

# **Living into Transcendence:**

## ***A Framework for Christian Education***

***Graham Leo***

**Gold Coast, Australia, 2019.**

**This version is current at 4 October, 2019.**

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## About the author

Dr Graham Leo served as a Principal for 25 years in independent, Christian schools. He completed a Doctor of Ministry in 2017 on the topic of Faith and Work. He has taught in four different universities or tertiary colleges in Education, Literature and Theology. Graham has authored scores of articles and papers, as well as publishing a fiction novel, a book of poetry and four other books in the areas of theology and school management.

He has addressed education conferences in the USA, Korea, Japan, Philippines, and the UK, as well as in most States of Australia.

Graham is married to Mieke, and together they have been blessed with three children and nine grandchildren.

More of Graham's writings can be accessed at [www.grahamleo.com](http://www.grahamleo.com)

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*Living into Transcendence: A Framework for Christian Education.*

E-book. Published at Gold Coast, Australia. 2019. [www.grahamleo.com](http://www.grahamleo.com)

## Preamble

This e-book has been written after more than four decades of thinking about Christian education.

I do not claim to be producing anything really new in this little volume. The ideas are as old as Genesis. Psalm 119 is an extended reflection of the entrancing beauty, the deep goodness, and the abiding truth of the Torah, the Word of God. That is essentially the base of these reflections, too, but brightened with the Light that came into the world at the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Outside of the Jewish revelation of truth, Plato and other Greek scholars mulled on these ideas in a pagan culture long before Jesus Christ was born. The prologue of the Gospel of John brought the ancient Hebrews and the Greek philosophers together in a *tour de force* of theological insight:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth (John 1:1 & 14).*

In this book I am standing on the shoulders of these ancient giants and pointing out a way of thinking those thoughts again in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century schooling.

I am making this e-book freely available to schools and tertiary institutions in Australia and overseas at least until I develop the content into a more permanent form. It is my gift to Christian education after most of my professional lifetime of service. I am willing to be engaged to speak to school staff or conferences to discuss the model that I propose in this book.

Some readers may value a brief sketch of my professional background.

I was born in Queensland, Australia, and educated at State schools and at the University of Queensland, where I earned separate degrees in Arts and Educational Studies, as well as a Diploma of Education. I taught in Queensland State schools from 1972 until 1982, and then took up a role as Principal of Launceston Christian School in Tasmania. I served there from 1983 until 1989, when I moved to Launceston Church Grammar School (1990 – 1995) as Head of English and Head of Boarding. While

there I earned a Master of Education from the University of Tasmania. I then took the role of Principal at Emmanuel College, Gold Coast, from 1996 till my retirement in 2013.

After retirement, (following on from an earlier studies in Divinity) I completed a Doctor of Ministry (Adelaide College of Divinity) using my original research to write a thesis in the area of Faith and Work. My research for this degree relates closely to the theological issues discussed in this book. In retirement I have served for a term as Theologian-in-Residence at Monkton Combe School in the UK, was employed for almost two years as a Hospital Chaplain, and have written three books.

Because I want to keep this book readable by busy, working teachers, I have tried to avoid any academic ponderousness as far as possible, but have provided all of the usual academic references and bibliography to enable further study. It is not 'dumbed down', but I hope it is de-jargonised! I loathe educational jargon, but I love teaching and I've never stopped learning.

I promise you won't read about how to 'push the envelope to create a visionary professional learning community which will create space to achieve transformative leadership goals'. You won't find the words 'teaching-learning interface' even once!

I am very willing to engage with readers about anything I have covered in this book, or the implications that might arise from it. I have included my own contact details on the third page of this publication, immediately following the Table of Contents. My purpose in writing is to engage, not to declaim and disappear. I hope that you will see fit to contact me with your thoughts on this little book.

Dr Graham Leo  
Gold Coast, Australia.

September, 2019.

## Chapter One: Once Upon a Time...

Everything starts with a story. Everyone loves a good story. I think that enough time has passed by for me to be able to tell the story I am going to tell in a moment.

My story is about Christian schools. That phrase needs some explanation, however, as my story will show. But I need to tell you a little more before I tell my story.

When Australians talk about Christian schools, *as opposed to other independent or church schools*, they generally mean a school that has been established to provide a profoundly ‘Christ-centred’<sup>1</sup> education to its community. Almost all Christian schools of this kind have been set up by churches or groups of Christian parents who want to have their own version of ‘uncompromised Christian education’ for their children.

The first such school in Australia opened in 1962, and came out of the (mainly Dutch) Reformed Church in Kingston, just south of Hobart – Calvin Christian School. This was the first of the Association of Parent-Controlled Schools, now called Christian Education National (CEN). They quickly moved to establish other similar schools in other States.

In 1976, the first ‘non-parent-controlled’ school commenced in Regents Park in western Sydney, a ministry (mainly) of Baptist churches. This was the start of a movement of church-based schools known as Christian Community Schools. Most of these would be associated with Baptist or Pentecostal churches.

By the mid-90’s a large number of schools had been established around the nation, mostly, but not all, connected with a local church. Queensland had a large number of independent schools, not connected with either of the two large associated bodies mentioned above, but similar in purpose and ethos. The vast majority of these contained the words *Christian School* (or *College* or *Academy*) in their names.

In 1985, a national body, the Australian Association of Christian Schools was established. Their current website describes its historical purpose:

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<sup>1</sup> What that means in practice, is, of course, extremely difficult to define – and certain to vary greatly amongst different groups of Christians.

The new wave of schools operating under the name "Christian schools" has been established by Protestant Churches and groups of parents so that children from Australian families can access an education delivered from a Christian worldview at affordable rates.<sup>2</sup>

These schools are Protestant, inexpensive, seek to employ Christian staff, and focus on a Christian worldview.

Now it's time to tell the story that I promised above.

At the time it occurred (about 1984 or '85), I had been Principal of Launceston Christian School for about two or three years, and I had just succeeded in having the school accepted as the first 'Christian School', into membership of the Association of Independent Schools of Tasmania (AIST). It was seen by many as a bold move by a rank outsider, a storming of the bastions of respectable, even prestigious, private schooling.

I was greeted reasonably warmly by the Rev. Dr Dudley Clarke, the Headmaster of the highly respected Hutchins School in Hobart. He was a venerable gentleman, even then, with a long and distinguished history in education. He was to earn an OBE for his contributions to schools.

He asked who I was, and on hearing that I was Principal of a Christian school, he was thoughtfully silent for a bit, almost as if he were deciding to tell me something; then he told me this anecdote. He did not give me any introduction to it, nor did he tell me why he told it. After he had finished, he shook my hand, told me he was pleased to meet me, and walked away. I was left to ponder his words.

This is what he told me:

*In 1962, I was invited to attend the opening of a new school in Kingston, the Calvin Christian School. I think your school may be associated with that group. I accepted the invitation, of course. I was sitting with the Catholic Archbishop, the Anglican Bishop, Heads of other independent schools, and guests from local churches. We were all happy to support the opening of this new school.*

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<sup>2</sup> AACCS, Australian Association of Christian Schools, <https://www.aacs.net.au/about-us/who-is-aacs.html>.

*I was quite surprised to hear the first words of the Official Opening Speech, given by the minister of the Reformed Church. He was from Holland of course, and in a very strong Dutch accent, he told us proudly, 'Ladies and gentlemen, today is a historical event. On this day, Christian Education has come to Tasmania.'*

*We all sat there a bit stunned, all these church leaders, and Heads of Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian schools. Our schools had been educating scholars in Tasmania for over 100 years.<sup>3</sup> But on this day in 1962, we were told, Christian Education had arrived in Tasmania.*

I couldn't know then, but our paths would merge more closely than either of us could envisage at that stage. Dr Clarke had earlier served as Chaplain at Monkton Combe School near Bath, UK, where I was to serve briefly as honorary Chaplain and Theologian-in-Residence thirty years later. He left such a powerful legacy at that school that within a couple of decades of his time there, it was estimated that one per cent of all Church of England ministers in the UK were graduates of that school. He was a deeply Christian man.

But on this day, as a nervous and quite over-awed new Principal, I was left to wonder at his reasons for telling me this little reminiscence. Of all the stories that he could have told me, and all the things he could have said to me at our first meeting, why did this thoughtful and dignified man tell me that story?

Well, it had the effect that I think he must have intended. I have never forgotten his story, and I have thought about it probably hundreds of times since. I can barely use the term 'Christian school' without a flash of memory – that fine head of white curly hair, the clear voice and rounded vowels, telling me of the Dutchman who boasted of Christian education coming to town.

Australian 'Christian schools' have always assumed that they held somewhat of a monopoly on Christian education in Australia. There has been an embarrassing tinge of newcomer's arrogance to much of our

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<sup>3</sup> Launceston Church Grammar School was established in 1846. It claims to be the oldest continually-operating school in Australia. There had, of course, been church education well before that date. The Rev. Richard Johnston opened the first Church of England school in Australia in Sydney in 1793.

posturing. Dr Clarke clearly held a different view – and had sound reason to do so.

I was forced to think then, and I have thought a great deal since, of the message he was giving me, and of the questions he was asking to me to consider.

What does it mean to be a Christian school?

Is a Christian school the only place that can offer Christian education?

Is there more than one way of offering Christian education?

Did the 'Christian School' movement in Australia make a category error in allowing itself to be called by that name?

This last question is an interesting one, and I think I may know why it happened the way that it did.

As it happened, I married into a Dutch family from the Reformed tradition in Holland, and I often listened to my mother-in-law talking in her thick Dutch accent about schools as I sat around the family meal-table, learning to comprehend her half-English and half-Dutch words and phrases. She talked about the schools that she was familiar with in Holland before the Second World War: the *Christelijke schol*, the *Katholieke schol* and the state *schol*.<sup>4</sup> (She didn't use a Dutch word for the state school, or if she did I've forgotten it.)

For her, as for all her compatriots of that era in Holland, it was a simple enough choice. If you were Catholic, you went to the *Katholieke school*; if you were Protestant (i.e. Reformed Church) you went to the *Christelijke school*, and if you weren't at all religious you went to the government school. When the great wave of post-war Dutch migration came to Australia in the 1950s, the newcomers looked to where they would send their children to school.

The Catholics had a simple choice. The non-religious ones just went to the State school, but the Reformed church families – of whom there were many hundreds in Tasmania, decided reasonably enough that they needed a Reformed Church school. So they translated the Dutch word they were familiar with, the *Christelijke schol* into English, and came up

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<sup>4</sup> Pronounced, respectively: *Krist-luh-kuh* and *Kat-oal-i-kuh*.

with *Christian School*. They saved their pennies week by week, and they finally built their first school: their very own Reformed or *Christelijke school*.

I suspect that Australian Christians have come to talk about Christian Schools as we do, because of a translation of a phrase from an energetic and productive migrant group who came to our shores over a half-century ago.<sup>5</sup>

When the sincere and faithful Dutchman unwittingly insulted his audience of educators and churchmen in 1962 with his declaration about Christian Education having at last arrived on Australian shores, he was telling the truth in his own translation. But that was not what the listeners heard. They heard an insult from a newcomer, devaluing the good work they had been engaged in for the last 120 years or so.

In 1985, 23 years later, one of his audience still remembered the smarting effect of those words. He thought he had been engaged in Christian education all of his life, and believed that he still was. And he invited me into his mind and his emotions to consider those words.

I'm still considering them, Dudley. And I'm about to write about them. *Pace*, old friend and colleague. We came together in the end, the way that God chose to weave the tale.

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, I am familiar with the term being used earlier in Canada and other places – but with the great Dutch Reformed tradition informing many of the schools in those locations, the same language transposition may well have occurred there, too.

## Chapter Two: What Story Could Christian Schools Live Into?

I'm going to assume that everything that I say about Christian schools and Christian education for the rest of this book will be relevant to the kind of schools and the kind of education that could be associated with the full range of Christian institutions. This will include Catholic and Protestant, old and recent, church and independent. It will include schools in Australia and overseas.

I'm guessing that the majority of my initial audience will be those newer schools that claim the title of 'Christian Schools', but there is no reason that the content of this book should not be adopted by any school which desires to present education through the prism of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the minds of children and families.

This is my starting point, one that I think Dr Clarke would have given his approval to:

***I am convinced that Christian education must maintain a firm commitment to preparing students for a full and active engagement in the world, on the basis of the best possible training both in the natural world through the arts and sciences, and the truth of God as revealed through scripture, tradition and scholarship. Further, this commitment will remain equally valid whether or not the students choose to follow Jesus Christ in their own personal lives.***

*Eternity*

Most Australians remember the Millennial fireworks display in Sydney in 2000, that featured the word *Eternity*, emblazoned on the Harbour Bridge. It commemorated the work of Arthur Stace, the alcoholic drifter who became a Christian in 1930, after stepping into the back rows of a revival meeting. He heard the preacher, John Ridley, say, *Eternity, Eternity, I wish that I could sound or shout that word to everyone in the streets of Sydney. You've got to meet it, where will you spend Eternity?*

For more than 35 years after that night until his death in 1967, this reformed drunkard wrote the word, *Eternity*, scores of times every night

in copperplate script on the pavements of Sydney.<sup>6</sup> He became a mysterious legend to Sydneysiders. It is estimated that he wrote the word over half a million times on Sydney streets. He was accused of defacing public property many times, but was never convicted.

What few people know is that the festival designer who came up with the idea to emblazon *Eternity* across the Harbour Bridge in fireworks was a graduate of St Ignatius College, Riverview, in Sydney. His name was Ignatius Jones. When he was given the task of Director for Sydney's millennium celebrations, it was the story of Arthur Stace and *Eternity* that came to Jones as being so 'incredibly Sydney'.

Regardless of whether Jones himself may or may not have led a post-school life closely linked with Christian practice, his schooling nevertheless enabled him to 'see', to imagine into reality, the connection that enlightened the entire world with the notion of *Eternity*.

That Christian schooling also enabled him to perceive the transcendent value of the word 'Eternity'. Without those years of being exposed to the mystery and beyond-ordinary-human experience of the Christian faith in formal school worship and daily life, Jones may have chosen any of a dozen things about Sydney to exemplify its character. It was his schooling that made his decision for him – whether he realised it or not.

This kind of outcome is the work of Christian education that we should all be seeking in our schools. The fireworks display was not especially religious. It was certainly not designed by the Committee which organised the display in Sydney with any evangelical or religious intent. But it promoted something that was worthwhile in the city and thus enriched Australian community life.

Effective Christian education brings light and truth to society.

Effective Christian education brings light and truth to society. It shines the light of beauty and goodness into dark places. It reveals truth, even if it is not always aware of what it is doing.

Since the beginning of Calvin Christian School in 1962, we have had almost 60 years of this radical kind of 'Christian education'. It's a fair question to ask, now, whether there has been enough to show for it?

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<sup>6</sup> His story may be read in detail here:

<https://theculturetrip.com/pacific/australia/articles/meet-arthur-stace-the-man-behind-sydneys-iconic-eternity-graffiti/>

How many Prime Ministers? How many research scientists? How many Supreme Court judges? How many Rhodes scholars?

I suspect that we just don't know the answer to these questions, but I think that we should be seeking to find the answers. That's a task for a national body such as the Australian Association of Christian Schools. We might be very pleased with the answers that they discover. Or we might not be. Either way, it is time for some research.

I read a short booklet recently which claims to present a worldview to undergird Christian education. It called its metanarrative 'God's Big Story' and its curriculum, 'God's Curriculum'.<sup>7</sup>

It is hard not to imagine that many people would find the phrase 'God's Curriculum' distasteful and potentially offensive. It smacks of the worst of fundamentalisms – the kind of description that suggests the users claim to know exactly what the Bible 'says' and 'means', and which allows no deviation from literalism and its own narrow thoughts.

The phrase implies that whatever any other Christian educator might adopt in good faith as an approach to a Christian curriculum (or even any religious one), it could not be as 'correct' or 'true' as this one. It is exclusivist and elitist. It rubs the noses of other Christian educators in State or independent schools in the murk of implied faithlessness, apostasy, syncretism or compromise.

It sounds like exactly the kind of thing that Dr Dudley Clarke would expect might come from a group which felt that it had just invented Christian education and that no-one else could possibly have a clue about how to do it. I can see him with one eyebrow raised, asking: 'Do you think that there might just be more to it than that?'

