

# A Theological Curriculum for the Whole Person

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*Man cannot help but see himself as a traveller, and can change his mind only about the road he is taking. He cannot be aware of himself as a person, cannot know that he is alive, without looking back to a past, and forward to a future. Whoever can put to himself the question, What am I Again, man knows himself as one among others of his kind, as a member of society, as an heir, and as an ancestor; and so passes easily from seeing himself to seeing his kind as a traveller.<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

It might be thought that this is a superfluous subject. How is it possible to teach anything other than the whole person? The teacher does not come into the classroom, and find a number of brains sitting on the desks, awaiting their daily input of knowledge. Students are not like computers, which receive whatever is given to them, and then regurgitate it at a later time. It is, of course, true that every teacher has, at one time or another, believed that the students have left their brains at home, and that, what appear to be whole people, are seriously defective in their intelligence. But that is only a perception, which expresses the inevitable frustrations of teaching. This subject is not a reference to the characteristics of students, however they may frustrate their teachers. This subject is a reference to the teachers themselves, and to the way in which they go about their work.

In dealing with it, I want to do a number of things. I want, first, to examine what we mean by the whole person, then I want to consider what the concept of the whole person might mean for the content of a curriculum, and what it might mean for the educational method of the curriculum.

All of this is to be considered in the context of a theological curriculum, which leads me to consider what qualifications I might bring to this task. I am not a theological educator. I teach in a school of social work, although I do teach a subject entitled “Christianity and social welfare”, which is the only one of its kind in schools of social work in Australia. What I am professionally, and what is relevant here, is that I educate for a

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<sup>1</sup> John Plamenatz, *Man and Society*, vol 2, London UK: Longman, 1963, p. 409.

professional group. It may not be fashionable to speak of the products of theological education as a profession. Many might prefer the concept of “calling” or “vocation”. But your products and mine bear many similarities. Professionals are not educated only in techniques, neither do they pursue knowledge just for its own sake. Integral to preparation for a profession is an education, which changes the person, and which builds-in a set of values and practices, which are designed to counter some of the human person’s natural tendencies to self-aggrandisement and self-assertion. The product of professional education is a person, who primarily uses self as a conscious piece of technology. A professional cannot act at arm’s length. Such a person is not a technician, who performs to someone else’s commands, but a person, who brings goals and values to technical achievement. This task involves not only knowing, and not only doing, but also being. How this perception assists in setting goals for professional education, I have outlined a paper in the previous issue of the *Melanesian Journal of Theology*.<sup>2</sup>

I also suspect that, when we ask ourselves how successful our education is, we may concentrate too much on the immediate results, i.e., do our students pass the tests we set them, whatever they are? Perhaps, we should ask some longer-term questions. Some of those questions might be:

- Which parts of our teaching do our students, and former students, actually use?
- Which parts of our teaching do our graduates, themselves, seek to develop?
- How long can our teaching last? Will the context, in which it is to operate, change too quickly?

The answers to these important questions may be influenced by how well we relate our teaching to the whole person.

### **The Human Person**

All Christian concepts of the human person start with creation. Humans are part of creation.<sup>3</sup> They are made by God, and are intended for God’s purposes. Being a creature has certain implications. The first, is that it puts us in our place. Whatever the achievements of the human race may

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Horsburgh, “Curriculum design at Newton College”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 8-1 (1992).

be, they do not place them above the rest of creation, except as God ordains. Humans are trustees, not the owners, of the world.

If humans are created, they are also created in the likeness of the image of God, as Gen 1:26f testifies. This a statement, of some considerable magnitude, for it gives a status to being human, which has the characteristics of divinity. Part of the meaning of divinity is an existence, in one's own right. God, after all, refers to no other being to justify His existence. Thus, if the human person is in the image of God, the human person has a being, which is inviolate. Each person is entitled to respect, on the basis of humanity itself.

