

Second Isaac Armitage Lecture
'The theology of childhood and adolescence'

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Introduction

I would like to thank Shore School, particularly the Headmaster, Dr Timothy Wright, and the Chaplain, the Reverend Matthew Pickering, for inviting me to deliver the Second Armitage lecture. I would also add my welcome to all who have foregone the pleasures of relaxation after a busy week in order to support this lecture – to the heads, chaplains, teachers, administrators and school governors from the network of Anglican schools and beyond.

It is an honour, a pleasure and a somewhat daunting prospect to maintain the very high standard of this lecture series that was so ably inaugurated by the Reverend Dr Andrew Cameron of Moore College last year. It was a memorable occasion when we were given food for thought about the vital task of the moral education of the young who have been committed to our care.

Andrew, as a theologian and ethicist, spoke about the moral basis of Anglican schooling, while I, an educationist and historian, am assaying to speak about theology. I think this is the genius of this lecture series set up in honour of Isaac Armitage, who throughout his ministry sought to relate education and theology to life. While Andrew's focus last year was on values, I want this year to focus on the student.

Unquestionably the centre of teaching and learning is the student. This has been recognised in all societies from the earliest times¹. The key question I want to address today is what assumptions and presuppositions do *we* have about the nature of our students as learners?

¹ This has been recognised in all societies from the earliest times. Often the concern was to pass on the accumulated skills from one generation to the next within the family. This may have been directed simply towards food collection in a hunter-gatherer community; at other times it had a vocational purpose. In Ancient Israel the Wisdom literature was directed at moral formation, the building of character. To avoid the chaos of societal or familial disintegration, the older generation instructed the young about ways of avoiding the pitfalls they would encounter in the various aspects of daily life. Beneath this lay the sense of awe and obligation towards the covenant God who had redeemed them from slavery and set them free. Deuteronomy 4-6 sets out the requirements of this relationship. The Shema assigns to parents the responsibility to impress these commandments on their children by talking about them while sitting at home, walking along the road, at bedtime and in the morning (Deuteronomy 6:7). Synagogue schools are thought to have existed from the eighth century, flourishing after the Exile, but only becoming compulsory for Jewish boys somewhere between the second century BC and AD 64 (James L. Crenshaw, *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), pp. 5 & 112).

Israel was not alone in its concern for the proper instruction of the young. Schools existed in Ancient Mesopotamia from as early as 2500 BC. The evidence shows that teaching was not restricted to males, although segregation by gender was practised¹. During the New Kingdom in Egypt (1567-1085 BC), schools were developed to train the numerous government employees. Priestly education stretched further back to the third millennium (Crenshaw, pp. 15-22).

1. *The nature of the learner.*

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

Subsequent experience has confirmed that my initial reactions were well-founded. We have all come across the Year 9 or 10 student whose perception of reality, notion of autonomy, resistance to school culture and ethical framework has put him or her on a collision path with how we as Christian educators might conceive self-actualization and how we structure and manage our school to achieve this goal. We state in our prospectuses and programs that we want each of our students to fulfil their potential. Yet, how are we and they to think of this?

At the core of this is one's self-concept – our ability to think of ourselves as an object. The dimensions of self-concept have been demonstrated to include self-worth, self-esteem, self-cognition, self-confidence, body image and self-evaluation. Much of our time in schools is devoted to building healthy and positive self-concepts. It was William James who identified three major components of the self: the *material* self, which includes our family, our personal property and our outward appearance; the *social* self, namely the recognition we get from others; and the *spiritual* self, the inner subjective being. More recent studies by Shavelson have confirmed the importance of one's environment in shaping our self-concept². Others have demonstrated that the self is a highly organised, differentiated and integrated system³.

In Greece, two attitudes towards the young fought for dominance. In Sparta, the child belonged to the state, not to the parents. Education was designed to repress individualism and to discipline each young boy to be an obedient and disciplined warrior for the city-state. The emphasis was on unquestioning obedience and physical endurance. Girls were taught how to nurture and sacrifice for their future sons. The contrasting alternative, Athenian education, was designed to develop the mind. A complex system of education arose with elementary schools for boys ages six to thirteen, secondary schools for fourteen to eighteen year olds, higher education for advanced studies in medicine, law, music and science, and military academies. From Athens we get our terms pedagogue (the slave who chaperoned the student to school) and the Socratic method¹. The latter involved asking questions to stimulate the student to think and of the teacher not being satisfied until the student had used his reason to come to an acceptable answer (Crenshaw, pp. 22-27).