I've included as an appendix a critical review of that booklet for Australian readers who may be interested. It's not the main purpose of this book, which I hope might be of interest to educators all around the world, but my review will be of interest to those who have heard of it.

Indeed, it may still have some interest for those who haven't come across it, because my comments might reflect some light onto something similar within their own context.

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<sup>7</sup> I am referring to the following publication: D. Benson et al., *Locating Learners in God's Big Story 2.0: Illuminating Education in Australian Christian Schools*, (Sydney: Christian Schools Australia, 2017).

What is the worldview, the way of seeing reality, the framework of truth that we can use in our schools to present the truth of God and of the kingdom that Jesus Christ came to inaugurate?

What language, what symbols, what concepts will speak to the modern person, to the young person in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What will lift their sights to that which is eternally true and deeply attractive to their soul?

My answer to these questions constitutes the remainder of this short book.

## Chapter Three: Turning Narrative into Theology

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a reading of Genesis, in particular, but actually a reading of the entire Bible, that will lead us to the worldview and curriculum approach that will be recommended in the next chapter.

In order to read scripture well, whether reading New or Old Testament, we should always ask the following questions:

1. Who wrote this?
2. Who was the intended audience?
3. What is the cultural setting of that audience?<sup>8</sup>
4. Why was it written?
5. What genre is it (history, letter, poetry, narrative, drama, etc.)?
6. How would the intended audience have been likely to interpret it?

***The Six  
Critical  
Questions for  
Sound Biblical  
Exegesis.***

The best readings of Genesis take all of these questions into account, along with all the sub-questions that arise from each. This is not the place to go into those sub-questions, but there are several very important questions that must arise from each major question.

I will approach the text from a high view of the inspired authority of scripture. My reading will be well-supported by academic writing – but I ask readers to remember that *this is a short e-book*, not a fully-developed text. Despite its brevity, though, this little book is well-supported by global academic and theological research. I have been careful to provide frequent footnote references for those who want to research further.

My intention is to provide a simple but well-supported basis of theology that can be taught in all schools, allowing the content of Biology and Science classes to be consistent with what is taught in Religion and History classes.

Going well beyond curriculum, I will propose an approach to thinking about schools that can transform not only the classroom, but all aspects

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<sup>8</sup> Theologians call this the *Sitz im Leben*; it is one of the most critical elements in reading scripture well.

of a school's operations. Hence the subtitle of this book: *A Framework for Christian Education*; I hope that by the end, readers will recognise that the model I will unfold in the following pages holds relevance for every aspect of organisational life – not only for Christian schools but for all Christian organisations.

### The Importance of Imago Dei in Understanding Christian Education

Standing at the beginning of the complex creation saga<sup>9</sup> – the first eleven chapters of Genesis – is one outstandingly significant element. In the first act of creation of humankind, God declared the male *and* female human beings to be rulers, in the image of God – *in imago Dei* (Gen. 1:28). The word used for rulers is not one that implies force or abuse of power.<sup>10</sup> The doctrine of rulership *in Imago Dei* is not a mandate for ruthless domination or pillage of the natural world.

Rather, humans are to take their place as image-bearers of the High King.<sup>11</sup> In the ancient world, a wood or stone image was commonly deployed as a *de facto* presence of the local god.<sup>12</sup> If you wanted to be reminded of the presence, or the hoped-for blessing, of a local god on your harvest or flocks, you would place an image of the god in your fields; if you wanted the presence of the god in your house, you would place an image of him/her there.

The carving and crafting of images of gods was a thriving business in the ancient world. (It still is, today, but our ruling prosperity and fertility images are now more likely to be found on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat!)

The *imago Dei* principle of Genesis acts in exactly the same way that ancient peoples would have expected an image to work in their world –

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<sup>9</sup> I will generally refer to the first eleven chapters of Genesis as 'the creation saga'. There are several stories in these chapters, all relating to each other.

<sup>10</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 139. Also in Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984), 161.

<sup>11</sup> I provide a much more comprehensive treatment of this topic in my forthcoming book: *Letters Patent: A Practical Theology of Work*. Those interested in this topic are urged to read this text.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012), 139. Also explicated at length in J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2005).

as you would expect from an ancient text. Human beings are declared to be God's vice-regal presences<sup>13</sup> ruling 'over all creation with power to control it and regulate it, to harness its clear potential.'<sup>14</sup>

Note how this reading responds precisely to Questions 2, 3, 4 and 5 as listed on the first page of this chapter. This is sound biblical exegesis.

Such is the tremendous glory which God has invested in his created humans – we are to perform a role rather like a local god in a pagan land – to manage and care for it as the one, true God would, 'if he were present'. We are to bring blessing, prosperity, growth, *and* produce an environment of care and safety for all creatures and the environment. We are to be vice-regal leaders and managers, running the whole show in God's stead, as it were.

### Learning to Live as Vice-Regents

Christians have commonly spoken about the human role in terms of stewardship. A simple Google search using keywords such as 'Christians' and 'steward of creation' will reveal over ten million entries. But *stewardship* does not go nearly far enough to cover what God has placed human beings in place to do, in this sound biblical reading.

Reading Genesis in the way being promoted in this book, takes the human role far beyond mere stewardship.

Reading Genesis in the way being promoted in this book, takes the human role far beyond mere stewardship. Stewards are only ever servants, or at best, managers. They have to constantly report to an overseer. Stewards don't have unlimited opportunities for initiative, or the freedom to engineer, invent, re-construct, govern, innovate without constantly referring to a Master.

A proper understanding of the glory of humankind as beings made *in imago Dei*, requires that we see our responsibility to act in, into and upon the world *as if God were acting through us*. Of course, God still

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<sup>13</sup> 'Vice-regal' is the adjective of 'viceroy'. The Oxford Dictionary's definition of 'viceroy' reads: *A ruler exercising authority in a colony on behalf of a sovereign*. Oxford Dictionaries, (Oxford University, 2016), <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/viceroy>. Cited 5 September, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 20.

ultimately requires an accounting from us, but it is a vastly different relationship from merely being stewards. We operate within a royal permit, as it were, from the High King himself.

Human beings are not *born of the royal family*, but we are appointed with *full authority to act on its behalf*.

*What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels;<sup>15</sup> you have crowned them with glory and honour, subjecting all things under their feet.*

Hebrews 2:6–8

Australians can understand this perhaps better than citizens of the USA might. We remember the national shock in 1975 when the Governor-General, acting unilaterally, but legally on behalf of (i.e. *in the place of*) the Queen, dismissed the democratically-elected Prime Minister. Most Australians had never before recognised the potential power of the Governor-General. Almost no-one had seen the G-G as much more than a figurehead.

It is precisely this level of responsibility which the creation narrative confers upon humanity – note this carefully – upon *all* humanity, not just those who acknowledge God. This is a human calling, not just a Christian or Jewish one.

Already, we can start to see one of the strengths of this way of reading the biblical story for a worldview construction. It is often the case that students who do not exhibit an active Christian faith at their Christian school seem to be left out of, or somehow limited in their capacity to engage in the full array of offerings at the school.

Furthermore, schools deal with very young students, as well as those in more mature years. The needs of very young children fit well into the model that we are starting to frame.

**All** students, as human beings, are made in the image of God. Schools can present this model to **all** students regardless of their faith stance, regardless of their age. You do not need to be a God-believer to act in God's image. You can live out your role as God's image from a very young age.

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<sup>15</sup> This passage references Psalm 8, where the word translated *angels* is *Elohim*, the same word as is used for God in the first chapter of Genesis.

*Agency* commences well before school age, even though it may yet be very undeveloped. A young Prince will act as a royal personage, even though not yet with all the maturity and power of a King. A young Vice-Regent may be taught to do the same.

The point of the Genesis narrative of humans acting *in imago Dei* is that God has, in effect, handed over leadership rights of the earth (and probably the universe, too, though that raises many other questions), leaving humankind to act in God's place. This point is demonstrated by expressions such as 'Let us go down...' in 11:5-7, and in the preamble to the flood narrative. Jesus' parable about the absentee vineyard owner<sup>16</sup> is based on a similar concept.

Of course, we know that God really *is* omnipresent in the world. There is no suggestion he *is* actually absent or withdrawn, like some pagan deity, leaving us to get on with things, while he lives a life of ease elsewhere.

The sustaining power of God in creation<sup>17</sup> is real, but does not detract from this delegated responsibility. God has chosen – and the Genesis text is clear about this – to grant to us as humans the responsibility and accountability to rule (manage, administer, develop) the physical creation on this planet (at least). In other words, we are to act on his behalf, as Governor-Generals, *as if* he were not here.

### Taking up the Role

Think about what it means to be a human living in the world through the model being described in this chapter.

Even more importantly for us as educators, think about how any student from any background might feel upon being invited to live into this story. It is a story of hope and potential, of grace and opportunity. If ever there was a time in history when young people needed to perceive hope and purpose for their futures, it is in this early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Imagine telling this story over and over again to students in your school, in scores of different ways, over different year-levels, in different academic, sporting and cultural contexts:

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew 21:33–46.

<sup>17</sup> Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3.

*The Genesis narrative, properly understood, describes all humankind as having been given a task of tremendous responsibility, nothing less than the vice-regal responsibility to manage the world as the direct representatives of the Creator God. This is what is meant by being made 'in imago Dei', in the image of God.*

*Even though we must manage with sin and evil as ever-present threats, God has given us the capacity to choose Him and to choose life, rather than false gods or mere materialism or humanism. The world itself, with all its life, energy and richness of resources, is under our control and we are expected to use it in all its parts for the betterment of humankind and for social happiness.*

*Every single human being who has ever lived, regardless of their abilities, intelligence or socio-economic or ethnic background, is invited to be engaged in this project.*

*The relationship of humanity with God is bound up in the very fabric of the world, with heaven and earth temporarily separated. But the promise of the future is that there will be a marriage of heaven and earth to bring them together again, on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The most elemental relationship on earth – the marriage of a man and a woman – has been given as a prototype of this future renewal.<sup>18</sup> The coming of Jesus reinforced this promise using the very same symbols and metaphors.*

This reading of a foundational scripture provides the purpose and significance that is the deep desire of every human being, especially teenagers at school.

This concept of **having a job to do**, of having **responsibility to step up to**, is of enormous significance to curriculum and educational philosophy. It illuminates what it is that people can actually aspire to, and achieve, in their day-to-day work.

'Secular' careers matter to God and to the world equally as much as 'spiritual' tasks. Indeed, the further one travels along the path of understanding what it means to be living *in imago Dei*, the more one sees that all such distinctions are human, not biblical, constructions.

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<sup>18</sup> Those interested in the deep theology of this may like to consult: Ephraim Radner, *Hope among the Fragments: The Broken Church and Its Engagement of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), pp121–28.

*Imago Dei* work tasks are not limited to grand, impressive, spiritual tasks – being celebrity youth pastors or foreign missionaries. They are the ordinary stuff from which the everyday life of any human community is made.

*Imago Dei* work is not limited to grand, impressive, spiritual tasks...

Electricians, hairdressers, volunteers are all performing the work ‘that God would do if he were here in our place’.

Three years of Jesus’ life ‘in kingdom ministry’ do not displace the incarnational value of 30 years spent as an obedient child, as a student learning his letters and his trade, and as a man exercising his trade in a family business.

Of course, Jesus was a unique human in so many ways, but he was still a human, *being*. His incarnation as a baby, growing into adulthood, means something. If it did not, he could just as well have appeared as an incarnated adult, ready to commence his ‘ministry’.

Living *in imago Dei* implies more than work, however.

The concept of ***having relationships to develop***, the closest ones culminating in the marriage of man and woman and the development of a family, is fundamentally a part of the human psyche. It is a concept that students, especially in the second and third decades of their lives, can especially imagine as part of their own future.<sup>19</sup> One of the great tasks of schooling is to enable students ‘to learn to be’. We will return to this later.

Furthermore, *in Imago Dei* is a universal principle that applies to all humankind ***on the basis of their humanity, not their Christianity***. It is not just Christian people who act *in imago Dei*. Atheists may, too. As may Muslims and Hindus and pagans. Not all do it in consistent obedience, but all do it by nature and vocation, even if they do it poorly or rebelliously.

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<sup>19</sup> Whilst it is not the topic of this book, educators should surely have glimpsed by now the potential for a deeply Christian narrative of the distinctiveness of gendered male and female is deeply embedded into this curriculum model. It has turned up subliminally in this text now several times, and alert readers will have picked up on it. This is a massively important element in this theological approach. I have developed it further in my *Letters Patent: A Practical Theology of Work*. (In publication.)

All work, all human activity, all relationships – when done with a profound consciousness of acting *in imago Dei* – honour God, and always seek to act in obedience<sup>20</sup> to his word and will.

Whether the activities/work are manual, technical or theoretical, whether they are paid or voluntary, and regardless of who performs them, they will reflect some aspect of, and response to, the blessing-to-rule (Gen. 1:28).<sup>21</sup> All relationships, when lived out in response to the character of God reflect his call to humanity to be his images.

The most effective (and truthful) school curriculum is ultimately concerned with preparing students to live in the world that God has made, as his images. We ‘do his work for him’, faithfully and obediently; not merely as stewards, but as his images; we live faithfully into relationships that honour the character of God and the true natures of women and men. He has entrusted this work and this responsibility to us, *as his vice-regal agents*.

Throughout the entire creation saga – the entire first eleven chapters of Genesis – work is seen as the natural human response to the word and will of God even if this ‘word and will’ is sometimes ignored or debased. ‘Work’, of course, is much more than merely the paid activity one does to make a living.

This biblical notion of work includes all human activity – including sport, voluntary work or care of others, caring for animals, gardening or conservation.

All work done in response to the word and will of God is the curating of creation, done by the caretakers in response to the Royal Commission, given by the High King to male and female human beings, administered *in imago Dei*.

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<sup>20</sup> The Hebrew word for *obey* comes from the same root as *hear*, exactly as in English our word *obey* comes from the Latin *audire*, to hear, and *ob-in the direction of*.

<sup>21</sup> This understanding of *imago Dei* has enormous relevance for discussions of vocation and the contemporary confusion in churches over what might comprise secular and spiritual work, but that is not our topic here. But to be clear about a basic principle, this concept properly understood allows for no distinction between secular and spiritual work – in any context. Again, see my forthcoming *Letters Patent: A Practical Theology of Work*.

The ultimate goal of school culture and curriculum (particularly in a Christian school) is to enable students to grasp their highest potential and purpose. With this vision, they can plan their careers and imagine purposeful, relational lives – whether they are engaged in the world of science and technology, media and entertainment, social and public service, or practical trades and labour.

The ultimate goal of school curriculum (and particularly a Christian school curriculum) is to enable students to grasp their highest potential and purpose.

This is our human calling. It is what N. T. Wright described as the ‘covenant of vocation’.<sup>22</sup> When this covenant is broken, by our refusal to work within his boundaries, by our failure to act as responsible images, it is a ‘vocational failure as much as ...a moral failure’.<sup>23</sup> Failure to work well and live well is a failure to worship well; it betrays our fundamental human purpose.

Once students (and teachers!) grasp the deep theological significance of this calling, they will understand that as his vice-regal managers, they have freedom of choice to act within his moral boundaries to take up whatever career they choose, making the world a better place.

They will not be deluded or derailed into weighing up whether serving God in a church or mission setting is more valuable than serving God as an accountant, electrician, nurse or teacher in a ‘secular’ environment.

They will grasp that in a world where we live every moment *in imago Dei*, there is no such thing as a secular environment. There are only obedient and disobedient actions and responses to our particular and present setting.

In the Old Testament we see in practice how work is never far from praise and worship. Human tragedy occurs when God’s images, God’s agents, act in rebellion, rejecting God, choosing idolatry rather than obedience: ‘*Avodah* is the transliteration of the Hebrew word for both *worship* and *work*. The root word means to work or to serve. ... Work involves the idea of serving someone.’<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Tom Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began* (London: SPCK, 2016), 102.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>24</sup> William D. Bjoraker, "Word Study: (Avodah) - Work/Worship," (2016), [http://ag.org/top/church\\_workers/wrshp\\_gen\\_avodah.cfm](http://ag.org/top/church_workers/wrshp_gen_avodah.cfm). Cited 26 August, 2016.

