TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF EDUCATION: THEOLOGY AS UNDERLABOURER TO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Some of the complex changing interrelationships among education, religion, secularism, and fundamentalism, demand a fresh defamiliarising view of education in our religious institutions. One of the key differences between Christian education and secular education (in secular or Christian environments) is its grounding in a theology as well as a philosophy of education, such that it surpasses secular education in several profound ways addressed in the paper. Theology is paramount to the development of a theological framework suited to underlabouring Christian education and sharing Christ in the classroom. This paper tentatively posits a number of interdependent complementary themes that together may make some progress towards the challenge of developing a theology of education framework for revisioning Christian education and the faith-learning nexus. The paper is based on the premise that, unless there is a continuous and vigorous effort by Christian educators to consciously embed and embody their philosophy of Christian education, and their policies, procedures, practices and values in a rigorous (and preferably explicit rather than implicit) theological framework suited to contemporary societies and particular faith traditions, the Christian educational enterprise will surrender itself to a surreptitious secularisation process and/or simply become another spiritless ideology. The posited theological approach implies that faith and learning are integral (and therefore integrated) to holistic understanding of the cosmos, and that education (and therefore learning) without faith, hope, or love, is empty of its essence. Faith and reason cohere in Messiah and Logos. Christian education, therefore, is concerned with salvation and truth; there can be no separation. A brief ensemble of ideas concerning Christian education is proffered for further consideration by Christian educators.

INTRODUCTION

Christian educational systems are situated and embedded within an historical and cultural heritage, which remains important for, and gives legitimacy to, their singular identities and ethos. Beliefs, doctrines and traditions, however, are historically contingent and vulnerable. Christian education, therefore, is emergent, dynamic, reformative and transformative, while simultaneously preserving and celebrating the essence of its Christian heritage. From early beginnings in the Hebrew, early Christian, Greco-Roman, and classical Christian education (e.g., Calvert, 2007), the more formal education systems have served ecclesiastical (Biblical exegesis), trade and commerce (Renaissance economies), secular (state-regulated) and, more recently, scientist and economic policy ends. Since these early beginnings, formal education via schooling systems has become a hallmark of Western civilisations, and, relative to our Global Village, most Western democratic countries have developed high quality schooling systems and sectors.

Notwithstanding this high quality, in the current education reform trends occurring at the various levels of Western governments, there is a continuing imperative for revisioning Christian education within the social, political and economic context of contemporary Western secularism and emergent fundamentalism. It is worth noting that secularism and Christianity currently seem to be more under threat from the increasing rise of fundamentalism (religious, market, political, and nationalist) as a mainstream and powerful influence in modern society, than Christianity is under threat from secularism. If fundamentalism (used in the broad sense of a strict – sometimes irrational - adherence to inflexible fundamentals of a religion or ideology) continues to grow within the contemporary western culture of narcissism (Lasch, 1980) and victim mentality (Radcliffe, 2005) with the potential to usher in a new dark age of dogma (Sim 2005), there is an imperative need for Christian education to revision its raison d'etre in a world that is increasingly post-information and image-oriented (Pink 2005). Some of the complex changing interrelationships among education, religion, secularism, and fundamentalism, demand a fresh defamiliarising view of education in our religious institutions. Karmel (1996), for example, has notionalised that the recent change in the Australian economic paradigm refocusses education as an instrument of economic policy wherein students are prepared to participate in economic life and skilled for the workforce, to the detriment of personal and social development. This instrumentalist practice of education, according to Karmel, has resulted in less emphasis being placed on the development of the critical faculty, objectivity, sensitivity to ethical issues, rational choosing from options, and an understanding of society and culture. Universities (and educational systems in general), at least in the eyes of some educators and politicians, are simply corporate institutions serving the wishes of big business and the national economies.

While not wishing to overstress the current difficulties and challenges confronting almost every nation around the world, and acknowledging that Western societies in general are relatively affluent and peaceful in a world context, it nevertheless is fair to suggest that Christian education today in most Western countries does encounter a world of uncertainty and confusion, relativism, fragmentation, and increasing technological dependency. There is always the temptation to benchmark success against such illusions as neo-liberal capitalistic corporate wealth and power, consumerism, and materialism. To some degree, methods employed to obtain this notion of success too often incorporate or engender corruptive injustice, deceit, discrimination, inequities and inequalities. Success defined in these terms depicts a life model corrosive of Christian and religious values, ethics and morals.

On the other hand, it should be noted that public corporations ipso facto need not be this way, and the Christian Church would be wise to eschew attitudes towards capitalism based on ignorance and anachronistic worldviews (e.g., Novak, 1991). Christianity, to be faithful to its founder and leader, lives in the incarnate concreteness of the world at it is, the existential yet corporeal "neighbour", referred to by Christ in the great love commandments. Perhaps a wise balance is required, such as that notionalised by Knight (1998): "The challenge for Christian educators is to select and develop educational practices that harmonise with their beliefs and are, at the same time, feasible in their

social, political, and economic context" (p. 33). Of course, at least one qualification necessarily accompanies this challenge: these beliefs must remain under constant honest examination. Summarily, though, there seems to be little doubt that the transcendent and spiritual aspects of life generally have been eclipsed by the various influences of secularism (Brown, 2001) and differentiation, and perhaps it is fair to assert that, at least to some degree, existential despair - or what Bennett (2001) refers to as 'collective depression' - has become a common, though not openly acknowledged, feature of modern societies. In modern societies, the modernisation process has left a "crisis and 'wholeness-hunger' in its wake" (Cuddihy, 1974, p. 10).