The world within which Jesus was born was influenced chiefly by Hebrew and Greek ideas, however his political masters came from the education system of Imperial Rome. Latin grammar schools, both publicly and privately funded, taught Roman youths the Latin poets, Greek literature and the moral philosophy of Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC). Their goal was an educated adult who was honest, public-minded, devoted to public service, and pure in mind and heart (see Michael J. Anthony & Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education: principles for the 21st Century* {Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003}, pp82-84).

² R. J. Shavelson in T. M. Brinthaupt and R P Lipka (eds), *The Self: Definitional and Methodological Issues* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 137-171.

³ For example, S Epstein in *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 15 (1985), pp. 283-310.

However, the Christian educator treads warily in this area. St Paul's warning 'Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you' (Romans 12:3) constrains our optimism. A self-concept that does not first begin with an understanding of who we are without Christ, what he has done on our behalf and who we become in Christ is not well-founded.

Before proceeding further I want to examine another dimension concerning the nature of the learner. Classical Roman education, drawing upon Cicero, made an assumption that has influenced educational endeavours across the centuries. Put simply, Cicero assumed that the student arrived at their first year of formal schooling in a condition that would allow instruction and encouragement *alone* to produce the desirable qualities of honesty, public-mindedness, a willingness to devote oneself to serving others, and a purity of mind and heart.

At the heart of this is a foundational belief that, with the right kind of tuition, a person is perfectible. Is this so?

Christian educators will recognise that there is a marked difference between Ciceronian idealism and the biblical realism. However, you might think that Cicero is too remote, so let me offer you a modern exponent of this position.

Peter Vardy has produced a book entitled *Being Human: Fulfilling genetic and spiritual potential*. Vardy is Vice Principal of Heythrop College, the Jesuit college that promotes itself as 'the Specialist Philosophy and Theology College of the University of London'. I believe that Vardy himself is an Anglican of liberal theological outlook. My interest in him has arisen from hearing him some years ago on one of his frequent visits to Australia to promote his five-strand approach to Religious and Values Education (RAVE). A number of Australian Anglican schools, including a small number in Sydney, have found an appeal in his five strands – Christian faith and biblical literacy, ethics, philosophy of religion, religions other than Christianity, and awareness of silence and spirituality⁴.

Vardy is a philosopher who, from British Analytical philosophical assumptions, argues for an Aristotelian virtue ethic along the lines suggested by Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*⁵. This may mean little to you, so let me clarify what I am saying by showing how this leads Vardy to a view of human nature that does not sit well with what the Bible appears to be saying.

Chapter 4 of *Being Human* deals with human nature first in terms of physical 'normality' and then in terms of its potential. 'Normality' is defined in such a way that physical abnormality of a genetic or accidental nature does not debar us from being regarded as truly human. In the second section titled 'Human potential as being more than physical', Vardy goes on to argue that other defects occur. In particular humans alone amongst the animal kingdom are able to use their free will 'to choose voluntarily to be less than they are intended to be'⁶. Note the use of the word 'intended' and the belief that human problems stem from the misuse of human free will. He goes on to give five examples of people not fulfilling their potential

⁴ It has come under criticism from Nicholas Coleman, an education consultant and reviewer of the Victorian Religion and Society course – see www.aare.org.au/victoria/RAVEforV.htm

⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a study in moral theory* (Second edition, London: Duckworth, 1985). On p. 45 of *Being Human* Vardy misspells MacIntyre's first name.

⁶ *Being Human*, p.39.

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

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

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

The reason for this methodological inadequacy lies in Vardy's desire, as a theological liberal, to formulate a definition of what it is to be human that is acceptable to Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists as well as to Christians. He rejects the traditional Roman Catholic moral theology with its focus on people being regenerate through baptism and their calling to live out their faith through moral living, because it does not serve his purpose. He rightly sees this as having too strong a focus on 'What should I do?'⁸. It is when he dismisses traditional concepts of sin as concentrating 'on the negative actions which drag human beings down and lead them away from fulfilling their potential'⁹ that he departs from orthodox Christianity. Vardy proposes instead a virtue ethic that 'holds that the task of human beings is to become fully what they are intended to be'¹⁰. He recognises that character and disposition are continually being developed through action. Acts that go against common human nature diminish a person, therefore morally wrong acts should be avoided. He concludes:

If individuals allow themselves continually to commit acts which go against their common human nature they will fall further and further away from fulfilling their true potential. The further they go along this path, the more difficult it is to turn around.¹¹

Can you see the flaws in his argument? His definition of 'common human nature' is both unbiblical and inadequate. On his view, transformation is to be achieved by moral effort rather than through the redemption won on the cross by Jesus Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit¹². At the same time there is an implicit appeal to purpose, to an end point that gives

⁷ *ibid*, p. 41.