Engaging students in the narrative of being agents (i.e. actors) in God's kingdom, equipping them for a lifetime of service to God, is the glorious opportunity and privilege of Christian education curriculum.

There is a very great difference, however, between education and evangelism. Education is about equipping people and preparing them for life: developing their ability to do sums and to read and write, learning about the history of the world, learning about science and how the world works, learning about making and selling things; preparing to live well both now and in the world beyond school.

Education is what schools are established for; it is why government funds them, for the general good of society. Christian education absorbs and accepts that social contract; but then it overlays that with helping students to develop a Christian worldview to enable them to engage meaningfully and truthfully in the world.

Education is fundamentally about teaching and learning how to **be**.

Education is fundamentally about teaching and learning to be.

Evangelism, on the other hand, is about sharing the good news of the kingdom of God. It happens in all kinds of settings, including schools – both Christian and secular – but it cannot be the core goal of Christian education. It may (and hopefully will) be a by-product, but it is not a key purpose.

Evangelism, on the other hand, is about sharing the good news of the kingdom of God.

Christian schools exist as part of the social contract that exists within the nation to educate the nation's children. It is why governments fund schools and the community accepts that within fair and reasonable boundaries.

Faith conversions may well happen as a result of what we do in schools, especially all those interactions and activities that happen outside of classrooms, but spiritual 'conversion' has almost nothing to do with school curriculum. School curriculum is to do with learning how to live into our calling as creatures made in the image of God. Evangelism has to do with encouraging others to enter the kingdom of God.

Each young person at a competently-managed Christian school, learning to write or do sums, investigating biology and genetics, geology and poetry, history, sport, music and dance, is building the basics of a life of surrender to the King, bringing their work as an offering of service.

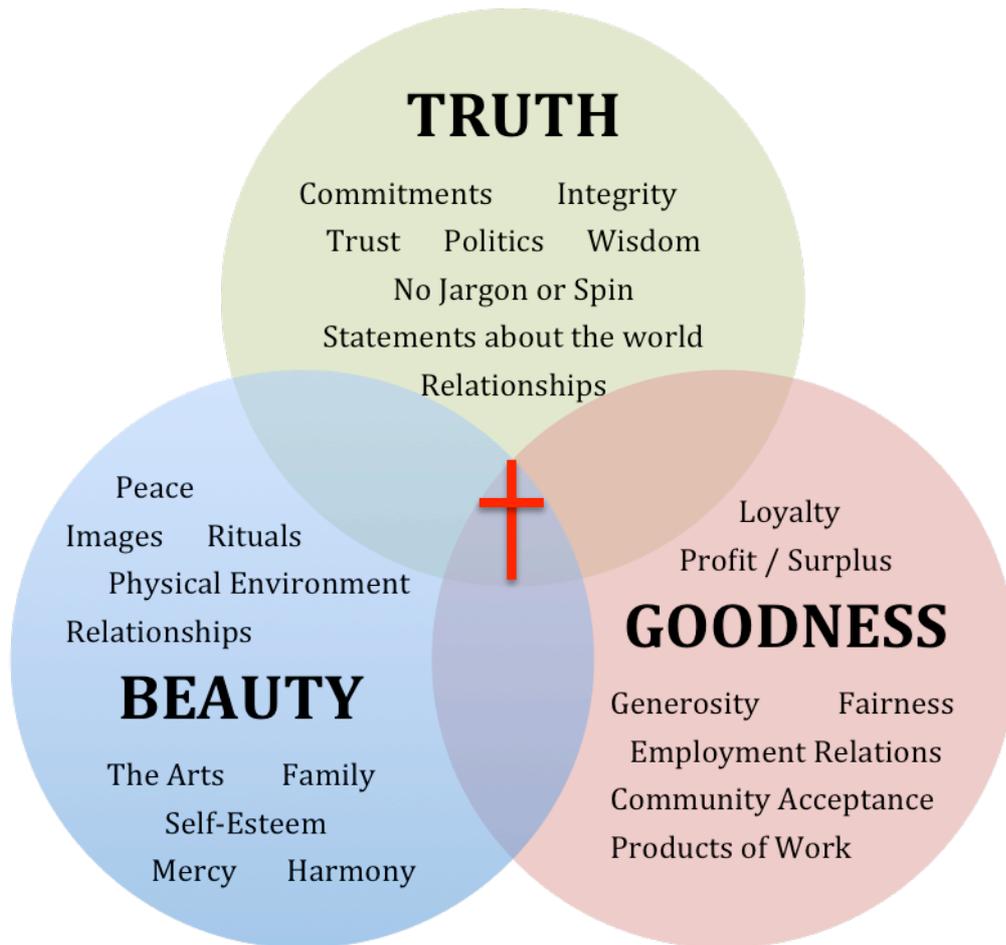
All of this is the glorious potential of Christian educational curriculum. In the next chapter I will put a shape around this theology that can be put into practice in schools.

## Chapter Four: A Culture, Curriculum, and Leadership Model

The model offered in this and following chapters provides all of the following:

1. A recognition of the equal value of all human beings, based on their divinely-ordered humanity, not their willingness to accept the Christian faith.
2. A way of reading the Bible faithfully, fully acknowledging its divine inspiration and authority, while also recognising that it is an ancient document that depends on recognition of genre, audience and human-authorial intent for its best interpretation.
3. A way of thinking about organisational culture and structures that is deeply and traditionally Christian.
4. A curriculum that can enable students to enter university or other tertiary study with a confidence that their biblical understandings are not critically dependent on out-dated or seriously compromised interpretations in regard to science or history.
5. A worldview of divine purpose for human beings which is as equally relevant in the Science lab as it is in Religious Studies, Ancient History, Maths or Technology classes; and which provides a way of thinking about leadership and organisational culture which will produce a human environment that will be deeply satisfying to all parts of its community both within and without.

I've called this model: the **Living Values Model**. I'll explain this title in a moment. But let's get to know it first.



**Figure 1: Living Values Model. © G. Leo 2019**

### Theological Basis for the *Living Values Model*

The traditional transcendent values of Beauty, Goodness and Truth are core elements of the Christian faith, as they are also of the Hebrews who grandfathered the Christian faith. Plato is often regarded as a populariser of the Three Transcendent Values, but the Greeks did not invent them.

They are called **transcendent values** because they **transcend** or **take us beyond**, ordinary life. They point to that which is greater than us. They point us towards God, towards Eternity. We live through and into beauty, goodness and truth, and we move from there to an awareness of the eternal Being of God himself.

**Being** is an important word here. It reminds us that we can only learn to be, when we truly know God. The British poet, David Gascoyne captured this in a poem:

... truly to be man is to be man aware of Thee  
and unafraid to be. So help me God.<sup>25</sup>

The Human **Being**, is however, only part of the story. That is why the cross in the centre of this image is so critical. To use the model without the cross would still be great education; but it would not be Christian education.

The Being that these three transcendent values lead us to is the glorious Being of God himself. Ordinary people in Old Testament times had to perceive God through Torah or through the cultus of the Tabernacle or Temple. Since the advent of Jesus Christ in his incarnated self, we can see God more clearly through the person of the Son who is the perfectly-reflected image of God.<sup>26</sup>

Remember the story about the Sydney fireworks display using the word *Eternity* that I told in the second chapter. Ignatius Jones learned values at his Christian school which enable him to perceive that the mere word *Eternity* contained the seeds of hope for a new millennium.

Through his education, he had so absorbed these values into his spirit that he was able to see how the whole world might be inspired if he could just write that one word for a global audience to see at the start of a new millennium. That vision for *Eternity*, that capacity to imagine divinely-transcendent Truth, was the result of a Christian education.

That vision for *Eternity*, that capacity to imagine truth, was the result of a Christian education.

The three qualities of Beauty, Goodness and Truth are central to the two stories of creation in Genesis.

It was these qualities that were attacked so comprehensively in the Garden of Eden narrative.

They came under sustained attack in the other narratives in the first eleven chapters.

They were reinstated in the form and fabric of the tabernacle that God instructed Moses to construct, and the code of law given on Sinai.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in: Ruth Etchells, *Unafraid to Be: A Christian Study of Contemporary English Writing* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), p95.

<sup>26</sup> John 1:1–14; Hebrews 1:1–4; 1 John 1:1–3.

They were revealed perfectly to humankind in the person, words and work of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

They will form the foundations of the New Creation, when earth and heaven are reunited again.

I'm using them in this order: Beauty, Goodness, and Truth. The sequence for talking about these values has varied over time and across cultures. The theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar was adamant that there was only one proper sequence.

The first step, he argued, involved the personal perception of the beauty of the Christian narrative. Once we are aesthetically engaged by the image of Jesus Christ and of God as Creator and Sustainer, then we may move to a personal response. We will choose to live out a life of goodness, in response to the beauty of the holiness of God. Eventually, after we have walked in the paths of righteousness for some time, we become intellectually convinced of the truth of the entire Christian narrative.

All of this is why the cross centred in this image is so essential to its meaning and application in Christian living. Without it, the Being to which we are drawn to worship is the only Being that we can identify – ourselves. Classical education fell over on this very stumbling-block. Enlightenment education did likewise.

If we seek the glory of Man (humankind, if you must) through the quest for beauty, goodness and truth, we will end up worshipping a false God, an insufficient transcendence. The cross reminds us of the true Being whom we seek and for whom we long.

He alone is the *sehnsucht*, the object of our longing desire, that C. S. Lewis wrote so passionately about in many places, but perhaps none so intensely as in his inspired sermon, 'The Weight of Glory'.

*In speaking of this desire for our own far off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to*

*laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both.*

*We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name.*

*Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter. Wordsworth's expedient was to identify it with certain moments in his own past. But all this is a cheat. If Wordsworth had gone back to those moments in the past, he would not have found the thing itself, but only the reminder of it; what he remembered would turn out to be itself a remembering.*

*The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was **longing**.*

*These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.<sup>27</sup>*

The cross at the centre of this Living Values Model reminds us constantly that our human experience of beauty, goodness and truth is always grounded in our life on this earth. That is where all of our experience must begin – because we are human, made of dust, inhabitants of Earth. But it is not where that experience ends. The earthed experience of these values draws us on, leads us out, seeking the sunlit uplands of their full glory.

There is a gestalt principle in this, where the ultimate whole is much greater than the mere sum of the parts. Our minds, our bodies, our imaginations and our spirits are all opened up to the glory of the Infinite. The deft interweaving of these three transcendental values by spiritually-perceptive leaders, constantly linked to the Infinite One who became flesh, becomes the daily presentation of the Gospel to and within our community:

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<sup>27</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Transposition and Other Addresses* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1949), pp23–4.

And in this regard, Jesus Christ, whose Gospel has enabled millions in many ages and cultures to find such meaning, is as it were, an open window on the transcendentals, joining together webs of human sensibility so that people can apprehend the transcendentals in their full reality.<sup>28</sup>

Further, after human persons enter our community which has been so suffused with the divine countenance in its triune revelation of Beauty, Goodness and Truth, they are open to becoming, indeed they desire to become transformed by that experience. Or, more properly, by the One whom they have encountered, earthed in this community.

Their human selves are now open to being re-formed, renewed, as a result of their encounter with these transcendent values which are unashamedly centred on and consciously pointing towards the Christ enfleshed on the cross. The three values have done the work of the Gospel; they have been the encounter with the Divine One about whom the old apostle John writes so warmly:

*We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us — we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.*  
(1 John 1:1–3)

Thus the full sequence of our model becomes: **Beauty → Goodness → Truth → Being**. The Being part of this process is on the one hand, the encounter with the One who is the source of all Being. On the other hand, it is the fulfilment of our own human *being*, as we are able to live out our true humanity as intended by our Creator.

Our task in leading or managing a Christian community is to enable, to bring into practical reality, the means by which this human transformation can occur. Once humans are engaged with any vision of true beauty, we are moved to live in greater personal goodness, which itself nudges us towards living more truthfully. This pattern may be simplistically seen in the following imaginary stories, which most of us will recognise as being fairly typical anecdotes of real life:

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<sup>28</sup> Aidan Nichols, *A Key to Balthasar: Hans Urs Von Balthasar on Beauty, Goodness and Truth* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd, 2011), p20.

*A person walks into a beautiful park, or a well-kept campus. There is no litter; the gardens are neat and attractive. The lawns are mowed. Rather than drop a piece of litter, or step off a walking path, the person is inclined to do the right thing, putting litter in a bin or staying on the walking path. They have subtly moved from beauty to goodness. But it doesn't end there. They meet someone who works there, or who owns or manages this place, and they ask how it is that the grounds are so beautiful. They have now moved from their experience of goodness to a search for truth.*

*A person joins a large group sitting around a table at a party. After a while they notice that the people are all tastefully dressed, without either outlandish fashion or untidy sloth. They soon note, too, that the conversation is not marked with swearing or crass jokes. They are surprised. They've been to parties before where guests have not conducted themselves like this. They soon realise that they are keeping their own language and conversation topics a little more carefully within polite and pleasant topics and style. They can't help but wonder why this group behaves like this. They wonder if they, too, could become like them.*

In both these simplistic but recognisable anecdotes, the person encountering beauty, soon moves on to an application of goodness and then finds the need to seek for truth to better understand what they are encountering. If they manage to achieve their personal quest, they may encounter the Divine Being from whom all this beauty and goodness flows, or at least they will find that their own being has been transformed a little towards those same qualities. Their ears and their heart have been tuned into the frequency of the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven that each of us will so embody these qualities than any who meet us will see in us those qualities and ask for the way to the kingdom. *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven* (Matt. 5:16). Thus we reflect the daily practice of the embodied or incarnated Son of God.

The purpose of the three values is to lead us towards the source, towards God himself.

This is the path laid out for us in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. In this short reflection, each of us moves from the quiet joy of contemplation of beautiful *green*

*pastures and still waters where He restores my soul, to the love of goodness, the paths of righteousness for his name's sake, and finally to the intellectual and logical certainty that Surely your goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord for ever.*

C. S. Lewis was also convinced of this sequence of Beauty to Truth to Goodness. Peter Kreeft writes about Lewis's understanding of this:

Truth is good and beautiful; goodness is true and beautiful; beauty is true and good. But there is an ontological (not temporal) order: it flows from Being to truth, truth to goodness, and goodness to beauty. Truth is judged by Being, goodness by truth, and beauty by goodness. The psychological order of our experience of them is the reverse: we are moved to goodness by its beauty, to truth by its goodness, and to Being by its truth.<sup>29</sup>

It should be very clear now that this sequence: Beauty, Goodness, then Truth, becomes important when we consider their role in a school community – or indeed, any community, even a commercial or not-for-profit organisation. The purpose of the reification in the organisational landscape of these three values is to lead us towards the source, towards the Being of God himself. Thus we re-affirm the critical application of the cross at the centre of our Living Values Model.

Any school community will include in its composition, a wide range of people. Some will be firmly committed to Christian faith, some to a more or less nominal faith commitment, and some will stand somewhere on the spectrum of agnosticism through to atheism. Others will belong to other non-Christian religious faiths, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and so on.

One of the benefits of this approach that I am proposing is that it engages the entire school community gradually, if we manage our school well. It should be clear now that all become pilgrims on this quest through the three transcendent values to the ultimate Source of their Transcendence.

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Kreeft, "Lewis's Philosophy of Truth, Goodness And Beauty" in Anthony Esolen, *Ironies of Faith: The Laughter at the Heart of Christian Literature* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2007), 153-71.

Those parents and students who are not committed to Jesus Christ are often first attracted by some beauty within the life of the school. They appreciate perhaps the appearance of the campus, with beautiful gardens and clean grounds; they appreciate the pleasant, winsome character of the staff; they are seduced by the idea that this place, this people, this environment is the fulfilment of the desire they have been pursuing all their lives.

Then they are enticed by the sheer goodness of this school and all it offers. They value the honesty and plain-but-gentle-speaking of the Principal and the staff. They notice the fairness and transparency of how they and others are dealt with in comparison to the last school in which they were involved. They appreciate the value-for-money that underpins the commercial aspect. Genuineness and sincerity seem to characterise this school. They see that staff are treated fairly and are given fair and respectable working conditions.