CHRISTIAN AND SECULAR EDUCATION

Is there, or should there be, a difference between Christian and secular education? Both Christian and secular education, and particularly so in formal schooling sectors, aim to prepare people for cultural and social citizenship, to develop reasoning and higher critical skills of thinking, to impart values, and to develop character as well as knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies. Secular education, via its institutions of learning, is to be admired and praised for its commitment and excellence in providing quality education, often with limited resources. Yet there is an expectation that Christian (or religious) education should not simply be a reproduction of secular education. Nor does Christian education wish to colonise secular education, or to be colonised by secularism. Both outcomes would be mere idols of the true. Both systems, as independent actors, occupy their own rightful space, and ensuing dialogue between the two in(ter)dependent systems would best occur from their own standpoints, while respectfully listening and being mindful of the other as worthy. Neither appeasement nor colonisation of the other need be on the agenda of Christian or secular education.

One of the key differences between Christian education and secular education (in secular or Christian environments) is its grounding in a theology as well as a philosophy of education; in many cases, however, only implicitly so. It is a premise of this paper that, without such a theology, it is doubtful whether education deserves the ascription of "Christian." Rather, in broad terms, Christian education is grounded in disciplined and open thinking about God and God's whole creation, and is based on a worldview that grounds its epistemic and moral values. In more narrow terms, Christian education is grounded in disciplined thinking about God from the general worldview of a particular faith tradition. For the Seventh-day Adventist Church, for example, it is noteworthy that, according to Knight (2001), "... the spread of Adventist education during the 1890s was directly related to the spiritual revival in the denomination's theology and to an enlarged vision of the church's mission to the world" (p. 188), leading Knight to conclude that "the health of Adventist education is dependent upon its ability to maintain its spiritual identity and sense of mission" (p. 188). Obviously, spiritual identity is contingent upon a healthy and vigorous theology suited to its contemporary historical time and place. Thus this paper is premised on the notion that it is opportune for the Church to explicitly revisit and research its current theology, spiritual identity and sense of mission, and to reexamine how these relate to its educational enterprises.

Christian education surpasses, in the sense of going beyond or passing over, an education that is merely situated in a Christian context, or education by teachers who are Christians for students who are Christians. Such education may be termed secular or humanist education in a Christian environment, and there may be a place for such education, but it is not Christian education. Christian education also surpasses secular education, but not in an imperialist or imperious manner, nor by considering itself to be more excellent. Rather, it surpasses in three profound ways. First, it does so in the sense of moving beyond the physicality and materialism of secularism, to be open to the metaphysical as well, to a transcendent personal and communal hope, faith, and love for a shared eternal future. As such, Christian education should be branded more by grace, humility, and respect for others than by self-partiality, arrogance, and indifference to others. At the same time, Christian education in integrating faith and learning, should not be involved in mediocre education, since it encompasses a God-inspired ethical responsibility, not only incorporating the economic, political, social, communal, and ethical wellbeing of society and the environment, but more so spiritual wellbeing. Spiritual wellbeing, as personified in Jesus, defines what it is to be wholly human.

Second, the secular may be seen to be an image of the religious, retaining its capacity for humaneness, but lacking a substantive foundation and justification for its existence beyond itself. Secularism could not have come into being without religion. It is a child of religion, but it has rendered its heritage and its substance invisible or irrelevant. In this sense, Christian education passes over secular education. The origin of such emergent progeny is the mystery of evil as the child of an infinitely transcendent good, humanly illustrated, for example, by Abel becoming a murderer as a child of Adam and Eve. Within God's provenance of agapeic freedom, ultimate good allows for the seeding and evolving of evil, theism allows for the seeding and evolving of atheism, love allows for the seeding and evolving of fanaticism, doctrine allows for the seeding and evolving of idolatry, and religion allows for the seeding and evolving of fundamentalism or of secularism. In all cases, there is a birth and separation from the original. Secularism, per se, though not pro-religious, need not be anti-religious, but basically it has emanated and separated from its religious originator. Consequently, Christian education surpasses secular education, because the latter is merely an image of the former.

Third, Christian education lays a foundation for the development of wisdom, as conceptualised in a theological sense. By God's power, it transforms as well as forms and informs (Hodgson, 1999), diminishing foolishness. Its beginning is in wisdom's conclusion: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man (Eccles. 12: 13). It takes us beyond the unquestioning impasse of common sense, which takes "life as is" for granted. It takes us beyond a rationality confined to a dogma of self-enclosed finitude. It takes the theological theme of watchfulness and wakefulness so as to be wise and ready. Wisdom and readiness are related to knowledge, understanding, and awareness of life issues and events.

It is foolishness, therefore, for Christian institutions to be hermetically isolated from (secular) communities, or from knowledge (provided by research, philosophising, science, theology, networking, etc.) on a global scale, particularly those communities

modelling best practice. If a Christian institution remains isolated, intentionally or otherwise, it risks succumbing to the temptation to glorify ignorance in a mutual admiration society (cf. 2 Cor. 10:12, 18), and be unaware of its comparative mediocrity. Christian education is not interested in an irrationalist fideism. Faith seeks continuing understanding and reason, because faith itself is rational (Desmond, 2005, p. 111), as God is rational. It therefore allows us to place our full confidence in those things that cannot be 'proved scientifically' in both past and future (Hebrews 11:1-3). As demonstrated in the Christian Scriptures, the more we understand and appreciate the works and character of God, the greater is the likelihood of an intelligent and deepening faith in God (the absurd opposite is to assert that those remaining most ignorant of God's works and character are those with the greatest faith). Christian educational institutions, then, should be about superior education as an ethical response to the infinite value that God has placed on his creation. But what would superior education look like? Surely it would involve helping people to know how to think well (e.g., psychology, philosophy), how to live well (e.g., well-being, nutrition), how to live responsibly and responsively with others (e.g., citizenship, sociology, politics, history), as well as acquiring knowledge and understanding via the key learning areas and related disciplines or trades.