If this seems to be too individualistic, we must also note that the God, in whose likeness humans are made, is a triune God. Whatever else this means, the doctrine of the Trinity states clearly that God is not a kind of introvert, in love with Himself, the ultimate egoist. It is not an accident that Christianity worships a deity, which it conceives of as a community, or a relationship. The Orthodox theologian, Kallistos Ware, puts it well, when he says:

The Christian God is not just a unit, but a union; not just a unity, but a community. There is, in God, something analogous to "society". He is not a single person, loving Himself alone, not a self-contained monad . . . God is personal . . . God is love. Now, both these notions imply sharing and reciprocity. A "person" is not the same as an "individual". Each becomes a real person only entering into relation with other persons.<sup>4</sup>

The doctrine of creation asserts that we are made in God's image, which must, therefore, imply a basic community of all persons thus created. Humanity is based on relationships, as God is. God participated directly in our society through the incarnation. Thus we are not only made in God's image, and have, as a consequence, a society of our own, but God also joined our society. If, also, the church represents the divine society, the

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<sup>3</sup> This section of the paper owes much to John R. Sachs SJ, *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology*, Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1991; and Margaret Rodgers, and Maxwell Thomas, eds, *A Theology of the Human Person*, North Blackburn Vic: Collins Dove, for the Anglican church of Australia, General Synod Doctrine Commission, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> T. Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, London UK: Mowbray, 1979, pp. 33-34.

image of the renewed humanity, community pervades every part of our existence, both fallen and redeemed.

But this gives us, not only a strong view of society, as something central to our humanity itself, it endorses the whole material world in which we live. Richard Hooker noted the essential material element of our life in this way:

All men desire to lead, in this world, a happy life. That life is led most happily, wherein all virtue is exercised, without impediment or let. . . . True, it is, that the Kingdom of God must be the first thing in our purposes and desires. But, in as much as righteous life presupposes life, in as much as to live virtuously, it is impossible except we live, therefore, the first impediment, which, naturally, we endeavour to remove, is penury, and want of things, without which we cannot live. Unto life, many implements are necessary; more, if we seek (as all men naturally do) such a life as hath in it joy, comfort, delight, and pleasure.<sup>5</sup>

The life, which we live in our society, is not an unfortunate impediment, which we must endure. It is not only essential to our being, as I have already suggested, but it is a prerequisite to our enjoying anything at all.

There is, nevertheless, a tension between the individual and social aspects of the person. Western societies tend to approach the issue from the point of view of the individual, and then relegate the social to second place. Melanesian societies may tend to do it the other way around: to start with the social, and put the individual in second place. But, whichever way you do it, the part you place second, does not go away. Particularly, when things go wrong, this tension becomes apparent. Thus, we may see a Western society disregarding the social, and destroying the individual. We may also see a Melanesian society, unable to incorporate newly-educated, young individuals, and destroying its social fabric.

This brings us face to face with the flawed existence, which we actually live, as compared with the ideal I have set out. In our ordinary life, it is possible to observe many examples of humanity, which do not appear to have the dignity of the image of God. It is possible to observe individuals,

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Hooker, "The First Book, chapter 10:2", in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, A. S. McGrade, ed., Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 88.

who not only are, themselves, less than godlike, but who treat others so. It is also possible to observe persons, who are cast out from their societies, who appear as lost, or wandering, souls. The depressed parts of all the towns in the world, here in PNG, as well as in more-industrialised countries, have such persons. Not only that, those persons, and many others, live in societies, which degrade and destroy them, instead of building and nurturing them. Such societies seem often to be at war with themselves, turning their energies to mutual destruction. This picture is also as familiar in PNG, as it is elsewhere.

This phenomenon we know in Christian terms as “sin or ‘the fall’ ”. It is characterised not just by the actual sins, which we commit separately or together, but by a fundamental turning away from God. It is seen in the claim to be able to determine the course of history itself. It is seen in the exploitation of the environment without any concern for other forms of life or indeed for our successors as humans. It is seen, in an apparently limitless capacity to turn everything inward, to turn everything towards the self, or the group. It is seen in the desire to be, not just made in the image of God, but to be gods ourselves. What we have, therefore, is a flawed humanity of potential, which needs to be redeemed, and turned to its proper purposes.