Finally, perhaps after several years, they are so won over by all that they see and experience that they think it is worth listening more carefully to the narrative being told by the school at public events and in the formal communications. They recognise the wisdom in the words of teachers and Principal. They become gradually convinced that following the God of this school makes good sense. They are inexorably drawn to the One whom they can see now is the only way to quench that desire which has been set on fire within them.

We will see enacted on our campuses the narrative which C. S. Lewis wrote so entrancingly about in *The Silver Chair*. To set the scene: the young girl, Jill, is desperately thirsty, and comes to a stream. But lying next to the stream is a huge lion. She stops dead, too afraid to move. Eventually, the lion (for it is, of course, Aslan himself) speaks: 'If you're thirsty, you may drink'. Then follows an exchange which speaks to us about the character of the lion:

"Are you not thirsty?" said the Lion.

"I'm *dying* of thirst," said Jill.

"Then drink," said the Lion.

"May I – could I – would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realised that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

“Will you promise not to – do anything to me, if I do come?” said Jill.

“I make no promise,” said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it she had come a step nearer.

“Do you eat girls?” she said.

“I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms,” said the Lion. It didn’t say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

“I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill.

“Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion.

“Oh dear!” said Jill, coming another step nearer. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.”

“There is no other stream,” said the Lion.<sup>30</sup>

### Why Call this Model the Living Values Model?

If you glance back at the words and concepts in the three circles in Figure 1 above, you will see there all of the qualities I have been describing in school life: peace, mercy, harmony, generosity, fairness, loyalty, integrity, wisdom, trust...

Of course, there is a great responsibility on schools to ensure that everything they do actually represents this pattern well.

I know from personal experience, that when you run a school like this, people who have long since abandoned the church and the Christian faith are enticed back. I have met them; they have told me how their experience as parents at the school was just so beautiful and good that they could not help but be brought to kneel at the feet of the God whom they saw there. More than one has had tears in their eyes as they told me how they had come to know God, or come back to knowing him as a result of what they had seen and heard at the school.

I know from personal experience, that when you run a school like this, people who have long since abandoned the church and the Christian faith are enticed back to seek the God who has been seeking them.

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<sup>30</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (London: Collins, 1980), pp23–24.

Had we started where many churches and evangelical programs try to begin – with attempting to prove God via an apologetics program – they would never have been so attracted. Logic and argument are never as attractive as the vision of Beauty. Once we are entranced by Beauty we are easily led to imagine the sheer novelty of Goodness, and encouraged to lay hold of it for ourselves. This opening up of our souls prepares us for the entry of the Bridegroom himself, Truth.

It should be clear now why I have called the model the Living Values Model.

I had originally thought of calling it the Living into Transcendence Model. But that was a bit clumsy and I was not sure that it would be understood by the ordinary day-to-day families who enrol their children in schools. I want schools to *own* a model like this and talk about it with parents.

The word ‘Living’ is important, because it is a present participle (for those who remember their grammar). That is to say, it is partly an adjective and partly a verb. It contains the seeds of action in it as well as the laid-back qualities of a description.

These values are living in the sense that they contain life. If properly absorbed and experienced, they will lead to the Giver of Life himself, the Original Being. But you don't have to know that to appreciate them. They don't have to sound religious – in fact it's probably better if they don't. These values invite people into their ‘living-room’, their *lebensraum*; they encourage acceptance because they are alive.

In fact, you don't have to be personally acquainted with the Giver of Life to appreciate them or even to live them. But once they form part of your lived experience, they will so fill your soul with longing that you won't rest until you meet the Life-Giver himself. Their effect is evangelistic, while their purpose and practice is educational.

They are also *living* values because they are values for life. If you live them out, your life will be better, more fulfilled. They are values for living, values to be lived. The more they are lived in, the more they become like a comfortably-worn set of clothes or shoes.

### How these Living Values Take Root in the Soul of a School

As most people understand about Venn diagrams, any of these circles may be moved in any direction. They may move so that they stand

entirely separate from each other. This is the way that they typically work in the day-to-day secular world.

While they are kept apart, any of them is open to ideological or sociological attack. Any person is able to identify with one circle, one value, but not the other at any given moment. It is only as they intersect with each other that they can each draw on the other's strength.

Furthermore, as one or the other circle is allowed to shrink, sometimes almost to nothing, society becomes at that point more and more impoverished, dangerous and ugly. If one circle is allowed to grow too far beyond the others, then it becomes its own god, and its worshippers become idolaters. If any one of the circles is allowed to grow too large as the others shrink, then society suffers.

Too great a focus on beauty with insufficient attention to goodness makes an unsustainable idol. Think of the fashion industry or the current preoccupation with 'selfies', endlessly posted on social media.

The destructiveness of goodness without beauty may be seen in households where authoritarian parents insist on good behaviour, but do not allow for fun, laughter and the joy of life to moderate the rules. I visited a Christian school in the USA once where the book of school rules and associated punishments consisted of about 40 pages of close type and small font. It was trying to force young people to be good, but the school was very ugly and unhappy.

Even too much truth, separated from its own beauty and with an insufficient base of goodness becomes harshly oppressive. Many people are still struggling to be healed of over-exposure to authoritarian, controlling churches or sects who suffered from exactly that problem.

At any given moment, a non-Christian person such as a Ghandi or Sufi or the Dalai Lama – or indeed, the person who operates the phone-repair stall at the local shopping mall – may act in ways that demonstrate genuine Beauty, Goodness or Truth. The man down the road, the woman in the next office, the student in Year Three or Ten – these may all exhibit qualities of Beauty, Goodness or Truth from time to time without any connection to the Gospel.

They exhibit these qualities because they are human beings made *in Imago Dei*. There are examples of these qualities all around the world, in all classes and races and kinds of people, and throughout all history.

Another possibility in practice is that the circles may move ever closer together, as ought to be the case in any given Christian community.<sup>31</sup> At those moments, the space where all three circles intersect in the centre of the diagram, is that place of ideal Christian unity of spirit, thought, word and deed.

It is no accident that this point of intersection is also the place of the cross.

The closer the circles intersect or converge, the larger that place of unity becomes, and the greater the cross appears in our focus. If the circles converge completely so that the centre space is at the one time the space of all three circles, then the complete potential of humanity as *Imago Deo* is achieved. This is perhaps what Jesus was praying for in John 17:20–3.

The circles have come together in perfect unison only once in history. This is certainly what Jesus lived out, and why he can be said to be so perfectly *the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being* (Hebrews 1:3). Each circle fitted over the other in harmony; ultimately all three became one. Jesus Christ is the perfect Human, the eternal Word who is all beauty, truth and goodness in his very being. As we move ever closer to his likeness,<sup>32</sup> we can become like him, both in an individual sense and in our various communal shapes.

### Beauty, Goodness and Truth Speak the Language of All Audiences

These qualities are usually also admired and valued by people who do not own a Christian faith. They resonate to parents and students alike, regardless of their faith position.

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<sup>31</sup> Most people will think of Christian communities as churches or Christian schools or some other not-for-profit Christian community. These are all good examples. But it also will include marriage – the ultimate Christian community. There is a deep theological truth here, for those who want to think it through. There is also a sense in which each person – body, mind, spirit – may live in such a way that the circles move closer to each other in that individual person's life. Of course, the Family is another community where these three values may shine.

<sup>32</sup> *Now all of us, with our faces unveiled, reflect the glory of the Lord as if we were mirrors; and so we are being transformed, metamorphosed, into His same image from one radiance of glory to another, just as the Spirit of the Lord accomplishes it.* 2 Corinthians 3:18 (my paraphrase).

This is what makes them so powerful in a Christian school with an open enrolment policy. It was what made Jesus' ministry so powerful to the down-and-outs, the rejected ones of his day.

It is true that in our society, there are some people for whom these qualities act as sparks, igniting barely-controllable anger. We sometimes see this demonstrated in journalism, comedy shows or TV panel discussions.

When people have become so filled with hatred of God, they will also hate the Beauty, Goodness and Truth that he represents to them. These are deeply wounded and damaged human beings. But for most people, their rejection – or, in many cases, their careless ignoring – of God has not gone so far as to damage their spirits so badly.

Christian schools, of course, will insist on interpreting and portraying these values through the lens of the Christian narrative. They are most richly read there, but they can survive in harsher environments, too. The following *briefly* shows how these values work in *both* Christian *and* non-Christian settings.

**Beauty – in the Christian setting:** Beauty has long been a characteristic of Christian worship in hymnody, liturgies, church architecture and Christian art, music and literature. Truly lived, the Christian Gospel leaves breathtaking beauty in its wake. A Christian community that is divided, oppressive or judgemental, is very ugly.

Most of us will have had the privilege of meeting a Christian person, usually an older person, whose beauty shines in their grace, generosity and gentleness of spirit. This is not necessarily a physical beauty; it is an attractiveness that comes from deep within. Thus the scripture speaks of the beauty of holiness – first of God, but potentially in us, too, as his images.

**Beauty – in the secular setting:** It is a human characteristic to love and desire beauty. Whether it is in the human face, in clothing, in art, in architecture or landscape, beauty is the common currency of human engagement. It even survives in ancient cave art and the contents of tombs and graves from tens of thousands of years ago.

Beauty has often been degraded by secular culture, however, for example in architecture and the arts, and the other areas mentioned in

the previous paragraph. The 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have often been characterised by the abandonment of the quest for beauty, or even by deliberate uglification, especially in the arts and media, in architecture, and in counter-cultural fashion practices.

**Goodness – in the Christian setting:** Goodness has long characterised Christian activity. Consider these as only a few possible exemplars: the actions of early Christians rescuing babies from Greek and Roman hillsides after they had been abandoned because they were of the wrong gender or had a physical defect; Christian establishment of hospitals and hospices from the earliest times right up to the present; Christians who have established aid agencies such as the Red Cross, World Vision, Compassion, and hundreds more; Christians who have fought for justice against such social scourges as financial oppression, racism, slavery, sex slavery, addictions...

**Goodness – in the secular setting:** Goodness may most commonly be associated in the contemporary, consumption-obsessed West, with wholesome foods rather than human behaviour, but genuine goodness is admired in human character when it appears. We yearn for it in our politicians, our sports heroes and our neighbourhoods and workplaces, often idolising it when it surfaces. In the commercial world, the Sanitarium brand (healthy foods developed by Seventh Day Adventists) has successfully managed to bridge the 'spiritual' and 'secular' divide in the grocery aisles.

Goodness has often been degraded by secular culture, mocked as prudery, while its counterfeits are lauded, given awards and popular recognition. Goodness is sometimes hard to find in contemporary art, music, film and drama, but easy to find in the work of the Old Dutch Masters, Baroque and Renaissance music, Milton, Tennyson, Hopkins, Eliot and Shakespeare.

In our culture, it is often caricatured in repressive attempts to coerce politically-correct behaviour and beliefs, but in this petty, diminished guise it appears more as a 'giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief'.

**Truth – in the Christian setting:** Truth is foundational to Christian thought. God is both the source and essence of truth; his Word is truth; Jesus spoke and lived truth. When Christians act at their best, their words are always truthful and reliable.

When Christians do not speak or act truthfully, the loss and damage are devastating. The early 21<sup>st</sup> century revelations of long-term child sexual abuse at the hands of priests and ministers is a tragic example.

The Christian narrative is the true story of the human race, and of the universe. At their best, science, literature and the arts all seek truth.

**Truth – in the secular setting:** Truth is more often lamented for its absence in the secular world, but its high value is measured well by the regret and sorrow that people feel and declare in its absence. Advertisers and marketers pretend it, lovers declare it, politicians sacrifice it, social media fake it.

Those who seek Truth often lament its corruption in law courts and in legislation. When Truth genuinely appears in the public square, it is lauded and loved – though often then is soon sacrificed because it is too sharp a weapon to hold in bare hands. It has often been degraded by secular culture, but that does not diminish the hunger and thirst for it in the human heart.

### Summary

The Living Values Model that has been presented here is a model that can be adopted in any school (or any other corporation or community). Its natural home is a Christian school because the values are derived from the Being that is before and above all other beings. They are human values because they are godly values, first. Ultimately, they lead back to their Source, to the face of God himself, where all who go may find pure joy.

Schools which desire to attract families to their campuses will find an unending source of possibilities as they think about how these values can provide the basis for how they conduct their business.

Whether it is a school fete, a sporting carnival, a music program or a language or mathematics curriculum, these values will enhance and ground that element of school life in ways that will be both attractive and nurturing.

Spoken about sensitively, they will never be abrasive or divisive. They are inherently attractive. Government bodies will find nothing in them to argue about. They become the bridge to evangelism that many Christian schools struggle to construct between themselves and the wider community in which they live.

## Chapter Five: The Living Values Model in Practice.

I have been stressing throughout the previous chapter that this model is not only useful as a philosophy to undergird curriculum, but also for application to a wide range of school practices, including for example, whole school appraisal and renewal. It can serve as the framework of a useful metric to apply to Strategic Plans and new ventures. It serves as a whole school philosophy which is readily communicated to students, parents, and the community at large.

I have provided some indications in the table below of how this educational philosophy might be overlaid as a framework on the whole school, as well as in various school subject areas, such as literature studies, science, history, and so on. Staff or Board Directors could add a column to the right labelled, 'How To Achieve This'.

**Please note:** the following table is *not intended to be a complete list*; it is representative only. It is merely an indicator of how any school could map its own campus, culture and programs, both as a first step of self-appraisal, and later for a revised Strategic Plan. Schools and teachers could quite easily generate further applications within their own contexts. In presenting this table, I am trying to show the breadth of application this Living Values Model has for any school.

In the Curriculum sections especially, teachers will readily see where to go for further ideas if they pause to reflect on what I've written. The curriculum content is meant to be just the very first sweeps of the harvesting-scythe of these ideas. There are many, many more waiting to be reaped.

I worked hard over many years at building this trinity of wholeness in my own Principalships. I didn't always inform the community about why I was doing a particular thing, but these values were always in my own mind as reminders of how to measure and gauge what I was planning or doing. I have *literally* been developing this model for over 30 years.

In many settings, the best way to proceed may be simply to embed these qualities in the culture and operational structures of your school, without widely advertising what you are doing. This is not being deceptive. You are merely achieving your ends without using the Gospel and the truth of God as hammers. You are, in effect, living out the Kingdom of God, allowing its yeast to work its way through the whole.

