

Core Content

1. The two ways God cares

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

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

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

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

Luther developed this doctrine however 'as a reaction to a widespread belief at the time of the reformation that Christians should retreat from the world' (Lockwood, 1993: p.10). Some Christians regarded anything secular as under Satan's domain and the physical world and body as negative. They said that human affairs were worldly and therefore not 'of God'. Some fifteenth century Protestants even felt that, because their rulers were secular they should be violently overthrown, that the only

righteous government is a Christian one, ordained and ruled by the church (a theocracy). This extreme approach was not peaceful but hostile and violent.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- children for the future.
3. **Work.** This gift is for the economic welfare and fair treatment of all people. It is never work for work's sake, but for the service of humanity as a whole.
 4. **Religion.** Religion is a universal phenomenon. Each believer (of whatever religion) has rights and responsibilities towards their deity and fellow humans. In so far as religions reflect justice, goodness and peace, they are acting in God's service.

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

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

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

God's specific care for the redeemed community has distinctive features. In God's specific care

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

In this area of care, the gospel is truly defined. It is the good news that through Jesus there is justification. Faith alone recognises and accepts this act of God's mercy. Christ is truly the sacrificial

shepherd and servant of this community and calls the community to a life of sacrifice and service. The people are justified, yet sinful. They are saved and therefore they serve others. The solution to guilt and sin is provided. The emphasis is not on what's fair or just from the human perspective, as in the area of God's general care, but on mercy and grace. All are children of the new covenant. There is no discrimination or class distinction; all are invited into this covenant of grace.

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

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

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

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2. Implications for education of the two ways God cares

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

There is no aspect of school life which can be regarded as unimportant or lacking value or not really Christian. Consider each of these activities:

- a child care assistant changes a nappy;
- a maths teacher marks a test paper;
- a preschool director interviews a prospective parent;
- a principal informs a student that he has been expelled;

- a secondary student helps a Year One 'buddy' to tie a shoelace;
- a netball coach supervises a practice drill;
- a teacher introduces a new unit of work in Geography;
- a receptionist reassures a concerned parent.

All of these activities are within God's general care for the world through the school. All of them have value. God uses all contributions and all contributors to care for his world. The same can be said of what happens in a government school.

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

(b) The Gospel is the heart of the school

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

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

(c) These two ways in which God cares are to be held in creative tension in the school

Lutheran schools as schools need to be places through which God expresses his general care for the world. Lutheran schools as schools of the LCA also need to be instruments of God's specific care.

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

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

It can be helpful to see the theology of creation as located within the general care of God. To grasp this theology of creation is, among other things, to

understand something of how God provides for all people through the creation and how people are to respond to that gift. In the context of ecological crisis, the theology of creation can play an important role in educating students for an increased awareness and appreciation of the Christian views about creation and an increased commitment to caring for it.

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

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

The Church over the past centuries has often

- openly or tacitly supported an abusive exploitation of the environment, as if it were what God commanded when he told the first man and woman to 'subdue the earth and fill it' (Genesis 2:28).
- neglected to promote the full implications of the doctrine of creation by focusing on the salvation of the individual and the Christian community.

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

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

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

(a) The whole universe belongs to God, who created and sustains it

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

The fact that God is creator and sustainer is not a concept unique to Christianity. Other religions, and especially Aboriginal religions, are deeply spiritual in their attitude toward and teaching about the universe. The Greek and Christian understanding of

creation have often been too closely associated with mechanistic world views. The theist idea was that God created the universe and then retreated while the universe sustained itself in predictable and absolute ways. This view which puts God 'at a distance' and 'above all' was sometimes a feature in Christian education. Post-Newtonian science has generally viewed the universe in a more relative, and less deterministic, way. Christian theologians now speak of God being totally and actively involved in all of creation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jesus taught respect and care for all creatures. No sparrow falls without God's knowledge (Matthew 10:29). Yet the Bible informs us that humans have a value in God's eyes which is on a different level from the value God places on all his creatures. Creatures are not the same as humans in every way and such an emphasis is not biblical and can lead to narrow sectional pressures being exerted. There is a teaching called 'creation spirituality' which has a

tendency to blur the distinction between creature and Creator. Eastern religious mysticism and some medieval Christian mysticism seem to display elements of this form of pantheism (cf New Age philosophy). Meditation and reflection are important, but pantheism and idolatry are not approved by biblical teaching (Rankin, 1992: pp. 98-105).

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

(d) Creation suffers from the effects of human evil

It is easy to see the pain and disharmony in creation. This does not include the pain inflicted by humans (although that is related to it), rather we mean that there are problems and imperfections in creation. Sometimes nature can be violent. Creatures inflict pain on each other. There are natural disasters that cause destruction. Weeds, droughts, vermin and fires are just examples of the fact that the natural world is no utopia. There is a groaning of creation (Romans 8: 21,22). There is pain. There is even a sense in which, since the original fall of humans, creation shares the pallor of sin (Genesis 2). The imperfect creation then, will also be healed and saved (like humans). This 'suffering creation' introduces us to the next aspect of creation theology.

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

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

The session about the theology of the cross referred to the suffering Christ in relation to human sin and pain. However, this crucified Lord also identifies with the suffering of creation, and with the universal pain and imperfection of the world. Jesus often used stories from nature to demonstrate the characteristics of his kingdom. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). Jesus was despised and rejected. He suffered in pain, like humans and creation suffer in pain (Romans 8).

The sacraments are also signs that God identifies, through Christ, with the natural world. Water, bread and the fruit of the vine were used as elements of rebirth and renewal. The suffering servant reminds us of his forgiveness and real presence through the basic elements of bread, wine and water. Care about creation implies service to Christ, through whom all is created. It is a moral imperative and for Christians a response to the gift of God through Christ. It is a gospel response, based on life, since baptism, in communion with Christ.

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

Core Content

4. Implications for education of the theology of creation

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

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

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

(a) The covenant people have a special role to participate with God in caring for creation

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

Care for creation is an issue for discussion in the

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

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

(b) Christ who became part of creation, frees us to investigate and restore creation

Lutheran schools do not promote the 'God of the gaps' view, or the 'divine watchmaker' concept. Both of these tend to see God as removed from the universe. The 'gap' idea claims that there must be a God because science does not have all the answers. A variation of the 'God-in-gaps' is the view that there must be a God because of the 'complexity' of the natural world, e.g. the wonder of the brain, eye, or other complex natural features. This 'only-God-could-have-done-that' idea is precarious if only because modern technologies have made great advances in explaining what were formerly considered 'miraculous' features of the world. More significantly, such views are also theologically flawed and dangerous because:

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

The compatibility of science and religion are widely recognised within the science community, as is the

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

All subjects and many other areas of school life provide opportunities to deepen and expand a knowledge of God's creation. The gospel of Christ

- releases Christians to get involved in God's world;
- encourages Christians to be devoted in; learning, discovering and understanding the natural world;
- recognises and values the world.

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

If God is involved in sustaining the universe, then there is no aspect of it that we should not explore. The school, then, has a moral and theological responsibility concerning creation and education. The school also has the responsibility to practice Lutheran theology in its daily operations, in every subject, in each classroom and all areas of school life. Schools need to:

- reflect creation concerns in the curriculum;
- develop informed students, willing to care and manage God's creation in practical and permanent ways. Students should be challenged to live in ways that reflect the value of life and creation;
- capture the consciousness of students, ignite imagination and inspire commitment to action.

(c) There is no simple separation between Christ's and Satan's areas of activity

Lutheran schools will not attempt to make a simple separation between Christ's and Satan's areas of operation. Satan seeks to denigrate and destroy the peace and confidence that comes through Christ. Christ enters Satan's activity to expel Satan and establish God's rule instead. Christ exists in the

areas where Satan works. Satan exists in Christ's world and is active even among the covenant people, but Christ is stronger than Satan is. Through Christ the powers of evil have been overcome. Jesus Christ is the victorious Lord who is with us.

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Lutheran Church of Australia

**THE LUTHERAN SCHOOL
AS A PLACE OF MINISTRY AND MISSION**

Statement of principles

1. The Lutheran school is a place of education. It is registered by the state to carry out this task. The LCA expects that each school will carry out its educational charter to the best of its ability. To that end the school appoints staff (Lutheran and other Christians) to enable it to fulfil its responsibility of providing quality education. The Lutheran school as school, therefore, works in the Kingdom of the Left.¹
2. The Australian government allows churches to own and run schools. The Lutheran school is a school; at the same time, it is a school of the LCA. As such the LCA expects the Word of God with the gospel of Christ at its heart to inform all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities of the school. It is expected that the principal of a Lutheran school is a practising member of the LCA and is the 'spiritual' head of the school. The LCA expects that pastors will be called to exercise a ministry of Word and sacrament within the school. Therefore, according to LCA teaching, the church is also in the school (Augsburg Confession, Article VII).
3. The LCA is a church in mission. Thus the Lutheran school at the same time as it works in the Kingdom of the Left is also working in the Kingdom of the Right. Young men and women and staff are challenged regularly with the gospel and the Spirit does his work, as some are encouraged in their faith and others are brought to faith.
4. When the LCA came into being, the situation within which Lutheran schools now operate was never envisaged and the extensive development of Lutheran schools was not foreseen. The Lutheran school was seen as an auxiliary of the congregation and this view is embedded within the constitution. However, many Lutheran schools have limited connection to a congregation and, vice versa, many congregations have little or no connection to Lutheran schools in their midst. There is no longer a close connection in some congregation-school relationships. In that light, how do we address the reality that the Word is doing its work, young men and women are coming to faith within the school but feel little or no connection to a congregation of the LCA. There is a need not only to introduce young people to Christ but also to a local congregation.

The LCA Statement *The LCA and Its Schools* describes schools 'as an integral part of the mission of the church'. The school's mission field is 'the world of the school'. For mission to occur, the gospel must be proclaimed with a view to conversion (evangelistic preaching); baptism must be administered; and the Lord's Supper will be available for the health of the baptised. Hence the College of Presidents took the decision in the mid 1990s that pastors in the school may administer the sacrament of Baptism and may provide the sacrament of Holy Communion responsibly within the school.

