

# Readings

### Additional readings

The following list is provided as options for:

- facilitator pre-reading, if desired
- participant reading during the **Reading Short Trail**
- a place where participants can be directed for those who wish to engage with more material following the workshop

#### **Truths, trends and traditions in Lutheran education – taking a stand**

[p. 1-13]

Extracts from McCutcheon, F. (2008) *Truths, trends and traditions in Lutheran education – taking a stand*. Paper delivered at ACLE 3, Melbourne, October 2008 available online

<http://www.lutheran.edu.au/tools/getFile.aspx?tbl=tblContentItem&id=1487>

#### **Wisdom and perspicuity**

[p. 155, 156, 157]

Extracts from Vardy, P. (2003) *Being Human*. London, UK: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd

#### **Theological significance of creation**

[p. 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42]

Extracts from Christenson, T. (2004) *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education*. USA: Augsburg Fortress

#### **Five themes**

[p. 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146]

Extracts from Christenson, T. (2004) *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education*. USA: Augsburg Fortress

#### **Some particulars – pedagogy**

[p. 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164]

Extracts from Christenson, T. (2004) *The Gift and Task of Lutheran Higher Education*. USA: Augsburg Fortress

#### **Social justice education**

Dohnt, A. (2000) Social justice education: more than just a community service project. *SchoolLink*. Vol 6 No 3 August 2000

#### **Valuing individuals**

Jericho, A. (2000) Valuing individuals. *SchoolLink*. Vol 6 No 3 August 2000

#### **Lifelong qualities for learners, Attributes and abilities: end statements, core values: elaborations**

[p. 5, 7, 14]

LEA (2005). *A Vision for Learners and Learning in Lutheran Schools*. Adelaide: LEA.

#### **Christian beliefs key idea 1, Christian living key idea 3, Christianity in the world key idea 2**

[p.16-17, 32-33, 36-37]

LEA (2005) *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework Curriculum Statements*. Adelaide: LEA.

#### **Six challenges six mysteries**

LEA (2005) *Six Challenges Six Mysteries*. Adelaide: LEA

## Truths, trends and traditions in Lutheran education – taking a stand

The challenge of Authority and knowing to whom or what it should be granted is related to the task of knowing which 'trends' one should respond and adapt to and which ones should be resisted because they challenge one's core Truths. This poses a real dilemma because all institutions do need to change with the times. Luther famously and rightly claimed that the church should constantly be renewing and reforming itself. Schools, too, of course. What is renewal and reform? It is a commitment to the 'life' of the truth and the ability to communicate it in changing contexts. The difficulty of course is that in the process of 'reforming', we must maintain a delicate balance between preserving our truths and making the changes to our traditions (or practices) necessary for those truths to find life in a new context, a setting which is sometimes downright hostile to them or too eager to water them down to make them more palatable.

My contention is that in educational terms, true teaching and learning is today threatened by similar 'short cuts' – promises to secure 'educational salvation' in the form of 'outcomes' by measures (works), promises to ensure 'happiness' for our young people via slogans, clichés and clinical drugs, and the prevalent and deeply mistaken belief that information is communication.

I am going to argue that like Luther, educators need to reclaim the Authority of Being. We, too, are surrounded by practices that promise salvation but lead spirits into darkness.

The Gospel in education, is, I suggest, comprised of three key aspects:

1. Imaginative possibility (a call to a deeper encounter with Being)
2. Self-identification (development of individuality and uniqueness with a moral compass)
3. Social interaction (authentic communication and encounter)

In secular terms, this might be put as "fulfil one's potential, live out one's dreams and make a difference". But those of us who have encountered deeper reality must remember that our potential is infinitely greater than this. C S Lewis once described it thus: "If we let Him – for we can prevent Him if we choose – He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though of course on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful, but that is what we are in for. Nothing less." (*Mere Christianity*)

Education in schools like yours is not merely a matter of passing on human knowledge. All true teaching and learning sets knowledge and skills against the backdrop of Faith and the possibility of human fulfilment and, which, therefore expands humanity (understood with transcendent reference), facilitates self-understanding (of a created being as opposed to a self-creating one) and enhances relational capacity (the ability to love others).

### Our context and our challenge

I believe there are three quite distinct challenges to our Educational Truths and their Authority in the form of contemporary trends. The three trends are quite distinct but I believe they are all related to each other and have their origin in the fact that culturally we have lost Faith in Being.

True faith is a kind of inner comprehension, the poise of being graced in a relationship constituted by obedience, conscience and love. Whilst it is at its heart, a mystery, it is also that which provides bearings for being.

What are the trends of our time and why are they to be resisted? I think we can identify three clear trends which present a different set of truths to rival the Authority of the Truths of Faith.

Trends:

1. Authority of Science/Measurement (if it cannot be measured it does not exist)
2. Authority of Ego/Individualism (when spirit or soul recedes, ego becomes dominant and needs new bearings and controls – normally in morally neutral language, like ‘that’s inappropriate’ or ‘that’s normal’)
3. Authority of Information (to disseminate is not to communicate)

These three trends form a kind of Secular Trinity of Truths. Because there is no interior world and no transcendent horizon, the self needs constructing and constraining and because there is no ‘being’ seeking ‘meaning’, information in the form of ‘data’ replaces understanding and communication between selves.

### **1. Authority of Science/Technological Measures**

Science has stepped up to provide new bearings for being. Its creed is essentially this:

Where do we come from? Random evolutionary mutations  
Why am I here? To preserve my life, to reproduce, seek pleasure, avoid pain  
What happens at death? Rotting stench and nothingness.  
What should I do? Whatever will make you happy and/or live longer.

Most people today look to scientists, doctors, psychologists, or indeed any kind of ‘expert’ for something that will provide bearings for their being. The problem here is that empirical data, research and statistics, are all focused on the outer life, the health of the body and the chemistry of the mind. If this domain was adequate to the task, we would surely have nearly eliminated depression and mental illness, whereas we are clearly only seeing it rise.

This will not surprise those of us who have transcendent bearings for our being. How could the expansive possibilities of spirit not be distressed by the thought that all there is to being is what science tells us.

What can the latest research tell us about human fulfilment? Why does science know nothing about the ultimate fulfilment of being? Of the kind of creatures Lewis wrote about? Because science proceeds by a method that rules the reality of being out from the very beginning. Being is not found under a microscope or at the end of a telescope, it is not discovered via experiment, or abstracted into universal laws of predictive behaviour. Being seeks meaning not measurement, it desires intimacy and belonging not abstraction and theorising. It is the deep of the person, seen only by the eye of God and those who love. Science can’t help but ignore it. This is not a weakness of science but merely a comment on the nature of science. The problem is not with science but with the granting of absolute authority to science (and by association, technology).