If Christian educational settings are to avoid being mere replicas of secularist education, however, the vision for these settings will connect to the theological traditions that originally sponsored the education. Christian education takes seriously the Christian faith's relevance to the entirety of personal lives, including the intellectual dimension (Matt. 22:37). Perhaps one of the more disenchanting trends in some denominations today is the trend towards a form of Pietism. "Pietism emphasises the interior life of faith, the religion of the warm heart, which can be sustained by worship and private devotion and renewed by revivals" (Benne, 2001, page 36). It is the interiorising of faith coupled with a lack of intellectual or serious biblical content that makes Christianity a simple affair of the heart, not the mind. If faith has no intellectual content of it own, if it lacks a rational biblically-grounded theology, then it becomes incapable of integration with learning beyond the point of sentimentality. As well, it is unable to engage with secular learning, and so succumbs to mediocrity in what may be mistakenly termed Christian education. Such hollowed-out faith partly explains why so many Christian students leave the church once they attend secular universities.

Two recent studies highlight the problematic nature of the relationship between educational institutions and their founding religious tradition or Christian church. Burtchaell (1998) described how sixteen colleges and universities in USA of diverse ecclesial origins disengaged themselves from their Christian Churches in a continuing process of secularisation and dissonance. Burtchaell pointedly proposed that these institutions end up judging the church by the academy, and the gospel by the culture, rather than vice versa. In other words, a theology of education is displaced or rendered invisible, or worse, considered to be irrelevant or an embarrassment. Faith is irrelevant to learning.

Alternatively, Benne (2001) described how six colleges and universities kept faith and consonance with their Religious Traditions. He proposed that there are three components

of the Christian tradition that need to be kept publicly relevant: its vision, ethos, and Christian personnel. Benne believes that the vision is Christianity's articulated account of reality, which cannot be surpassed. It is central to life in meaning, purpose and conduct. It arises from the Bible and Church History - in sum, a theology. To him, Christianity as a reality is lived, embodied, and expressed in an ethos, a way of life, including the practices of worship, a heritage of music, patterns of moral action, and the practice of vocation. Faith and learning are partners in shaping the history of students' lives.

It seems, then, that unless there is a continuous and vigorous effort by Christian educators and Christian institutions to consciously embed and embody their philosophy of Christian education, and their policies, procedures, practices and values in a rigorous (and preferably explicit rather than implicit) theological framework suited to contemporary societies, the Christian educational enterprise will surrender itself to a surreptitious secularisation process and/or simply become another spiritless ideology. God, and therefore theology, become unnecessary, irrelevant, and valueless. On the other hand, if theologians themselves fail to turn their attention to education, preferring to study only the various discipline fields of theology or the theology-science nexus, or leave it to the philosophers of education, then the Christian educational enterprise is irreparably weakened from within. Notwithstanding these comments, the following optimistic reflections are situated within the knowledge that "the secular world owes the Christian past a huge, unacknowledged debt" (Ruston, 2004, p.286), and that the "success of the West, including the rise of science, rested entirely on religious foundations, and the people who brought it about were devout Christians" (Stark, 2005, p. x). Rather than retreating from, appeasing, or succumbing to the world, Christian education continues to identify with, serve, and critique the world for its common good.

RESURRECTING A THEOLOGY OF EDUCATION

In response to these uncertainties, complexities, fragmentation, and confusion of the current world of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) of images, logos, symbols and signs, a theology of education acts as a foundational framework for the development of a sound philosophy of Christian education, operationalised in situ through its policies, procedures, practices and values. A theological framework, therefore, contributes to societies which, it may be argued, have lost a sense of depth and perspective originally anchored in their Christian history and cultures. Christian education may be better conceptualised according to the will, purpose and activity of God.

At the most radical or foundational level, and from a holistic perspective, a theology of education prepares the ground for Christian educators to address four contextually interrelated questions: (a) What do we want Christian education to become? (b) What are we allowing it to be? (c) What does it mean to be 'Christianly' educated? and (d) How does Christian education relate to other educational systems? In short, what is the aim, goal, or telos of Christian Education? There are no easy answers to these questions, and each faith tradition will countenance its own response strategies and tactics, preferably based on a sound theology (and philosophy) of education. If, however, a theology of education (as theoretical framework) and Christian education (in policies, procedures, practices and values – in situ) are to gain and retain credibility, individually and

corporately, the Christian Church will love and live in a way that identifies and demonstrates its wholesome relatedness to God, as well as evidencing the vibrant presence of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. Indeed, the Church has nothing to say to people, until they first realise that God loves them as individuals.

A theology of education is multifaceted and multidimensional. Across the various faith traditions, differing though interrelated theologies of education occur, and this variation is conducive to a healthy dialectic and dialogue. Analogically, state, religious, and independent school systems develop and oversee their specific alternative programs, which differ from but interrelate to one another. The dialogical and sometimes competitive process allows for more effective evaluation and progress of curriculum across the various educational systems. It is a respectful recognition of otherness. The various churches and faith traditions carefully craft their own particular theologies of education, for the common good of Christian education. Christian education is contingent upon how truly and clearly its vision, mission, goals, policies, procedures, practices and values reflect Christianity and cohere together. At its deepest level, a theology of education operates as an underlabourer to guide, nourish and empower Christian education. The significance of a theology of education framework for Christian education is of such import that it needs to be approached with an epistemic humility that recognises and accepts the seriousness of the endeavour, while also appreciating the inadequacies of the human mind when contemplating the divine.

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF EDUCATION FRAMEWORK

In the interests of economy, this paper does not attempt to present a comprehensive and systematic theology of education framework, but it does intend to move toward visioning such a framework. Theological themes important to some churches and faith traditions inadvertently may not be addressed, obviating a continuing need to incorporate further relevant themes to better express the gestalt of the tentative, preliminary framework.