We should also note that some feminist theologians have proposed different forms of original sin for men and women. If the original sin of the man is rebellion, the active grasping of a separate identity, the original sin of women may be submission, the denial of the independence and dignity, which come from being a child of God. If this is so, the mutual exploitation of men and women is their joint original sin, as they, together, deny the very qualities of their creation.

All of the forgoing is set in universal, or general, terms. Such a doctrine of the human person applies to all humans, no matter where they are, or at what time.

The human persons we actually see are not like that. They come in all sizes and colours. They come as male and female. They come of different ages, and with different capacities. They come already formed by different cultures. One of the important functions of a doctrine of the human person is to transcend the many forms of the human person, and to emphasise what they have in common. For it is not always easy to see the common beneath the particular individual in front of us.

That this is a difficult enough task, may be seen everywhere in the world around us. Universal ideas about the human person have been taught to the people of Yugoslavia, by the Christian church, for hundreds of years, and by the communist party for about 50. None of that teaching seems capable of withstanding the terrible strength of ethnic division. Similar events are unfolding in the former Soviet Union. None of that should be unfamiliar in Melanesian society, where the strength of group ties is so obvious, and so pervasive, as to cast doubts on whether it has a general concept of the human person at all.<sup>6</sup> If we take this seriously, we should see that the creation of a curriculum, based on the concept of the whole person is not an easy task. It must hold, in tension, the formal concept of the human person, and the infinite variety of the actual appearances of humans. It must juggle the persons themselves, and the social reality, of which they are a part.

But, before I embark on some reflection about that, I want to ask what may be, at first sight, an unnecessary question. Who are the human persons, to whom this curriculum is to relate? I began this paper by referring to students, but that was a throwaway line, which hid the reality of education. There are at least three groups of persons involved here. The students are an obvious part, but, in addition, we must include the teachers, and the ultimate consumers of the education, the parishioners, or others, touched by the ministry of our students.

Students are, of course, not just sponges, to soak up what is presented to them. But even the students are not as simple a group of persons as we might think. In those churches, where there are married clergy, students come with spouses and children. These share, if not the ministry itself, the consequences of being associated with it. The teachers are as much persons, as are the students, and the curriculum will need to take them seriously, too, not just as reservoirs of useful knowledge, but as persons who have a life, apart from teaching. Finally, the ultimate consumers must be present in their fullness, and not just as objects of the technical expertise of theological college graduates. In particular, they must be regarded as whole persons, not just as fodder for the organisational requirements of the institutional church.

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<sup>6</sup> [The text for this footnote is missing from the original article. –Revising ed.]

## **The Whole Persons**

### **The Students**

There may once have been a time, when theological students were relative novices in the world. This was particularly so in those colleges, which prepared students as religious, rather than secular, clergy. Such students often came straight from school to the novitiate, and were completely formed by the institution. But, I suspect, that this has never been the pattern in Melanesia. It is now almost universal for theological students to come to their training as already formed adults. Often, in churches, which allow it, they are married, with children.

This represents learning, and experience, of an important kind, which a curriculum, that deals with the whole person, must seek to use. But this is easier said than done. In my own experience, teaching in a course, which has encouraged mature-age students, the past experience of those students can be a two-edged sword. In many cases, it provides invaluable insight into real life issues, and a corrective to the often-precious theories of their teachers. But it can also be a dead weight, which has to be unlearned before real development can begin. I have found that this is particularly so when the experience is closely related to the area being studied. The point being made here is that it is not so much having the experience that counts. What counts, is the use that the person has made of that experience.