Worship involving Word and sacrament should be distinguished from daily school devotions. The former is voluntary, a gospel invitation; the latter might well be compulsory. This distinction is in turn linked to a changing role for school pastors. They are increasingly called to minister to the families of students especially in sickness and tragedy. They are increasingly asked to preside at weddings of old scholars and then baptisms. Therefore, many school pastors no longer have a significant teaching load within the curriculum of the

school. Rather they function as a pastor to the 'world of the school' – to principal and staff, to students and their families and to old scholars and their families.

5. *The LCA and Its Schools* statement notes the 'spiritual task of the principal' and the importance of the school pastor functioning as a 'pastor' within the school and as such exercising a ministry of Word and sacrament. We rightly have some difficulty with the idea of the school as a 'faith community' but our difficulty with that terminology dare not be the means of avoiding the reality that in many instances there is a worshipping community within the Lutheran school.

Pastors in the LCA continue to serve worshipping communities where a group of people in a locality are gathered from time to time to hear the Word and to receive the sacraments. This grouping of people is not ready to organise itself into a constituted congregation of the LCA. Nonetheless, such groups are part of the people of God, they hear the Word and receive the sacraments, they grow in their faith and they serve as Christians in the world. They are recognised by the Church as part of the Church. They may be 'on the way towards constitutional membership'. Worshipping communities within school communities fit into this situation.

6. The current context of the Lutheran school requires us to find ways to keep contact with those within school worshipping communities when their connection to the school is no longer relevant. We also need to provide support and supervision for those who lead these communities (particularly in the areas of worship and communion practice, pastoral decision making, hymnody).

Implications for practice

A number of implications and responsibilities result from the principles stated above and the following are highlighted:

1. LCA

- affirms the fact that its work is undertaken in and through schools by appropriate constitutional and pastoral/doctrinal statements and rites,
- ensures that there is an intentional program of spiritual formation for all staff and principals,
- provides support and oversight for school pastors.

2. Congregations

- support neighbouring schools,
- are involved in and committed to ministry which enables transition from a worshipping school community to a local worshipping community

3. ALC

- prepares pastors who can minister in the mission field that is the school,
- provides resources and courses in support of spiritual and vocational formation of principals and school staff.

4. School governance

- ensures that the school operates in accordance with LCA policies, including *The LCA and Its Schools*, *The role of the pastor in the Lutheran school*, and *Statement on school worship*,
- is required to have a membership that is overwhelmingly Lutheran so that there is total commitment to the LCA's aims for its schools.

5. Principals

- act as spiritual leaders of the school,
- understand the LCA's expectations of its schools through an intentional formation program,
- must be active members of the LCA
- ensure that there is a core of Lutheran and other Christian staff in the school for the sake of Christian witness.

6. School pastors

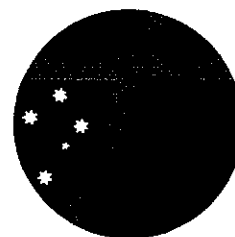
- focus on supporting the Christian witness of staff and students in the school,
- equip principal, staff and Christian students for their witness and ministry through prayer, Word and sacraments,
- are involved in the discipling and baptism of those who come to faith,
- shepherd the disciples into permanent faith communities.

7. Staff

- are affirmed by the LCA as being involved in important ministry,
- understand the ethos and identity of Lutheran schools,
- are sustained for their Christian witness in the school by a ministry of Word and sacrament.

¹ In Lutheran theology, the way in which God operates in the world is described through the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms. He works through either the Left Kingdom (through law, reason, order, human institutions), or the Right Kingdom (through gospel, sacraments, forgiveness, church as a worshipping and witnessing community).

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AUSTRALIA AND ITS SCHOOLS



1. The Lutheran School

- 1.1 The Lutheran Church of Australia (hereafter called 'the church') has a variety of agencies through which it carries out its ministry and mission to the people of Australia and New Zealand.
- 1.2 One such agency is the Lutheran school. The church, through its congregations and districts, owns and operates kindergartens, primary schools, and secondary schools. It does this in order to make available to its members and to others in the community a formal education in which the gospel of Jesus Christ informs all learning and teaching, all human relationships, and all activities in the school.

Thus through its schools the church deliberately and intentionally bears Christian witness to students, parents, teachers, friends and all who make up the world of the school.

- 1.3 Specifically, through its schools the church offers a program of Christian education which
- serves students, parents, the church, the community, and the government, by providing a quality education for the whole person
 - strives for excellence in the development and creative use by all students of their God-given gifts
 - equips students for a life of service to God in the church and the community
 - provides an alternative to a secular, humanistic philosophy and practice of education
 - includes, as a core part of the program, a Christian Studies curriculum which has been developed deliberately and consciously from the perspective of what the Lutheran church believes and teaches
 - involves the school community in regular Christian worship.

2. The Lutheran school and education

- 2:1 The Lutheran school is committed to serving its students by providing quality education which meets the requirements of the state. Such quality education also responds to the needs of students and develops their God-given abilities as fully as possible within the resource limits of the school community.
- 2:2 The principal functions as educational leader in the school. He or she is responsible to the governing council for the total program of the school.
- 2:3 The Lutheran school operates from an underlying holistic world view. All learning and teaching is integrated into this world view, which recognises the role in education of both God's revelation and human reason.

3. The Lutheran school and worship

- 3:1 The Lutheran church confesses that worship of God is central to the life of the people of God in mission to the world of the school. Within the school such worship may be
- (a) public worship by the faithful, involving the ministry of word and sacraments. This worship is open to all and is organised to meet the needs of the school and of the wider community. Or it may be
 - (b) school or class devotional exercises which are part of the regular program of the whole school and which in different ways involve all students and staff.
- 3:2 The church urges and encourages schools and local congregations to work together in worship and mission in the world of the school.
- The school pastor serves as worship leader. He oversees and encourages staff, students, and others as they serve as leaders in class and school devotions. He feeds and equips the people of God for service and leads them in mission.
 - Christian principals, teachers, and other staff are key persons in ministry and mission to the world of the school. They participate in worship and lead it when appropriate. They model the Christian lifestyle and uphold Christian values.
 - The school worshipping community works in mission together with surrounding congregations, either as a distinct worshipping group or as an extension of a local congregation.

4. The Lutheran school and the responsibilities of the Lutheran Church of Australia

The church commits itself to the promotion and support of its schools by

- assisting and encouraging congregations, associations, and districts to provide for the Christian education of members, in keeping with the command of Christ
- providing means and opportunity for the professional theological pre-service and in-service education of teachers
- encouraging congregations and parishes to follow up and minister to the contacts made in the wider community by the school, and to involve the members of the school community in the ministry and mission of the congregation
- working with the schools to help them realise their full potential as mission and nurturing agencies of the church.

5. The Lutheran school and the responsibilities of governing councils and principals

The church expects the governing councils and principals of its schools to

- staff its schools with skilled and registered educators who are able to uphold the teachings of the church and model the Christian lifestyle. In the first instance it seeks to use the services of active members of the church. Beyond that, the church seeks to staff its schools with active Christians from other denominations who are willing to uphold Lutheran teachings
- support and encourage in-service training — including theological training — for the professional development of teachers
- promote the purpose of the school in the local congregation, zone, or district
- help local congregation, zone, or district to use the school as a means of establishing and maintaining contact with the wider community
- actively pursue every opportunity for maximising the school's effectiveness as a mission agency of the church

6. The Lutheran school and parents

The church acknowledges that parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. Through its schools, therefore, the church seeks to support parents in the fulfilment of this responsibility to their children. Furthermore, the church, through its schools, offers to all parents the option of a Christian education for their children.

7. The Lutheran school and the government

- 7:1 The church acknowledges that the state has accepted responsibility for providing schooling for all its citizens. This education is compulsory, free, and secular in its orientation.
- 7:2 The church further acknowledges that the government permits non-government authorities, such as the churches, to operate schools, provided that they meet certain government-determined criteria, such as curriculum and health and safety requirements.
- 7:3 The church will continue to own and operate its schools in accordance with government requirements, provided that meeting these requirements does not bring the church into conflict with the word of God and the teachings of the church.
- 7:4 The church will continue to accept financial assistance from the government under conditions determined by the government from time to time, provided that the teachings of the church are in no way or at any time compromised.

KEY IDEA 3: CHRISTIANS HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY IN AND FOR THE WORLD

Since the God to whom the Christian belongs is the same God to whom all the earth, all domestic, political, and economic life belongs, the Christian has no reason to withdraw from the world of the world — either out of timidity or out of aloofness — but every reason to make the world's work his own, as a worker together with God. Thus as the Christian awaits the new age he is already busy with its kind of life, here and now.

(Schnabel: *Lutheran Education* 98 (1963), 448)

HUMAN BEINGS AS GOD'S STEWARDS IN THE WORLD

Human beings are created 'in the image of God' (Gen 1:27). Part of what is understood by this is that human beings function as God's representatives in the world and are accountable to God for the care and protection of all of God's creation, human beings, the animals and the natural and humanly constructed environments (cf **CL1**).

Care and protection of the world

Although human beings as God's stewards were given responsibility to 'rule over', 'subdue', and 'have dominion over' God's creation (Gen 1:28), they were also commanded to 'work and take care of' and 'till and keep' it (Gen 2:15). This means that they cannot simply use or abuse God's creation for their own benefit, but are to care for and protect what God has entrusted to them (cf **CL1**).

Human beings are also invited by God to share in the joy of creation (eg Ps 104). Not only are they urged to enjoy creation, but also to join in praising God with and on behalf of creation (eg Pss 19:1-6; 148).

The impact of human sinfulness

Sin has destroyed the original harmony and perfection of God's world (cf **CL1**). This has impacted on all relationships within creation (Gen 3:14-19). Creation now waits to 'be set free from its bondage' under which it 'has been groaning' (Rom 8:18-23). Human beings continue to add to the suffering of creation through their sinful actions, leading to pollution of the environment, land degradation, the loss of endangered species, and the increasing ecological crisis.