In problematising and formulating a dynamic theology of education, it seems sensible to briefly address a number of themes that, at least tentatively, may be points of discussion in seeking a contemporary theology of education. In positing a mapping out of complementary interdependent themes that together may move towards a developing framework for a revisioning of Christian education, the following reflections are more exploratory and suggestive than rigorously systematic, and therefore do not pretend to emanate from any epistemologically or morally privileged position. Obviously, each faith tradition will engage with these, and other, themes and subthemes, in the shaping and expression of its own theology of education. The term 'themes' has been chosen rather than 'principles', as used by Martinez (2007, pp. 58-63) when identifying nine principles that characterise a Christian theology of education, based on the theologies of Comenius and Wesley (nine principles of paideia; paideutic power of God; meeting students' needs and capabilities; universality; tripartite of piety, virtue, and rationality; thinking Christianly; a classroom of delight and purpose motivating spiritual growth and academic achievement; transcending educational goals; holiness of educators and students).

1. Creation and re-creation theme

The act of creation by God confers inherent infinite value to all existence, and provides the metaxu between metaphysics and physics, the transcendent and the temporal, the real and its image. Theologically, it provides reasonable grounds for an epistemological and ontological holistic perspective, whereby we recognise a complex mutual conditioning between part and whole (Murphy, 1997, p. 34), and that all things are related and connected (Peters, 2003, p. 81). As such, there is a radical social ethic that permeates all existence. Divine creation ultimately is the meta-ground of all value, and by extrapolation, all values. As Desmond (2005, p.285-286) iterates, if the creation is valueless in itself, then we are ontologically valueless, as are, ultimately, all our human constructions and learning. To place value on our own constructed values is without worth, for they can mean nothing, and our belief in the worth of human beingness is only self-delusional nihilism. Desmond (2005) writes:

> But there is no way to make sense of our respect for other-being, or for the human being as an end in itself, if there is not a deeper reverence for value that is not merely human: to be is to be good: it is good to be: ontological value, and reverence. Where does the notion of ontological value fit within scientific objectification? Nowhere. Science tells us nothing about these issues and does much to make human beings insensitive to them by taking them up into the dances of determinate explanations.
> (p. 281)

As well as ontological value, creation orients and reorients our worldview towards an existence that has worth, purpose, love, relationships, community, and life environed in energy/matter, space, and time. There is more to life than mundane matter reacting to, or at best, reflecting upon, matter. A supernal mind superintends matter, foregrounding the sacramentality of the world. All things are manifestations of the divine Mystery, and, therefore, we are in need of an education that incorporates metaphysics as well as physics, that integrates faith and learning.

Epistemologically, Christians believe that all true knowledge is of God, and thus possesses a cosmic unity that, at its deepest level, the various knowledge areas (e.g., disciplines such as language, history, mathematics, science) of that unified knowledge are related, interconnected, and integrated. As noted by Polkinghorne (1986, 1991), there is only one world. All knowledges within the cosmos are co-oriented to truth, and the essence of Christianity is truthfulness and wholeness. Consequently, faith and learning are integral (and therefore integrated) to holistic understanding of the cosmos, which views human beings as living organisms with inseparable and integrated mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual dimensions. Human understanding will continue to progress as it unearths these connections as better methods and instrumentation for measurement are developed, and as wisdom is sought over human knowledge and information. Glimpses of the divine in our world counter the certainty of uncertainty encountered on a daily basis. Rather than being a barrier to further progress, uncertainty provides a strong stimulus for, and an important ingredient of, creativity and progress (Pollack, 2003). And, as Pink (2005) suggests, creativity will be one of the necessary survival skills for the 21st century, and more so for Christian schools expressing their identity as faith communities (ecclesial identity) and, more recently, as agencies of evangelistic encounter (mission) for the unchurched children and young people. As Peters

(2003) noted: "God does new things and we, made in God's image, are capable of transforming the old into the new" (p. 79). The creation story unleashes "the energy of a courage that is a life of mindfulness" (Desmond, 2005, p.69) to otherness beyond finitude, to metaphysics beyond physics; and courage is the most urgently needed virtue in the Church today (Radcliffe, 2005).

The incarnation represents the second and final creation of humanity (in Christ), and the second and final true imago Dei (in Christ). Unlike Adam and Eve, but like Moses, Christ was born into bondage. His task was to change the nature of death from terminus to portal; a portal to eternal life through which he could lead his people out of bondage toward the promised land, the Kingdom of Heaven. 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery' (Galatians 5:1). Jesus demonstrated what it is to be really human, in his relationships with God and with others. True humanity, modelled by Jesus, is represented in 1 Cor. 13 as love. Without love, humanity is ultimately null and void, empty of its essence; humanity cannot be truly human without residing in the divine. In the apostle Paul's terms, we only become truly human "in Christ." In similar manner, Christian education is empty of its essence if not residing in the divine via a theology grounded in faith, hope and love. Consequently, it is reasonable to argue from this perspective that education (and therefore learning) without faith, hope, or love, is empty of its essence. Furthermore, it is reasonable to suggest that any discussion of the integration of faith and learning is impoverished if not accompanied by the essential roles of hope and love in a holistic faith-learning context.

Christian education is founded on and grounded in the Creation and the Incarnation: Christ is both Human and God and One. Therefore, a theology of education gives a *qualitative* difference to Christian education beyond that of secularism. The difficulty is to eschew the temptation to derive pride from quantitative intellectual, social or personal differences (such as better facilities, higher academic scores, higher salaries, etc.) as if in competition with secularist education. Incarnate love is people-centric. Being people-centric, Christian education works from a sacramental focus on members, service, responsiveness, and relationships. It removes all humanly constructed barriers with respect to such fields as gender, generation, geography and grouping (Witherington, 2004), replacing them with a future that is open to new realities and a continuing creation within God's overall design.

God, in Old and New Testament times, acted first to save his people (John 3:16), and secondarily to restore order in the universe (Psalm 19:1-6; 104:19-23). The latter action of God indicates an important foundation for life and learning, that there are laws of physics and laws of the Kingdom of Heaven by which to live wisely and humanly. Christian education is founded on a relational power (perhaps law?) of love: God to humanity, humanity to God, humanity to humanity. Embedded in this love is a commitment and loyalty to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical) (Luke 10:27; Matt. 22:37), as God first loved and chose us. And there can be no Christian love without equality (Radcliffe, 2005, p. 66). One of the most compelling theological truths relating to the Trinity is the equality and oneness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in whose image humanity was originally

created, and which is recreated 'in Christ'. Consequently, all humans are ontologically equal, irrespective of nationality, position, gender, and so forth (cf. Gal. 3:28,29). The implications of this theological truth, based on the Godhead itself, have yet to resonate throughout the Church and its educational corridors - for example, in gender and leadership equality and oneness.