Experience is also very variable. Having naive students also means having relatively uniform students. Having experienced students means having a diversity of starting points. Ideally, this problem can be dealt with by allowing certain flexibility in the curriculum. It may mean starting students at different points, or giving some choice, through elective courses. This may mean individual course planning.

It is a characteristic of adults, that they are not expected to accept everything told to them by their superiors. As anyone, with an experience of children, knows, children so not actually accept everything told to them by their superiors, it is just that they are supposed to. But adults are not even supposed to do so. To treat persons as adults means to respect their questioning. This can often best be done, by setting students problems to solve. In this way, they can see for themselves how the various parts of their studies come together to make sense of a real situation. In this way, they can also bring their experiences to the assistance of their fellow students, and education becomes a collegial exercise.

But we cannot just assume that adult students are confident students. Although they may have considerable experience, they find themselves suddenly in the position of children. Their academic skills may be undeveloped, or in the distant past. At an older age, they must embark on a new way of thought, and learn new skills in reading and analysis. Thus, they may exhibit a high degree of anxiety. This may show up in a willingness to accept everything they are told, particularly if that is supported by cultural practice. But they may also show anxiety, by rebellion or anger.

An important part of all professional education is the use of the self. This applies particularly to clergy. Although they may administer objectively-valid sacraments, they cannot dissociate themselves from the liturgy. What they do, how they do it, how they perceive the effect they have on other people, are all parts of the effective use of the self. In pastoral care, the same is true. All the activity comes through the person of the priest or minister. A curriculum, which treats the whole person, cannot limit itself to a theoretical knowledge of how to perform ritual acts, or of what is important in pastoral relationships. It must expose the student to an actual encounter, on which the student can reflect, and, through which, the student can learn.

In my teaching Australia, I deal with questions of social policy. There are three concepts in social policy, which I think are relevant here. They are: discretion, accountability, and rationing. Discretion involves the making of a choice in the administration of a policy, for example, whether or not to grant a person a welfare payment. If we translate this to the life of the clergy, in their pastoral relationships, we might use this example. A priest knows a lot about what is happening in his parish. He has a duty towards his parishioners, and he might feel the need to speak to some of them about their behaviour, or about a problem, which he observes. He might equally decide not to speak, but to wait for a while and see what happens, before he acts. This is the use of discretion, or judgment.

People who exercise discretion are usually accountable to others for their actions. To call priests to this account is usually the function of the bishop. But, it is a feature of many situations, that accountability is very difficult to administer. This is particularly, the case when the superior is a long way off, or cannot easily check on what the inferior does. Thus, many professionals must be self-accountable. Clergy, and other "front-line" workers, are almost impossible to call to account, until something goes seriously wrong.



Rationing is the mechanism, by which scarce resources are distributed. A good example is the queue, perhaps, for a bed in a hospital, when there are too many patients. In such a queue, some patients get better by themselves, and do not need treatment; some die, and also do not need treatment; then you are left with the rest, who may be enough to fill the beds. Every priest has at least one scarce resource, his own time. It must be distributed in a disciplined way, and not just by force of habit.

All these activities, discretion, accountability, and rationing, demand a clear knowledge of oneself, and a capacity to evaluate one's own behaviour. If that is so, the curriculum, which reflects it, must have two characteristics. It must provide a direct opportunity for knowledge about, and reflection on, the self. It must also teach students how to recognise and solve problems.

### **The Teachers**

One of the most difficult lessons to learn, is the use of authority. I start my consideration of teachers as whole persons by referring to this, because it is the point, at which the teacher's own anxieties, and lack of wholeness, will come through. Writing about university courses, where there are adult students, R. S. Usher, of the University of Southampton, notes that the role of teachers, in this context, is very different from the approach traditionally taken. Teachers tend to have a self-image of expertise in their subject areas. Thus, they are tempted to seek to transmit what they know to their students. But, if adult students need to have their own experience acknowledged, a more-experiential, and problem-centred, learning approach may be required.<sup>7</sup>

