

BEGINNING WITH SILVER OR COPPER:

Soon after World War II a young, gangling lad would find himself perched regularly each Sunday high in the gallery at the rear of a large rural Lutheran Church. Here he would sit next to his mother and turn music pages for her as she played the organ for the regular worship service. From here, he could also look down at the altar at the front of the church below and watch the pastor, who was his father, conduct the service. Placed between the altar and the worshipping congregation were two pedestals, each supporting an offering plate. A high part of the service was the celebration of Holy Communion and on returning from the altar the members walked past these two pedestals and their waiting receptacles. As each member reached the collection bowls they had the opportunity of expressing their thanks to God and the church by placing an extra offering in these bowls for their servants, the pastor and the teacher. One bowl was for the pastor and the other for the teacher. From his advantageous position high in the gallery the young lad found it easy to observe the amount of each offering. He saw clearly that it was usually a sixpence for the pastor and a penny for the teacher. It was silver for the pastor and copper for the teacher. Silver or copper, then, emphasised the station each held in the eyes of the congregation and the members of the Lutheran Church. The extra offering was a custom that lasted in the Lutheran Church for 120 years. Although it is no longer practised there may be other attitudes of silver for the pastor and copper for the teacher that still exist today. To understand this development it is necessary to go back to the beginnings of the Lutheran Church in Australia.

AN OFFERING OF COPPER:

The Perception of the Lutheran Primary Teacher's Role in the Ministry of the Lutheran Church

The status of the Lutheran primary teacher in the employment relationship is affected by the perception the Lutheran Church has of the principal's role in the ministry of the Lutheran Church. To many within the Lutheran Church the ministry of the pastor is regarded as silver, because it is essential and precious, while the ministry of the primary teacher is a service of copper, as it is not essential and is of lesser importance.

Teachers as lesser people: A study of the historical development of the relationship between Lutheran pastors and teachers and principals suggests that, indeed for a great period of that history, those who served the church in roles other than that of the pastor were treated as lesser people. **The Lutheran Church of Australia - Sub - Committee on Policy Regarding Christian Education [1967]** recorded that the Lutheran Church had implied that lesser intelligence was required to be a teacher than a pastor. Heinze, one of the original class to study for the pastoral ministry at Lobethal College, found it difficult to keep up with his studies and in 1851 he was advised to take charge of a school [**Brauer, 1956**]. In 1911, when Victor Appelt failed his exams at Concordia he was also told to take charge of a school and it filled his parents with much sadness that he would never preach the Gospel [**Appelt, 1904 - 14**]. When, in 1996, the writer interviewed **J G Strelan**, Vice - President of the Lutheran Church of Australia and lecturer at Luther Seminary, Strelan was asked what students for the pastorate thought of student teachers who studied alongside them at Concordia College in the middle of this century when he was preparing to be a pastor. His honest reply was, '*Upon reflection, I believe we thought they were lesser people*'. The message, sometimes subliminal and sometimes overt, has been that if you wanted to serve the church and could not be a pastor, there was a place for you as a teacher.

The Lutheran understanding of ministry: The Lutheran Confessional understanding of the ministry has no doubt contributed to the possibility of teachers being considered as lesser people in ministry. The Lutheran Church teaches that there is one, essential ministry which has been instituted by God for the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the sacraments [**Augsburg Confession, Article V**] and it is to this ministry that the local Lutheran pastor belongs. The position of teacher in a Lutheran school, however, is an office which has not been instituted by God and is not essential, even though Lutheran schools might be considered desirable, and is therefore an auxiliary office. At the General Synod of the Lutheran Church of Australia in 1970 an official statement was adopted on '*The Status of the Teacher in the Church*' [**Doctrinal Statements and Theological Opinions of the Lutheran Church of Australia, 1985**] which described the office of the teacher in a Lutheran school as an auxiliary office of the public ministry. The office of the teacher, or teacher, has its '*roots in the office of parent*' and the nurture of the people of the church. It is this latter description that gives the teaching office its connection to the public ministry. Although distinguishing the status of the teacher from that of the office of the pastor, the statement encourages congregations and the church to treat teachers, who dedicate their lives to teaching in the church and faithfully perform their tasks, with the same honour and concern given to pastors. In practice, however, it has not always worked out that way.