2. The garden and wilderness temptations theme

The Garden and Wilderness scenarios elucidate such (sub)themes as freedom, choice, the faith-reason nexus, and the infinite love of God for humanity. The Garden depicts the temptation scene of Adam and Eve, the temptation to undo creation by a choice within agapeic freedom. Primarily the choice is between life (sustained by the life-creator) and death (separated from the life-creator), secondarily between a knowledge of good and a knowledge also inclusive of evil. At the most elemental level, Adam and Eve resorted to an illusory unbalanced separation of reason from faith (trust and confidence) in God's word, believing that reason apart from faith would deliver greater wisdom. Instead, when the choice was freely made to know evil as well as good, the Creator was superseded by the created, faith was superseded by reason, and life was superseded by death. The creature chose a self-enclosed self-referential finitude of fabricated reality, with outcomes so vividly and starkly evident in the world today. For in the modern world, faith generally has been replaced by science, and science and reason are viewed as the ultimate source of all meaning, rather than faith and reason.

God forbade the pair to eat of the tree of good and evil, but he did not inhibit them from partaking of the fruit. God did not act as preventer of their thoughts or actions, nor did he give a preview of what would happen, apart from the ultimate consequence of death. The language implies that the ethics here is partly consequentialist, or teleological, and partly deotological, indicative of the intended inseparable unity of faith and reason. By using reason without faith, they forfeited life.

The choice of Adam and Eve, the undoing of the purpose of God's creation, reveals several theological (sub)themes pertinent to Christian education. First, freedom is a gift of God, permitting people, in some sense, the autonomy to create their own destinies, somewhat ironically also allowing for autonomy to separate away from God (e.g., through the hollow ideas of free thinking or relativism). Second, reason apart from faith ends in foolishness and separation from the goodness of God. Third, it evidences the most radical love of God that he offers to all, as depicted by Desmond (2005):

> But the offer, as radically free from hatred, is also an offer in freedom and of freedom, and as such it can be refused. The offer cannot but let free the evil one to remain as it wills itself to be, and, if it wills, to be enemy. There can be no necessary redemption of the evil, this enemy. The letting be of evil, as free, is entailed by agapeic love, and evil's redemption can only come through freedom, when freedom consents to freedom. But this consent, too, is freely graced. (p.311)

Christ, as the second Adam, prevailed in an imperfect wilderness setting diametrically contrasted to the perfect Edenic setting of Adam and Eve. The choice by Adam and Eve

concerning the serpent and the temptations in the Garden of Eden, delivered death – not the life and wisdom aspired to by the couple. The choice by Jesus concerning the serpent and the temptations in the desert wilderness, delivered life - not the death and foolishness depicted by Jesus' detractors. The basis of freedom and choice is the agapeic love of God, and it is this radical love that provides the impetus for Christian education.

God tempts no one, and cannot be tempted by evil (James 1:12,13). Jesus advised that we pray against temptation (Mk. 14:38; Matt. 6:13). We may choose to separate from God into a falling away (separation to apostasy), or we may choose to unite with God into a standing together (wholeness to holiness). In salvation history, the record reveals the temptation of Adam and Eve, the three great temptations of the wilderness wanderings of Israel, and the three temptations of Jesus. At its most elemental level, temptation is a testing, a trailing of faith, which is of far greater import than morality alone. The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13) focus on the temptation to fall away from the Great Commandment to love God (the shema of Deut. 6.4,5,13; cf. 22:36-40, Luke 4:7) and replace it with spiritual pride. The temptations focus on the creature daring to either replace God or control him. After the temptations to fall away, Christ preached of his own life and mission (and therefore the mission of the Church) in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-16), revealing a further basis for Christian education.

3. Imago Dei in humanity theme
Creation placed a superlative value on humanity, as humanity was made in the image of God. The imago Dei assigns meaning and worth to human beings as male and female, togetherness as shared. wholeness, one incomplete without the equal other. To be wholly (holy) human is to be more than human: it is to be in Christ, to be connected to God; to live in relationship with God. To be truly human, then, is to transcend our humanness as is. It is humanity in the making, becoming, rather than humanity as made, being.

All have been made in God's image, and therefore all persons are of worth and should be respected. All persons have a dignity based on the imago Dei. Christian education, particularly in formal institutions of learning, has the privileged responsibility to account for God's grace, the reason why grace is necessary for the human condition, and the need for restoration of God's image in humanity (White, 1952). It is sound practice to be empathetic and caring of students, and a safe learning climate is normally necessary, but not sufficient, for learning to occur. It is overly optimistic of human nature, however, to assume (either from a secular or religious perspective) that if a teacher adopts a facilitative and affirming role, then students will respond positively, and spontaneously adopt the right choices and goals. For teachers to take on a mere facilitative or managerial role allowing students to conduct or construct their own learning, places too positive an emphasis on students' ability to be mature. Of course, this approach sometimes disguises the subtle affirmations and reinforcements of a traditional behaviourist approach to covertly direct students towards a preferred personal (teacher, societal, or religious) worldview.

4. The exodus theme: the leading out and towards, of Israel and the Church

Salvation history events illustrate that God's agapeic love not only provides the freedom for people to choose bondage, or be placed into bondage, but also provides the means to free people from bondage. More importantly, people are free to emerge into something new and more whole (Peters, 2003, p. 83). God brings out of, he redeems, he delivers, he saves, and he leads in the present – from both the past and the future. The latter (What Peters calls a *retroactive ontology*, p. 85), because Christ incarnate brought the future with him into the present; for example, the Kingdom of Heaven established under his leadership. The term of leadership is particularly apt for a theology of Christian education, since the term educate derives from Latin *educere*, approximately meaning to lead out, to lead forth, to bring up, to educe. So an educator is also an eductor, one who educes.