Item Description	Element to Cherish and Promote
<b>BEAUTY</b>	
<b>Physical campus</b>	<p>Visitors are greeted with welcoming signs, beautiful gardens, places to sit and be refreshed.</p> <p>Reception areas are comfortable and welcoming. There are clean toilets (all day, including just after breaks and especially before evening public events).</p> <p>Old, dilapidated furniture and paintwork, unkempt gardens, worn playgrounds and paving are regularly renewed or replaced.</p> <p>There is an absence of litter in the grounds.</p> <p>Hallways and corridors are not blocked with old furniture or boxes waiting for someone to tidy them away.</p>
<b>Public Face of the Organisation</b>	<p>Signs, posters, notices are clean, up-to-date and attractive. The website is current, with signs of daily monitoring.</p> <p>Colours, logo and vision statements are inherently attractive and memorable.</p> <p>Student uniforms, Office uniforms, corporate colours and designs are bright, attractive, and worn well.</p> <p>Personal presentation of staff and students is neat, smart and clean.</p>
<b>Staff Culture</b>	<p>Staff are happy. Morale is high, turnover is low.</p> <p>Trust and contentment characterise the workplace. Smiles and greetings are the norm.</p> <p>Staff are willing to go the extra mile for students and parents.</p>
<b>Student Culture</b>	<p>Students respect the environment of the school grounds and rooms. There is no graffiti and no litter.</p> <p>Manners, personal greetings from students, and a sense of peace pervades the atmosphere and is tangible to visitors.</p>
<b>Curriculum Focus</b>	<p><b>Humanities:</b> Texts, lessons, curriculum content deliberately seek after that which is beautiful in the human condition. Literary or musical creations promote beauty, truth and goodness in the minds of the students. Visual and performing arts focus on things</p>

	<p>that are positive, and that exalt wholesomeness. NB: This does not mean that only 'sanitised' texts are studied, but it does mean that teachers seek to identify beauty and ugliness and bring students to an awareness of them, always valuing beauty over ugliness. Orwell's <i>1984</i>, Miller's <i>Death of a Salesman</i> and Munsch's <i>The Scream</i> or Du Champ's <i>Nude Descending a Staircase</i> may be discussed for the loss of this trinity of values, but they are capable of being used by skilful teachers to point towards the depression of ugliness, the terror of evil, and the deep sadness of the loss of truth. Student compositions in art, writing and music are encouraged towards wholeness of life not negativity and darkness.</p> <p><b>Sciences:</b> The natural world is studied with an emphasis on guiding students towards a greater appreciation of natural beauty, of the fine-tuning of the universe, and the elegance of maths and science.</p> <p><b>Technologies:</b> Technological innovations are chosen and valued for how they contribute to human happiness and pleasantness, and used in such ways as to promote these qualities.</p> <p><b>Legal, Business and Commerce:</b> Teachers deliberately lead students towards an appreciation of economic models and of business practices which create a sense of delight and wide participation.</p>
<b>GOODNESS</b>	
<b>School Outputs</b>	<p>The community values highly the typical graduates of the school, because of their intrinsic and typical good qualities.</p> <p>Students will find that they are sought after for job interviews, just because of their school affiliation.</p> <p>The school carefully discriminates towards all things good in its enrolment patterns, daily practice and future planning.</p>
<b>Service of the Public Good</b>	<p>The school is seen to contribute to the overall economic and qualitative value of the nation or community or sector. Without this school, the nation or the community would be the lesser.</p> <p>The school is known for its integrity in business practice, in the trustworthiness of its senior staff, and in the behaviour of its students, both in the community and on the sporting field.</p> <p>The school is a model corporate citizen, environmentally,</p>

	<p>behaviourally, relationally.</p> <p>The school offers service programs within the community.</p>
<b>Altruism</b>	<p>The school puts back into its community more than it takes out of it.</p> <p>The school demonstrates an awareness of its status in global wealth and privilege comparisons, and acts accordingly.</p>
<b>Media Technologies</b>	<p>The school requires students and staff to use media technologies for good, not selfish or destructive ends.</p> <p>Students learn responsibility in self-management of media technologies.</p> <p>Parents are guided and encouraged towards good uses of media technologies.</p>
<b>Student Culture</b>	<p>Students demonstrate honesty and openness in their daily interactions, both with staff and with each other.</p> <p>Students are encouraged to make career and life choices which will add to the general betterment of the world and society.</p>
<b>Curriculum Focus</b>	<p><b>Humanities:</b> Texts, lessons, curriculum content deliberately celebrate goodness, and identify outcomes which create human flourishing. Teachers identify negative expressions of human life in texts and name them as such. Teachers use opportunity provided by student compositions in creative works such as art and drama to encourage students towards the good and beautiful, rather than towards the dark or negative.</p> <p><b>Sciences:</b> Students are directed towards how they can engage with the sciences to increase the good of society and improve human welfare and social wellbeing.</p> <p><b>Technologies:</b> Technological innovations are measured against how they add to human flourishing, not just whether they make money or provide entertainment.</p> <p><b>Legal, Business and Commerce:</b> Teachers deliberately lead students towards an appreciation of economic models and of business practices which increase social wellbeing and prosperity, while doing no harm.</p>

<b>TRUTH</b>	
<b>Internal Communication</b>	<p>Staff and management work in an atmosphere of mutual trust.</p> <p>There is a shared belief and trust in what the other says, and a generosity of spirit in how communication is received.</p> <p>Communication is characterised by clarity, a lack of jargon and clear timelines and commitments.</p>
<b>External Communication</b>	<p>The organisation is generally trusted by the local community and the parent/student community.</p> <p>Documents and publications are in Plain English, and provide reliable information about future or current activities. They do not rely on spin; nor do they confuse readers with jargon or media-hype. Images are real representations of organisational reality; they endeavour neither to deceive nor manipulate.</p>
<b>Business Practice</b>	<p>The organisation practises prompt payment of accounts.</p> <p>The organisation's practices in regard to listing of costs and services is fair and transparent. It does not conceal costs or fudge meaning in regard to services.</p>
<b>Community</b>	<p>The school adds to the net wisdom of the community through what it says, and the products that it delivers.</p> <p>There is a general sense of liveliness, vitality of spirit and intelligence associated with this school.</p> <p>The school has built up a sense of deep trust within the community. This is an important protective against social media slurs or negative news.</p>
<b>Student Culture</b>	<p>Students are constantly encouraged to speak and to live truthfully.</p> <p>Students are encouraged to use social media and treat other students in ways that are truthful.</p> <p>Sport (and other competitive activities) are played in ways which honour truth-telling and integrity.</p>
<b>Curriculum Focus</b>	<b>Humanities:</b> Texts, lessons, curriculum content deliberately seek after truth, and promote it in the minds of the students. Literature and the arts are assessed against their truth-telling

	<p>about human life and the world.</p> <p><b>Sciences:</b> The natural world is studied with a deep respect for the work of scientists and mathematicians who are genuinely seeking to know the world truthfully. Truth is honoured regardless of where it comes from. Untruth, poor scholarship or deceptive writings are shunned, regardless of their source.</p> <p><b>Technologies:</b> Technological innovations are measured against how they add to the sum total of truth in the world, not just whether they make money or provide entertainment.</p> <p><b>Legal, Business and Commerce:</b> Teachers deliberately lead students towards a deep respect of economic models and of business practices which promote and practise truth. Dishonest business practices are clearly recognised and named.</p>
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### Why this Model is so Effective

This model is predicated on an understanding of the Christian scriptures as inspired by the Holy Spirit for our learning and instruction. It allows for proper respect to be given to Science and History among other fields of enquiry, so that our interpretation of the Bible may be mediated by ancient tradition as well as by the best learning that we have achieved over the centuries.

This model is based on the most ancient and fundamental values. It will not be threatened or made obsolete by the next fad in educational fashion, or the next findings of science or any other field of human enquiry. Students trained in it will not find that they need to jettison their values at university because of what they are taught there. Rather, it will hold them on safe ground.

This model is not merely *acceptable* to the average person in the community at large; it is *highly desirable* to them, because it speaks of who they could be and who they really desire to be. It uncovers the deep longing that is in every human soul to encounter the deep beauty of God.

The model allows us to acknowledge the work of philologists, of translators, of social historians, of experts in ancient documents in our acceptance of the most reliable texts of scripture and the best translations.

Similarly, the model allows us to acknowledge the best work of scientists, of astro- and quantum-physicists, of geneticists, biologists, chemists, geologists and historians. We can use their work to help us to interpret various parts of the Bible, in exactly the same way as we use the skills of the translators and experts in ancient languages.

Building an educational framework such as this erects a bulwark against much of what passes for educational philosophy in the contemporary West.

Beauty, Goodness and Truth are often degraded by the current fads and fashions of the intelligentsia and cultural zeitgeist. Because we measure these values against scripture, and against the word and work of Jesus Christ, this model will maintain an orthodoxy that is reliable and stable.

The key tenets of contemporary humanistic thought which are denied and rejected by this framework include:

- matter or material as ultimate reality;
- physical body and mind as the sum of human being;
- the rejection of absolutes in favour of the relativity of truth;
- the preference of emotional response over truthful analysis;
- the primacy of the economy, at national level, or the bottom line at corporate level;
- socially agreed or politically-correct standards as substitutes for absolutes.

The key tenets of Christian thought which are affirmed and nurtured by this framework include:

- acknowledgement of a Creator who is both divine and personal;
- being made in the image of God, *in imago Dei*, with all that this implies for humans, being;
- a sense of purpose, *telos*, deriving from our createdness as images in a world designed by God;
- the individual personality and identity of each and every human being that is of worth and value despite differences;
- the existence of an immortal spirit, which forms part of our whole being but which is not necessarily more important than our bodies, which anticipate the glory of resurrection;
- the authority and inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, especially when read in ways consistent with their purpose and genre;
- the existence and reality of moral absolutes.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have presented a philosophy or a philosophical approach which readily is turned into a framework that can be used to construct and critique, not only school curriculum, but all the practices and activities of a school.

This approach does not attempt to distinguish amongst the student or parent body, dividing them into arbitrary groups of Christians and non-Christians. While acknowledging the desirability of faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ, it does not mandate such a belief as an essential component to be able to gain value from this school.

## Chapter Six: Other Applications of the Living Values Model

As suggested in the previous chapter, the Living Values Model is not merely a framework for a curriculum. It is a whole-school framework, against which virtually everything that a school does can be measured.

Just some of the areas other than curriculum for which it could be used include staff appraisals, staff appointment processes, cultural practices in such diverse areas as sport, performing arts, personal presentation, management of personal communication devices. The list is virtually endless, once teachers and administrators begin to imagine the potential.

A thoughtful leader will initiate staff thinking about how to use this Living Values Model as a way to re-frame just about everything that the school does, or that area for which their section or department is responsible.

The remainder of this chapter is given over to an extended example of just one of these possible uses – the conducting of an entire school review. It is intended as a model for many other possible uses. Again, readers are encouraged to consider widely the possibilities of this Living Values Model in their own setting.

Christian leaders in secular settings will consider how it may be adapted to their own particular environment to further the purposes of the Kingdom of God.

### Conducting a School Review

The following proposal is just one way that a school might commence such a self-analysis. Again, this is presented only as an exemplar. Each school should rewrite it to suit its own setting and particular place in its own stage of development.

Imagine that the school presented to its community the following **Plan for a Whole School Review**:

## Twelve Steps to Organisational Success following Ancient Words

*Stand at the crossroads and watch. Ask for the ancient paths. Seek out the good way to walk in it. Refresh yourselves and your people.*

Jeremiah ben Hilkiyah. (6<sup>th</sup> century BC Hebrew philosopher)

Of course, the passage above comes from the Bible (Jer. 6:16). The wording in the box is just my paraphrase. Presenting it in this form is a way of using scripture that can engage the school community without sounding too 'preachy'. It is more likely to elicit questions from a varied parent population, rather than criticisms.

I have used a Twelve Question approach for a very simple reason. Everyone is familiar with the idea of Twelve Step programs. This is a 'catchy' way of engaging your school community in your school review, while using the **Living Values Model**.

Following the advice of Jeremiah, schools can assess how their school and its programs really are aligned to truly human values. (Yes, I know, they are godly values first, but you don't need to point that out just yet. Remember the sequence we identified earlier in Chapter Four: Beauty → Goodness → Truth → Being.)

The following checklist is sufficient to start a long process of review for any school, in keeping with its commitment to the Living Values of Beauty, Goodness and Truth. Again, I stress that what is offered here is a beginning step, not a complete program. It is meant to be used as a thought-starter. Each of these 12 areas could easily have additional questions added as subsets to the main topic.

### BEAUTY

1. Think about what Beauty would look like in your organisational setting; how and where would it be evident if it were there.
2. Examine your organisation for evidence of Beauty (or for shortfalls, failures or just plain ugliness).
3. How could we actively and deeply wed this organisation to Beauty? Love Beauty? Enhance Beauty? Admire Beauty? Invest in Beauty? What would we need to do to rid our organisation – its

physical resources, its processes and its media – of all that is either plain or ugly.

### **GOODNESS**

4. Understand what Goodness could mean, within the context of your organisational setting.
5. Examine your organisation for evidence of Goodness. Root out any spores of moral rot or mould which show evidence of disease.
6. How could we change our appetite for outcomes so that we only desire that which is good? What would we have to do to embrace Goodness within and without? To honour it anywhere we find it?

### **TRUTH**

7. Think about what Truth would look like in your organisational setting. Who would notice if it were there or not there? What would its presence (or absence) look like?
8. Examine your organisation for evidence of Truth. Search for Absent Truth and Present Truth. The absence of Truth is apparent where there are any kinds of falsehoods (including silences or non-inclusions) built into your organisational, relational or marketing structures. The presence of Truth is evident where clear, transparent truth and factuality are built into those areas.
9. How could we straighten what is bent, and create new straight paths? Can we get rid of anything that is not True and ensure every word and image reflects a commitment to Truth?

### **REFRESHING (i.e. Reviving your Being)**

10. Having considered all of the above, and having thus conducted a Beauty, Goodness and Truth survey of your organisation, you are now in a place to begin to refresh your organisational community. Start by examining your organisational vision and mission statements to see whether they reflect your desired commitment to Beauty, Goodness and Truth.
11. Conduct an audit of all areas of your organisation and create a table such as that in the previous chapter, with additional

columns for Action Steps, to determine what you need to do and in what sequence.

12. Conduct a staff retreat, focussing on these three spiritual qualities.<sup>33</sup> Engage staff in a deliberate process of slowing down, and a review of their own lives, both as private persons and as professional teachers and administrators or ground staff. Then move to a review of the school as a place where these qualities are found in every part of the school's life.

## Summary

It should be possible by now to imagine a wide range of ways that your school could engage with this Living Values Model in ways that will truly benefit your school and help it to improve.

If schools can step up into this model, they may find that they really are Living into Transcendence.

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<sup>33</sup> Schools may contact me to check availability to assist schools with processes such as this, if they choose.

## Chapter Seven: Where To From Here?

This book has attempted to provide a model of worldview and theology for school management and operation, which:

- can awaken the hearts and spirits of men and women, boys and girls, teenagers and young adults to the glorious beauty of the holiness of the one, true God, revealed to us in the Son, Jesus Christ.
- can be relevant and of real, practical value to all current students, parents and graduates whether or not they choose to embrace the Christian faith.
- demonstrates a reliance on foundational principles that are not contentious in their interpretation of scripture, *and* (b) are not antagonistic towards some elements of the school community, *and* (c) are not likely to raise questions regarding appropriateness for funding by government authorities.
- can be used alongside whatever the best of science and other research will reveal over time. The model relies on ancient core values of biblical truth, rather than on specific narrow interpretations of scripture which are the subject of deep division around the Christian and the secular world.
- is likely to preserve graduates in the Christian faith long after they leave the shelter of their school.

There are still many questions to be explored by teachers and administrators on the front line, at the workplace. Some of these include:

1. How can I use the **Living Values Model** to inform my curriculum program in a specific and detailed manner?
2. How can I use the **Living Values Model** to frame particular lessons or units that I teach?
3. How can I bring to bear the **Living Values Model** on our Sporting or Performing Arts programs?

4. How can I use the **Living Values Model** to manage other areas of school life, e.g. student management structures, leadership programs, school culture development, landscape or capital programs...
5. How can I use the **Living Values Model** to assist me in matters of staff appointment, staff management, staff appraisal...?

Boards and Councils may also want to ask how they can use this **Living Values Model** to enhance the conduct of Board meetings, the governance of the school generally, and frame questions for appraisal of senior Executives and the development of new Strategic Plans.

### What are the benefits of moving to the Living Values Model outlined in this book?

There are many advantages for this model. I will summarise some in very brief terms below:

1. The first great advantage is that it is easily demonstrated to anyone – whether they share the Christian faith, or possess either non-Christian faith or no faith – that it is a positive force for human betterment. No-one wants to be seen to be arguing against Beauty, Goodness, and Truth as core values.
2. Maximising the presence of the cross in the centre, Christians may easily tie the model closely to their core Christian values and faith perspectives, and to their own particular distinctives as church-based schools, vocational schools, special schools or whatever kind of school they happen to be operating.
3. The model is able to be held in close association with current scientific knowledge, but will not need to be altered when that current knowledge changes. The values in the model are universal and eternal.
4. The model will be inherently attractive to the average Australian parent and community. Regardless of their approach to religious matters, these values are what every human being aspires to.
5. The model is not divisive. It does not segregate parts of the community, regarding one as more favoured than another.

6. The model is almost infinitely adaptable to all kinds of schools – indeed to all kinds of businesses and service enterprises.
7. This model has the capacity to change the local community or the nation. As students graduate with these principles inherent in their minds, or as business and enterprises adopt the practices and approaches they have witnessed in their local school, these ancient transcendent qualities may become more entrenched in human society. They will succeed, simply because they are attractive. This is the simplest definition that I could imagine, of the kingdom of God in operation.

### What should be done now?

I expect that my **Living Values Model** can either be improved, or benefit from added intellectual and spiritual ideas.