People also add to the suffering of others through their actions. The Bible speaks out against those who exploit others, mistreat others, use others for their own purposes, and show lack of care and concern for others in their suffering and difficulties (eg Isa 3:14-15; Jer 5:26-28; Amos 8:1-7). Jesus' teaching about the last judgment shows how important he regarded the care and compassion shown to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the prisoner: 'just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me' (Matt 25:40). 'Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful' (Luke 6:36).

People may also cause suffering for themselves through their own actions (eg substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, unwillingness to forgive, etc). While Jesus was quick to point out the dangerous fallacy of trying to link specific cases of suffering to particular causes (John 9:1-3), people do contribute to their own suffering through actions which ignore the boundaries God has provided for human protection in his law. The ten commandments, for example, indicate situations which people may need to address in their own lives to deal with circumstances of their own suffering.

The Old Testament teaching on 'wisdom' and 'foolishness' is also helpful here (cf Proverbs). God, who created order out of chaos to bring the world into being, still preserves and sustains that creation. It is God who has provided the framework in which creation operates, and God's design directs and controls that creation. Wisdom grows from recognising the patterns God has incorporated into his creation and from living in harmony with God's will for creation. Knowledge of God, and the knowledge which God gives also through the gift of reason, provide the context in which wisdom develops: 'the Lord gives wisdom; and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding' (Prov 2:6). Only the 'fool' does not recognise God and the boundaries which he has set (Pss 14:1; 53:1).

THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

Theology of the cross provides the motivation for a Christian response to situations and circumstances in the world (cf **CL2**). In becoming a human being, Jesus Christ identified with people in their weakness and suffering. He still does so. While the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of the world was 'once for all' (Heb 10:10,14), nevertheless Jesus continues to suffer with his suffering people. Hymn 761 (Lutheran Hymnal with Supplement) expresses this in verse 4:

In every insult, rift, and war,
where colour, scorn, or wealth divide,
he [Christ] suffers still, yet loves the more,
and lives, though ever crucified.

Christ asks Christians to join with him in identifying with those who are suffering and defenceless. He also empowers them through the Holy Spirit. Christians who have experienced forgiveness and reconciliation through the cross of Christ will also seek to take that forgiveness and reconciliation into the world also in the day-to-day circumstances of life, exploring the relationship of justification and justice.

THE TWO HANDS OF GOD — JUSTICE AND MERCY

Lutheran theology speaks about God operating in the world using 'two hands' in order to deal with the problem of sin and evil. One 'hand' (the 'left hand') sees God working with the law in the realm of the state in order to maintain peace and good order and keep sin and evil in check. This is the realm of justice, through which God shows his love and care for the world. The other 'hand' (the 'right hand') sees God operating through the church in the world with the gospel of forgiveness. This is the realm of mercy. God's 'left hand work' is sometimes seen as his 'alien work', because God's nature is to forgive, his 'proper work' (his 'right hand work').

Although Christians are concerned with the work of God's 'right hand' in spreading the good news of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, Christians are also involved in God's 'left hand' work. They are involved in the 'left hand kingdom' as a catalyst for social justice, demonstrating the desire to help create 'shalom', peace, and wholeness, and using the law ('political use') to protect and preserve God's creation and help it to function in the way God wants it to. This is part of their 'vocation' as Christians (cf CL2).

Peace and justice

Establishing and maintaining peace and justice in the world is the concern of all people, not only Christians. However, Christians have a particular responsibility and motivation for this which flows from the gospel, which proclaims Jesus Christ as the one who has brought peace into the broken world. He is the 'Prince of Peace' (Isa 9:6) through whom we are reconciled to God and to one another. Through his Holy Spirit, Christians are empowered to work for peace and reconciliation with all people. The gospel is the power that can change human nature, so that peace, reconciliation and justice become realities.

Peace ('shalom') does not simply mean the absence of war (although it includes that). It relates to the total wellbeing and 'wholeness' of every person. Justice includes upholding the rights of every individual person. It recognises the fundamental dignity of all human beings as those who have been created and redeemed by God.

Christian social welfare

The work of Christians in social welfare, for example, grows out of the 'right hand' work of God in the church, but is developed in partnership with governments and other charitable organisations. In this way God operates in the world through both Christians and non-Christians as they function as 'God's hands', acting justly and compassionately for the good of all.

Through the ministry of caring, Christians can make incarnate God's message of love in Christ. Care is offered graciously and unconditionally because the neighbour is in need of care and support, in the same way that the gospel is proclaimed 'without strings attached'.

A prophetic role

Christians need to exercise a prophetic role in society, pointing out specific sins of a society and nation, opposing social trends or proposed legislation, and calling society to repentance.

Speak out for those who cannot speak,
for the rights of all the destitute,
Speak out, judge righteously,
defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Prov 31:8-9)

Christians need to become aware of sin as a social and systemic evil as well as a personal reality. Injustice becomes entrenched in structures and systems which oppress people and violate creation rather than serve them. While Christians are to respect and obey proper authority, there may be cases where those in power enact laws which support or practise obvious injustice. In such cases, Christians are called on to 'obey God rather than human beings' (Acts 4:19).

Some issues and questions for discussion and reflection:

- In what ways does the Lutheran school promote education for social consciousness?
 - How do Lutheran schools develop an awareness of and sensitivity to suffering in the world and help students to identify with the weak, the vulnerable, and the suffering?
 - Should any student be excluded from a Lutheran school because they cannot afford the fees?
 - How can a school administrator help to deal with a teacher who is struggling to reach an acceptable level of competence? How can a teacher deal with a struggling student?
 - How can students be helped to deal with suffering which relates to circumstances under their own control (eg substance abuse)?
 - In what way is the concept of God's 'two hands' useful in helping members of the school community, whether they are Christians or not, understand their responsibility for promoting and working for social justice in the world?
 - How do we see the relationship between 'justification' and 'justice'?
 - What role does the Lutheran school have in the social welfare ministry of the church?
 - In what ways can Lutheran schools exercise a prophetic role in the field of education generally?
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Lutheran Education Australia Conference

"Cross Currents: Charting a Course in a Sea of Diversity"

Global Challenges and Currents in Contemporary Society

Keynote Address by

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko

General Secretary, The Lutheran World Federation, Geneva

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, I am pleased to be once again in Australia since my previous two visits in the years 1996 and 2000. In addition to providing me with an excellent excuse to visit your country again, I consider it an honour and a privilege to address this important conference of Lutheran Education Australia. The long history of Lutheran education in Australia and its growing role in the formation of the young people of this nation is something to be proud of. On behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, I wish to acknowledge and affirm this important Lutheran contribution geared towards the building of a 'good or decent society' in our global village currently in so much need of healing.

The Theme: "Cross Currents: Charting a Course in a Sea of Diversity"

The theme chosen for this conference is both timely, and of critical importance. It presents, in my view, the central challenge for this generation. It appropriately describes the context in which we live and work as a 'sea of diversity', therefore implying that navigation through this 'sea of diversity' to our intended destination is impeded by countless and complex 'cross-currents'. Since the conference theme does not spell out the intended destination to be reached through the charting of this course, I have bestowed upon myself the liberty to name such a destination.

For me, one of the basic and fundamental purposes of education and educational institutions in the 21st century is the building of a 'good society' through the difficult process of transforming the 'human race' into a 'human family'. It goes without saying that those responsible for the education of our children and youth will have a transformative influence on whether and how this objective is reached.

Globalization, and the 'Sea of Diversity'

The context from which the 'good society' must be built is indeed a 'sea of diversity'. Through the processes of globalization many of us have come into closer contact with a far larger sample of that diversity than was the case in previous period of human history. Increasing international travel and trade, immigration and other population flows, and especially the advances in communication technology since the mid-1990s, have widened our view of the world. In our global village, we can now see a lot more of our neighbours than before, even if we do so through opaque glass walls that give us a glimpse of each other but still prevent us from meeting. For the church, this means that people of those nations whom we loved and cared for to the extent that we sent missionary pastors, medical personnel and teachers, are now waiting for our love and care across the street or in the refugee camps within our national borders.

In this connection let us not forget that the church has always defined itself as a supra-national entity – as a global community that transcends all political, ethnic, tribal and other human

boundaries. In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul unequivocally says, "There is neither Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

And yet, despite the subscription to this globalized self-understanding the Church has for much of her history tended to reduce herself to separate nationalist entities. Have we not seen and have we not been part of the church structures that divide the body of Christ along the lines of self-imposed boundaries? In this regard it is of paramount importance to note that the formation of a Christian world communion such as the Lutheran World Federation results from the realization that most of the national and historical differences among the various Lutheran churches are not communion dividing.

Since its formation in 1947, the Lutheran World Federation has moved beyond the recognition of mere commonalities, to defining itself as a communion of churches, now numbering 138 in 77 countries, of approximately 65 million people around the world. In this communion, churches from different cultures, with different histories and traditions, different liturgies and spiritualities, (except a few) are joined together in altar and pulpit fellowship. This is a significant shift in our ecclesiology - self-understanding. And the effect that this shift has on our approach to the challenge of diversity, and our response to human suffering, is (or should be) fundamental. Our responses must then be grounded in our oneness in Christ – and in compassion, rather than mere sympathy.

And yet, on one hand, we cannot underestimate the fear and uncertainty that results from diversity. Those who fear the loss of their identity have sometimes reacted in negative, extreme or even violent ways. This fear, and the radical re-assertion of identity, is at the core of some of the main global challenges confronting us today, and which I will discuss in more detail later.

Charting an Inclusive Course

Let me now turn to the objective towards which we strive in this 'sea of diversity': the unity of the human family, and the building of a 'good society'. Central to the Biblical message is the belief that every human being is created in the image of God and that through the Christ event we are made acceptable before God. Therefore the exclusion of anyone on the basis of gender, race, colour, nationality, class, language, religion, political opinion or any other basis offends against the image of God in that person.