A theology of education is well illustrated by the narrative of God, through Moses, leading out and leading forth God's chosen people to freedom from bondage, and to enlightenment of the Kingdom of Heaven and its laws (Deut. 8:2; Isa. 43:16). Jesus was recognised as the ultimate leader (e.g., John 14:6; Heb. 2:10; 12:2). Separate from this theology, secular education may lead out and lead forth into increased information, knowledge, and understanding of that knowledge, but all is encapsulated within the limits of the finite and material. There is nowhere to escape to, from the immediate and imminent. Jesus spoke of the blind leaders of the blind (Matt. 23:16, 24; 15:14; Rom. 2:19), when reason is set apart from the Spirit of Truth (Matt. 15:14; Luke 6:39; John 16:13). This education is predetermined to be self-enclosing, since it is self-referential and this-worldly. It is empty of future significance apart from perhaps a dream of earthly success (cf. the three temptations of Christ). Success, however, of itself, is vacuous. Success in leadership, if not subtended by a deep sense of responsibility, worth and value, if not grounded in a spirituality of being, can deteriorate into self-serving, tyranny and evil. Illustrative of this point is the notion that secular universities now, in a form of bondage, serve only themselves, simply being another corporation in a world of transnationally exchanged capital (Readings, 1996, p.43).

Learning may be viewed as an active reaching out for knowledge and comprehension of the mind and heart to create a future. Teaching may be viewed as an active leading out, as eductor, of knowledge and comprehension for the students' mind and heart, allowing them to create a future – a future of possibilities enabling them to become something that they could not have become without education. Teaching is about the leading of learning; and educational systems, often inadvertently, do disservice to students, parents, themselves, and their countries to categorise teaching as simply management of learning. The latter notion places too much onus on the student. Jesus led his disciples; he did not merely manage their learning. Students, though, may be helped to manage their learning in the journeying together of Christian education. Leading and managing, teaching and learning, are two sides of the same unity, both a form of putting forth (and therefore active and dynamic), where the pedagogue (as theist rather than deist) leads out in - that is, a putting forth of - the garden of knowledge (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:15-16), and where the student reaches out to subdue and rule over this new garden (Gen. 1:28-30; 2:15-16), with opportunity for pedagogue and student sometimes to reverse roles in free educative and holistic interaction.

Christian education leads minds and hearts to an understanding of reality, and therefore is ethical in the sense that it deals with what is and has the courage to be. It incorporates a lifelong dynamic way of viewing the world, a leading towards, to make informed choices and life decisions. Christian education is a leading out of bondage to self and others (as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus). It is community-minded, and is prepared to stand up for self and others. Rather than simply being socialised, being educated is being updated, seeing new scenery, with new knowledge, critically reinterpreting the old with the new - as ever new. It is a continuous refreshing of the mind, a continuous expansion of the horizons, confronting new frontiers, a re-cohering of incoming data, the growing and expanding universe of the mind and heart. There is an impartation of new knowledge, allowing continuing departures from the present moment on a continuing journey, an ongoing conversation with strangers and mystery, the unfolding of the mind to an expanding worldview, a parting of company from that which no longer is sensible or meaningful, remaining open to participate with others in a shared understanding (a community) of new meanings and senses. All this with humility, since, no matter how intelligent, humans constitute only a small part of a larger reality which will always be beyond their comprehension.

5. Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven theme

Jesus began his ministry after his victory over the temptation in the wilderness, to preach and teach about the good news of the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven. The coming of the Messiah was the ushering in of God's Kingdom with its two principal commandments, to love God and to love one another. All churches, to remain authentically Christian, will consciously continue to identify with the nature, qualities, and values of the Kingdom of Heaven, and, therefore, from this perspective, there is an irreducible, non-relativist, fundamental essence to Christian theology, such that this essence remains the same over various conditions and circumstances, geographies and time. This essential Christian theology contours the shape and content of Christian education, and the way that it is understood and practised.

Christ's sinless death ensured that he became the "Tree of Life" for humanity, all of whom now have a knowledge of good and evil. The choice is for life, not death, for all those who pick from this tree. The underwritten guarantee for the potency of the fruit of this tree is the resurrection event. New Testament theology emanates from the resurrection content of 1 Cor. 15:3-4 (cf. Phil. 2:5-11). The resurrection is the means of salvation (Rom. 4:24; 8:11, 34; 6:4, 9), and therefore is the decisive factor in the gospel, of God's breaking into and breaking apart history. The Kingdom of Heaven welcomes the becoming of true humanness in Christ, and the forthcoming return of Christ, wherein occurs a total transformation from corruption to incorruptibility; dishonour to glory; weakness to power; and natural to spiritual (1 Cor. 15:42-44). The resurrection is the guarantee of the fulfilment of permanent and perfect rest in Christ, and access to the promised land (Heb. 4:4; cf. Gen. 2:2). The past has been cancelled; exit slavery and bondage, enter freedom and Kingdom of Heaven. Christ is leading his people into the freshness of new and everlasting life. Death has been vanquished (1 Pet. 1:3; I Cor. 15) by rebirth – being born again (cf. baptism) into a life of hope; by faith as a dying and

rising again with Jesus (Rom. 6:11; Jn. 5:24). The prodigals become alive again (Luke 15:24).

The Christ-crisis event (birth, life, death, and resurrection) unveils and re-orients, even re-cognises, the value and meaning of life, and confirms an ontological sense to our existence. The foolishness of the cross breaks the stupor of self-reference and self-reverence, enlightening the mind to a clearer understanding of the mystery of life. In theology there is awakening. A theology of education gives education purpose, freedom, respect for self and others, justice and mercy, discipline, celebration and delight, and care. Christian education converts to telos, an unfolding 'toward' as well as 'from', to a vision for the future, imagination, and destiny.