I would like be in communication with Christian education bodies around the nation, and engage other educators in discussion about this Model. I am confident that after a 12 month period, the collective wisdom of teachers and academics will have either improved the model or expanded its implications far beyond what I have presented here.

This version of the e-book is dated on the Title Page. Other revised versions that may appear from time to time will be dated accordingly. You should check whether your version is the most current version. The most current version will always be posted at my website: [www.thethinkingleader.org](http://www.thethinkingleader.org) Search under the Books tab.

In the closing decades of my life where I must expect that my potential for contributions to Christian education is limited, I am pleased to give this Living Values Model to the community of Christian educators for the benefit of young people everywhere in the world.

I have provided my email address in the opening pages and invite comment about this book and its core ideas for the benefit of all who are involved in the great enterprise of Christian Education.

Let us go out into the world, to love mercy, to act in justice and walk humbly with our God. These three goals represent the simple daily operation of the values of Beauty, Goodness and Truth in the Living Values Model.

## Appendix: A Critical Review of *Locating Learners*

As indicated in Chapter Two above, this Appendix is devoted to a very brief summary and critical review of the booklet *Locating Learners*. It is not a full critique, because I have no particular interest in publishing such a document. However, the flaws that I perceive in that document have encouraged me to produce the alternative approach that occupies the main part of this book.

However, even for those readers who have never read the *Locating Learners* document, the critique made in the following pages may still be meaningful as I will give sufficient context to make it so.

Much like C. S. Lewis's reference to an unnamed English text in the first chapter of *The Abolition of Man*<sup>34</sup>, one does not need to have read the original text to follow the arguments of how particular ideas can lead either to wrong or to unintended consequences.

*Locating Learners in God's Big Story 2.0*, was published by Christian Schools Australia (CSA) in 2017. The authors of that text included: Dr David Benson, Dr Darren Iselin, Dr Ryan Messmore and Dr Craig Murison.

I will refer to this booklet throughout this Appendix as *Locating Learners*, and the writing team as Benson *et al*, or simply 'the writers'.

As I read *Locating Learners* I became increasingly aware of how much I felt the approach being recommended was missing the mark at which it was aiming.

Further, I am convinced by my own experience that the approach being recommended is likely to produce negative results, even to the point of being the exact opposite of what is hoped for.

I want to make here an important disclaimer of a personal nature.

I have known three of the four writers of *Locating Learners* for many years, and count all of them as my good friends. I met Dr David Benson briefly only a couple of years ago, and have had almost no contact with

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<sup>34</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (Glasgow: Collins, 1978).

him since, but I am sure that he and I would be friends, as I am with the other three, given the opportunity to do so.

In writing this review, I am conscious of the risk to relationships of long standing. I need to make it clear that this book is written in the context of these warm relationships, nurtured over many years (more than 20 years in two instances). I respect and honour each of them as sincere and honest scholars, professional educators, and seekers of truth. Nothing in this book is intended as a personal critique.

I am trusting in the quality of our friendships, our common love of Jesus Christ, and our shared confidence in the reliability and authority of Christian scripture, that each one will understand that I write this book in humility and grace, to initiate polite and informed debate, and to offer what I believe to be a better way.

I am quietly confident that, even if we all ultimately agree to disagree, we will remain good friends, respectful and gracious to each other. Christians everywhere do well to remember the ancient adage:

*In essentials – unity;*

*In non-essentials – diversity;*

*In all things – charity.*

### **My Reflections on *Locating Learners***

The text of *Locating Learners* raises five key questions for careful readers:

1. What is the purpose of Christian Education?
2. What exactly is meant by ‘God’s Curriculum’ (p33<sup>35</sup>)?
3. What exactly is God’s Big Story? (Is it effectively the ‘Four Lenses’ (p34)?)
4. How well does this version of ‘God’s Big Story’, the ‘Four Lenses’, and ‘God’s Curriculum’ fit into the 21<sup>st</sup> century educational landscape?

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<sup>35</sup> To reduce footnoting throughout, page numbers in brackets and in-text, will refer to Benson *et al*.

5. How can this curriculum cope with the reality of day-to-day school environments that include people of all faiths, no faith and Christian faith? How can it deal honestly with the demands of receiving government funding?

We will address below how *Locating Learners* deals with the first four of these. The fifth will also be addressed, but in a more generalist manner in the last part of this Appendix.

## 1. What is the purpose of Christian Education?

*Locating Learners* quotes an excerpt from the Vision statements of Christian Schools Australia (CSA) as part of its foundational setting: 'The hope of a Christian school is that students will find their purpose in Christ, in response committing to worship and serve Him.' (p8).

It would have been better if they had based the document on the Purpose segment of the CSA website: 'Thus Christian schools aim to prepare students to live full, productive and purposeful lives, contributing to the wellbeing of their families, communities and as global citizens.'<sup>36</sup>

A 'Hope' is a very different concept from a 'Purpose'. Purposes guide thinking; hopes drive feelings. Educational curricula must be based on thought, not emotions.

It will become clear later in this chapter that this latter statement is a much better base point from which to guide the thinking of school administrators and teachers. Effective Christian schools are ultimately about education, not evangelism. Nor should we expect the Commonwealth Government to fund evangelism.

It is my view that Christian education must maintain a firm commitment to preparing students for a full and active engagement in the world, on the basis of the best possible training both in the natural world through the arts and sciences, *and* the truth of God as revealed through scripture, tradition and scholarship. Further, this commitment will remain equally valid whether or not the students choose to follow Jesus Christ.

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<sup>36</sup> CSA, "Vision and Purpose," Christian Schools Australia, <https://csa.edu.au/about/vision-and-purpose/>. Cited 15 November, 2017.

## 2. What exactly is meant by ‘God’s Curriculum’ (p33)?

It is hard not to imagine that many people will find the phrase ‘God’s Curriculum’ in *Locating Learners* distasteful and potentially offensive.

This title smacks of the worst of fundamentalisms – the kind of description that suggests the users claim to know exactly what the Bible ‘says’ and ‘means’, and which allows no deviation from literalism and its own narrow thoughts.

The phrase implies that whatever any other Christian educator might adopt in good faith as an approach to a Christian curriculum (or even a religious one), it could not be as ‘correct’ or ‘true’ as this one. It is exclusivist and elitist. It rubs the noses of other Christian educators in State or independent schools in the murk of implied faithlessness, apostasy, syncretism or compromise.

In a global context where Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant schools – and, for that matter, Jewish schools – might adopt what they believe to be curricula honouring to God, this unhelpful title suggests that only *this* curriculum is truly worthy of being called ‘God’s Curriculum’. It marginalises and deprecates every other attempt to write curriculum that seeks to honour God.

Perhaps this is why the authors introduce it thus: ‘Let’s playfully call this collective metaphor, **‘God’s Curriculum’** (p33). ‘Playfully’ suggests that the authors recognise that this claim is an over-reach. Yet any asserted playfulness quickly shows itself as disingenuous, because over the next three pages, ‘God’s Curriculum’ is used as a title on two key diagram-models; within a page or so it has dropped its inverted commas (p34); within ten pages it has become ‘a rich metaphor’, with its own ‘divine pedagogue’ to teach ‘God’s Big Story’(p42).

## 3. What exactly is ‘God’s Big Story’?

The writers regard ‘God’s Big Story’ as being summarised by the ‘framework of four lenses: Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration’ (pp 34 & 42). It is fair to say that this framework underpins and forms the basis of the entire curriculum approach in *Locating Learners*.

There is a number of difficulties with this as the absolute metanarrative of God.

Any process which commences with 'Creation and Fall' creates serious theological and practical issues for Christian or Jewish thinkers who are also committed to an evolutionary understanding of human origins.

There is *at this moment* a major theological debate in process across the globe about how to reconcile traditional understandings of the Fall with what is now generally accepted both in the secular academy and by theologians about human origins. The writers appear to be either ignorant of this important debate or unwilling to take it into account.

In the traditional Fall model, Adam's and Eve's sin(s) were real and original, though original sin is attributed to Adam alone. That Eve actually sinned first is generally disregarded. Adam's sin is regarded to have resulted in certain punishments, which have flowed onto all human beings who have been born since, along with the guilt and shame of that first sin(s).

In particular, death was a major consequence, and thus all human beings (and perhaps also all animals<sup>37</sup>) must die. Furthermore, no ordinary human being since Adam and Eve has been able to avoid sin. Original sin is inevitable and inescapable for all ordinary human beings.

Theologians across the world have recognised that this model presents serious problems. For example, global evidence abounds of the continued death of human beings and animals over vast periods of time.

There is a vibrant debate afoot amongst Christians who are committed to belief in the inspired Biblical text. They are re-thinking a doctrine which was formulated some 400 years after the apostolic era.

Please note carefully – this is very important: where you or I stand on these questions of created origins and Fall is irrelevant.

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<sup>37</sup> Many recent six-day creationists would argue that it was not only human beings, but that animals also had not suffered death before the Fall. Just one example of several articles that can be found on the *Answers in Genesis* website states: 'This paper will demonstrate that human physical and spiritual death, together with the death of animals, came about through the disobedience of one man...' See: Simon Turpin, "Did Death of Any Kind Exist before the Fall?" *Answers Research Journal* (2013), <https://answersingenesis.org/death-before-sin/did-death-of-any-kind-exist-before-the-fall/> Cited 13 March, 2018.

The essential point is this: in developing a school curriculum, we must commence with data and philosophical positions which are not blatantly inconsistent with known realities; and we must give to students a fair and full explanation of current knowledge and thinking.

What is presented in *Locating Learners* is a narrow and incomplete version of how Christians across the globe think about human history. That narrowness short-changes students in an educational setting.

The writers' representation of 'God's Big Story' presents serious issues for any thoughtful and well-read educator. Later in this chapter, I will mention difficulties arising from the last two 'lenses'.

#### 4. How well does this version of 'God's Big Story', the 'Four Lenses', and 'God's Curriculum' fit into the 21<sup>st</sup> century educational landscape?

It is a given that any curriculum framework for the general instruction of Australian schoolchildren should be both logically defensible and consistent with known and accepted bodies of human knowledge. Christian schools make a strong point of their intention to serve all Australian families, not just the children of a narrowly-defined group.

Christian schools make a strong point of their intention to serve all Australian families...

The Creation—Fall—Flood—Tower sequence as described in 'God's Curriculum' requires a fairly literalist reading of Genesis 2—3 to make any consistent sense.

The debate engaging theologians and Christian scientists runs along these lines: The concept of a space-time moment of Fall with inherited sin and death for all subsequent humans cannot be sustained by any model of human origins that moves substantially away from an original, innocent pair who sinned at a space-time moment in recent, known history.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Many attempts have been made to do this, including the positing of a special pair of hominids who were selected by God and given a moral compass, but such attempts all face a complete lack of evidence of any kind, and smack of the God-of-the-Gaps type of solution. (That is, when you have an insoluble problem, stop trying to solve it, and just say: *God stepped in and did whatever was needed to fix this issue, but we don't know what he did.*)

If humanity (and the universe) can be reasonably shown by physical and biological sciences (especially in the field of genetics) to have not originated in this way, *which is what all students will be taught at university, even if their school does not teach it*, then students will be confronted with the cognitive dissonance of trying simultaneously to hold two contradictory beliefs.

Schools using the *Locating Learners* curriculum document must be prepared to answer the questions that will inevitably arise from the teaching of 'God's Curriculum' and 'God's Big Story' as outlined above.

They will need to demonstrate how they can affirm to the parents and the children of all their enrolled families that their curriculum is the ONLY possible way of thinking about the world – after all, that is the clear implication as shown above of the use of the term 'God's Curriculum'.

Once that hurdle is passed, they will then have to convincingly argue that the only possible approach to human origins will require acceptance of the idea that death is a quite recent phenomenon, not more than 6–10,000 years old, despite the long record of human (and animal) history of life and death that apparently exists across the globe.

They will need to identify how a literal Adam and Eve could exist in the geological, paleontological and genetic histories of humanity.

They will need to show how the immediate descendants of Cain, within fewer than ten generations had mastered bronze and iron metallurgy (Gen. 4:22) despite the historical record of bronze and iron age development being a relatively late development, spread over hundreds or even thousands of years across wide areas of the ancient world.

They will need to locate the flood in geological history, and show how the descendants of Noah are the antecedents of all living people, within only the last 5,000 years or so.

They will need to demonstrate persuasively that the events at Babel show the origins of all different human languages within just the last 5,000 years or so, despite what we have learned about language development over many thousands of years (e.g. the Proto-Indo-European [PIE] language theory).

The records of Neanderthal settlements, ancient stone-age settlements, Australian aboriginal stories, ancient cave art across Europe and the fossil records in Africa, Indonesia and many other places will all need to be accommodated. The findings of genetic science and biology will need to fit into this narrative. Several centuries of research into global language diversity and development and philological science will need to be reconciled with the Tower of Babel narrative.

None of the above even begins to answer the massive astro-physical and cosmological problems required to accept the creation of the entire universe fewer than 10,000 years ago, with the earth existing alone in the universe for three full days before the stars, sun and moon.

There can be no logical or cognitive dissonance between the actual content of a reasonable 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum and its foundations as 'God's Curriculum'. Such a curriculum cannot be wrong, for it is, after all, **God's** Curriculum. It must, **axiomatically**, be accurate in all its parts! What is taught in Religious Studies must not be at odds with what is taught in Science or Ancient History.

What is taught in Religious Studies must not be at odds with what is taught in Science or Ancient History.

Please note carefully that none of those engaged in this debate doubt that God is the Creator of the universe and of life.

That is never in question. Of course the God of the Old and New Testaments is the Creator! The entire Bible shouts this claim from beginning to end (quite literally, I mean from Genesis to Revelation). The questions being asked quite legitimately are about the processes and time-frames that he used to create, that is all.

Many writers have pointed out that we face a binary choice in regard to our understanding of human origins. Either humanity originated recently from a unique, perfect pair whose single sin introduced the inevitability of death and universal wrongdoing to the species, or we have originated via some other process of slow development, in which death played a constant and essential part.

No amount of sophistry can alter this – and older students understand it absolutely and implicitly. If they don't yet grasp it fully at school, they certainly will within their first semester at university.

There may be minor variations within these two options, and our understanding of the latter option will no doubt be further developed over time, but the central two alternatives remain the same. Both cannot be true in any literal sense. For a thoughtful, enquiring mind to try to hold onto both simultaneously creates a psychological, emotional and intellectual tension that is deeply damaging over a sustained period.

This is precisely the problem that many of our Christian school graduates have confronted and will confront if their schools lead them through a *Locating Learners* curriculum.

Those students are entitled to hear, while they are still at school, some evangelical voices, most modern but some ancient, writing from the academic world. These voices will show them how to read the Bible, including Genesis, faithfully but not literalistically. Here are just a few such voices:

***Peter Enns is an evangelical theologian, and Professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University, USA:***

One cannot read Genesis literally – meaning as a literally accurate description of physical, historical reality – in view of the state of scientific knowledge today and our knowledge of ancient Near Eastern stories of origins. Those who read Genesis literally must either ignore evidence completely, or present alternate ‘theories’ in order to maintain spiritual stability. Unfortunately, advocates of alternate scientific theories sometimes keep themselves free of the burden of tainted peer review. Such professional isolation can encourage casually sweeping aside generations and even centuries of accumulated knowledge.

Literalism is designed to protect the Bible, but in reality subjects the Bible and its literalist interpreters to ridicule. Augustine made this point more than one and a half millennia ago concerning the cosmology of Genesis 1: *It is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these [cosmological] topics, and we should take all means to prevent such an embarrassing situation, in which people show up vast ignorance in a Christian and laugh it to scorn. (Augustine, approx. 400 AD)*<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Enns, 137-8.

***Todd Wood is a self-declared recent six-day creationist. He holds a Ph. D. in Biochemistry from University of Virginia:***

Evolution is not a theory in crisis. It is not teetering on the verge of collapse. It has not failed as a scientific explanation. There is evidence for evolution, gobs and gobs of it. It is not just speculation or a faith choice... There has really been no failure of evolution as a scientific theory. It works and it works well.