C S Lewis, writing 60 years ago of his concerns regarding educational trends, spoke powerfully of “the trees of knowledge and life growing together” ...Lessons with blood and sap” (Lewis, *Men without Chests*, p.6)

The problem with lessons that have blood and sap is that it is so much more difficult measuring outcomes devised by a system that knows nothing about either. The danger of giving authority to such systems is that increasingly, we learn to teach without blood and sap. It is a gain for the system (which does not want and cannot compute anything as messy as blood and sap!) and a loss for humanity, who are essentially, creatures of blood and sap.

What happened to the Educational Authorities of Joy, Wisdom and Love?

In communities and classrooms where visible measures have gained ultimate authority, we will inevitably find a forsaken humanity; teachers with crushed spirits and dulled minds (and from my experience, broken hearts) and students in a kind of wasteland of assessment and meaningless information.

Rules and procedures can be so attractive. They take away the need to think about what we are doing. To understand why we are doing it. To become capable of something more than we currently are. In other words, they promise a short cut to salvation. "Better teaching", "improved learning". It's a modern form of magic. Just invest in some interactive white boards, some lap top computers, wireless your classrooms and poof, magically, the rabbit of understanding will come out of the hat!

Technology perpetuates passivity at its best and confusion at its worst (think Brave New World or 1984). Passivity prevents true encounter but promises spiritual fulfilment. It is a powerful lie. But it is a shortcut to a substitute. Wittgenstein once wrote: "if you use a trick in logic whom can you be tricking other than yourself" (*Culture and Value* 24).

Good teaching and real learning cannot be achieved with gimmicks and tricks, machines or measures. It will always depend on the mind and heart of the teacher and the learner undertaking the slow and difficult process of applying their minds with discipline in order to master material.

When it comes to asking questions about technology, I can think of no better advice than that given by the late Neil Postman. Here are the 6 questions he thinks we should ask before we introduce or adopt a new technology

1. What is the problem to which this technology is a solution?
2. Whose problem is it? (Will the people who pay for it be the people who have the problem? Concorde example)
3. What new problems will be created as a result of solving the old problem? (motor car, clocks and monks)
4. What people/institutions will be harmed by this technology? (Luddite example)
5. What language and communication will be changed by this technology?
6. Which people/institutions will gain new power through this technology (and which will decline i.e. how will it shift power and authority?)

We could apply these questions to interactive whiteboards, laptops, digitalising newsletters, even things as basic as templates for reports etc. (Online reporting is now apparently mandatory in the UK. Did anyone discuss or consider what the gains and losses of such a decision were going to be?) We could even ask these questions of the 'latest research'. You will be amazed at what is revealed about the actual effects of a decision like changing a reporting system which seemed so innocuous. Will we have Lutheran-like courage to stand by our findings?

We may not always be in a position to prevent the implementation of the technology but we can always attempt to understand (remain conscious about) the decision being made and its relevant impact on the question of Authority.

## **2. Self-Identity (Integrity/Conscience/Wisdom)**

Our Gospel tells us that our fulfilment, our identity, the possibility of Life depends on acknowledging our Source, having a transcendent reference point which grants us our nature and our place in creation. Without this kind of inner bearing, when we are left in an egoistic, relativistic free-for-all, it is not surprising to find outer measures of control being imposed.

Hand in hand with the loss of transcendence and the rise of the technological is its psychological counterpart – modelling human beings on information processors. Resilience and well-being are the trendy new terms but take a look at the programs designed to help young people cope with the trials of life and you find documents full of mantras and slogans that do not invite or encourage depth of spirit or an encounter with being (imagine Jesus teaching 'BOUNCE BACK' to those suffering from a loss of meaning, from a sense of incompleteness, to the bullied and outcast and to those suffering from an inability to walk through life with a straight back.)

The rise of resilience, happiness, wellbeing, life skills programs is testament, I think, to an environment without bearings, without any sense of reality having a structure in which suffering can be meaningful and without any sense of spiritual purpose. The default position for a self that does not have a 'determining centre' or inner bearing, is the residual Freudian 'id', the anonymous 'it' that unleashes itself on the world, expecting to get its own way, expecting instant gratification, expecting to avoid all pain and unpleasantness. On the surface it can appear quite 'tolerant' and accepting. But inside it is often rigid and inflexible, and when given the opportunity, it shows its true colours.

It is no wonder that programs that promise direction and happiness proliferate. I consider these programs a classic example of taking a short cut to 'emotional salvation' and whilst they certainly can serve a purpose, they surely cannot provide the spirit with what it truly longs for. And an unforeseen consequence of applying outer measures (like mottos and mantras) to the inner life is that the authority shifts from the spiritual to the behavioural.

When outer measures gain control and Authority over inner ones, we deny being and devastate Identity.

Systems must serve something beyond themselves.

If we don't claim the Authority of the inner, we grant authority to the outer.

"If not within, then without".

### **3. Information as Communication**

The proliferation of programs, the retreat of the deep self and the rise of ego chatter has gone hand in hand with the third person in this Unholy Trinity – the belief that information alone can solve problems. Now of course, information matters and it can be extremely useful but on its own, it does very little. For example, I cannot think of one major problem in the world today that is caused by a lack of information. The global economic meltdown, the Middle East crisis, global warming, terrorism, poverty and so on. None of these problems are caused by a lack of information and none will be solved by having more information.

As soon as language loses its connection with inner-meaning (and what other kind is there?), it becomes meaningless. There are two kinds of noise to be identified I think. The first is the chatter of distressed and fragmented identities, lost in the world of outer sense; the second is the rise of what I will call technological rhetoric. Both are manifestations of the disconnection from the anchor of the silence and authenticity that is characteristic of Being.

Neither offers the soul sustenance in the form of meanings to live in or the comfort of true communication, of being known, trusted, heard, understood and loved. The best example of

the first is the kind of ego-chatter you witness on reality TV shows and which was beautifully described by Thomas Merton who lamented the rise of noise and the loss of silent communication.

"Where men live huddled together without true communication, there seems to be greater sharing and a more genuine communion. But this is not communion, only immersion in the general meaninglessness of countless slogans and clichés repeated over and over again so that in the end one listens without hearing and responds without thinking...Each individual in the mass is insulated by thick layers of insensibility. He doesn't care, he doesn't hear, he doesn't think. He does not act, he is pushed. He does not talk; he produces conventional sounds when stimulated by the appropriate noises. He does not think, he secretes clichés.

Merton goes on:

"There is actually no more dangerous solitude than that of the man who is lost in a crowd, who does not know he is alone and who does not function as a person in a community either. Yet he is by no means free of care. He is burdened by the diffuse, the anonymous anxiety, the nameless fears, the petty itching lusts and the all pervading hostilities which fill mass society the way water fills an ocean". (Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, p.56-7)

Notice here Merton's description of the invisible world. On the outside all seems well. On the inside, quiet despair and chaos.

In a fractured world of data-overload and endless identity reconstruction, communication struggles to be authentic. Worse, authentic communication becomes threatening (have any of you dared ask of a curriculum document or a policy decision: 'what exactly does this mean?") John Ralston Saul argues that the sign of an operative ideology is that no-one asks what the language means, nor whether it makes sense or whether it is true.' Syntax masquerades as meaning. Obscurity suggests complexity. But what does it actually say and whom is this language supposed to serve?