Christian education, then, is an edifying, an enlightening, an unveiling (aletheia), a transforming. One can never master mystery, only live intelligently with and within it. Christian education has to do with enlightenment founded in a Christian heritage, and not to be used in the same sense as Hinduism and Buddhism (of the highest attainment of the imminent self, separating that self from the rest of humanity – a holy self). Christian enlightenment, this unveiling, is finding the whole self in a holy transcendent other. Jesus, in coming to save, came to enlighten, to bring light to a world of darkness – he came to educate, the ultimate goal being to bring each person and community to an informed voluntary choice of choosing between two types of freedom: freedom of God or freedom apart from God; faith and reason, or reason without faith. Crucial to an understanding of Christian education is recognising that the freedom Christ gives is not simply something (a commodity) that we have or the choices that we make, but also what we become/are. There is a deeper ontological and theological quality to freedom than mere freedom of choice, of expression, and of rights.

Christian education is concerned with the incoming presence of the Kingdom of Heaven, introduced by Jesus at his first visitation, and to which he gave his highest allegiance. It incorporates Kingdom living, which, from an eschatological perspective, cuts across cultural, social and geographical boundaries and exemplifies God's promised new creation in a process of unfolding present-to-future realisation. The Kingdom community is the reconciled unity of people (Col. 1:17-20) living the eschatological good news in the presence of faith, hope and love, to be modelled by Christian education.

6. Values of the Kingdom of Heaven theme

Christian education is value(s)-driven because of the theological themes of creation and re-creation, and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (e.g., Matt. 5-7). Christian education emulates the values inherent in the Kingdom of Heaven, and considers the values of education to be sacred. The question of values sharply focuses the problem of values in secular education, which derives not from values that have been inverted from the highest ideals, but more so the simulations of these highest ideals, which, however, have been inwardly hollowed out and are false originals without foundation (cf. Desmond, 2005, p.186). A theology of education reposits its educational values in its foundational Christian heritage, which remains as an anchor of divine origination and credibility. Secular values, humanist values, may appear to be the same, may even be

called by the same name, may be considered to be socially important, but the foundations have been removed – they have been hollowed out inside.

The core Christian values that permeate throughout theology act as drivers to Christian education, and are pervasively influential. It is these values that build or destroy trust and commitment, integrity and authenticity, in Christian education. Values might include the three great theological virtues of faith-hope-love, as well as respect, truthfulness and trustworthiness, transparency, relationship, learning, generosity, openness and diversity. Values constitute the basic glue that binds together and undergirds education. For any church education system to be authentic to its Christian identity, it needs to remain authentic to its values and the theological beliefs upon which these values are founded. As such, Christian education cannot be ethically or morally quiescent in a society that supports moral equivalence and cultural relativism, or proffers secularised humanist values based on a constructionist shared understanding independent of religious belief. Consequently, a plurality of values does not mean an equality of values. Plurality is not equality, nor should it imply equality. The axiological question of what is of value must be answered in the light of the Kingdom of Heaven.

FROM THEOLOGY TO CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

It is outside the limited framework of this paper to address a philosophy of Christian education, or Christian education per se. The preliminary theology suggested above educes numerous implications for both the philosophy and practice of Christian education, which are also outside the scope of this paper, including a focus on the interface between faith and learning. Certainly this focus needs revisiting via a philosophical dialogical and dialectical analysis concerning the varied and layered meanings of these terms (faith, learning, integration, etc.) and whether there are more preferred terms or not, in order to better formulate theoretical and empirical research and practice concerning the interaction between faith and learning, and the positioning of Christ in the classroom. Integration of faith and learning alone may not be enough to ensure a successful outcome. What of convergence, or consonance, or different or parallel planes? If there are points of contact, what are they? Based on what assumptions and evidence? Does faith necessitate learning, and vice versa? There is the need for the continuous re-inventing of intellectual synergy and fresh perspectives on the faith-learning nexus. For instance, Barbour (1990) discusses four models relating to the interdisciplinary nexus between religion and science, namely: independence, conflict, dialogue, and integration. Padgett (2003) suggests a mutuality model, situated between the dialogue and full integration models. What models might be helpful in exploring the faith-learning nexus in Christian education?

Perhaps it would be a productive exercise for the church to bring together academic- and practitioner-scholars and other relevant stakeholders to critically engage with these, and other, models for contemporary Christian Education within the various global and local contexts. With this engagement, serious consideration would need to be given to where and how each of these models may occur in Christian Education. Basic questions, for instance, might include: Is integration expected at the very practical and concrete level within each lesson or unit of work across subject areas, or, more abstractly and generally,

only at the level of worldview? Is the mutuality model a better fit for some subject (discipline) areas than a full integration model? How do theology and education interrelate (with the correlative question of how do theology and philosophy – faith and reason – relate)? And, therefore, how do theology, philosophy, and education interrelate? The strategic point here is to note that unless time is taken to develop, evaluate and respond to the 'best' questions and the best models concerning the faith-learning nexus, the faith-rational knowledge interface, and the interrelatedness of faith, reason, and learning, much time and effort may be wasted on addressing inferior or wrong questions and models, thus limiting the efficacy of Christian Education. However, from the above few theological reflections interspersed with several implications for Christian education, a brief ensemble of ideas concerning Christian education is now proffered for further consideration by Christian educators.

Undergirded by the triadic virtues of faith-hope-love, Christian education works by principles of honesty, integrity, self-criticism, and compassionate service to others. It is trustworthy, lives with self-control, self-discipline, self-contentment and self-containment, with service to others a high priority. It gives humanity freedom that allows choices, which in turn allow differences and even disagreements. It encourages people to mature. It permits love, which in turn allows people to learn from one another. It behaves in a human(e) way. As well as equality, it is concerned with rights, duties and responsibilities.