I say these things, not because I'm crazy or because I've converted to evolution. I say these things because they're true. I'm motivated by reading yet another clueless, well-meaning person pompously declaring that evolution is a failure. People who say that are either unacquainted with the inner workings of science, or unacquainted with the evidence for evolution... It is my own faith choice to reject evolution, because I believe the Bible reveals true information about the history of the earth that is fundamentally incompatible with evolution.<sup>40</sup>

***Scot McKnight is an evangelical theologian, Professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary:*** [referring to at least four ancient near Eastern creation stories<sup>41</sup>]

I do not assume the author of Genesis 1—3 knew these texts, knew about them, had read them, or was consciously interacting with them. I assume only the generally recognised conclusion that *these texts express the kinds of ideas 'in the air' when Genesis 1 and 2 were drafted.* ...

A [historical] contextual approach to reading Genesis 1—3 immediately establishes that the Adam and Eve of the Bible are a literary Adam and Eve. That is, [they] are part of a narrative designed to speak into a world that had similar and dissimilar narratives. Making use of this context does not mean Adam and Eve are 'fictional', and neither does it mean they are 'historical'. ... we need to begin with the undeniable:

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<sup>40</sup> Todd C. Wood to Todd's Blog, 2009, <http://toddcwood.blogspot.com.au/2009/09/truth-about-evolution.html> Cited 18 December, 2017. It should be noted that Wood is in precisely the position outlined above. He is trying to hold two opposite views in place – his evidence-based scientific view and his 'faith-based' biblical view. I suspect that Todd's story has not reached its logical end yet. I hope and pray it ends well for him.

<sup>41</sup> The Babylonian *Enuma Elish*, *Gilgamesh Epic*, *Atrahasis*, and the Sumerian *Assur Bilingual Creation Story*.

Adam and Eve are literary<sup>42</sup> – are part of a narrative that is designed to reveal how God wants his people to understand who humans are and what humans are called to do in God’s creation.<sup>43</sup>

***Walter Brueggemann is a prolific author and evangelical theologian; he is Emeritus Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary [commenting on Genesis 1:1-2:4...]:***

There is no doubt that the text *utilises older materials*. It reflects creation stories and cosmologies of Egypt and Mesopotamia. However, the text before us transforms these older materials to serve a quite new purpose, a purpose most intimately related to Israel’s covenantal experience. ...

The text is dated to the sixth century BC, and *addressed to exiles*. It served as a refutation of Babylonian theological claims. ... this text is not an abstract statement about the origin of the universe. Rather, it is a theological and pastoral statement addressed to a real historical problem. ... At the outset, we must see that this text is not a scientific description but a theological affirmation. It makes a faith statement. ... it is important to hear this text as a declaration of the Gospel.

Our interpretation must reject the seductions of literalism and rationalism to hear the news announced to exiles. The good news is that life in God’s well-ordered world can be a joyous and grateful response.<sup>44</sup>

**Brueggemann, again, this time commenting on Genesis 2:4-3:24:**

No text in Genesis (or likely in the entire Bible) has been more used, interpreted, and misunderstood than this text. This applies to careless, popular theology as well as to the doctrine of the church. ...

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<sup>42</sup> McKnight makes it clear elsewhere in the chapter that by saying ‘literary’, he does not mean *literal*. He means that they are primarily characters in a story, a narrative, and the exact nature of that narrative is not entirely clear, and may even be several things.

<sup>43</sup> Dennis R. Venema and Scot McKnight, *Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: BrazosPress, 2017), 113-18.

<sup>44</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: Interpretation, a Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1982), 24-6.

The text is commonly treated as the account of *'the fall'*. Nothing could be more remote from the narrative itself. ... In general, the Old Testament does not assume such a 'fall'. Deuteronomy 30:11-14 is more characteristic in its assumption that humankind can indeed obey the purposes of God.... Frequently, this text is treated as though it were an explanation of *how evil came into the world*. But the Old Testament is never interested in such an abstract issue. In fact, the narrative gives no explanation for evil. ...

Similarly the narrative is taken as an account of *the origin of death* in the world. That assumption is in turn based on the mechanistic connection of sin and death. But again, the Bible does not reflect on such a question in any sustained way. ... It is especially worth noting that no-one dies in this text.<sup>45</sup>

***Professor N. T. Wright is one of the foremost evangelical theologians in the UK:***

I think the difficulty we have is that questions about the historicity of Genesis and questions about the history of Adam and Eve get caught up in contemporary, particularly American culture. ...

When anthropologists talk about myth, what they mean is not 'an untrue story'. What they mean is a story which is full of power for how we understand ourselves individually, for how we understand ourselves as a community, for how we understand what the human project is all about, and some of its paradoxes and tragedies and so on.

... To flatten that out, as in: 'This is simply telling us that that the world was made in six days', is almost perversely to avoid the real thrust of the narrative. ...

I say, 'Clearly you just haven't been reading the same Bible. The meaning of Genesis is that this world was made to be God's abode, God's home, God's dwelling. He shared it with us and He now wants to rescue it and redeem it.'

We have to read Genesis for all it's worth. To say it is either history or myth is a way of saying, 'I'm not going to study this text for all it's worth. I'm just going to flatten it out so that it

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 41-2.

conforms to the cultural questions that my culture today is telling me to ask.' I think that's actually a form of being unfaithful to the text itself.<sup>46</sup>

***John Walton is Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, USA:***

Some Christians approach the text of Genesis as if it has modern science embedded in it or it dictates what modern science should look like. ... The problem is, we cannot translate their cosmology to our cosmology, nor should we. If we accept Genesis 1 as ancient cosmology, then we need to interpret it as ancient cosmology rather than translate it into modern cosmology. If we try to turn it into modern cosmology, we are making the text say something that it never said.<sup>47</sup>

... Genesis 1 was never intended to offer an account of material origins and ... the original author and audience did not view it that way. In fact, the material cosmos was of little significance to them when it came to questions of origins. In this view, science cannot offer an unbiblical view of material origins, because there is no biblical view of material origins, aside from the very general view that whatever happened, whenever it happened, and however it happened, God did it.<sup>48</sup>

What these voices tell us is that, *at the very least*, there is a vast body of intelligent, educated Christian thought, coming from the evangelical sector of the church, not the liberal sector, which holds to a view of origins which is at odds with a literalist interpretation of Genesis 1–11. It is my view as an educator that it is these voices that deserve to be aired and discussed in classrooms in Christian schools.

If it be objected that the question of recent six-day creationism (or Intelligent Design) was never raised in *Locating Learners*, my response is that even if they were not declared, they are inevitable implications.

The linking of the two words *Creation* and *Fall*, as an historical sequence *in only two words*, describing the change from a condition of innocent

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<sup>46</sup> Partial transcript of a video found at: N. T. Wright, "Adam and Eve with N. T. Wright," The BioLogos Foundation, <https://biologos.org/resources/videos/nt-wright-on-adam-and-eve/>. Cited 15 March, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 14-15.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

perfection to one of sinful perdition requiring redemption, leaves no alternative to a model of creation based in a literalist reading of the narratives of the first three chapters of Genesis.

*Locating Learners* strongly implies that two human beings were created; at least one of them committed sin which resulted in death, and that sin and death has been inherited for all time by all subsequent humans.

To make this narrative even more suspect to a contemporary world suspicious of all patriarchies, the sin of the woman is virtually ignored in traditional Fall theology, even though it was committed first. It is the sin of the man which came after that of the woman, which became so devastatingly definitive for all subsequent humankind. It is as though, right from the beginning in this biblical account, what women do just doesn't count.

If anyone were to argue that the inferences I have drawn in the previous paragraphs were unreasonable, and that *Locating Learners* does not require such an assumption, I would respond by pointing out that no school exists in a social or intellectual vacuum.

The first two lenses, *Creation* and *The Fall*, exist as intellectual concepts in the general social, religious and intellectual framework of the West. Furthermore, in the West, the debate between recent six-day creationism and evolutionary science is common knowledge even in the general public. Christian Schools, in particular, have to be aware of it. Most Australian Christian schools are probably crisply aware of it, because their staff will almost certainly be divided over it, unless they have very small staff numbers, all recruited from similar backgrounds.

The concept of *Creation* inevitably raises religion-related issues around questions of cosmology, the origins of the universe, the nature of time and of reality, and the origins of humankind, for the simple reason that a Creation requires a Creator. That is why secular texts use terms such as 'origins of the universe' or 'human beginnings' or 'the emergence of life'.

The concept of *The Fall* is self-evidently a religious topic. It can have no basis in science because it is not a scientific matter. It requires a theological perspective to which no element of a school curriculum could contribute, other than a religious studies subject.

Ultimately, students will face basically four choices in thinking about their human origins if they are committed to following 'God's Curriculum'. They must choose from one of the following four options:

- a) Jettison their literalist narrative of creation; after which they will immediately have to abandon their understanding of how human beings bear moral guilt before a holy God, because their education has inextricably linked the Fall with moral guilt for them. In the absence of strong moral and spiritual anchors, it is too easy for 18-20 year-old young adults to simply abandon their faith and join the peer group in enjoying a life with variable moral and spiritual boundaries. It's a simple enough logic: if *God's Curriculum* is found to be insupportable, then God's other claims about truth or how we should live must also be in doubt.
- b) Abandon any study of the sciences and change to an area of study where questions of human origins may be more easily avoided, and their faith can be clung onto with quiet, private desperation.
- c) Abandon their tertiary study altogether, seeking a safe emotional and psychological place to hide.<sup>49</sup>
- d) Manage an intellectual transition to a new way of reading scripture and understanding Christian faith in ways that are not in conflict with their tertiary study.

Option (d) above is the only option that will preserve their faith *as well as* allow them to engage in the academic career of their choice.

Unfortunately, this almost never occurs at this early stage of life. Such a shift requires significant emotional and intellectual maturity, wide reading, and personal stability. It also generally requires competent instruction from evangelical Christian teachers and mentors who are competent in both science and theology. None of this is readily available in most church or university environments.

Because of the reasons given above, it is an extremely rare event to see a young Christian person, once they have left school and are in a university environment, manage this transition successfully. At their stage of life, the temptations of the first option are simply too attractive.

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<sup>49</sup> Church internships, youth ministries, short-term missions, time away from study 'to seek God's will for my life' are typical escape routes chosen to save face, by young Christian school graduates who encounter this dilemma.

The siren calls of peers, parties and play are far more likely to win over the average student.

Many teachers who have been around for a while can name those students whom we have taught diligently and faithfully in so many ways at school, but who have faced precisely these limited options – and have fallen from faith.

There is a major fault line among Christians that is focussed precisely on this question of human origins and the origins of our planet and universe. The line is perhaps drawn most sharply in the USA, quite sharply in Australia, and somewhat less so, though still evident in some parts of the UK. I have visited many schools in those three nations and understand this issue very clearly.

For some schools in each of those countries the question of origins is a critical shibboleth. Either you are a believer in recent six-day creationism or you are not; merely to suggest that there may be some truth in evolutionary science is enough in some circles to assume that you have sold out to liberal theology, and have abandoned the essential foundations of Christianity.

Churches have for too long avoided upsetting some parts of their congregations, and just abandoned deep thinking and appropriate analysis of current science and how it relates to theology.<sup>50</sup>

That this is not just an Australian problem is shown by recent research from the Barna Group focussing on North American young people. The report stated:

... the perceived conflict between science and Christianity is also a factor for Christian teens. More than one third of engaged Christian teens (37%) and more than half of churchgoing teens (53%) say that the church seems to reject much of what science tells us about the world.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The pastor of a large charismatic-style church recently reported in a private conversation that one of his congregation believed in a flat earth; the minister consequently felt that he had 'to be careful what I speak about from the platform'.

<sup>51</sup> D. Kinnaman, R. Stone, and B. Hempell, "Gen Z: Your Questions Answered," Barna Group, 2018, [https://www.barna.com/research/gen-z-questions-answered/?utm\\_source=Barna+Update+List&utm\\_campaign=51e28f1451-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2017\\_12\\_28&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_8560a0e52e-51e28f1451-180663961&mc\\_cid=51e28f1451&mc\\_eid=04d831818e](https://www.barna.com/research/gen-z-questions-answered/?utm_source=Barna+Update+List&utm_campaign=51e28f1451-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_12_28&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_8560a0e52e-51e28f1451-180663961&mc_cid=51e28f1451&mc_eid=04d831818e).

These figures are not surprising given the hold that recent six-day creationism, or Young Earth Creationism (YEC) as it is often called, has in American evangelical circles. It seems reasonable that similar figures would apply to Australian Christian teens.

The data that we have for Australia seems to bear this out. The Australian figures are only a little less concerning than the American data cited above.

McCrindle Research<sup>52</sup> asked a large group of Australians about a range of issues in response to the general question: *To what extent do each of the following issues and Christianity's stance on them block or engage with your interest in Christianity?* Specifically responding to the sub-question: *Science and evolution – How does science and Christianity fit together?* the responses were as follows:

- 34% replied that they felt that the church's response to science and evolution either blocked completely or significantly their engagement with Christianity.
- Another 19% felt that it blocked their engagement slightly.

In other words over half of respondents felt that the way that the church and science interacted was sufficient to disengage them from being involved with church.

Participants were also given a range of religious attitudes or beliefs to consider under the broad heading of the question: *When you think about Christians and Christianity, to what extent do the following negatively influence your perceptions?* Specifically in response to the prompt: *Outdated – The church in its beliefs and practices is not aligned with the world today*, the responses were as follows:

- 32% reported a massive negative influence.
- 23% reported a significant negative influence.
- 27% reported a slight negative influence.
- Only 17% could report that there was no significant negative influence in this area.

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<sup>52</sup> Mark McCrindle, "Faith and Belief in Australia," (Sydney: McCrindle Research, 2017), p33.

In other words, 83% of Australians think that the way that the church deals with science has negatively affected the way that they think about the church. Is it any wonder that churches are losing members? Surely Christian schools might sense an opportunity, if not a responsibility, here, to redress this poor impression?

When both Science and Biblical Studies are properly taught and understood, there should be no conflict between them. There may be unanswered questions, but as long as these are honestly acknowledged, conflict can be averted and doubts managed.

It is admittedly a complex matter for churches to deal well with, though clearly the general public thinks that more could, or should have been done. But in Christian schools – that is surely our great advantage and our best opportunity! We have time to teach and to read, and we can lay strong foundations for deep trust in the Christian scriptures as true and authoritative, while also teaching well about science, history and human development.

When both Science and Biblical Studies are properly taught and understood, there should be no conflict between them.

I am certain that my intentions in this book will be misunderstood by some at this point. It is not my concern in this book that some Christians believe one thing and some believe another about human origins. I am not saying that it doesn't matter – it matters greatly, as I will show below. But the mere fact that Christians differ on the matter is not my concern here.

Let me make my position clear at this point. It is not my concern to convert anyone to either point of view in this little book. If it were, I would be writing an entirely different kind of book.

My only concern in this book is that Christian schools should develop curricula which are truthful, fair, balanced, *and* attractive to their communities. Every school's curriculum documents should be based on principles that are representative of current academic and theological knowledge.

Schools should acknowledge that there has been a very significant rift in the trust that the community at large places in the church when it comes to being honest about science, especially the science of origins, both of the cosmos and of humans. They should be attempting to address that historical problem, not worsening it.

The Gospel should appear to the community at large as being attractive and reasonable. Judging on the McCrindle data cited above, this has not been the case, at least in this area. The Gospel is Good News, after all, and should appear to be so in the curriculum documents of a Christian education.

Thankfully, such an approach is possible, as I have outlined in the previous chapters.

### **The High Stakes of Basing a Curriculum on a Particular View of 'Creation'**

When we say that all human beings now alive came from a single human pair sometime in the last ten thousand years or so, and were infected both with an inheritable sin-guilt and an unavoidable inclination to sin, we are absolutely at odds with everything that we have learned about genetics in the last twenty years.

Note that we are not just talking about a few atheistic scientists like Richard Dawkins who are prejudiced against Christianity. We are talking about the vast, interconnected global community of scientists, who daily practise the science that produces the medical, technological, communication, physical and astro-physical research that undergirds our entire society.

The medicine we take, the cancer research we fund, the space exploration we watch, the earth sciences that we use to learn about volcanoes, tectonic plates, rivers and soils, oil and mineral deposits, the historical records and investigations we undertake to investigate climate, the genetic manipulation we perform on plants to increase crop yields – all these are predicated on contemporary scientific understandings of an old universe, an old earth, and all life formed slowly over long ages.