Because diversity is often difficult to deal with, inclusiveness does not come naturally or easily to us. Cultural and historical factors often impede our capacity to accept and tolerate. Tolerance has its limits, of course, in the case of actions that harm others. But acceptance of the person is nonetheless a calling that derives from very fundamental faith principles. The alternative - exclusion and isolation - is clearly not a Christ-like response to human diversity.

Cross Currents: Exclusion and Isolation

Despite this, exclusion and isolation has all too frequently marked our dealings with each other, both in the past and present. For example, the founders of the Lutheran church in Australia left the security of their European homeland to escape a situation in which political pressure left no space for diversity in religious practice. They came to Australia following a vision of a 'good society' in which their religious freedom would be assured. In this respect, they had much in common with the 'Pilgrim Fathers' (and Mothers) in what is now the United States of America.

At the same time, the intolerance they faced at home led them to a choice that was by definition a closed and exclusive one. It excluded those from whom they had separated in

their original homelands who did not, in their view, share the pure unadulterated truth of the faith. It was an act of isolationism from the diverse and difficult reality of the church and the world. This dilemma and the heritage it created continue to have great impact on our psychologies and ecclesiologies even today.

Cross Currents: Immigrant Societies and Indigenous Peoples

The immigrant societies that these pioneers founded or joined -in both Australia and the United States -were established at the expense of the indigenous peoples of the 'New World'. The relationship between such immigrant societies and the indigenous peoples of the land is a matter that remains as a key issue for the construction of a 'good society'.

From the little that I know of Lutheran mission in Australia, I have the impression that the Lutheran missionaries to the Aboriginal peoples of this land were culturally sensitive. At least the Good News was brought to the people in their own languages, unlike in some other places such as in my own continent Africa, where cultural and linguistic assimilation preceded the preaching of the Gospel. I do not doubt that the translation of the Scriptures into numerous Aboriginal languages has helped to preserve some of those languages and cultures from extinction.

At the same time, as in all other places where indigenous peoples are still struggling for recognition and rights, there is unfinished business between the 'immigrant society' of majority Australia and its indigenous hosts. The enormity of the gap in health, education and living standards between Aboriginal people and majority Australia is a sufficient indictment by itself. A 'good society' cannot accept this situation. But neither can the solution be imposed, or achieved by money alone. For peoples that emphasize spirituality as strongly as indigenous peoples do, material solutions will not suffice. Attitudes must be transformed, in both the majority population and indigenous populations, to accept the capacity and responsibility of indigenous peoples for self-determination and self-reliance.

This is not a uniquely Australian problem. The same or similar issues are still to be confronted in reaching a just accommodation with communities as diverse as the First Nations of the USA and Canada, the indigenous peoples of Latin America, the Sami of the Nordic region, the San of Southern Africa and the Tribals of India. The Tenth Assembly of the LWF, which was held in Winnipeg, Canada, in July 2003, included a strong focus on indigenous questions. Within the LWF family, there are many experiences and a great deal of expertise to share. It will be our task in the years ahead to provide forums and processes in which this sharing can take place.

Cross Currents: Poverty, Economic Globalization and the Growing Gap between Rich and Poor

Poverty, that original social concern of the church, continues to be an overwhelming source of division and despair in the world. Poverty persists in our societies as much as the result of discrimination and exclusion, as of economic deprivation. The poor are excluded because they are poor, and this exclusion perpetuates and institutionalizes their poverty.

Once upon a time economic globalization was believed to have the potential to lift unprecedented numbers of people out of poverty. However, the outcomes of trade and financial liberalization in many parts of the world have been deeply ambiguous when judged according to standards of justice and ethics. Today, the global market is ever more clearly seen as an engine for the creation of even greater wealth for the wealthy, and a closed door to the poor and 'un-competitive'. The era of economic globalization has been an era of a rapidly growing gulf between the rich and the poor. Those who have been excluded by this process – the unemployed, the homeless, the destitute – are increasingly visible in almost all of the countries I have visited, both in the developing and the developed world.

The 'good society' would require that economic policy be re-focused on the *oikos*, the human household, and directed to the enhancement of human dignity for all. It has been wisely said that the measure of a 'good society' is based on a simple criteria, ie on how it treats its poor and disadvantaged. The dispossession, homelessness and despair increasingly visible in many contemporary societies are an indictment of our lack of inclusiveness, and our rejection of those who are unable or unwilling to 'compete'.

The challenge for the Lutheran communion will be to define ways in which to respond to economic globalization as a communion. We are all of us part of the one body of Christ. If part of the body suffers, all suffer. The Lord's Prayer is a community prayer; we pray to "our" father, not "my" father. And when we pray "give us our daily bread", we are praying that bread be delivered to all tables. How can we, in our economic relations, act in ways that are consistent with this prayer?

Cross Currents: HIV/AIDS, Stigma and Exclusion

HIV / AIDS pandemic is one of the mind-boggling 'cross-currents' in our 'sea of diversity', posing an existential threat to the health of our societies and churches, not only in the worst affected parts of the world, but in the entire world. For example, in Botswana -with an HIV prevalence of over 35% -the future of the nation itself is in the balance. Almost every family is touched by the disease. Though Africa is often seen as the epicentre of this pandemic, the disease knows no boundaries, and its impacts in this one region have been recognized as affecting the security of the world as a whole. HIV/AIDS in one part of the world is HIV/AIDS everywhere.

But still we try to minimize or avoid our own responsibilities in the face of this crisis. When our societies stigmatize people living with HIV / AIDS, we conspire to defeat ourselves in the fight against the disease. When churches exclude those affected by HIV/AIDS, we reject Christ's call to compassion.

Many churches have, however, heard this call and have responded in faith and action. As part of the ecumenical mobilization against AIDS, the LWF has articulated a response that involves the three elements of compassion, conversion and care. Compassion means that we acknowledge that each person living with HIV / AIDS is made in the image of God; he or she is Christ in our midst, made vulnerable by this disease, and deeply in need of the church's unconditional love, acceptance and support. Conversion means that the church itself is called by Christ to repent of how it has sinned against those who are affected by HIV/AIDS; it is called to love those whom it has shunned. Care refers to the treatment, prevention and advocacy that we provide and promote.

Our challenge, in addition to an effective diaconic response, is to reflect on how to be church in a time of AIDS. Christ called into being the Church including the rejected and outcasts of society. If Christ is our model and guide, how will we respond to those who our societies have rejected because of their HIV status:- with acceptance and compassion, or with judgment and exclusion?

Cross Currents: Racism and Casteism

One of the most ancient and persistent forms of exclusion is that based on race. Racism was not only a 20th century South African phenomenon; nor was it defeated with the fall of apartheid. It is, I regret to say, a powerful and persistent undercurrent in all human societies. The physical differences associated with race are the strongest anchor to which our propensity for exclusion has attached.

However, the struggle against apartheid, and its ultimate success, has masked the many other more subtle and often equally pernicious forms of racism. Racism continues, not only in South Africa and not only by 'Whites' against 'Blacks'. In Sudan, both in Darfur and in the

civil war in the south of the country, the conflict is based on racism by Sudanese of Arab descent against 'Black African' Sudanese. In Israel-Palestine, the conflict has strong racist undercurrents. In many Asian countries, racism against foreigners is an unacknowledged but obvious reality. Indigenous peoples throughout the world continue to suffer from racism in their own ancestral lands. And in my own country, I am disturbed and saddened to observe the emergence of a racist political ideology amongst those who fought against such an ideology in the past.

It is in the nature of this deeply-rooted human prejudice that it should re-appear in many new guises and with many different pretexts. The terrorist attacks and atrocities perpetrated by certain Arab Muslim groups and individuals has encouraged prejudice against all Arabs (as well as feeding anti-Muslim sentiment). The most objectionable actions of the Government of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories have given increased credibility to anti-Semites. The undoubted difficulties of fulfilling international commitments with regard to refugees and asylum-seekers have served as rationalizations for policies that are, quite frankly, racist.

However, the ubiquity and persistence of racism is no excuse for inaction. Commitment to the unity of the human family, and the recognition of the image of God in every human being, demand the rejection and uprooting of racism wherever it appears.

The LWF has also made the issue of casteism, and in particular the extreme form of exclusion suffered by the Dalits of South Asia, one of its key priorities. A number of the Lutheran churches in India are comprised almost entirely of members of this community, formerly known as 'untouchables'. By their birth, Dalits are defined as being impure and polluting and less than human, and are ascribed the most degrading roles in society. They are estimated to number up to 250 million people, but they nevertheless represent an excluded and marginalized minority in India and elsewhere.

The difficulties we faced with regard to visas for delegates to attend the LWF's Tenth Assembly in Canada last year was a small but illustrative example of the current situation in the world. In previous LWF Assemblies, obtaining visas for delegates has hardly ever been an insurmountable difficulty. The most serious previous occasion was when two delegates from Taiwan were denied visas to attend the Sixth Assembly in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. Last year, however, Canada denied visas for 5Q delegates to the Tenth Assembly - and all of them from African or Asian countries, all of them Dalits, or indigenous people, or black Africans.

Cross Currents: War and Violence

War and violence is today, perhaps more than ever before, impressed on our global conscience. Images of the violence in Iraq are on our TV screens almost every night. The conflict in Darfur, Sudan, has belatedly achieved international prominence. Other conflicts continue to rage out of the media spotlight, in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, northern Nigeria, and elsewhere. Meanwhile, terrorism and the so-called 'war on terrorism' have become the dominating issue in international relations, to the exclusion of almost all others.

A number of the conflicts in today's world are portrayed as religious conflicts. The civil war in Sudan, the intermittent clashes in northern Nigeria and parts of Indonesia, the recent upsurge in global terrorism and the war on terrorism itself are often seen in this light. However, in my view, there is really no such thing as a 'religious war' in the contemporary world. Invariably in these situations, religious diversity has been manipulated for other - usually political - ends. People of one community have been actively encouraged to see all those belonging to the other community as enemies. These constructed 'enemy images' are the real source of conflict.