The image of expertise is a disadvantage to teachers in another way. It may lead to the assumption that the teachers are not also learners. They may, and should, learn much from their students, but they also need to acknowledge, and have acknowledged, their need for continuing education. I suspect that this is a particular difficulty in Melanesian, where distance and cost may be overwhelming problems. This seminar, itself, is an important part of the recognition of the wholeness of teachers. But there may be simpler, and less expensive, solutions to this problem. Learning does not depend on going to a place of learning. It ultimately depends on an inquiring mind, and the time to reflect and investigate. Over-full teaching

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<sup>7</sup> R. S. Usher, "Reflection and prior work experience: some problematic issues in relation to adult students in university studies", in *Studies in Higher Education* 11-3 (1986), pp. 245-256.

schedules, and excessive administrative demands, are ways in which the wholeness of teachers is constantly denied in teaching institutions.

### **The Consumers**

The people, to whom the products of theological education minister, live in a complex and demanding world. In Melanesia, as elsewhere, one of the overwhelming characteristics of that world is the speed at which it is changing. Many people live in the modern world in a state of perpetual fear and confusion, as what was once familiar is now strange. Many young people have never known what the old stability was.

Of course, just as students are often teachers, and as teachers are often learners, both students and teachers are part of this world of change. It is not that they, alone of all God's creatures, stand apart from all this and look on.

One of the major aspects of this change is secularisation. Secularisation refers to the development of a way of life, in which the material is preferred to the spiritual. Questions of religion and faith are relegated to the realm of private opinion. They are what people do in their private life, not part of what they do in public. This process may not have proceeded so far in Melanesian societies, but, as urbanisation continues, it will increase. It is important, therefore, that clergy do not treat people as though their spiritual life was separate from their material. The essential unity of the human person must be fostered, not destroyed.

Neither is it permissible to treat people as objects. This is the way to exploitation and oppression. Human rights, and the development of people as a whole, are, thus, central concerns of a curriculum, which treats its ultimate consumers as whole persons.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Curriculum**

We come, now, to the way in which all these considerations might be put together into a teaching program. To a certain extent, this discussion leads, not so much to conclusions about content, but about method. That method should have some central characteristics. They are:

- A sense of common purpose between staff and students;
- A degree of self-determination among the student body;

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<sup>8</sup> See "Congregation for Catholic Education", in *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Doctrine in the Formation of Priests*, Homebush NSW: St Paul Publications, 1989.

- Attention to problem-solving, not just book learning;
- Realistic contact, with practical experience in the church;
- Realistic contact with the secular world; and
- Opportunities for reflection and personal development.

None of this displaces the traditional content, although it opens the way for more social-science and pastoral studies.

It would be interesting to ask the graduates of the colleges represented here, which experiences most marked their development as clergy. I expect that they may not be the experiences of college. It possibly resides more in particular things that happened to them, the day they were told they were accepted as ordinands; or the day of their ordination. These are points when they feel changed. Theoretically, it is the college, which is supposed to do this; education is supposed to change people, but the reality may be different.<sup>9</sup>

Feeling different is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Each graduate must have a new identity. But the danger may lie in the double standard, implicitly promoted by the church. That is, priests must be better than the laity. Some have noted that,

“unlike other professionals, the priest is both provider and recipient of the church’s services”. Doctors . . . service health, but are not necessarily healthier than their clients, whereas the priest’s quest for greater, and more intense, spirituality is both public and personal, both for the pastor himself, and for his flock.<sup>10</sup>

If this is true, the treatment of the clergy, as less (more) than human, is being perpetuated.

But, I have now said enough to make it likely that I am not practising what I preach. I now pose you this problem. If what I have said is correct, what is the curriculum, which is designed for the whole person?

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<sup>9</sup> J. Gay, and J Wyatt, “Aspects of the role of the residential theological college in the initial education and training of the clergy of the Church of England”, in *Studies in Higher Education* 13-3 (1988), pp. 249-261.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

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