Communication might properly be thought of as an exchange of personal meaning, not merely the posting or passing on of information which, in the digital realm, renders everyone anonymous. Information will not fix communication problems (to think like this is to imagine that in order to reveal himself all God needs to do is to send everyone in the world an email.)

When we fall for the lie that information can save us, we are complicit in shifting Authority from the Relational to the Impersonal. And we are well on our way to disconnecting our practices or traditions from the truths that give them Life.

## Wisdom

In the days of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle philosophy was concerned with the search for wisdom and the search for an understanding of how each individual should live. Today, in a postmodern world, 'wisdom' is an unusual word to find in a philosophy book, but this was not always the case. The ancient Greek philosophers were occupied with the search for wisdom and this search precisely represented the possibility individuals have, as human beings, to be more than can be contained in any physical description. It is the omission of this possibility that is such a damaging part of the state of human beings today.

The motto of the Greed God Apollo, 'Know yourself' is, perhaps, the hardest tasks any human being can face. Wisdom and knowledge of ourselves do not come from learned philosophic journals. The professional philosophers that inhabit university departments may be cleverer than others but few of them are wiser. Wisdom requires the integration of a whole range of disciplines and does not come from intellectual study alone. It is the child of experience, adversity and failure. It demands integration of many elements which make up the life of a fulfilled human being.

## Perspicuity

It is so easy to judge others, to impose one's own conceptions on the lives of others. Some so-called religious people are experts at this, branding as 'sinners' those who do not conform to their own simplistic rules. Perspicuity recognises human complexity and understands that judging other people is almost always done with inadequate understanding and information. Jesus condemned those who judged others and for good reason as judgement is always made with inadequate information. It fails to understand complexity and lacks perspicuity. Those who have wrestled with the complexity of life, who have lived serious lives seeking to wrestle with the difficulty of the human condition, know that simple judgements are almost always inaccurate and lack wisdom.

Seriousness in itself is part of the search for perspicuity but it is not the same as perspicuity. It comes from the recognition of the absolute demand made on each person to become a self, to fulfil his or her potential, to become what every human being is capable of being. However, insight is required to understand what this is and the radical consequences of being mistaken.

Perspicuity and wisdom are not things that merely happen to anyone. They are achievements, and many people who seek them for most of their lives may never attain them. Wisdom has the peculiar feature that the more it is sought, the further the person seeking may appear to be from the object of their search. Socrates felt that he knew nothing and, when the Delphi Oracle described him as the wisest man in Athens, he was so sure that this was an error that he set out to prove the Oracle wrong. In a similar way the great saints of the Christian tradition often acknowledged themselves as the greatest of sinners. This is not perversity, still less a glorifying in contradiction, but rather a recognition that the more individuals understand themselves, the more they achieve wisdom and a perspicuous understanding of what it is to be human, the further they realise they are from the ideal.

Perspicuity enables human beings to probe the complexity of what it is to be human. Wisdom may be the child of the search, but understanding ourselves in itself will not bring wisdom. It will only be a beginning of the path. The achievement of wisdom demands something more, and there is a key ingredient which has to underlie any ethical system and any idea of what it is to be fully human. This ingredient is accountability.



## Theological Significance of Creation

Lutherans affirm God as creator of the entire universe, of all that exists. Someone reading this is likely to ask, "Does that mean that Lutherans are creationists?" My understanding of creationists is that they are persons who advance the creation account as a scientific theory or at least as a theory to rival scientific theories. Lutherans, by and large, are quite content to let scientists do their best work to answer the questions science can answer. It is very possible for a Lutheran astrophysicist to advance some version of the big bang theory and for a Lutheran biologist to argue some version of the evolutionary theory. As a scientist she ought to pursue the best account that science has to offer. She certainly should not want to reject a scientific account just because it is not the same as a biblical account. Lutherans, generally, do not think that the bible is an authoritative scientific text. They do not think that it is a task of theology to come up with cosmological accounts to rival the best that science has to offer.

Christians who are inclined to read the Bible as an authoritative scientific text do so, usually, out of two assumptions: (a) they want to honor the Bible, to affirm its truth, and (b) they think that scientific truth is the only kind worth bothering about. From these two assumptions flows their conclusion that we should read the Bible as an authoritative scientific text and affirm it as an alternative scientific view. If the creation accounts in Genesis are not scientific, they reason, what good are they? Isn't the only truth worth asserting scientific truth?

Lutherans do not draw the aforementioned conclusion largely because they do not make the second assumption mentioned above. They do not make that assumption for two reasons:

First, Lutherans are not inclined to enshrine science (or any discipline for that matter) as *the* paradigm of knowing. This does not mean that Lutherans think science is worthless. Far from it. Some very eminent scientists have been Lutherans, and Lutheran colleges and universities generally make great efforts to have excellent science faculty and facilities. For Lutherans, science is a perfectly appropriate human response to the created universe. We do God's creation honor by trying to understand it.

For Lutherans science is an extremely valuable but limited enterprise. Scientists pursue specific kinds of inquiries, based, like all human endeavours, on certain assumptions, shaped by particular kinds of tools, molded by human agendas and the institutions that embody them. Lutherans would be inclined to say that we should pursue science in the best ways we know how. Having done that, we should be critical of our means of knowing and modest about what we have come to understand in the process. When asked whether creationism should be taught in science classes in the public schools, I responded, "No, I don't think so. I think in science classes we should teach the best science we know. And we should teach it critically, admitting what we know, what we do not know, what we assume, and what we conclude on those bases. Where there is more than one theory that is viable we ought to admit that and explain the grounds for preferring one theory to another."

The second reason Lutherans are not inclined to accept the creationist premise is because we think that the affirmation of creation is a richer and deeper concept than any scientific theory. For lack of a better term, I would say that *when we affirm God as creator of all things we are making an ontological claim, a claim about the fundamental nature of reality and our relation to it*. What, exactly, are we affirming? The following seven things are at least part of the meaning of affirming God's creative work. They only begin to show how many dimensions this one theological idea has.