I do not wish to be misunderstood on this point. There will always be extremists whose method and goal is death and the annihilation of the other. They must be prevented from carrying out the sort of atrocities that have occurred recently in Beslan, in Kirkuk, and on an almost daily basis in Israel-Palestine. But the greater threat is that they may succeed in provoking a wider confrontation. My fear in the current global context is that we, the peoples of the world, our political leaders, and all too many religious leaders, have permitted these extremists to hijack the course of our history.

I am convinced that, in our global village, the idea of national security no longer has the relevance it once had. A new concept of human security is emerging, recognizing the increasingly borderless and interdependent nature of the world today. If recent history has demonstrated nothing else, it has shown that there is no guarantee of security in even the most powerful of military arsenals. True human security in the global village will require the unresolved hatreds, alienation, and economic and social injustices of the world to be genuinely addressed.

Australia finds itself caught between the horns of the current global dilemma. Australia, a country that is by force of geography isolated from the rest of the world - in actual fact, the rest of the world is isolated from Australia - now finds itself engaged in the centre of the world's most prominent crisis. And for the first time in almost two generations, Australians find that they have enemies in the world. Why is this so, and how to respond? These are likely to be questions that will remain for the young Australians being educated in your schools today to resolve.

Living with Diversity: The Importance of Structures and Procedures

In the experience of the LWF, structures and procedures have demonstrated their value in the orderly management of our life together in diversity. Among those instruments is the LWF Assembly, which occurs every 6 or 7 years, and to which all member churches are entitled to send representatives. At an Assembly, representatives of all LWF member churches have the opportunity to see the full diversity of the LWF in physical form. More importantly, they have the opportunity to experience that diversity not as an abstraction, but as other human beings, women and men. Between Assemblies, an elected Council - drawn from all the regions in which the member churches are present - is responsible for managing the life and work of the LWF.

Structures and procedures such as these provide a framework in which our various perspectives and concerns can be shared and processed. They help to contain the fears and anxieties that might otherwise intrude in our relationships and threaten to tear them apart. In addition, I believe that the element of personal encounter which these structures and processes entail is crucial for our togetherness. In a context in which diversity is not understood or accepted and in which we have not encountered 'the others' as human beings, we are very susceptible to manipulation of our opinions. On the other hand, where we have met and established a personal relationship with people from the other group or community, it will be relatively harder for us to accept gross generalizations about that group or community.

The Transformative Power of Inter-Faith 'Diap Praxis'

In the current global context, inter-religious relations has become one of the most burning issues. Rising fundamentalism and extremism is evident in elements of many of the world's major religions, Christianity included. These fundamentalist and extremist influences typically have a strong political connection and agenda. They are leading us rapidly towards the 'clash of civilizations'. In my view, religious leaders have a responsibility to resist the 'capture' of their traditions by such elements, and to avoid being manipulated for political purposes.

Inter-religious dialogue has a long history, during which a much wider circle of religious

leaders have become open to dialogue with people of other faiths. But in the current context, something more than dialogue among the leadership is required. Some strong criticism of current models of inter-faith encounter is emerging, including from committed 'dialoguers' themselves. Inter-faith dialogue is increasingly being described by some as a 'middle class pastime' that does not engage the realities of the grassroots communities of faith. Certainly, we now have many noble inter-faith declarations, but too little implementation of the sentiments contained therein.

For my part, I believe that deeper and more active sort of relationship is required; a process of living and working together, as well as of talking together. The relationship must be based on the identification of common concerns, and commitment to active cooperation in addressing those concerns. In the LWF, we call this sort of relationship 'diapraxis'.

Typically, the common concerns identified as a basis for diapraxis will not be primarily theological in nature, but very practical. As an example, in the process of Christian-Jewish dialogue, we on the Christian side may have a desire to explore the deep theological questions of the relationship between the covenants with the Jewish people and the Covenant in Christ. But this concern is not necessarily shared by the Jewish participants in this relationship. Their primary concern is, quite simply, that there should be less anti-Semitism. That, however, is a point at which our interests can intersect, and on which we can work together as well as talk together.

In the world today, conflict and violence – especially with a religious connection – is a basic common concern. At the most fundamental level, we all share the hope for a more peaceful and safer world for our children. On the basis of this shared hope, we have a firm foundation for working together. It is this foundation on which we, in October 2002, brought together over 100 religious leaders from across the geographical and faith spectrum in Africa to discuss and agree on practical initiatives for working together for peace in Africa. All of the seven major faith traditions in Africa - Christianity, Islam, African Traditional Religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and the Baha'i faith - were represented. The participants adopted a Declaration, and more importantly, a Plan of Action, in which they recognized their common concern for peace in Africa, and outlined a series of joint actions.

Encounter and Experience: Meeting the 'Other'

In this and other such initiatives, in which those who have been apart begin to cooperate with each other, it is the personal relationships that develop in the process that will provide the path to peace. The personal encounter with the 'other', and the experience of our common humanity and similar concerns and hopes for the future, begin to transform the 'human race' into a 'human family'.

Conclusion: The Role of Education and Educators

The church, the mosque, the synagogue and the temple all have the unquestionable obligation to educate for peace and co-existence. But we know that these are also holy places where we tend to emphasize our own special identities. In the light of the limitations of these holy places, I have hope in schools and educational institutions. They have the potential to provide a context in which we can search for the common identity that binds us together.

Indeed, Lutheran schools in Australia and elsewhere are already in the vanguard of this process on behalf of the Lutheran churches. Originally, the purpose of Lutheran schools may have been to care for the 'flock', or, where there was no existing Lutheran community, to serve as an instrument for evangelism. But in the changing social landscape their role has evolved and expanded. In your schools you have long been instruments of encounter with diversity. The presence in Lutheran schools of so many students and teachers of other Christian denominations represents an advance ecumenical commitment that has undoubtedly set the stage for other forms of ecumenical engagement and cooperation. The growing

presence of students of other faiths in your educational communities is a nursery for inter-faith encounter and personal relationships that build bridges of peace. In addition, the increasing presence of students from other countries brings young Australians of a range of different backgrounds into contact with the wider world.

I am aware that students from Asia have been coming to Australian schools and universities in large numbers for a long time. However, I was surprised on a recent trip home to southern Africa to discover how many young people from my region are now going to Australia to study. It seems that Australia is rapidly becoming the educator of the world. But it is also true that this international presence in your schools is a learning opportunity for Australia.

You are aware, I know, of the valuable resource and pedagogical opportunity represented by the diversity in your school communities. It provides a basis for an educational experience that will prepare the young people in your charge for the challenges of global citizenship in the 21st century. It enables you to promote and establish co-existence, at a time when there is no other path to a just, peaceful and secure future in our global village.

To grasp such an opportunity, it is necessary to be intentional. The existing diversity in your communities provides the raw materials. A clear focus must be given to the creation of curricula, structures and processes that present and explore this diversity and that promote encounter, while at the same time containing the initial fears and anxieties that might arise. The intentional preparation of teachers for this role will be required, since diversity is difficult to deal with and demands special skills and sensitivity. Teachers must first be equipped to accept and embrace diversity themselves, before they can equip others. Lutheran education from the perspective of Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon was intended to equip the ordinary believers. Theirs was education for life.

Australia, the educator of the world, can also become a navigator towards the unity of the human family through this mutual pedagogical experience of diversity. Lutheran education, already in the vanguard of this process on behalf of the Lutheran churches, can lead the way. Lutheran traditions and faith principles, in particular our traditional Lutheran emphasis on love for one's neighbour, and new understandings of the implications of communion, can provide important foundations for a response to this challenge. The Lutheran World Federation is ready to be your partner in this process, and to offer you and your students additional opportunities to experience the diversity of the world. Can you envisage, for example, an education summit drawing together representatives from Lutheran schools around the world? Such a summit would seek ways to refocus Lutheran educational resources in order to better contribute towards a 'good society' and 21st century citizenship.

In my language, we have a saying that if you educate your son in English, he will never be buried at home. This saying expresses a recognition by the mothers and fathers of Africa of the advent of globalization and its impact on the family. It is tinged with sadness and regret. But it also looks with hope to a future in which the sons and daughters of Africa, or of Australia, or of any other part of the world, will be at home everywhere. Our task as educators is to guide them beyond the barriers of culture, across the shores of tradition, through the fears of the present, to the 'good society' and the family that embraces all humanity. If there is any community of people and institutions that will prepare the next generation for 21st century citizenship, it is none other than the teachers and our educational institutions.

LIVING FAITHFULLY IN GOD'S CREATION



**Studies on
Christian life
in the
environment**

by

Rev Aubrey Podlich

LIVING FAITHFULLY IN GOD'S CREATION

INTRODUCTION

For several years various environmental groups and scientists have raised their voices in our communities to protest against the exploitation and willful destruction of the environment, or to urge that we repair the damage already done. Sometimes the protests are extreme, perhaps reflecting the extreme damage that has already been done and is still being done to the environment. Sometimes they are not well-balanced. But undoubtedly they reflect the genuine concerns of people who have become aware of the value of our natural environment and the delicate balances in nature which can be easily upset, causing serious damage to all, including human beings as well as other creatures.

Unfortunately, the environmental concerns of people have seemed mostly to arise from pragmatic concerns about a bleak future rather than religious concerns about living in God's world.

The following six studies, by Pastor Aub Podlich, on Christian life and the environment, will help us to understand better God's design for his creatures and to live responsibly, reverently, and joyfully in his creation.

Study 1: Keeping things in perspective

Study 2: Human beings: special creatures

Study 3: The cosmic scope of God's plan

Study 4: What does 'dominion' mean?

