation, self-growth and self-knowledge need to be examined in the light of a biblical theology of creation.

(d) Creation suffers from the effects of human evil

It is easy to see the pain and disarray in creation. This does not include the pain inflicted by humans (although that is related to it), rather we mean that there are problems and imperfections in creation. Sometimes nature can be violent. Creatures inflict pain on each other. There are natural disasters that cause destruction. Weeds, droughts, vermin and fires are just examples of the fact that the natural world is not utopia. There is a groaning of creation (Romans 8: 21,22). There is pain. There is even a sense in which, since the original fall of humans, creation shares the pain of sin (Genesis 2). The imperfect creation then, will also be healed and saved (like humans). This 'suffering creation' introduces us to the next aspect of creation theology.

(e) By becoming human, the Lord of creation becomes part of creation

Jesus is Lord of creation and through him all things were made. The cosmic aspect of Jesus’ nature is often overlooked. Christ the Lord is involved in creation and identifies with it. Christ, specifically, is Lord of the universe. Anything we do to nature, or teach about nature, has this ‘Christ connection’.

The session about the theology of the cross referred to the suffering Christ in relation to human sin and pain. However, this crucified Lord also identifies with the suffering of creation, and with the universal pain and imperfection of the world. Jesus often used stories from nature to demonstrate the characteristics of his kingdom. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). Jesus was despised and rejected. He suffered in pain, like humans and creation suffer in pain (Romans 8).
The sacraments are also signs that God identifies, through Christ, with the natural world. Water, bread and the fruit of the vine were used as elements of rebirth and renewal. The suffering servant reminds us of his forgiveness and real presence through the basic elements of bread, wine and water. Care about creation implies service to Christ, through whom all is created. It is a moral imperative and for Christians a response to the gift of God through Christ. It is a gospel response, based on life, since baptism, in communion with Christ.

Christians meet Christ in the communion of saints. They are sent into creation to care, conserve and heal. Many non-religious people in the world care. Christians care because they join Christ in this task.

**Core Content**

4. Implications for education of the theology of creation

The school and staff community needs to work as a team to positively affirm the Christian view of creation, and practise it within the classroom and across all activities of the school.

Let’s banish the political and patriarchal images. We’re not concerned with kingdoms and realms and empires, really. We are rather concerned with our work and with our faith, with our students’ work and with their faith... we are concerned about what we may trust to make and sustain our life before God (Truempfer, 1991: p.128).

The implications of a Lutheran theology of creation for school life include the following.

(a) The covenant people have a special role to participate with God in caring for creation Seiffert stated that ‘there seems to be no open religious discussion within environmental education programmes’. (Truempfer, 1991: p.42ff). Lutheran schools must incorporate environmental issues attitudes, sensitivity and theology into education. This can be done both directly and indirectly and include not just the popular and emotional issues but the total care and management of all of God’s creation. Destructive pollution and careless short-term use of resources are sinful, not because they are current media topics, but because they demonstrate irresponsibility towards the Christ of creation. To impoverish the heritage of future generations is surely sinful, even though it is not as immediate and obvious as rape and adultery.

Care for creation is an issue for discussion in the classroom, in worship and in the general operation of the school. It is not enough to simply instruct young people that ‘We should look after the environment’. Students need opportunities to explore Christian beliefs about creation and how people have been called by God to participate in caring for it. Environmental education from the Christian perspective is vitally important at all levels from preschool to senior secondary school. The school community as well as individual teachers and students need to be willing to examine their own attitude and practice towards creation in the light of the theology of creation.

God deals with us in law and gospel, then we will look for that and be struck by that in Genesis and Joshua and the Ascension story. And we will recognise that whatever the cosmology – our own or that of the Bible – God calls our idolatrous use of his world into question with the law, and creates everything – even sinners – anew out of nothing, through the gospel (Boorman, 1983: p.34).

(b) Christ who became part of creation, frees us to investigate and restore creation Lutheran schools do not promote the ‘God of the gaps’ view, or the ‘divine watchmaker’ concept. Both of these tend to see God as removed from the universe. The ‘gap’ idea claims that there must be a God because science does not have all the answers. A variation of the ‘God-in-gaps’ is the view that there must be a God because of the ‘complexity’ of the natural world, e.g. the wonder of the brain, eye, or other complex natural features. This ‘only-God-could-have-done-that’ idea is precarious if only because modern technologies have made great advances in explaining what were formerly considered ‘miraculous’ features of the world.