When we affirm creation we affirm:

1. *That the world is real and important, a manifestation of the ultimate, God.* Some religions and philosophies have seen the world as an illusion; some see life in it as ultimately meaningless. People who affirm God's creation cannot see it that way. We take the world seriously. We are caught by the wonder of it. We want to scale its heights and plumb its depths. The ordinary is intimately and essentially connected to the ultimate. The world is not God, but it is good; it is good in its finitude. It is ours to wonder at and care for. Those who affirm creation are thereby called to affirm the world and find their rightful place in it. To persons who affirm God's creative act the universe is not vast, meaningless emptiness. We may wonder at its vastness, but for us its vastness unlocks a depth of meaning, not a depth of meaninglessness.
2. *That the world is good, loved by God, God's domain of creativity.* Some religions and philosophers have seen the world as basically an evil place, a place to be rescued from, a place opposed to God. There is ample evidence in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures that this is not the dominant biblical view, even though there are some passages, influenced by Gnostic thought, that point in that direction. The creation narrative is punctuated with the line, "And God saw that it was good." John 3:16 begins with the assertion, "God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son." This attests to God embracing the world in spite of its fallenness. So it is fitting for those of us who affirm the creation to enjoy it, savor it, celebrate it, give deep thanks for it. We sing, we dance, we explore, and often we are awed into silence. These are all ways in which we, as the psalm says, "taste and see how gracious the Lord is." Some have viewed the world as meaningless chaos, some have imagined it as meaningless repetition, and some have seen it as a battleground of opposing forces; the Genesis account envisions the world as divine creativity, a work of depth, of beauty, of awe.
3. *That the world is God's; it is not the possession of humans.* Human beings are created beings like all the others. We have a kind of creatureliness that we forget at our peril. We are but one part of a larger community of creatures. The creation and our fellow creatures are not ours to destroy, but ours to enjoy. The wanton wasting of creation simply to suit our own agenda is blasphemy. It claims as ours what is only ours to use and enjoy. We would not destroy a friend's vacation home if allowed to use it. Yet too many of us are ready to destroy the world without any sense that we have to answer for it. Affirming creation puts us in our place as part of, not apart from, the natural world.
4. *That humans are fundamentally of-the-earth.* The Genesis narratives relate that humans are created from mud, the only of all the creatures of which this is said. The name they are given, *adamah*, means "from the earth." Interestingly, there is also an etymological connection between the Latin-English word "human" and a word for fertile ground, "humus." Wendell Berry has commented that Genesis gives the following "recipe" for making humans: mud plus God's breath. What does this account communicate to us? I would suggest at least two things: It reminds us of our finitude – that the earth was here before us and will be here after us, and that our lives are basically "dust to dust." It reminds us to be humble (once again a humus-related word), or in the words of the Shaker hymn, "to come down where we ought to be."
5. *That all humans, the Genesis accounts tell us, come from a single set of parents.* This implies that the differences between people (race, caste, class nationality) that we are tempted to place so much importance on are not part of the created order. Fundamentally humans are one family, we are all children of God, and any differences between us must be justified (if at all) by some other explanation than, "That's how God made it." Some creation accounts establish castes; some establish a king as the god

incarnate. The Judeo-Christian creation account tells us that basic equality is the default setting for the human situation.

6. *That we are created and called to be in conversation with God.* The Genesis narratives, in fact the whole of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, show us that to be human is to be in the presence of God. God calls us, and one way or another we answer, even when our answer is to hide. The Psalms illustrate the wide variety of forms that conversation took in the life of the Hebrew people. There are psalms of joy and praise, psalms of doubt and questioning, psalms of abandonment and lamentation, even psalms of accusation, putting to God hard questions that had to be voiced.

The Genesis account tells us that humans are created in God's image. Over the ages there have been many interpretations of what that means. Some have said it is human reason, or human creativity, or human freedom, or some other human gift that makes us image God. My own interpretation is that all of these things may play a role, but that we image God by virtue of our mutuality, our being-with, our being-in-conversation.

7. *That God calls us to be human stewards of the creation.* God calls us, because of our special gifts, to be stewards of creation. We are God's delegated caretakers. For this role we have been given certain gifts. We are responsible because we are, of all creatures, response-able, called to conversation with God. And perhaps we are stewards because we are, of all creatures, of-the-earth.

It should be clear from the above discussion that the affirmation of creation is much more than a cosmological theory. It addresses so many more concerns. It explains to us where we are, who we are, what our orientation is, how the world is to be regarded, how we are related to each other, how we are related to the Creator. I do not know of any scientific account that does that. Science, appropriately, has a different focus. Our affirmation of creation has the power to inform our lives. It makes clear that we are called to be in the world in particular ways, and not others. We are here to manifest wonder and care, to savor and plumb, to be a part of creation, earth-born siblings to all humans, responsible stewards in conversation with God.

## Five Themes

It is my contention that education informed by the Lutheran tradition ought to be built around five general themes: Giftedness, Freedom, Faithful Criticism, Service/Vocation, and *Paideia*. The education provided at our colleges and universities ought to be known far and wide for the way we celebrate gifts, for the way we learn in freedom toward freedom, for the depth and engagement of our criticism, for connecting learning to doing that serves, and connecting learning to the self-becoming of the student. Most of these themes have been discussed in what precedes, so I will address each theme very briefly here.

### 1. *The Celebration of Gifts*

A Christian encounters all of life and all of creation as a gift. A Christian teacher, therefore, is a sharer and unwrapper of gifts: the gifts of the world or discipline or author to be studied, and the gifts each of us brings with us. There were teachers I had in college who opened the same gifts semester after semester, year after year, and took great delight in it. In some cases the gift was swamp ecology, in other cases the dialogues of Plato, cathedral architecture, the chorales of Bach, the poetry of Rilke. In each case the teachers were as excited as kids, not finding what was in there (they had a pretty good idea about that already), but at our coming to discover what was in there.

There were also teachers (sometimes the same ones) who excelled in making students see the gifts that were inside them: the gifts of language, of music, of leadership, of scholarship, of teamwork, of art. Such teachers enabled, encouraged, cajoled, critiqued, and supported students in their process of self-becoming. Then there were also teachers (again sometimes the same ones) who led their students to see their own gifts (and sometimes their handicaps) as a vocation, i.e., as a gift to be shared in service to a needy world. And so that passing on of gifts continues and continues.

The classrooms and laboratories and studios of such teachers were a potlatch, a celebration of gifts – giving, opening, receiving, and sharing. A celebration of gifts and giftedness. Each campus should be an embodiment, at least in an intellectual and spiritual sense, of what Lewis Hyde refers to as “a gift economy.”

### 2. *Freedom*

Understanding freedom as a consequence of grace, as another of God’s gifts, we are freed from the necessity to work out our own justification. As a consequence of this freedom there is no part of ourselves or of the human story we have to suppress in order to be pure or pious in some phony sense. This freedom should distinguish education in the Lutheran tradition from “religious education” commonly found in other traditions. Education in a Lutheran college or university should be surprisingly bold, open, multidimensional, challenging, experimental, diverse, and engaging; never frightened, closed, authoritarian, sanitized, and defensive. A religious view without freedom tends to reduce the world, to shrink it to one that confirms the opinion of the believer and does not open one to challenge. It is interesting how frequently secular education presents a reduced world as well.

The freedom is also manifest in the fact that we do things other institutions don’t seem able to manage. We teach religion, particularly Christianity, and we teach it appreciatively *and* critically. Secular institutions do not feel free to do the former, and many religious institutions are not free to do the latter. So this attitude of critical appreciation that seems so right and natural to many faculty in Lutheran institutions is very rare in the culture at large. The assumption is that if one is appreciative she is not critical, and if critical, not appreciative. This is but one more example of a Lutheran approach that is founded on what, to many, appears to be the affirmation of a paradox.