Mueller [1964] believes the understanding of the public ministry of the pastor as distinct from the auxiliary office of the teacher has contributed to an understanding of the supremacy of the pastor within the church because it can be implied that the teacher's office stems from that of the pastor. As a result an ideology has developed within the Lutheran Church that sees the ministry of the church as depending upon the pastor, thus giving that position supremacy in the minds of both pastors and people. A hierarchy of ministry ensues that has been felt by many teachers.

Different expectations of teachers by members of the Lutheran Church: The different expectations of the teacher's role that are engendered by pastors and the Lutheran understanding of ministry are also evident in the members of Lutheran congregations that control schools. They too often see the ministry of the teacher as a lesser ministry and whether this is actually the theological understanding of members of the church and believed by them, or whether they have been encouraged to think that way is debatable.

Mixed messages from church leaders about the ministry of the Lutheran school teacher: Teachers also believe they receive mixed messages concerning their role from leaders within the Lutheran Church. **S P Hebart [1969]**, a former principal of Luther Seminary, claimed that the ministry of the Lutheran teacher was that ministry given to all Christians in baptism and was to be distinct from the special ministry of the pastorate, leading Hebart to question the appropriateness of the term ministry being applied to principals and teachers. On the other hand, in 1978 **C I Koch [1978, 3 April]**, then president of the Lutheran Church of Australia, South Australia District, described the teacher's position as '*a most sacred office in the ministry of people*'.

The document, '*The Teacher in the Lutheran School*' adopted by the **Board for Lutheran Schools [1992]**, describes the teacher as a competent educator who is

'committed to the Christian faith as confessed by the Lutheran Church, is willing to identify with, uphold and promote the Lutheran ethos of the school and who will exemplify and model the Christian life - style in and beyond the school'.

Another more recent document that was presented to the Lutheran Church of Australia in September, 1997, '**The Lutheran Church of Australia and its Schools**', continues to see Lutheran schools as places that are informed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that '*through its schools the church deliberately and intentionally bears Christian witness*' to '*all who make up the world of the school*' [Board for Lutheran Schools, 1997].

FOUR PHASES OF TEACHING MINISTRY AS IT WAS, IS NOW, AND WILL BE

PHASE 1 – *The school behind the church*

Within several months of arriving in South Australia in 1838 the settlers from Germany, who founded the Lutheran Church in Australia, began to establish Lutheran schools in conjunction with the formation of congregations, for the purpose on inculcating the Christian faith as confessed by Lutherans [Brauer, 1956; Th Hebart, 1938]. Although the reinforcing of the teachings of the church was their major function, it is evident, that there was also a desire to keep alive the German tradition and culture.

Quickly, Lutheran schools spread throughout the state of South Australia and reached as many as 51 before being closed by Act of Parliament in that state in 1917. Though German was no longer the means of instruction when Lutheran schools began to reopen from 1930, they maintained the purpose of inculcating the faith in their own children, and, as a result, their enrolment was almost exclusively Lutheran. The schools were, indeed, fortress schools, designed to keep the children of the church within and the twin evils of materialism and Catholicism without. In a sense, they could be depicted as ruling class schools – operating for the rural landowners, who formed most of the constituency of the Lutheran Church right into the early 1950s.