Christian education eschews territory and authority over humanity, where the ultimate putdown is to deny the right of another to exist, or to deny the existence of the other. It aims to study the underlying realities in order to become more useful in order to generate better wellbeing (health and happiness) throughout humanity and the environment. It requires the full range of information, knowledge, understanding and wisdom from all discipline areas, such as the sciences, philosophy, and theology. Christian education, as an eclectic meta-discipline, depends on a leadership that is spiritual in essence since education is about the study from, of, and to reality vis-a-vis Christian theology. It gives the freedom to criticise reality, to improve, strengthen, and defend reality, but not the freedom to abandon it. Christian education, with its spiritual and educational essence, is the antithesis of abandonment. God became incarnate – he did not abandon his human creation. Leadership is about giving freedom, not taking it. It is about assisting and enabling, not abandoning.

Christian education believes in life. It changes lie to truth; death to life; hatred to love; failure to grace; despair to hope; defeat to victory. It transcends secular education, in that secular education (of itself), though performing for the good, cannot solve many of the existential and spiritual problems of contemporary Western societies. Christian education models life, so that it empowers and enables peoples, religions, families, societies, organisations and individuals to change, to hope, to live, and to die in peace and ontological freedom.

Adam and Eve succumbed to the temptation to separate faith and reason, choosing reason apart from faith. There is also the temptation to choose faith apart from reason,

subverting the truth question to concentrate on the salvation question. An overemphasis on religion of the heart may find the truth question undesirable and the salvation question more appealing. Christian education is concerned with balance, and therefore seeks truth through every means, since all truth derives from God. The promise is to seek and it shall be found – a reaching out, a searching and researching. Faith and reason cohere in Messiah and Logos. Christian education, therefore, is concerned with salvation and truth, where truth is the "mediated disclosure of what is real" (Padgett, 2003, p. 162), not merely agreement, consensus, or something uncontroversial, and so forth. Thus, there can be no hermetic separation between truth and salvation.

In a previous section, *Christian and Secular Education*, it was suggested that Christian education surpasses secular education in three primary ways. There is a fourth way, however, that is even more important. Timothy Radcliffe (2005), in his fascinating book: *What is the point of being a Christian*, believes that, if Christianity is true, it does not have a point other than to point to God who is the point of everything. The whole point of doing anything, of being anything, emanates from this "point of everything", which is what religions are all about. He states that a religion that tries to market and justify itself as useful for other purposes (e.g., it helps one to live a stable and longer life; there are nice people in it; it makes one prosperous; Christians are better than other people; it keeps the youth from frequenting 'worldly' places, etc.) is not a religion that can be taken seriously. "The point of Christianity is to point to God as the meaning of our lives. To hope is to hang on to the confidence that there is some ultimate point to human existence. If there is not, then Christianity and all religion is a waste of time" (Radcliffe, 2005, p. 5).

In education the following questions seem particularly pertinent: *What is the point of being a Christian educator?* and *What is the point of Christian education?* The point would have to be: to point to God, to point to Christ. Christian educators point to the Saviour, but are not saviours themselves. The notion that the main purpose of Christian education is to save souls for the Kingdom, I believe, is based partly on the current popular fallacy of a Christian teaching ministry, where the term 'ministry' is now so overused that fundamentally it is almost meaningless. The point of Christian education is not so much to 'save souls' (the responsibility of the Holy Spirit) as to point students to God as the meaning of our lives. It is enabling students to make an intelligent and informed choice - for themselves - between life and death. "The essential point of education is to provide individuals with the understanding to make their own rational judgment as to what is known and what is not" (Barron & Woods, 2006, p.114). Christian educators, then, accompany their students' exploration of life and of themselves, sharing (rather than imposing) what they know and believe in an educative friendship and partnership.

From a Christian perspective, two points may be extrapolated from the above. First, a religious education system or institution that tries to market and justify itself as useful for other purposes (e.g., superior academic achievements, state-of-the-art resources, bigger and better facilities, safer environment, teacher-student ratios, etc.) is not a system that can be taken seriously. Christian educators should not be part of some mutual admiration society. Second, the temptation to covertly enculturate, indoctrinate, or to socialise, rather

than educate, the minds of children and young people in the educational setting is one that educators, including chaplains, constantly must guard against, since the essence of Christianity is wholeness and truthfulness, not differentiation and deceit – irrespective of the worth of intention. Christian education, as a system, and Christian educators within this system, point to Christ, for it is only He who can strip away the masks that we wear (as a fragmented part), and who allows us the freedom and delight to discover who we really (wholly) are, and the purpose of/for our lives.

Christian education points to God who is the point of everything, and to Christ who alone can give meaningful freedom to all who accept the invitation to come/go to Him. "Christian scholarship or Christian learning is thus scholarship informed by, grounded in, and interpreted within the Christian worldview (a worldview that arises out of Christian tradition, practice, and faith)" (Padgett, 2003, p. 115). Christ's life and teachings point to God, as do the life and teachings of Ellen G. White, a lesser light pointing to the greater light. As Ellen White wrote in the context of education for children and young people: *Point them to the One "altogether lovely." When once the gaze is fixed upon Him, the life finds its centre.*

CONCLUSION
It is only through the Spirit of God that the Christian Church can receive, as gifts, the agapeic confidence, courage, fidelity, freedom, and wisdom to vision its essential theology in twenty-first century, first-world Western democratic societies. Theology is paramount to the development of a theological framework suited to underlabouring Christian education and sharing Christ in the classroom. This paper tentatively has posited a number of interdependent complementary themes that together may make some progress towards the challenge of developing a theology of education framework for revisioning Christian education. It is hoped that scholars in theology, religion, and education disciplines from the various faith traditions might accept the challenge to apply their accumulated wisdom to better express the gestalt of the tentative, preliminary framework presented in this paper – for the common good of all Christian, and perhaps by extrapolation, religious and secular, education.

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