This freedom also exhibits itself in the books read, the films viewed, the questions asked, the discussions launched, the new things tried on our campuses. It should exhibit itself in the way we treat each other, in the social ultimacies and stereotypes we challenge, in the way we

regard our successes and, most particularly, in the way in which we respond to our failures. Darrell Jodock has summarized this freedom extremely well:

The divine "yes" of the gospel sets people free to search for the truth, no matter how messy it may turn out to be. Because humans have no basis for any sort of claim on God, nothing needs to be protected ... No inherited ideas or practices are exempt from critique and evaluation. Religion itself can be critiqued because it is capable of getting in the way of the gospel ... The state can be critiqued. To the distress of presidents and deans, the college itself can be critiqued. Wherever loyalty to a learned profession gets in the way of education, it can be critiqued. Every area can be investigated ... The net effect is freedom of inquiry.

There is a second dimension of freedom that has to be central to Lutheran education: educating students towards the realization of their own freedom. Thomas Merton wrote:

Life consists in learning to live on one's own, spontaneous, freewheeling: to do this one must recognize what is one's own – be familiar and at home with oneself. This means basically learning who one is, and learning what one has to offer, ... and then learning how to make that offering valid. The purpose of education is to show a person how to define himself authentically and spontaneously in relation to his world ... A superficial freedom to wander aimlessly here to there, to taste this or that, to make a choice of distractions ... is simply a sham. It claims to be a freedom of "choice" when it has evaded the basic task of discovering who it is that chooses. The function of the university is, then, first of all to help the student discover himself: to recognize himself, and to identify who it is that chooses.

Freedom is more than just not being prevented or limited, though that is how an eighteen-year-old just liberated from her parents is likely to think of it. It is also more than just "doing what I like." Even an addict may have that counterfeit of freedom yet to be completely unfree. Freedom is choosing and acting consistently with who one really is. Until then we are dependent on what others tell us we are, and in this world we are surely puppets being manipulated by invisible strings. Freedom is not easy. It certainly is not as easy as moving away from home, or having the funds to support one's fantasies or habits. It requires some hard learning, a learning that finally reveals to us who we are and what we are called to do.

For Lutherans freedom is intimately linked to grace and to vocation. These three rightly overlap each other. When freedom is pursued apart from identity or identity apart from vocation we get counterfeits of each concept. Since all three of these ideas are at the heart of the Lutheran vision, Lutheran colleges and universities have something quite distinctive to offer students: an education toward freedom that is also an education toward self-identity that is also an education toward vocation. No secular university, to my knowledge, makes such a claim. Nor would it occur to most faith-related colleges to do so either.

### 3. *Faithful Criticism*

Being critical is one of the manifestations of freedom. Christians are freed to serve the world by being critical and by challenging all human claims to ultimacy. We are called, in other words, to recognize idols when we see them. This is not an easy thing to do because most of us have been "captured" by some agenda our society has laid on us. We tend not to recognize the prisons we willingly live inside. Certainly materialism in all its modes is one such idol in our society. How often have we felt the temptation to believe that we are valuable for what we have, for those things we call "our possessions"? How frequently do all other concerns take a back seat to economic progress? How tempting is the idea that having more will bring us happiness and fulfillment? For how many of us is success defined by income and consumption? David Orr confronts this issue boldly in his book, *Earth in Mind*:

The plain fact is that the planet does not need more successful people. But it does desperately need more peacemakers, healers, restorers, story-tellers, and lovers of every kind. It needs people who live well in their places. It needs people of moral courage ... And these qualities have little to do with success as our culture defines it.

The question arises, where does the moral courage come from to challenge the pervasive god of success: Certainly secular education has no reason to do so.

So many students are convinced that education serves only to get a job, and that a job serves the end of copious and conspicuous consumption. Why is this so widely believed? For many it is believed because it is a story convincingly told daily in all the media. We are

informed about what human excellence is mainly by people who are trying to sell us something. For many students this is their story because they have never heard any other story and because they have never heard anyone challenge it, much less embody an alternative.

We need to be asking, "What are those beliefs almost universally held in our culture? What are those notions that demand our loyalty and obedience?" Then we also need to ask, "Where do these things come from? What do they depend on? How well founded are they? Who benefits from our obedience? Who is harmed thereby? Why are we tempted to follow them? What do we fear will happen to us if we don't?" All these normally very frightening questions we are freed to ask because none of these things have ultimacy for us. And the diligent pursuit of these critical, yet faithful, questions is part of our service to a world in need.

#### 4. *Service/Vocation*

Service is an implication of each of the preceding themes. Having realized our own gifts we use them in service. Sometimes that service is helping others to realize their own gifts. Having been *freed from* bondage to the service of idols we are *freed to* serve the neighbour in need. Being critical of the claims to ultimacy our societies and their institutions make on us we are able to see human need in a new way and risk engagement that frees others.

Learning in a Lutheran setting should always have this practical piece, the place where theory is connected to practice, the place where classroom work is connected to the problems of real people in a real place. We need this because it brings its own critical agenda, asking, "Does it really work? Does it actually help those who most need it? What does it sound like communicated to real people in need?" We also need the service dimension because it provides an opportunity for those engaged in it to come to know themselves, their prejudices, their fears, their deepest dreams. That is why it is not uncommon to hear students comment, "I learned more in that service project than I learned in all my major courses combined."

The third reason for connecting service to learning is because it is a source of hope. We will never solve the whole problem of poverty, but we can be kept from despair if we can help just a few kids overcome the handicaps that poverty would otherwise inflict on them. We cannot make the problems of racism and classism disappear, but we may show people in particular cases that someone cares enough about them to make an effort. A purely theoretical education produces optimists and pessimists. Service connected learning creates people who try. My friend Sig Royspern coined the phrase, "as useless as a convention of optimists." I would rather have two or three who are willing, in spite of the size of the problem, to make an effort that serves. That's where hope is connected to vocation.

#### 5. *The Paideia Paradigm*

The word *paideia* comes from the Greek word for child, *pais*, and means roughly the same as nurture, intentional education. Werner Jaeger and several others have employed the term more generally to mean "the formative process of human personality and character." Peter Hodgson more recently has used the term to mean a process of education (in the old Latin sense of *e-ducere*, to lead forth toward wisdom and freedom. And bell hooks has employed the term to talk about a concern to teach "that respects and cares for the souls of students." I use the term here to talk about a kind of education that takes the connection between knowing, teaching, and human becoming seriously.

- It is a commitment to recognizing the learner as a whole person.
- It is a commitment to facilitating the human development of persons.
- It is a commitment to exploring the larger, human-related dimensions of our knowing.
- It is a commitment to relating knowing to the larger issues of living in the world.