The life of these Lutheran communities centred around the church and its pastor who, as spiritual leader, was pre-eminent in all activities including that of the school [Brauer, 1956]. A major support for the pastor was the Lutheran school [Blaess, 1964]. Because the major focus of these Lutheran schools was the nurture of the Lutheran Church's own people, those who taught in and administered them were seen as servants of the church [Brauer, 1956; Th Hebart, 1938] and worked under a church salary scale that placed them at first below [Lutheran Church of Australia - Sub-Committee on Policy Regarding Christian Education, 1967], and later equivalent to, that of the pastor [Lutheran Church of Australia Convention, 1970]. The local congregations called into their service pastors and teachers from whom they expected some sense of self-sacrifice [J B Koch, 1979] and who had been recommended by the Lutheran Church and given special theological preparation by its training institution [Brauer, 1956; Board for Lutheran Schools Handbook, 1988]. A mutual covenant required church workers to operate under the Confessions of the Lutheran Church and in response the local Lutheran authority promised to honour, respect and provide for them [Call Letters, 1945 - 1995].

Pioneer pastor, Fritzsche saw the teaching of children as the most important task anyone could do and urged that teachers be '*accorded the honour and respect [that] the high office entitles*' [Brauer, 1956, p195]. The teachers had a workload which also reflected their involvement in the ministry of the local congregation. They were to be members of the congregation that controlled the school, a fact decreed by the Light Pass Synod of 1861 [Th Hebart, 1936, p71] and they served variously as lay readers, secretaries of the congregation, held the umbrella for the pastor at funerals and were in charge of the sacred vessels of the congregation [Brauer,

1956; Th Hebart, 1936]. Call documents examined from 1945 [**Call Papers, 1945 - 1995**] continued to reflect the importance of the teacher, apart from the teaching and administering role within the school, in the work of the congregation. The work of the congregation was to be supported by the faithful example of the teacher who was beseeched to assist in the teaching of the Sunday School, train Sunday School teachers, lead in the music of the congregation and conduct Bible Study.

Teachers were, therefore, quasi pastors and took on many duties to support the ministry of the church. Until 1946 they were automatic delegates at Synodical Conventions.

PHASE 2 – *The school alongside of the church:*

In the late 1960s a dramatic change occurred. Up until that time Non-Government schools were financed entirely by their own resources, made up of low fees and large congregational contributions. Then came Government Grants. Schools became more professional and were less inward looking. Lutheran schools began to cater for non – Lutheran students more prolifically. No longer was the Lutheran school the laboratory of the church, where Sunday's worship was lived out and practised. Such practice became increasingly difficult, because an increasing number of students and families did not have that same religious experience, if, increasingly, they had a religious experience at all.

Schools were now alongside the church. No longer did schools replicate the church or take for granted that all its students came from similar experiential backgrounds. New parents acknowledged the influence of the Lutheran Church in the school, but it might not effect their attitudes and beliefs. Some school families joined the church as a result, other christians were supported, while even others just moved through.

As schools grew, both in number and size, they accepted as students an increasing number of children from families alien to the Lutheran Church and Lutheran schools now became more oriented within a wider community outside the former confines of the congregation [**Oster, 1983**], causing schools to lose some of their close working linkages with the local Lutheran Church. Such a movement into the wider community brought schools into closer contact with other education sectors and introduced them to business and professional approaches with the salary nexus between the pastor and teachers being broken by the introduction of awards for teachers in 1988.

The changing employment conditions of those who work in Lutheran primary schools and the marked change in clientele, from an almost totally Lutheran student enrolment to one that is less than half of the patronage, has resulted in some prominent leaders and members of the Lutheran Church from time to time treating as suspect both the role of its schools as agencies of the church and the service of Lutheran school teachers as church workers [**Lutheran Church of Australia, South Australia District Convention, 1986**]. A culture of sacrifice had developed within the Lutheran Church and in the minds of its servants from the outset. When J Ferdinand Mueller was called to be teacher at Lobethal in 1842 the itemising of his salary was introduced with the words, *'there will be some degree of hardship'* according to the **Lutherische Kirchenbote [1888, p136 - 137]** as cited by **J B Koch [1979]**. **J B Koch [1979]** believes that teachers were called upon to serve and sacrifice and, along with pastors, were continually called upon to take less. The **United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia, South Australia District Convention [1948, p77]** stressed *'that certainly the principle demanding financial sacrifices from servants of the church [was] not being abandoned'*. This idea of sacrifice was again addressed at the **Constituting Convention of**

the Lutheran Church of Australia [1966, p204] when the report of the Sub - Committee on Salaries asked of church servants

