

1. The nature of the learner.

There are a number of starting points from which we can begin to address this question. Most teachers will have first confronted it in educational psychology programs. I can well remember the first time that I heard some forty years ago about Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. It made sense to me that only when physiological, safety, love and esteem needs had been met, can a student move on towards self-actualization. This initial interest turned to alarm when the characteristics of self-actualization were revealed. Whilst human kinship, interpersonal relationships, humility, respect, values and fresh appreciation were unexceptionable, what Maslow had in mind when he spoke of autonomy, resistance to enculturation, ethics and perception of reality raised real issues for me as a graduate in theology.

Subsequent experience has confirmed that my initial reactions were

before stating that ‘Beneath each of these scenarios lies the assumption that all humans share a common human nature and that fulfilling this nature matters.’⁷ So far, so good!

It is in the final section of the chapter that things go seriously astray. It is entitled ‘Defining what it is to be human’. We would agree with him when he argues that you cannot define what it means to be human simply in terms of our physical composition – so much water, carbon and minerals – or our physical likeness and attributes compared with the animal kingdom. Instead he believes the key to a proper understanding is to accept the Aristotelian understanding of human nature as being constituted by its potentialities – what it is capable of becoming.

At this point one might expect a Christian philosopher or theologian to consider the *imago dei* (‘image and likeness of God’ concept) of Genesis 1: 26. But, no! Vardy is concerned only with behaviours, not the relational dimension. His methodology is suspect because he makes no attempt to exegete the biblical passage and to relate it to the broader theological concerns that the opening chapters of Genesis are seeking to develop. As a consequence he never considers Paul’s diagnosis of the human condition in Romans 1:18-3:20. The pivotal verse Romans 1:18 makes it quite clear that all people are under the wrath of God because of their godlessness (Greek: asebeian = loss of relationship with God) and moral wickedness (Greek: adikian = nsy

‘fulfilment’ meaning, and to an objective measure of moral right and wrong¹³. However, this is without reference to the biblical picture of human destiny, which is closely linked to the call to be in relationship with God and to be obedient to his revealed will as expressed in the moral law. St Paul expresses this powerfully in 2 Corinthians 5:20a-21 when he exhorts his hearers ‘We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.’

What relevance does all this have to teachers in Anglican schools? If the understanding of the human person that underlies the Five-strand RAVE approach is so inadequate, we should be very hesitant about embracing it. Yet I have observed that this naturalistic approach appeals to, and is uncritically adopted by, numerous teachers in Anglican schools. I have observed it all too frequently in Christian Studies lessons where the teacher moves directly from the Bible passage to a moral application, whether the passage is making a moral point or not. This type of problem is

examine shortly, is: To what extent do we allow our theology to impact upon our professional understanding and practice as educators?

With respect to the relation of theology to culture, a range of possibilities is open to us. At one extreme, we can take a fundamentalist stance and attempt to repeat a traditional theology or version of Christianity as though reality can be understood on its own terms, without any recognition that our historical and cultural situation affect the way we read the Bible and engage in thought. This separation of faith from educational practice has led fundamentalists to adopt Skinner's operant conditioning psychology as a foundation for their Accelerated Christian Education program. This approach appears to be in direct contrast to the biblical view of the human person. I believe that we are obliged by the scriptures to try to apply our theological understanding to our educational practice. In doing so we are forced to come to terms with social and cultural change as well as alternative assumptions and worldviews that are held by educational psychologists, sociologists and others. So I maintain the fundamentalist approach is not acceptable in Anglican schools.

Cambridge theologian David Ford¹⁵ suggests there are four other possible approaches for relating theology to culture. The second type is when priority is given to the self-description is

world faiths.²⁵ One critic of the liberal Protestant agenda has argued that ‘Out of such a metanarrative emerged the tendency to substitute the particularities of a given faith for the generalities of a vaguely defined, universally available, humanist-oriented religiosity’²⁶

What is the point of all this for leaders in Anglican schools? We need to recognise that the training of many, if not most, of our teachers does not equip them to be as discriminating as they need to be in what is a very complex landscape. Much of what I have just said would be quite foreign to them. They believe that God has clearly spoken through his word, the Bible, but they do not have the skills to analyse critically the masked presuppositions of others, or to think theologically about their own assumptions and teaching methodologies. Evangelical Christians are prone to compartmentalising their faith from their educational practice. They too readily adopt liberal humanist teaching philosophies and practices, such as those I have described, without being aware of the conflict this has created.

I turn now to the central question: What is the biblical view of the nature of the human learner?

3. What theology of childhood and adolescence does the Bible teach?

Two major issues have been raised for us in the light of the foregoing discussion. What is the nature and extent of human potential? What limitations are there to human capacities? I want now to address

While you may not be inclined to accept Augustine's developing thought, the challenge is to analyse why you do not and to see whether the position you hold has a stronger biblical foundation than his. The second salutary thing is that Augustine began the way he did because that was a softer, more conducive position for his contemporaries. By hard thinking and application of his Bible to his experience he came to a different view. There is a lesson here for us to keep working with the biblical text on the

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and to all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground – everything that has the breath of life in it – I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. God saw that all he had made, and it was very good.

As Blocher remarks, ‘the Bible excludes the pagan theme of the divinization of man and all the dreams of hidden divinity

of humanity (1 Corinthians 7:7, 26-

an interpretation and in favour of it being a breach of the covenant relationship through an wrongful assertion of autonomy⁴⁰.

Blocher sums up the effects of sin in this way:

[The author] tells us that at the heart of sin lies the claim to autonomy, that sin is rooted deep in our hearts by doubt and covetousness, that it overthrows the created order, that it is both weakness and arrogance, and that it brings alienation to the human race, to the advantage of that spirit of false wisdom which corrupts the religion of men⁴¹.

This begs the question of whether the biblical material at this point is mythical, historical or some other literary genre. I do not have the time to consider this. The full range of positions taken

This is an unattractive doctrine for those brought up on the current Darwinian perspective on human origins. Some are as bold as French philosopher Paul Ricoeur in declaring

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This slumber also constrains our ability to address the big issues in education, since
Christians have not seen it to be desirable to be in the forefront of ed471.030Td0231Fj/TT01Tf0sues

and only 24% had orthodox views on the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Surprisingly perhaps, 51% of students believed in the Trinity and 74% believed in the virgin birth. Students were shown to hold conservative beliefs in spite of their teachers' theological liberalism! This is not a happy situation, nor is it one that we would like to see in Anglican schools. The remedy, friends, lies in our hands. It requires sustained work, since yesterday's solutions may not apply to today's problems.

What resources are available to help us to avoid such pitfalls? Our hope is that the Anglican Teacher Education program will, over time, produce more critically aware teachers with a deeper grasp of biblical theology. For those who prefer self-directed learning, Robert Pazmino's two books *God Our Teacher*⁵⁵ and *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*⁵⁶ are a good starting point. Trevor Cooling's 'Transforming Hearts and Minds' address⁵⁷ to the 2005 Australian Anglican Schools Network Conference provides a way into the resources that have been developed 1