## Some Particulars – Pedagogy

We make a very great impression on our students not only by what we teach, but how we teach it. So it should be no surprise that the Lutheran understanding of human being and human knowing will have implications for teaching. Looked at from the other direction, we would expect to find that every mode of teaching has its own implicit anthropology and epistemology as well. In this section I want to identify four attitudes or approaches that I think fit the Lutheran tradition particularly well, but I certainly don't think these are the only ones worth looking at.

1. *Teaching that leaves room for wonder.* The noted biologist, Ursula Goodenough, tells the story of teaching, with two science colleagues, a year-long science survey. This class included astrophysics – the becoming of the cosmos from big bang to the formation of planetary systems, geophysics – the coming of planet earth, and biochemistry – the coming of life. Each of the instructors taught their own specialty and gave a comprehensive test at the end of their respective sections. Goodenough taught the last one. As the class was coming to an end, she engaged several of the students in conversation, asking them what they thought had gone well and what had gone badly. The student comments were overwhelmingly positive with a few complaints about how hard the exams had been. Goodenough said she was feeling really good about her own (and her colleagues') work when one of the students said, "The three processes you revealed to us are so awesome and so amazing, but you never gave us any chance in an assignment to process or assimilate that awe and amazement. The fact that you based grades only on exams said to us that our own reactions to what we were learning were not important. Is that what you meant to say?" Goodenough then went on to say that she and her colleagues had, because of that student comment, changed the way they taught that course. They now structure group discussions and personal response papers on the course. "The awe and wonder of science was certainly a large part of our motivation as scientists; why should we have all along been denying its importance to our students?"

I think the lesson Goodenough learned can be applied to all of us, not just to scientists. Anyone that teaches something that is deep, profound, awe-inspiring, provocative, challenging, invites a human response. That human response, thought out and articulated, is a very important part of learning. We should not only recognize it, but honor it by making room for it. Too often we, as faculty, run away from learning occasions that spill out of our academic boxes. "It's not my speciality," we argue. Sharon Daloz Parks laments:

We have become vulnerable to exchanging wisdom for knowledge and moral commitment for method. Moreover, professors have been vulnerable to functioning as less-than-whole persons ... Accordingly, young adults are bereft of the mentors they need, professors are too often mere technicians of knowledge, higher education can articulate no orienting vision or offer leadership toward a coherent unity, and discrete academic disciplines disclose only isolated (and thus distorted) aspects of truth. As a consequence, some of the most important questions of contemporary world are difficult to address within the prevailing rubrics of the academy.

I think it frequently happens that we hide in our expertise because we are genuinely afraid of encountering ourselves and other selves in their full humanity.

2. *Teaching that shows respect for language, for argument, for the tools of thinking and reasoning and investigating and creating.* This is the learning of the disciplines of what used to be called "workmanship." I don't know of a better name. Every field and every discipline has something like this as part of it. My father left me a wooden trunk/tool chest that he made and the set of hand tools that fit in it. But along with, and more important than the tools themselves, he taught me how to use them and how to take care of them. I remember him showing me, then aged eight or nine, how to sharpen a plane blade and told me, "If you take good care of it, this blade should serve you your entire life." He showed me how to sweat a copper pipe joint and what it ought to look like when the job was well done. I still have that chest and those tools, many of them now over a hundred years old. Some of them are not now used much, some replaced by power tools, but all of them are still usable, and I'm proud to say, in good working order.

Cy Running, art professor at Concordia College, showed me how to stretch canvas, how to boil a pot of rabbit-skin sizing and size the canvas. I learned from him how to make a cartoon and "ponce" it onto the wall or canvas the work would finally be on. He was also very particular about how he cleaned and stored brushes, and this was part of our learning as well. He would frequently say, "Learn to respect the materials."

I do not work with physical tools and materials in the teaching of philosophy, like my father and Cy did in their work, but there is a dimension of workmanship that needs to be learned here as well. Words are our material, concepts and arguments and arguments our tools. It is important in philosophy that they be kept both clean and sharp, otherwise all kinds of intellectual messes can be made. I know a story, told about the American poet E. E. Cummings, but I have not been able to find the source for it in print. A young man came to see the poet at his house and begged him to give lessons in the writing of poetry. Cummings said he was not able to give such lessons but that he knew a book the young man might find helpful. Cummings told him that if he came back the following day he would give him a copy. The young man returned, full of enthusiasm, expecting a book of instructions. Cummings handed him a dictionary and then closed the door.

Part, perhaps a large part, of learning any art or discipline is learning to respect, even to love, the tools and the medium. For poets and for philosophers the medium is language, for chemists and biologists it is the apparatus of their laboratories, for painters the canvas and paints, etc. Learning to be stewards of and with these tools is an important dimension of learning.

Sometimes students are surprised that their essay grades reflect points deducted for lack of care in grammar, construction, as well as argument. They whine, "But this isn't an English composition class." What this shows me is that not everyone in the university they submit written work to is holding them to a high standard. Learning to write, and proof, and re-write is part of the workmanship of the academy, and it should be expected to all work students do.

3. *Teaching that is an induction into a community of discourse.* College education can be viewed as the training and induction of persons into a community of discourse. When students become part of that community they have to learn what is expected of them. Both for their own good and the good of the community created the expectations should be very high. When my own kids went off to begin college they were anxious about what would be expected of them, but very eager to find this out and to meet the challenge. One of my daughters remembers going to a recital the first week of her freshman year, where the senior students in music were asked to perform for the first-year students. She remembers being so impressed by the seniors' preparation, their presence, their professionalism. She came away thinking to herself, "Now I know what's expected of me. Now I know what I have to strive for." And she was excited by it, not put off by it. I think we should do something like that for all our incoming students, demonstrating for



them what a really good performance, or piece of lab work, or essay looks like, and what the critical standards are that it embodies. We should be saying to them, "Here's what studying X requires of you. Here are the critical standards we expect you to meet. We are training you to be full participants in a community that respects these standards and performs to this level." In the Lutheran tradition this attitude toward workmanship is connected to the idea of stewardship, which is, in turn, connected to vocation and a respect for the creation.

4. *Teaching that encourages student creativity.* Creativity is the natural partner of critical thinking. We will not be very creative if we always assume that there is one right answer or one right way to do things, particularly if we also assume that we know what the right answer and right way is. This is part of the reason we see children as creative; they are not yet burdened with knowing the right way, and so are able to think of others. As a consequence a good part of learning towards creativity needs to be de-constructive, an unlearning of things we have supposed have a kind of necessity about them.