'that they do not interpret adequacy ... in such a spirit that they are developing that form of covetousness which seeks to secure the highest financial gain from their position'.

The report also stated that, if higher salaries were required to attract workers then this would be *'due to the motives of those that work and not due to the discriminating gradings within the church'* [ibid, p206]. Within this context an attitude was developed amongst teachers and principals that accepted a sense of sacrifice in order to serve in Lutheran schools [J B Koch, 1979] and they made no strong urge to receive salaries based upon state awards, as was demonstrated in a survey conducted by J B Koch [1972]. Now, however, that teachers were being paid award salaries there was a suspicion by some in the church that the role of the teacher was no longer that of a church worker, because teachers were not prepared to sacrifice.

PHASE 3 – *The school in front of the church:*

Again, the number of nominal Lutheran and unchurched students has increased dramatically. Some parents may choose Lutheran schools because they are Christian, but an increasing number choose them because of the quality of education they offer, and, as such, Lutheran schools are in a competitive market. In this environment Lutheran schools have a good reputation and, indeed, make the church known. For many the Lutheran school is the front door to the church. The schools have become an agency for mission in the church and this is recognised by the church. At the same time schools are financially independent from the church and very few schools receive anything like substantial grants from their sponsoring congregations.

Still, for us and for our Lutheran schools, Jesus is the reason for our existence and the presence of the school. He is its hub, its pivot, its whole being, and we gather around him in worship and service as he gives purpose to our lives. This, then, is Christian Education. A school that espouses Christ is one that practises Christian Education. Such a school has as its motto that Christ is in all things [Colossians 3:11]. In this way Christian Education becomes the canopy that covers, the skin that enfolds, and the substance that permeates all that the school does. Christian Education is the big picture and is, in a broad sense, everything the school is. Central to this Christian Education is worship and all the activities the school provides that encourage its students, staff and wider community to give expression of their faith. Throughout the entire range of the school's engagements, staff model what Christ means to them and, by God's grace and power, live *'...so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed...'* [2 Corinthians 4:10]. By all the school does it is voicing that all things come from God and each person is encouraged to find his or her place in the big picture, to discover the talents that God has provided, and to return those talents to him through a life of service to others. It is the Christian Education program that enables all life to become a celebration of discipleship. To this end teachers witness and pray that students will find their way into the Lutheran Church or some worshipping community if they are not already there. It is mission and ministry.

Today teachers find it more difficult to engage in many of the activities previously seen as part of the teaching ministry because of the increasing complexity of the teacher's role. The change over time in the clientele of Lutheran schools from one which was an exclusively Lutheran enrolment to include a large proportion of people alien to the Lutheran Church,

causes the teacher to channel ministry efforts more and more away from the congregation to assist these people who by definition do not fall under the umbrella of the Lutheran Church. The resultant lack of visibility of the teacher in extra congregational activities is then sometimes interpreted by church members as a lack of involvement in the ministry of the congregation. Despite the fact that there are still congregations which believe that the teacher belongs at the church organ during worship, there are many schools where the local Lutheran community understands the role of the school and the teacher as extending beyond the Lutheran Church and acknowledges that the role of the teacher is a complex one which does not necessarily require direct involvement in many of the activities of the congregation to be one of ministry.