More significantly, such views are also theologically flawed and dangerous because:

- They devalue science as a God-ordained endeavour;
- The majesty of God is reduced every time science makes further ‘inroads’ into the knowledge ‘gap’;
- The existence of God depends on what science can or cannot do and creates an unbiblical polarisation between faith and reason;
- The ‘watchmaker’ concept incorporates the idea that God made the world, then set it going, and, like a watch, it’s just ‘ticking away’ without any further need for the creator’s involvement. This view ignores God’s constant and active identification within the physical world and in the developments and changes in the created universe. (Luther’s explanation ‘...and still preserves us’ of the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed, Tappert, 1959.)

The compatibility of science and religion are widely recognised within the science community, as is the
need for science and religion to work closely together. Arthur Peacock was the winner of the 2001 Templeton Prize for Religion and Science and also founder of the Society of Ordained Scientists. In an interview with radio commentator Philip Adams, an atheist, Peacock dismissed Adams' suggestion that few reputable scientists these days are Christians by responding with the figure of approximately forty percent fitting that category. This means that there are proportionately more Christians within the scientific community than within any other occupational group (Late Night Live, ABC Radio National, 21/6/01).

All subjects and many other areas of school life provide opportunities to deepen and expand a knowledge of God's creation. The gospel of Christ
- releases Christians to get involved in God's world;
- encourages Christians to be devoted in; learning, discovering and understanding the natural world;
- recognises and values the world.

I may receive its insights (if it has any) with gratitude to God the Creator. I may pursue its rewards (if there are any) for whatever their value. I may create paintings, construct hypotheses... analyse, compose, write... design. I may do so when and because I trust only the gospel about the crucified and risen and the ground for my life and identity as God's beloved one (Truemp, 1991: p.127).

If God is involved in sustaining the universe, then there is no aspect of it that we should not explore. The school, then, has a moral and theological responsibility concerning creation and education. The school also has the responsibility to practice Lutheran theology in its daily operations, in every subject, in each classroom and all areas of school life. Schools need to:
- reflect creation concerns in the curriculum;
- develop informed students, willing to care and manage God's creation in practical and permanent ways. Students should be challenged to live in ways that reflect the value of life and creation;
- capture the consciousness of students, ignite imagination and inspire commitment to action.

(c) There is no simple separation between Christ's and Satan's areas of activity
Lutheran schools will not attempt to make a simple separation between Christ's and Satan's areas of operation. Satan seeks to denigrate and destroy the peace and confidence that comes through Christ. Christ enters Satan's activity to expel Satan and establish God's rule instead. Christ exists in the areas where Satan works. Satan exists in Christ's world and is active even among the covenant people, but Christ is stronger than Satan is. Through Christ the powers of evil have been overcome. Jesus Christ is the victorious Lord who is with us.

Therefore in Lutheran schools, sin, evil and Satan need to be confronted, and may even be studied in the name of Christ by Christian teachers and students. Some topics that may seem provocative to some need to be discussed openly in the light of Scripture.

Some schools have policies in regard to these matters and processes which parents can use if they are unhappy about any school teaching or resources. Sometimes parents may complain about books and other resources in the school which contain material on magic, the occult, and other topics which they condemn as works of Satan and his demons. They regard such material as dangerous because it exposes students to unhealthy influences. Good quality resources that deal with these aspects of life can be accepted and used in the Lutheran school. In the world of the arts and literature, imagination, 'make believe' and fiction are essential to many investigative learning experiences. Educating students for critical awareness and discernment is more effective than blanket bans on resources.

Assisting students to critically analyse the influence of television, film and video as well as internet material is also vitally important. At the same time Lutheran schools should not provide access to literature that openly promotes occult experiences. Parents need to be informed of the school's approach and processes in relation to this and encouraged to communicate their concerns to teachers and school leaders.

Conclusion

The Lutheran Church teaches that everyone and everything in the universe and in the life of the school is under the Lordship of Christ, whether individuals acknowledge this or not. This teaching frees all those in the school to explore widely their role in the process of learning. It identifies and affirms the place of each person and thing within God's world and the school itself. With discernment of the different ways in which God operates in the world, all within the school can enthusiastically go about the business of education under the Lordship of Christ.