I frequently teach a course on philosophy of religion and I like to begin this course by examining our assumptions about what religion is. I like to show some slides of Hellenic vases that picture nude males running, wrestling, throwing spears, discuss, etc. I ask students, "What's being pictured here?" The most common answer is "athletes training." But I can count on someone saying, "But why are they naked?" Someone else will then suggest this isn't athletics at all, but sexual goofing off. Then the question is usually raised about why such things would be preserved in a work of art? Some even suggest there's a kind of homosexual eroticism at work here. I usually ask, "Any other ideas?" There are seldom any. A long silence ensues. I then ask, "How about something religious? Is something religious taking place here?" They almost always dismiss the idea. What could possibly be religious about naked young men racing or wrestling? For most, such activities are the very antithesis of religiousness. The suggestion is shocking, to some even disgusting. I then show some slides I took at Delphi, Olympia, and Epidaurus, pointing out that all these important religious centers in the Hellenic world had running tracks and a stadium in which people could watch athletic contests, and that the pan-Hellenic games, precursor of the Olympics, always were also a religious celebration and a festival. Those old Hellenes had blended together things we normally keep very separate: religion, drama, the arts, athletics, and even a bit of "sexual goofing off." I then show some pictures of Sumo wrestlers, of Native American games and contests, and read the passage in Samuel that describes David dancing naked before the ark of the covenant.

The point of all this is not to shock students. That's easy enough to do. The point is to loosen up the gridlock that our categories often have on our thinking that keeps us from seeing, understanding, and imagining alternatives. I need that exercise as much as the students do. What happens in this dialogue is that we all come away with less rigid ways of thinking about the religious, but also less rigid ways of thinking about the athletics, about the human body, about spirituality, and about the way we, like those ancient Hellenes, celebrate human struggle, the *agon*, in our sports, the stories we tell in fiction, the movies and TV, and the arts. A de-construction of those categories allows us not only to see and understand many things about Hellenic culture, but also to see and understand many things about our own. A serious study of the religious dimensions of sports activities is thus made possible, and the running back pointing toward the heavens after scoring a touchdown takes on a different dimension of meaning. The creativity here is not in an artwork produced or a new theory devised but in a more flexible and more self-aware way of thinking about the world. After such a deconstruction I often ask myself, what other part of my way of thinking about the world actually limits my perception of it? Where else has a hardening of the categories taken place? Where else would we all benefit from a rethinking or perhaps an un-thinking of things?

Creativity is seldom enabled simply by a blank sheet of paper and the demand, "be creative." Herbert Kohl relates his experience getting young children to write poetry. He says that the blank sheet and the demand to write a poem will get nothing but a blank stare in response. What is required is a prompt that challenges with its peculiar mixture of particularity and openness. So he suggests it is better to start by saying, "Try a four line poem, not more than six words per line, and each line should have a color word in it." Or from a visual arts teacher I heard, "It doesn't do any good to say, 'Draw an interesting shape.' But its much more productive to say, 'See what interesting shapes get generated by the overlapping of thick capital letters.'" The latter gives the student less creative space to play in, but is a much better enabler of creativity.

Are there some areas of learning where creativity is inappropriate? I suppose there might be, if what one is supposed to learn is some established way of doing things, sorting things, naming things. There may be an importance in learning this way. Some people do have to pass standardized tests that demonstrate their mastery of such things. But it seems that after such things have been learned there is still the possibility of posing the questions, "Is there another way to do this?" Is there another way to name this? Is there another vocabulary with which to think this through?" Posing such questions loosens the grip that categories have on our minds and may move us toward a better way of doing things.

When I taught at Concordia College a friend of mine bought property in the hills just east of the Red River Valley and built a house there. One weekend I was helping him with some finishing work on it. While I was there many folks who lived in the area drove over to see what this "new place" looked like. I remember overhearing their comments: "look at the way these big windows look out on the woods on one side and the rolling hills on the other. What does our big window look out on? Our driveway. Why didn't we think of that?" The husband replied, "The picture window is always on the same side of the house as the front door. Everybody knows that." Of course the husband is right; 99% of houses have their biggest windows on their front-door side. But what his wife had been able to do was see the lack of necessity in this and the inappropriateness of it if the house was situated in the country, not a street in town, and situated where there were beautiful views to be seen from the house in other directions. Knowing that "this is the way it's always done" may be an advantage in some circumstances, but it may also be a terrible handicap in others.

Whether one is a student in art or music, psychology or physics, communications or philosophy, I believe there is occasion for creativity in all learning. It honors reality, honors the spirit of the learner, and makes teaching a whole lot more interesting. Alfred North Whitehead wrote:

The justification for a university is that it provides the connection between knowledge and the zest for life by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning. The tragedy of the world is that those who are imaginative have but slight experience, and those who are experienced have feeble imaginations .... The task of a university is to weld together imagination and experience.

The assumption of Whitehead's approach is that the old will provide the experience and the young will provide the imagination. But my experience is that the young are just as likely to lack imagination, to be thoroughly confirmed in the world's account of how things are, as old folks are. And sometimes the old are not particularly experienced either, or have learned little from the experiences they have had. It requires a particular attitude in both the old and the young, an attitude of openness that needs to be continually exercised, to make creativity possible. Yet this is what makes the academic life particularly attractive, that it is an adventure and all of us who are learners are embarked on it. I really cannot imagine teaching the same things, year in and year out, without the promise of learning something radically new. Curricular space and a community that honors creativity – both of these are as important to faculty as they are to students.

# SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION: MORE THAN JUST A COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT

**E**lliott Eisner suggests that schools have three types of curriculum; explicit, implicit and null. An explicit curriculum includes the texts, unit plans, lessons, teaching and learning activities that schools list as their subject or course offerings. He states that an implicit curriculum is the teaching that goes on because of the kind of place the school is. In this curriculum are those things that teach implicitly such as the patterns of decision making and the structure of the school day. The null curriculum teaches because it does not exist and includes all things in the school that are ignored or passed over. I believe this provides an excellent framework for reflecting on what is taught about social justice through each of these curriculums in Lutheran schools.

## The Explicit Curriculum

It is important for all educators to examine their explicit curriculum documents in terms of what they include and teach about social justice. What do the students in our school learn about social justice from the junior to senior years? The goal of such curriculum offerings is that students will develop from an awareness of a range of social issues to a concern for action. Educating for peace and justice involves methodology,

experiences and content. It cannot be crammed into a single unit or community service project. The learning needs to provide a comprehensive exploration of issues from the early years through to the senior years. Starting with issues that speak to students' own needs, eg, focussing on conflict resolution at home or how to cope with materialism or violence and moving towards focussing on a limited number of issues that enable students to delve into the causes of problems as well as data about the problems. Students need to help determine those issues that are studied. The content developed through the years will assist students to:

- explore the human consequences of their and other people's decisions
- be more critically aware of the gospel-culture contrasts in society
- be conscientious decision-makers. Students need to be encouraged to think for themselves, to see and evaluate alternative positions on various issues, to formulate their own questions and articulate clearly the reasons for their position
- explore why evil and injustice exists
- consider the biblical basis and church teaching for social justice. Students need to develop an awareness of social issues as they are placed in the context of the Christian faith
- develop an awareness of how social change takes place
- nurture their inner wholeness through regular moments of contemplation and stillness

Most research has shown that to bring about a change in

attitudes, knowledge has to be linked to some experience with representatives of different cultural and social groups. Students need a structure in which the values are actually lived and experienced and not just talked about. Direct personal encounters can be powerful learning experiences and assist students to overcome fears and stereotypes and provide a counter model to culture. Encounters might include:

- participating in peace and justice groups or in group actions where students are in regular contact and sharing with people who work for peace and justice
- hearing the experience of a hungry person or a victim of racism
- becoming part of pairing project with a group or mission such as Australian Lutheran World Service in the third world
- direct action needs to focus on local as well as global issues, however, local issues permit more concrete and personal actions.
- critical reflection needs to be a vital part of any social justice learning experience as it provides the opportunity for students to explore issues at greater depth. Our classrooms need to be places where critical reflection and discussion flourish.