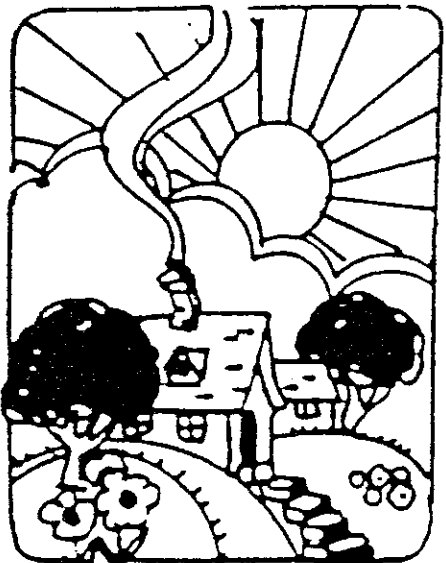
Study 5: Reverence for the earth

Study 6: The church at work within God's cosmic plan

STUDY ONE:

KEEPING THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE

THE PLACE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CARE IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

- Environmental concern is not optional for Christian people. It is part of the life of praise, obedience, and sacrifice which issues from faith in Jesus Christ. It is a response to the cross of Jesus, an unnatural human activity, in that, like all true Christian good works, it is produced by the Spirit of Christ.
 - ♦ For Christians, true environmental concern is never motivated by fear, despair, or hopelessness. We always work as people in whom God is at work. As surely as God's power was able to effect the resurrection and ascension of Jesus himself, so by his power we are able to live out the implications of our salvation. Christian environmentalists work within a spirit of certainty, assurance and hope. We are assured in Ephesians 1 that the time for final harmony is coming, and that we are both part of it and agents of it, right now.
- 
- Like any concern, environmental concern may become a passion for individual Christians. It should never be allowed to become a crusade or an obsession. It is only one of many pressing contemporary issues for Christians. No single Christian can be pro-active in every such issue: the environment, abortion, social justice, poverty, family-related issues, racism, war and peace, etc. Do what you can, pray for others, and, if possible, take up only one major concern, as God gives you the gifts and strength. In this way, guard yourself against:
 1. unnecessary guilt
 2. placing at the centre of the faith, a concern which is really a fruit of faith.

BIBLICAL RESOURCES:

To be read and referred to in preparation for the discussion questions.

The 'environmental Gospel' is not THE Gospel

Galatians 1:6-9

John 3:16

1 Corinthians 15:1-11

Human beings cannot save the world

Isaiah 40:6-8

Romans 3:9-18

James 4:13-14

John 15:1-5

Romans 7:18-20

Acts 4:12

The extent of sin is more deep-seated than our bad attitudes and actions which adversely affect the environment. Sin is what we ARE: creatures born blind, dead, and enemies of God.

1 Corinthians 2:14

Ephesians 2:1,2

Romans 8:7

Salvation, reconciliation and renewal are entirely God's work

Revelation 7:9-12

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Ephesians 2:1-10

Revelation 21:1-5

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is it important for Christians to know that environmental care is not the gospel, but a fruit of the gospel?
2. Why should Christian concern for the environment not be motivated by fear, frustration, or a sense of doom?
3. In what way could some concern for the environment have more to do with our own base self-interest than with any real attempt to be faithful to God, or to show genuine care for his creation?
4. If most environmental problems are the result of human sin, what is the most pressing pollution that needs to be addressed on earth? (Ps 51:5-10)
How will you address this pollution problem:
 in yourself?
 in others?
Why is it vital that this problem be addressed first? (John 15:5)
5. Comment on this statement:
'True environmental concern begins for Christians in the water of baptism'.

STUDY TWO:

HUMAN BEINGS: SPECIAL CREATURES

- ♦ Human beings are truly special creatures, different from all other creatures. They are made in the image of God, and are somehow representative of God himself. Yet human beings are still creatures, sharing a common origin in the earth, a common home on the earth, and a common destiny in the new heavens and new earth, with all other creatures. These two biblical teachings, that people are at one and the same time special and ordinary creatures, need to be carefully balanced.
- 
- The assertion that 'God made everything for us' needs qualification. The world never ceases to belong to God. No creature owns the earth. All creatures are granted use of the created environment of which they are all part, but within strict guidelines or 'laws of nature'. Many of those guidelines are clarified by the God-given gift of science. For human beings, clear guidelines for the occupation of this earth are laid down in Scripture.
 - ♦ Our privilege to use the earth is never licence to abuse it. We are entirely answerable to God for what we do in his earth. We have no mandate from him to use the earth in such a way that basic building-blocks of creation are destroyed, or essential created relationships torn apart. We may use trees, but we may not destroy forests. We may mine for minerals, built cities, or farm the land, but we may not destroy vital networks in nature (ecosystems) to do so. We should recognise that because of sin there will always be a tension here between the rightful use of natural resources and exploitation of our environment.
 - Human beings, special as they are, remain creatures. They must not act as though they had absolute authority, imposing their arbitrary will on what does not belong to them. Their use of creation must always be sustainable, that is, use which allows the basic created relationships in that place to continue. People must work within the relationships God has ordained. The will of the human creature does not take precedence over all God's other creatures. and over the will of the Creator himself.

BIBLICAL RESOURCES

Human beings as creatures

Genesis 2:7

Psalm 8:3,4

Human beings as special creatures

Genesis 1:26-28

Psalm 8:5-8

Matthew 10:31

Matthew 12:12

God's ownership of all

Psalm 24:1

Psalm 95:3-5

God's special concern for all

Genesis 1:31

Psalm 145:15-17

All things are for God's glory, not that of human beings

Psalm 19:1

Colossians 1:15-17

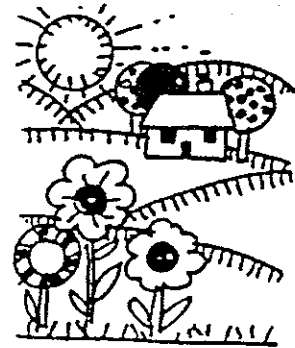
Human beings and responsible use of created things

1 Corinthians 10:31

1 Corinthians 3:21-23

Human beings and sustainable use, careful, limited use

Genesis 2:15-17



FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what ways are human beings creatures like any other creature? In what ways are human beings special, different from all other creatures?
2. If God is the owner of all and has special compassion on all he has made, how should this affect our attitude towards those creatures or things which appear to have little value?
3. In what way does the following statement reflect attitudes that are clearly unbiblical: 'There was only rubbish growing on the block, so we cleared it all off'?
4. Is it ever possible to give glory to God at the same time as we arbitrarily impose OUR will on his creation?
Could there be certain environmental implications in the petition of the Lord's Prayer: 'Thy will be done'?
5. In what circumstances might Christians say: 'This activity is clearly not a God-pleasing one, no matter how many jobs it produces'?
6. What is the difference between the rightful use of resources and the exploitation of resources, for instance, in relation to forests, mines, farmland?

STUDY THREE:

THE COSMIC SCOPE OF GOD'S PLAN

- ♦ In the beginning, God created everything that exists outside himself. Not only did he bring objects and creatures into being by his powerful word, but he fit all those objects and creatures together in inter-woven families, or relationships. Nothing was placed in isolation from its neighbour, its immediate environment, its ecosystem. The whole created order (cosmos) is a family made up of such interconnecting families. And all were made in relationship with their Creator, as Scripture makes clear. The science of ecology increases our knowledge and wonder at the intricacies of the relationships within creation.
- The basic relationships built into the creation are these:
The relationship of:
 1. God to his entire creation
 2. God to people
 3. People to people
 4. People to the rest of creation.
- ♦ Because all things are thus bound together, a break in one relationship has serious consequences for all the relationships. When the first people on earth broke the loving and obedient relationship they had with God, there was a 'flow-on' effect into their relationship with one another and the rest of creation.
- God in his grace came to the rescue of his creation. He sent Jesus Christ to bring God's reconciliation to people. But the reconciliation brought by the good news of Jesus is much wider than the 'people-God' relationship. Reconciliation through Christ embraces the whole creation, with all its interconnecting relationships. God's plan through Christ, which will be completed at the end of time, is to bring all things together again under Christ as head.



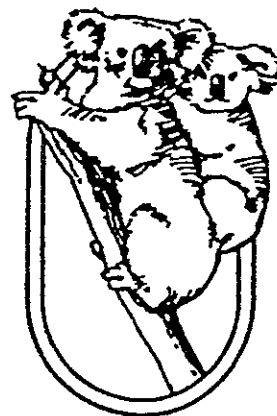
BIBLE RESOURCES:

Observe the breaking of relationships in the following:

- Genesis 3:8-24* The fall (God-people, people-people, people-earth)
Genesis 4:8-16 Cain and Abel (a man at odds with his brother is at odds with God and at odds with God and with the earth)
Numbers 35:33,34 Israel was constantly warned that to break the covenant with God would defile the land . . . the land itself would spit them out!
Isaiah 24:1-6 Sin has its consequences for the land.

God's saving grace includes all things

- Genesis 7:1-10* Animals too are saved from the Flood
Ephesians 1:3-10, esp 9.10 All things brought together in Christ
Romans 8:18-22 Creation groaning, waiting for liberation
Isaiah 11:1-9 Harmony among the creatures as Messiah rules
Psalms 98:7-9 Creation rejoices as the Lord comes to judge
Revelation 5:13,14 The creatures join in praise of the Lamb who was slain



FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Saddam's oil fires in Kuwait and the Allied Forces' defoliation through chemical warfare of one-third of Vietnam, are good examples of how the shattering of relationships between people also destroys relationships with the earth. Can people inflict such damage on creation and remain in harmony with the Creator? What about abortion?
2. If creatures also benefit from relationships restored through the gospel, what evidence of this should we already be seeing in the relationships of Christians to other creatures? How should it affect the way we regard other creatures?
3. Is it appropriate to bless animals, or pray for them?
Is it appropriate to pray when you plant seeds or gather a harvest?
Is it appropriate that the creatures be allowed access to the places of worship with us? (Ps 84:3)
4. If the creatures are also involved in the final kingdom where Christ is the head, can we ever again approach the rest of creation in a spirit of total exploitation, greed, and selfishness?

WHAT DOES 'DOMINION' MEAN?