We must, as educators, at least be honest to our students about this.

As Christian educators, we must also concede that the Old Testament prophets and writers also did not enshrine the concept of the Fall in their writings. The concept did not emerge until the second century AD, via the teachings of Irenaeus, who approached the idea with some vagueness. It was to lie relatively dormant until Augustine formalised it in the fourth century.

The Old Testament writers insisted on saying things like this, after several chapters of outlining the covenant responsibilities of following God's law:

*Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. Deut. 30:11–14*

A careful reading of the Psalms which have a great deal to say about sin will show no consistent sense of guilt arising from an original sin. Instead, the individual is typically called to responsibility for his/her own guilt.<sup>53</sup>

So here is the critical point: When a curriculum document designed for schools links the two words 'Creation' and 'Fall', in capital letters and sequential order, accompanied by historical re-tellings of a garden in Eden and The Tower of Babel, *it inevitably implies a recent, six-day creation in general accordance with a literalist reading of Genesis* (see pp44-5 of *Locating Learners* as examples). It inevitably suggests to students that (only) two original human beings sinned, suffered death, and by doing so, left an unavoidable legacy of sin and death for every other human being in history.

Furthermore, if this is a school's formal position, it cannot have it two ways. It cannot teach this as fact in Biblical Studies classes, while teaching something else as fact in Science. Nor can it just say to students that they can make up their own minds which view to accept, though this is exactly what some schools do. That is not an option open to a responsible educator.

An ethical teacher is obliged to place facts, competent research, and full disclosures in front of students. It is one of the most deceptive of cop-outs for teachers and churches to blithely tell students they can make up their own minds on matters of science and known history.

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<sup>53</sup> A reading of the seven Psalms known as the Penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) will demonstrate this clearly.

We don't give them that choice about other historical events. We don't tell them they can choose whether or not to believe in the theory of gravity. We tell them they can develop their own theories, based on solid academic evidence, about why the First World War happened, but we don't tell them they can make up their mind about *whether* it happened.

We tell students they can make up their own minds whether they prefer Mozart to rap music; we allow them freedom of choice over whether they choose to play football or tennis; we let them hover between ideals of capitalism or socialism, while constantly seeking out data and opinions to guide them; but no school tells its students that they can make up their own minds on whether or not the earth is flat, whether American astronauts actually landed on the moon, whether vaccinations work, or whether or not the Holocaust<sup>54</sup> really happened. We do not ask them to choose whether they accept the Pythagoras theorem or not.

Where history or science is uncertain, for example, regarding the causes of the First World War or the behaviour of light, we teach them to assemble the various different opinions from *respected* sources and then to assess the arguments, presenting a reasonable and logical analysis of the *expert opinions*. It is theological and educational betrayal not to do the same thing with accounts of human origins.

Christian school administrators and teachers have to be really honest with themselves at this point. And we have to be honest with the government bodies that fund our schools through the taxes of Australian people.

We now know vast amounts about ancient societies, about genetic codes and the mapping of the human genome, about archaeology and anthropology, about astrophysics and space.

Are we really prepared to teach our students with absolute conviction that there can be no doubt about there being no human (or animal) death on planet earth until about 6,000 years ago?

Indeed, are we really prepared to say with absolute certainty, that life on earth, and indeed the earth itself, did not exist until about 6,000 years ago?

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<sup>54</sup> Or, with greater cultural sensitivity, the Shoah.

Are we prepared to teach students to ignore all that we now know about astrophysics and cosmology, and to believe that the sun, moon and distant galaxies have not existed for longer than 6–10,000 years?

What evidence will we use to show students that the earth hung alone in space for a few days at the beginning of creation, defying every known principle of Physics, before the sun, moon and stars even existed?

How will we teach students to investigate space if there is simply no model in our curriculum to explain the light from ancient stars, the evidence of historical microwave radiation in the ancient cosmos, and the development of carbon on earth as a basic building-block of life?

Nor will it do if we try to hold a 'religious' theory, sanitised for chapel and Religion classes, but hold a different view when it comes to science and history.

There will always be teachers and preachers who say, with all the good intentions in the world, 'It doesn't matter whether you believe in a literal six-day creation or in evolution. What matters is whether you believe in Jesus.' But this is a red herring in this discussion, which young students are not likely to be able to identify easily.

It is true that your belief on human origins does not matter for salvation; but nor does it matter for salvation if you believe in a flat earth or in not vaccinating your children against diseases such as measles or polio. Whether or not you want to drink fluoridated water is not a matter for salvation.

If your faith forces you into saying something that is at odds with some other physical reality, then you finish up living a lie.

*But such things are not unimportant!* They really do matter, when you are training young people to enter university and train as medical doctors and scientists!

If your faith forces you into saying something that is at odds with some other physical reality, then you finish up living a lie. Or at least living in a schizophrenic mental state, with two opposing worldviews kept in separate rooms, or on upper and lower floors.

No thoughtful person can survive for long holding a particular foundational idea in a mental upper storey, while trying to live in the practical lower storey world holding an opposite set of foundations.

Eventually, the cognitive dissonance becomes so great that one or the other has to be abandoned. For young people with enquiring minds and entering tertiary education, it is the Christian story which is most commonly abandoned, usually in the first couple of years at university. That is precisely what the statistics we examined earlier show us to be the case.

The good news is that faithful Christianity does not require us to hold an upper storey religious view, while living and working day by day with an opposite view. Christianity properly understood, on a firm biblical footing, allows us to hold compatible views both in our upper storey minds and our lower storey everyday living.

One of the reasons that we have too few Christian theoretical scientists and researchers in Australia is because our Christian schools<sup>55</sup> have failed to give them a set of intellectual *as well as* spiritual tools at school which were sufficient for the task ahead.

Some schools gave them sufficient intellectual tools, but failed to inculcate a deep trust in the Bible and Christian faith. Others majored on building personal faith, but failed to show how the Bible and intellectual enquiry could be held tightly together.

Mark Noll devotes two chapters to this problem in his book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Christian school Principals and teachers should read this book closely, especially the two chapters entitled: *The Intellectual Disaster of Fundamentalism* and *Thinking about Science*.<sup>56</sup>

He castigates the fundamentalist world for producing almost no significant contributions to science, to history, to philosophy, to literature, in fact to almost every facet of intellectual life during the twentieth century. Noll's book is now 25 years old, but it is doubtful whether the situation he describes so passionately has changed significantly.

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<sup>55</sup> I mean to include here, all church or religious schools as well as the younger schools which are generally known as Christian schools.

<sup>56</sup> Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994).

Without doubt, if we took *Locating Learners* as our measure, Noll would be a seriously disappointed man.

### Other Problems with *Locating Learners*

The Third and Fourth Stages of *Locating Learners* are entitled 'Redemption'. and 'Restoration'.

The writers suggest that the educators' main task in Stage Three involves 're-forming *shalom*, absorbing evil and enacting justice to bless the world' (p45). And herein lies the problem. I will treat this problem very briefly in this review, but it involves some very serious issues.

This task, of (re-)building *shalom*, appears to be open *only to those who claim to be Christian*. The work of this stage is done only 'through Christ's salvation' (p45). This surely creates a real dilemma for schools.

There is an obvious difficulty (not to mention spiritual arrogance!) of deciding who, among our students has a genuine Christian faith and who does not. Further, what are schools to do with those who attend our schools, but fail to show outward signs<sup>57</sup> of accepting the Christian faith? That not all students will turn to Christian faith is acknowledged by the writers (p24).

The teen years are a time when students are working things out in their minds. *Who am I? What is the world like? How do I fit in the world? Is there a God? How do I respond to the idea of God?*

How is the school to help those students either who are resistant to, or who reject Christian faith outright, in 'journeying towards and re-learning to live in Shalom' (p51-3)? In my experience, the practice of adults forming judgements about a student's faith, even up to Year 12, is fraught with many risks, and ought to be avoided at all costs.

Forming judgements on the faith of students is generally unwise.

<sup>57</sup> In my experience, some students excel at showing outward signs of faith if they perceive that by doing so, they are more likely to be given a leadership position or some other benefit, such as selection in a chapel band. Equally, some other students may observe a quiet faith which they effectively conceal from others, either from a desire to appear 'cool' or because they reject the hypocrisy they perceive around them from the loud pretend-Christian voices.

In any event, for those who are still apparently rejecting Christian faith, there seems to be little hope for them to be able to engage in Stage Three of 'God's Curriculum'.

There must presumably be no hope at all for any students of other, non-Christian faiths who are enrolled. Again, our minds inevitably turn toward Commonwealth Government funding issues.

Christian schools which adopt *Locating Learners* face two very real problems at this point. The writers seem to have been unable to resolve the first, and do not appear to have even considered the second.

**The first problem** is that not all students in our schools will choose to follow the Christian faith. In the current social climate of Australia, and especially in some urban localities, some students are very likely to come from other faiths, e.g. Islam, Hinduism, etc. Indeed, some will reject religion altogether. Some will come from families where each of their parents identify strongly with different faiths.

**The second problem** is an even more serious issue. Australian Christian schools accept significant amounts of government funding. There is unease (not unreasonably, perhaps) in the community about taxpayer-funded religious schools attempting to coerce their enrolled students to adopt the faith of the College or school attended. This community anxiety probably centres on where on the spectrum of teaching the faith school focuses its level of instruction: encouragement, training, persuasion, indoctrination, coercion, brainwashing...

It is generally (though not universally) accepted that religious schools may reasonably teach and promote the faith of the founding body. A Catholic school may teach the Catholic faith, and so on through various denominations.

Nevertheless, the Australian community does not expect religious schools to train young people into fundamentalist warriors. But what if the entire curriculum were to be structured around 'conversion'? Indeed, *if it were impossible to achieve in the curriculum without such 'conversion'*, then the community at large would have real concerns. (Again, not unreasonably, it seems to me.)

Christian schools should be very wary (not to mention socially-responsible and fair) around this complex issue. How would they feel about government-funded schools from other religions becoming

centres of narrow, sectarian, fundamentalist indoctrination, ignoring or suppressing vast sections of Western learning and tradition?

It is open to question whether the declared goals that undergird the *Locating Learners* curriculum model are in accord with the general thrust of the Commonwealth Ministers' Declarations on Australian education or of the ACARA purposes.

Having as a key educational goal 'to see students find their life's purpose in Christ' (p20) or of getting children to live Christian lives of 'holiness and wholeness' (p52) may not be seen to be within those official guidelines. If so, that may well place in jeopardy the funding of schools using this curriculum – not to mention the concomitant funding of other faith-based schools which may be caught in that net.

There is some acknowledgement by the writers that not all students will come on this path towards redemption and restoration: 'Granted, not every learner is walking in the Spirit, or wants to cooperate with God's work in the world. We must never coerce' (p50).

The hope is well expressed that through 'common grace' these students will nevertheless contribute to the world. This is an important reservation, and it is gratifying to see it made. Nevertheless, it seems to be a reluctant nod to a problem that their curriculum finds virtually impossible to manage.

It is clear that *Locating Learners* expects that each student must respond personally to a call to follow Jesus Christ if they are to be able follow the curriculum. See for example,

*'...ask how, through this subject, you can hear the call of God to co-labour as peacemakers, exercising their fledgling faith.'*  
(p50)

*'How can you grow student intentionality, fostering a new self with a godly second nature (cf. Colossians 3)?'* (p51)

*In sum, then, how do we locate learners in God's Big Story? We must know the story, get the curriculum, and make the links. In all these ways we've explored and more, we can illuminate and repurpose the Australian Curriculum to form learners as wise peacemakers in a community of practice, journeying toward shalom (p53).*

The Third Lens, 'Redemption', requires teachers to direct students towards 'effective salvation' (*sic* p48 – is there any other kind of salvation?).

It remains difficult to see how students who have not made the kind of particular Christian commitment that the school demands, can be anything but second-class members of the student body in a school using 'God's Curriculum'. The entire curriculum is simply not open to them.

In fact, the final item in the *Locating Learners* document tellingly relates to assessment. Teachers are to 'use formative assessment to find evidence of learners becoming wise peacemakers' (p64). Presumably, a student who has not embarked on this journey towards redemption or 'effective salvation' must either fail the course or pretend to hold a faith that they really do not own.

A student who has not embarked on this journey towards redemption must either fail the course or pretend to hold a faith that they really do not own.

Alert thinkers will by now have spotted yet another problem. So far we have confined our thinking to students in later years of schooling. Most schools enrol children from the age of five – or even younger, if there is a child care centre on campus. How can these young children possibly engage in this curriculum, if it requires a knowing assent to God's call on their life for redemption?

Any experienced teacher or youth worker knows that it is easy to get an entire year level of ten year olds around a campfire on a weeklong school camp to raise their hands and offer to 'give their lives to Jesus'. But whether this is fair methodology for evangelism, (or fair use of government educational funding) is very open to question. The writers acknowledge that 'faith integration must be age appropriate' (p36).<sup>58</sup>

Wise Christian education (especially when funded by taxpayer dollars) does not place young people under unreasonable emotional pressure to 'become Christians'. It certainly would never predicate evidence of religious conversion as a requirement for their summative assessment.

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<sup>58</sup> Further admonitions to temper radical evangelism are noted elsewhere, e.g. pp 24 and 41, but it is hard not to regard these cautions somewhat doubtfully since the entire curriculum depends on every student making the 'pilgrimage' successfully.

Society reasonably expects schools to respect legitimate parental responsibility for faith-guidance, as well as differing church practices of infant baptism, catechism, and 'growing into faith'. It also expects that students will be given free and open choices in regard to religious faith without academic or social consequences.

### **What are the risks of adopting or continuing with *Locating Learners*?**

The first risk flows from my conviction that it is simply a flawed theological model for education. If it is flawed, as I have argued above that it is, then it cannot be an acceptable approach. If we are aware of something that is wrong or flawed, then we must challenge or change it.

Of course, I recognise that not everyone will agree that it is flawed. However, that is not the end of the matter.

The next risk is equally serious. It is this: The purposes and content of the *Locating Learners* curriculum framework offer a devastating tool to those who are opposed to Christianity to argue that all Christian schools should lose their taxpayer funding.

It is difficult to refute an argument against public funding being used to rule some people in or out of a faith, and then on that basis to severely disenfranchise those students enrolled and paying fees in their school.

There is a strong argument to be made that *Locating Learners* encompasses a view of science and history that is out of step with the current global academic worldview and that public funding should not be used to support it. (Again, this argument will have strength regardless of whether you or I agree with that claim.)

It seems highly likely to me that the *Locating Learners* approach if adopted widely in Christian schools must ultimately bring about a negative response from observers outside our schools who may not have the best interests of faith-based schools in mind.

The program is a gift to hostile media or academics to show that Christian schools are not presenting to Australian students a philosophy of education which deserves public funding. It is an open invitation to denigrate Christian education in the public mind.

## Summary

Christian schools need a curriculum model that will serve all students in their care, for their entire time at school and beyond school, not just those who happen to be believers. That curriculum needs to be strong enough to continue to ground them, even if they later decide to jettison some aspects of the faith they were taught at school.

Such a curriculum would meet the general goals of Australian education, training young people for careers of all kinds, for living well and understanding what other people believe and how they live. It would develop global citizens, with a broad understanding of the world.

What if the real task of Christian education were not to recover something that was lost at an instant of Fall by our first parent(s)?

What if it were not about looking towards the final achievement of a heavenly city of shalom?

What if it were really about the potential of all human beings to fulfil their divine calling in this world as human beings made in the image of God, managing, nurturing and developing the world?

What if the core hope is that at school students are given the tools to discover genuine Christian faith, either now or later, and are also given tools to live a life worthy of being a human being made in the image of God, *whether or not they are yet (or ever) ready to own him as Lord and King?*

The Living Values Model approach to worldview and curriculum theory in schools resolves all of the difficulties identified in the *Locating Learners* proposal. It does so by remaining faithful to a high view of biblical truth as well as maintaining a deep respect for current scholarship and learning.

The Living Values Model that I have outlined in this book provides a philosophical approach for schools to follow that will stand all of their students – and their parents and the general community – in good stead not only now, but into their futures.

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