## The Implicit Curriculum

Students will also learn about social justice through what they experience in the school environment. Explicit teaching about social justice will be undermined if students have little opportunity to be involved in decision making or if women do not hold positions of authority. [Ryan, Willmet Brennan]. Schools need to consider questions such as: In



*A community service visit by a student from Faith Lutheran Secondary School, Tanunda SA*

what way does our total Christian Education program witness to the importance of social justice and social action? How best can schools prepare teachers with the skills, knowledge and competencies so that they can work collaboratively with students to contribute to a socially just society?

## The Null Curriculum

Schools also need to consider what they do not teach as it may teach students as powerfully as what they do teach. Some choices can never be made because they are never considered in the school environment. It may be useful to discuss and survey students to consider what they believe the school communicates by what it does not teach, ignores and neglects.

Mike Middleton suggested at ACLE that social justice was an area for development in Lutheran schools. I believe it is vitally important for Lutheran schools to ensure that the total curriculum provides opportunities for working towards a vision of a more open and accepting society in which prejudice and injustice is recognised as unacceptable.

**Anne Dohnt**  
**Christian Studies**  
**Coordinator**



*Christian Living in the Community  
 Students from Faith Lutheran  
 Secondary School, Tanunda SA*

# VALUING INDIVIDUALS

RESOLVED that 'learning difficulty needs' be a high priority in the mission and ministry of Lutheran schooling in the LCA.  
1997 LCA General Synod, Croydon Vic

Through the attendance of this severely disabled child, other students within the school have learnt a great deal about disabilities, tolerance, love, and care. Indeed we have found that (these) students ... can add a dimension of breadth and depth to the educational life experiences and give more blessings that they receive.

Article by Elaine Nitschke in The Lutheran 22 November 1998

We respect individual gifts and differences ... Lutheran schools are caring communities where each individual is valued ... Our schools cater for a wide range of abilities. We ... provide programs for Gifted and Talented students and Special Education needs.  
BLS brochure 'What makes a Lutheran school distinctive?'

... taking an A student and getting them to achieve As is not as impressive as taking a C student and helping them produce Bs ... good education is not always measured by statistical comparisons and league ladders ... If life is like a box of chocolates, perhaps schools are like a bag of pumpkins. We can't judge their quality based on appearances alone. In a good bag, we have to look beyond the surface to find the best.

'Quality' by Richard Hauser - Headmaster's address to Good Shepherd Lutheran College, Noosa, Presentation Night 1997

Schooling should be socially just, so that ... students' outcomes are free from the effects of negative forms of discrimination based on sex, language, culture and ethnicity, religion or disability; and of differences arising from students' socio-economic background or geographic location.  
The Adelaide declaration on national goals for schooling in the Twenty-first century  
April 1999

These quotations make it very clear that Lutheran schools must take social justice issues seriously. They are a cloud of witnesses to the importance of valuing and affirming differences, and they summon us to work to this end to the best of our abilities within available resources. Will we hear Christ say to us 'When you showed patience to the ADD student, empathised with the aggrieved and stood up to the bully, you did it to me'?

This year my class celebrated its fortieth year reunion. As I renewed acquaintances with people, some of whom I had not seen for 30 or 40 years, I reflected on what they had done with their life. Who would have guessed the diversity of stories that were told that weekend? The question I kept asking was how does one judge success. Was it achieved by the:

- professors of world renown
- inventor honoured by the government
- person who sat with his wife through her last fight with cancer
- courageous conscript who died in Vietnam
- mother who nurtured six children

The list went on as each shared their story. Individual differences were affirmed and concern shown for those whose lot had not been easy. It would have been patently unfair if one person was not listened to or told that their story was useless.

Specifically, through its schools the Lutheran Church of Australia offers a program of Christian education which ... strives for excellence in the development and creative use by all students of their God-given gifts. The Lutheran school is committed to serving its students by providing quality education which ... develops their God-given abilities as fully as possible.  
The LCA and its Schools

A feature of Lutheran schools is valuing and striving for excellence in education. Our students are empowered and inspired to achieve beyond what they thought they were capable. However there can be a genuine tension between valuing excellence and honouring meritorious achievement, and at the same time, being inclusive and praising what is seemingly of little value.

Social justice means valuing differences and affirming the dignity of each individual. Christ has given us many examples through the widow's mite, the Good Samaritan, Zacchaeus, and the lost sheep. We are above all motivated by his love for each one of us. If he did not have a social justice policy he could not possibly have included us and certainly we would have had no claim to make on him. It is because of his creative and redemptive work that we are to value all people and it is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we can respond to the unique individuals in his creation.

Because of all of this, I wish that:

- Lutheran schools sent as many students on community service projects to Papua New Guinea, Indonesia or our Aboriginal communities as go on school visits to the USA or New Zealand
- bullying was not the issue it is in too many of our schools and that there was a zero tolerance policy of this evil
- all schools had meaningful grievance procedures so that the disempowered staff, student or parent was always heard
- somewhere a group of Lutheran schools worked

Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.  
Matthew 25:40

together to form a well resourced unit for students with severe special learning needs

- Australian Lutheran World Service was regarded as a major focus for school community service fund raising projects and through it our students developed a genuine appreciation of, and sensitivity to, global poverty and the extensive needs of by far the majority of the world's population
- Lutheran schools had a special emphasis on acknowledging and appreciating the value of Aboriginal cultures to Australian society and helped their students contribute to genuine reconciliation
- the additional funding that most of our schools will receive through SES funding will be spent to make them more accessible through lower fees or fee relief.

I did not want to write this article and felt that anything that I wrote would be bland and full of motherhood statements. However, my secretary simply put before me the documents from which the quotations on this page come and said that this is important. We certainly have made some pretty powerful affirmations in our documents and writings as educators. Our rhetoric is clear. Now it is time for action.

I praise God for the good work that is being done in Lutheran schools through genuine and spontaneous response to needs. It is not easy to balance survival as a school with healthy enrolments and a positive image in the community, whilst at the same time, ministering to those whom no one else wants, or who will place a seemingly unrealistic burden on limited resources. However, social justice must be more than words.

Adrienne Jericho  
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