- God clearly gave human beings dominion over other creatures. But already at the beginning the command to have dominion was balanced by the command to 'till the garden and keep (protect) it' (Gen 2:15). This command was given to perfect people in a perfect world. Presumably they had the ability to carry out this command perfectly.
- We can no longer assume that people have this ability. Although the assertion that people are rulers of the other creatures is repeated after the fall, as in Psalm 8, it is clear that sin prevents us from perfectly carrying out God's mandate. Sin turns God's command to act as a loving ruler into a licence to exploit and destroy mercilessly and greedily. Sin also becomes that attitude which judges the rest of creation to be valuable or worthless according to its perceived value to human beings. Sin makes humankind, rather than the glory of God, the measure of all things.
- Christ sets us free through his death and resurrection, the benefits of which become ours in baptism. We are freed by Christ to be what God originally made us to be. But we still remain sinners, incapable of good deeds except 'in Christ Jesus'.



- Christians therefore exercise proper dominion, or lordship, over the earth only 'in Christ Jesus'. Moreover, the lordship of Christ becomes our pattern for lordship. Christ most commonly exercises lordship in servanthood, sacrifice, and suffering. We are therefore, above all else, servants of the creation on behalf of God, and answerable to God. As lords, our chief role is to protect the relationships laid down by God in his creation. This does not prevent responsible use and development and even 'improvement' of the creation via responsible and careful genetic engineering. Our role as lords may even involve careful culling of those creatures whose abnormal increase in numbers threatens the balance necessary for the continued health of other creatures.
- Human beings themselves remain special creatures, representing God in a special way. We allow no culling of human beings, born or unborn. Yet the exercise of lordship by people must surely involve the use of responsible birth control, that the one species of creature, human beings, does not become a plague on the earth, to the detriment of the lives of all other species, and of the very health of the earth, its food, and its vital atmosphere.

BIBLICAL RESOURCES:

The original commands

Genesis 1:27,28

Genesis 2:15

The continuing 'nobility' of human beings

Psalms 8

The use of Psalm 8:5-8 or parts thereof, in the New Testament

The psalm, or parts of it, is quoted or alluded to three times in the New Testament. Whereas it is clear that originally the psalm referred to human beings in general, in each case in the New Testament it is applied to Jesus Christ. Those passages are:

Hebrews 2:6-8

1 Corinthians 15:27

Ephesians 1:22

The implication is inescapable: only 'in Christ Jesus' are we able to exercise dominion rightly.

All things (the New Testament phrase for the whole creation) become ours 'along with Christ'

Romans 8:32 (Note: the Good News Bible here, mistakenly omits the crucial 'along with Christ' point.)

Who inherits the earth?

Matthew 5:5 The meek are those in right relationship to God through Christ.

The world is inherited THROUGH FAITH

Romans 4:13

Even in the Old Testament, true kings were caring shepherds

(Note that 'shepherd' is a common Old Testament term for 'king'.)

Psalms 23

An excellent picture of dominion as caring and protecting

Psalms 72:1-14



FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'Everything was made for human beings to use. Therefore we can do what we like with it.' Comment on this.
2. Do we have any responsibility towards creatures which have no known benefit to human beings, and which may be unattractive and repulsive?
3. How do you see your role as lord of a piece of ground and the creatures that live on it, whether that area be as large as an entire country (politician), a pastoral or agricultural holding (grazier or farmer), or as small as a houseyard (an average home owner)?
4. Under what circumstances might our role as lords require active intervention in nature to cull a species which has reached plague proportions? Is that intervention required only when the plague adversely affects human livelihoods, or when it threatens other creatures too?
5. The old, beautiful word for farmer was 'husbandman'. In what way do you see the relationship of human beings to the land as being similar to that of a husband and a wife?
6. Why does lordship include responsible ways of limiting human population growth?

STUDY FIVE:

REVERENCE FOR THE EARTH

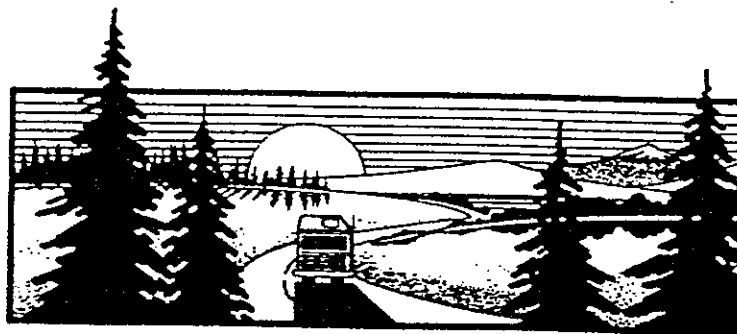
Christians see three main reasons why human beings are to respect, even revere, the earth:

1. **This is God's earth.** It comes from his breath and his fingers, and is still upheld by his gracious word. It is his good and gracious work.
2. People are to respect the earth because of the incarnation. God, who in the Old Testament calls the earth is 'footstool' (Is 66:1), that is, the place where he rules, in the New Testament becomes a human being and comes down to earth as Jesus Christ. This earth has been walked on, sailed over, slept upon, even bled on, by the Son of God.



Just as the presence of the Lord at a wedding at a particular place (Cana in Galilee) added something special for all time to all marriages where he is welcomed, so his physical presence in a particular land (Israel) has added something special to all lands. The ancients called this 'something special' 'COMMON HOLINESS'. Common holiness is holiness that comes about by the association of common things with God and his special actions. It is called 'common' holiness to distinguish it from the 'special' holiness of God in his word, sacraments, and holy people, the saints.

3. We are to respect the earth because of **Christ's continuing presence** in it in his people (who are his body) and in his word and sacraments. By coming to us in, with, and under bread, wine, and water, Christ honours all creation, just as once he honoured all people, especially women, by coming in the body of a young woman.



BIBLICAL RESOURCES:

The earth as God's possession and realm

Psalm 24:1

Isaiah 66:1

Deuteronomy 11:12-15 (in particular Israel, the Promised Land)

The presence of God through the incarnation

The Christmas story (*Luke 2*)

The gospel stories of Jesus in Israel

The continuing presence of Jesus on earth

Matthew 28:20

Matthew 28:18-20 Christ in baptism and the taught Word

Matthew 26:26-28 The presence of the body/blood of Christ in Holy Communion

1 Corinthians 6:19; 12:27 People as God's temple, Christ's body

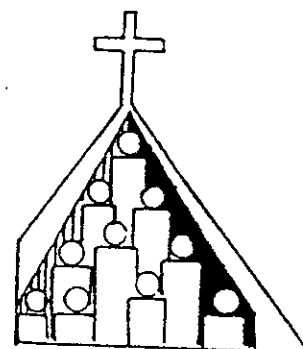


FOR DISCUSSION

1. How can we best guard against turning reverence for the creation into worship of the creation?
2. How important is it that Christians learn to stand in awe and wonder before the things God has made?
3. 'The earth is sacred.' In what sense is that true? Where does the sacredness of the earth derive from?
4. If the earth is sacred, how will that affect our attitude toward it?
5. How can science increase our sense of awe and wonder at the earth and its creatures?
6. Consider the fact that God used his own creation (a human body for Jesus, water in Baptism) and a joining of his creation with our 'creation' (bread and wine in Holy Communion) to work a salvation that has consequences for all creatures. How does this broaden your view of the Christian faith? If so, in what way?

THE CHURCH AT WORK WITHIN GOD'S COSMIC PLAN

- ♦ God's final goal for the creation is to restore everything in harmony in a new heaven and a new earth, where Christ is the head. Everything that was once 'subjected to frustration' (Rom 8) through sin, corruption, and the curse, will be 'set free from its bondage to corruption'. This will only happen at the end of time, when Jesus returns in power.
- ♦ In the meantime, the people of God are called to wait, watch, and be faithful. They are called to lives of faithful prayer and praise, just as the whole creation at the beginning culminated not in the creation of humankind, but in the Sabbath, which became for Israel its day of rest and praise. Not only are God's people to join in the praise of all creation, but they are to uphold and preserve that praise as they uphold and preserve the creatures which utter it. As each species falls casualty to human excesses and is driven to extinction, praise of God is diminished - a song is stilled.
- ♦ Through the gospel, God reconciles his broken people to himself, and in their reconciliation lies the hope for the eventual salvation of the whole creation, which waits eagerly for the return of Jesus, when the sons of God will be revealed (Rom 8:18-25).
- ♦ We are the first-fruits of the new creation. The church gives the first glimpses of creation redeemed and restored. In the way that Christians both individually and as a church, act towards the creation, people should both see and experience a foretaste of the harmony that will exist in the new creation after the end of time.
- ♦ In the worship life of the church, the ancient creature-praise psalms come to life, and the perfect creature-praise of heaven (Rev 4 and 5) is anticipated as creation and Lord meet in the sacraments. In the sacraments Christ once again walks with his creation, as he did with the wild beasts in the desert (Mark 1:12,13). As Creator he comes to be with creatures in Holy Communion, where there is an anticipation of the final harmony of the creation with its Lord in the age to come. Through water, and through bread and wine, the Lord of the whole creation comes to be with his creatures. The sacraments are the sign and guarantee of future SHALOM.



BIBLE RESOURCES:

God's final goal for the creation

Ephesians 1:1-10

Romans 8:18-21

Snapshots of the redeemed creation

Isaiah 11

Isaiah 2:2-4

Revelation 21:1-5

Sabbath-rest as culmination of creation, and praise as the chief response

Genesis 2:1-3

Psalm 8:1

Psalm 57:7

Psalm 108:5

Creature-praise

Psalm 98:4, 7-9

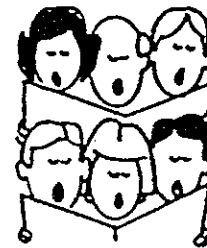
Psalm 148

People of God joining with creature-praise

Psalm 98

Psalm 150

Revelation 5 The worship of heaven, earth, angels, and people combine



God's people as first-fruits

James 1:18

First-fruits are:

1. dedicated to God (Exod 23:16, 19)
2. signs and guarantees of other fruit to come (Rom 8:23)

The 'fruits' that follow us can be other believers, or (in the light of the scope of God's redeeming activity) the whole creation.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. In what way does true godliness benefit the environment?
2. Why does the command to love embrace also genuine concern and care for the environment?
3. In what way can a deeper understanding of the nature and scope of Christian worship have benefits for the environment? If creatures are our fellow worshippers (eg Ps 98; Rev 5:11-14), should we regard them in a new light?
4. To which special initiatives in environmental care could you point as signs and a preview of the new heaven and the new earth (eg land care, sustainable use of forests, and other actions in which we catch glimpses of Isa 11:2-9 and Rev 21:1-5)?

SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

GOD'S PEOPLE IN GOD'S CREATION - A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

It stands to reason (and makes good economic sense) that if the church is to be a sign of right relationships to come, it will look very closely at its way of doing things now, with a view to eliminating bad stewardship of resources, outright waste, and negative impacting on the environment. Here are some suggestions as to how this might be done:

- (a) The church should consider carefully its stewardship of the great deal of property and real estate it owns. All too often the church which 'believes in the creator' unnecessarily bulldozes natural bushland for buildings and car parks. Careful attention should be given to the kinds of people who are elected to the controlling boards of camp-sites and college and school grounds, so that no 'develop at all cost' attitude ruins priceless environmental assets.
- (b) The church should carefully examine its use of energy, its heating, lighting, and petrol use. Its gardens and grounds should be a highlight of any neighbourhood, a refuge for birds and animals, and places of delight. There should always be in a church ground an abundance of flowers and shade trees.
- (c) The church worship should make greater use of the creation. Harvest Thanksgiving, seasonal thanksgivings, special creation-centred liturgies, indoor gardens, hanging baskets, and a profusion (not just a bunch) of flowers, all add to our appreciation of the creation and its Creator and Redeemer.
- (d) The church library should have suitable books on many areas of environmental care, from the 'handy hints' type of thing, to solid theological studies of creation and environment-related topics.
- (e) Following the precept of St Paul who urges his people to 'follow my example and way of life', the inhabitants of the manse can take a lead in caring well for their own gardens.
- (f) The church can take its people out into the environment more, first to enjoy it, as in bushwalking, picnics, fishing expeditions, and the like, and then in promoting and joining in with community projects of tree-planting, soil-care, and the like.
- (g) A city church can enjoy the fellowship of some of their country brothers and sisters by arranging environmental awareness days and tree-planting on some of our struggling farmers' lands, or by spending a day doing farm chores.
- (h) And in all our own living as individuals and Christians we should all, for love of Christ, strive for simplicity of living, a non-materialistic life-style, a love of simple things, and a gentle walk on the earth with all our fellow creatures, all of us being close kin to the earth to which we will all return one day.
- (i) And on our graves, or with our scattered ashes, let others who love the Lord scatter flowers, in the certain hope of the resurrection and of the praise of all the creatures, when the Lord of all life comes again!

SCHOOL LINK



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HOW SOCIALLY JUST?

*Here's to the kids who
are different,
the kids who don't always get
A's, the kids who have ears
twice the size of their peers,
and noses that go on for days ...*

*Here's to the kids who
are different,
the kids they call crazy or dumb,
the kids who don't fit, with the
guts and the grit,
who dance to a different drum...*

*Here's to the kids who
are different,
the kids with the mischievous
streak,
for when they have grown, as
history has shown,
it's their difference that makes
them unique.*

This poem by Digby Wolfe is
a strong expression of the
uniqueness of each child

and a reminder of the need to
provide individual care to all
children. We affirm its
sentiment. But we also ask
(maybe quietly, wistfully), 'How
is such care really possible?'

How can Lutheran schools
actually meet the specific needs
of each child? These needs are
often framed in terms of
outcomes and schools face the
competing interests of the
child(ren), parents, teachers, the
church, the government, society,
potential school families, and the
marketplace. Teachers and
school administrators acutely
feel the complex pressures
involved in providing quality,
Christian education. The
complexities can be immense as
competing interests impact on
all aspects of school life.
Compounding the situation

further is the awareness that
schools – indeed most
communities – are constructions
of perceptions that influence
how the school is viewed,
regarded, and engaged.

Lutheran school documents
proclaim that the gospel of
Jesus Christ informs all
learning, programs, and
relationships. Yet the pressure
of the markets exists to impose
image management so that
whatever occurs in the school
may be seen in the right light
and be acceptable to a paying
consumer. This is most acutely
experienced in the issue of
behaviour management and the
school's response to activities it
regards as wrong, dangerous,
illegal, or immoral. Each
incident will involve a
constellation of students,

families and staff and,
depending on the perceptions
at the time, may generate a
host of comments or queries
about the nature of the gospel,
the concept of justice, the
importance of community
harmony and safety, the nature
of personal responsibility, and
care for the individual. Reasons
for expulsion have changed
over the decades and seem to
reflect social sensitivities rather
than any objective criteria. What
is fair or just is not easily
determined or enacted.

The expectation of the church
might guide enrolment
practices, curriculum
development, pedagogical
activities, and a host of other
things occurring in schools
which exist through fees and
government grants but there
seems to be little or no direct
economic support from the
church to facilitate the provision
of quality, Christian education.
User-pay education is part of
the fabric of our country (though
that topic itself is a social justice
issue) but the final word on the
appropriateness of user-pay
mission by a church has not
been spoken.

The existence of industrial
awards presents and constructs
staff relationships in certain ways
that seem to presuppose
adversarial positions and can
foster the ethos of career paths
and packages at the expense of
a collegial, service culture. How
working conditions should be



*How can Lutheran schools actually meet the specific needs of each child?
(Students from St Peters Lutheran College, Indooroopilly Qld)*

Theme for this issue

Social Justice

determined so that they are just seems shrouded in mystery.

Tensions can exist between meritocracy and egalitarianism whether it be on the sports field, at the enrolment interview, or in the classroom seating plan.

As social welfare networks are being dismantled or restructured, and as society redefines notions of 'at risk', 'care', and 'responsibility' so also schools are faced with increasing issues relating to disability, poverty, ethnicity, juvenile behaviour, and behaviour management. As society wrestles with the appropriate legal treatment of its citizens and juveniles in particular so also schools reflect and initiate responses towards students who are 'at risk' or who place other students 'at risk'. How far and to what extent should schools support individual students?

All this and more are faced by schools whose prime role is to educate young people at a time when they are exploring their identity and self image ... in all sorts of different ways! For whom do we educate? For the students? Their parents and family? Society? The Lutheran Church of Australia? The Christian church in all its denominational clothes? God?

While such discussions happen, schools are making decisions and enacting policies, acting in

certain ways and expecting compliance. They have to do so because they live in the world and are dealing with people. School council members, administrators, and teachers act with the best intentions and juggle the needs of the individual over against the needs of the community and vice versa. As microcosms of society which reflect and teach a social connectedness, schools inculcate students into a community which, to a greater or lesser degree, will reflect the social values and experiences that are important to those who administer schools and to those who pay for students to be educated in our schools. Again the final word has not been uttered on whether students involved in a school which selects its students can fully experience and participate in an education that will enhance their participation in a democratic society that seeks social justice for all its citizens.

In a finite world with finite resources, what is the fairest and most judicious use of the resources we have available and for whom should these resources be available? What is the best response to all the inequalities and differences that are encountered by schools? There are no simple answers to these and countless other questions and topics that may be raised.

The first thing that needs to be recognised and remembered is that the gospel does not have the answers. Now that is a provocative way in which to engage readers of a LCA school magazine! The gospel does not give clarity of vision in relation to the design or the supplier of the school uniform (and whether it should be simple and inexpensive or not); nor does it give unswerving guidance in terms of enrolment decisions, budgets, resource allocations, class sizes, curriculum development, the form and function of the P&F, salaries, duty statements, formal assessment criteria, and even behaviour management (the litmus test for church schools as to whether they practise what they preach). The gospel proclaims God's justifying act towards sinners because of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit using the means of grace calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies those who are in Christ and unites them through faith given personally at baptism into a hidden community in which its members seek to live as disciples of Christ in all the circumstances and relationships (eg, child, parent, husband, wife, citizen, employer, employee, etc) in which they find themselves. It could be argued that if the gospel informs enrolments then a church school should only comprise non Christian students so that mission may occur or a church school should only have baptised students so that nurture may occur.

A Lutheran school is not a hidden community; nor is it defined by baptism; it is a contractual community in which its members work towards a common goal (in this case, education). Lutheran schools are our creations - we decide (to a very large extent) what happens within them. Students benefit or are hurt by these decisions as are those who have invested in the school (eg, staff, parents, and church).

Schools are structures which teach students to support and participate in the created orders of our world - family, politics (government), and work. The

decisions regarding how to live in the finite world of the school would be well made in response to the questions: What promotes good order and justice in the world? What is in the best interest of Australia? What is in the best interest of the child? Answers to such questions would help inform us as to the just use of all the resources church schools receive and would be in keeping with the fact that God is left handed as well as right handed (if you think in two kingdoms terms). Possibly this might mean going into the educational 'markets' that are difficult (eg, working with children who have special needs or supporting children who continually exhibit 'at risk' behaviour) so that the social fabric of this country and its citizens are enhanced and enriched.

The question whether a church should be involved in the enterprise of schools (as opposed to being involved in a chain of supermarkets, petrol stations, or privately run prisons) is moot. However given that Lutheran schools are an increasing component of the Lutheran Church of Australia and within the Australian society it is important for the church to genuinely and continually ask the questions of how to best serve the citizens of this country through the provision of education. After over 20 years of recurring government funding, perhaps it is a good time for schools to consider what values of citizenship they are inculcating and for the congregations and parishes of the LCA to seriously consider how best to support such work (eg, with additional finances and human resources) so the children in our schools receive the best possible education and sense the free gift of God's grace ... for even the most different child.

Social justice? Nah, a Lutheran lunacy of grace. Whatever it is, let's keep talking, struggling, and wrestling in this finite world!

George Samiec
Chaplain

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