PHASE 4 – *The school apart from the church:*

Already, some schools may have entered the stage of what promises to be. We are still in, what academics and historians call the ‘post – modern’ age, and we do not know how long it will last. We do know, however, some of the characteristics of this period. Grand theories are no longer accepted – even to the point of saying ‘God is dead’. Institutions are distrusted as they divide people and have let people down, while the language of institutions is considered by some as no longer appropriate. Rather than believing in institutions, people now believe in causes. To be Lutheran is not enough, one must believe in what the Lutheran Church does, because there is a greater concern for people than keeping the institution alive. Increasingly, then, people will not choose Lutheran schools because they are Lutheran, but because of what they do. How important will be the Lutheran tag on our schools, or may it even be a hindrance.

Within this context other groups are developing a mission policy within their denominations to sustain their churches and they are aggressive in establishing new schools for this purpose. At the same time, fundamentalist Christians are developing “Christian” schools and by the use of that claim, portray a dimension to the community that they are the truly Christian schools. Perhaps, for many, schools are replacing churches. Perhaps schools are new churches. They no longer stand behind, alongside of, or in front of churches, but apart from them. In Lutheran schools we are entering a stage of sponsorship by the church of Lutheran schools. The church promotes schools and, in turn, the schools support the church and both work for a common cause, the confronting of people with Jesus Christ. Yet, many school students and families might not take the step to the church connection, even though those who teach might aspire to such an end. Schools may be one of the edges to the church and teachers a new breed of ministers, working under God, to do what is possible in proclamation. The teaching ministry has never been placed in a more strategic position in our church. It is a call to service of the Word. In recent times there have been heartening and strong signs that an appreciation of the teacher’s role in ministry is being recognised by influential church leaders.

Yet, and there is always a yet, when teachers feel a calling to ministry and endeavour to follow these objectives faithfully by attempting to minister to a diverse community, but increased members in Lutheran pews or extra people studying for service in the church do not result, will they then be criticised for not performing ministry?

IS THE OFFERING OF TEACHING MINISTRY STILL ONE OF COPPER?

When we consider where we have come from and where we are now, has anything changed in the perception of teachers in a ministry?

One principal wrote recently of an invitation for that principal to take part in a float parade, along with some students from the principal's school. The float was a beautifully designed ship that had the theme, 'Christ is our Lifesaver' and was to witness to the community. The principal wrote:

'On the day I located the float and found that four of the local ministers had also been invited to take part, along with four other congregational members and a teacher with 20 students from the school. As we were about to start I went to board the ship with the ministers and was told by the organisers that the ship was for pastors only and that I was required to walk with the other teacher and the school students. [The four other adults were either driving or supervising procedures]. Our task was to walk alongside the float and hand out tracts...the ministers were to sit on deck chairs on the float and wave while wearing sailor hats' [Kahl, 1997].

Summary: Teachers of Lutheran primary schools in the past were often led to perceive themselves as lesser people in the ministry of the Lutheran Church and there are evidences that such feelings amongst some teachers and in the eyes and minds of some pastors and members of the church still exist. The Lutheran Confessional understanding of the ministry of the Lutheran Church has tended to place pastors in supremacy and this ideology is sustained by some pastors and congregations. Although many teachers regard themselves as being spiritual leaders and, therefore, in ministry, there is a vagueness as to what this really means. That there is an increased complexity of the teacher's role and that changes in society have resulted in changing the dynamics of schools are not widely recognised within the Lutheran Church, coupled with the diverse work that teachers must do as a result and the past poor articulation of the ministry of the Lutheran schools and their teachers by church leaders, sustains a clouded understanding of the office of the teacher. However, at the local level the majority of teachers feel appreciated in their ministry role and are able to cite pastors with whom they have been able to work positively in team ministry. If the teacher's role is to be enhanced as a ministry within the Lutheran Church then teachers must take initiatives themselves to give better expressions of their work characteristics, to support one another in their work and to encourage church leaders to provide symbols that support the teacher's ministry so that the acknowledgment many teachers feel at a local level becomes generalised throughout the church.

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