⁸ *ibid*, p. 44.

⁹ *ibid*, p. 45.

¹⁰ *ibid*, p. 43.

¹¹ *ibid*, p.45.

¹² Over sixty years ago Reinhold Niebuhr put his finger on the problem in his highly influential *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. He wrote:

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

What relevance does all this have to teachers in Anglican schools? If the understanding of the human person that underlies the Five-strand RAVE approach is so inadequate, we should be very hesitant about embracing it. Yet I have observed that this naturalistic approach appeals to, and is uncritically adopted by, numerous teachers in Anglican schools. I have observed it all too frequently in Christian Studies lessons where the teacher moves directly from the Bible passage to a moral application, whether the passage is making a moral point or not. This type of problem is also found in some curricula. I recall a major primary RE curriculum having a unit entitled 'Helping hands', where the learning outcome from the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1-13) was that children should share with one another!

2. Critical awareness in how we do theology

In the foregoing discussion, drawn from educational psychology and RE programs, are some examples of a problem posed by liberal theology: What is the relation of theology to culture? This is not a new question. Tertullian (ca. AD 155-230) first asked it when he raised the issue, what does Athens have to do with Jerusalem. His allusion was to Paul's defence of the gospel among the pagan philosophers in Acts 17.

It is a question that cannot be avoided, particularly since the context in which we undertake and apply our theological reflection changes over time. I began teaching in the era of John Robinson's *Honest to God* and before anyone in Australia had heard of Joseph Fletcher's situation ethics¹⁴. These seem very passé today, although we are bound to recognise their profound impact on popular culture. To what extent do we allow contemporary understandings to impact on our theology, the way in which we approach and understand the Bible as God's word written for us? A second and related question, which we shall

Our analysis of the human situation in the light of Christian faith has brought us to the conviction that both the Renaissance and the Reformation embody insights which must enter into an adequate redefinition of the possibilities and limits of man's historical existence. In order to do this effectively it is necessary to reopen a debate which was brought to a premature conclusion in modern culture by the almost complete triumph of the renaissance over the Reformation. This triumph was so great that the most characteristic insights of the Reformation were lost even to the consciousness of large sections of Protestant Christianity. Modern Protestantism frequently betrays greater indifference to, and ignorance of, the ultimate problems for which the doctrine of justification by faith was the answer than either Catholic Christianity or secular culture¹². (*The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), Volume II: Human Destiny, p. 157.)

Neibuhr points directly to the missing dimension in Vardy's idea of the human person: fallen humanity is in need of redemption. Without it, full human potential is unreachable.

¹³ In what Vardy claims is an attempt to bypass the problem of the Kantian separation of the knowable phenomenal world from the unknowable noumenal dimension and the Hegelian rejection of the reality of the noumenal, he has unsuccessfully left an implicit appeal to this dimension in his thought. In view of his desire to develop a framework that transcends any single faith position it is fair to ask, is this any more acceptable for the Muslim or Jew than the picture of human beings the Bible presents?

¹⁴ Fletcher's ethical system was based on pragmatism, relativism, positivism and personalism. Love became the norming norm, whereas orthodox Protestantism saw the Bible as filling this function.

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

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

Cambridge theologian David Ford¹⁵ suggests there are four other possible approaches for relating theology to culture. The second type is when priority is given to the self-description of the Christian community with its insistence that Christian identity is primary and all other reality needs to be construed in relation to it, but also that Christianity itself needs to be rethought continually in order to engage seriously with the contemporary world. This is the approach adopted by most conservative evangelicals. The third type is a theology of correlation, where theology and modern understandings are brought into dialogue and an attempt is made to correlate them in appropriate ways. Liberal evangelicals favour this approach. The fourth type uses one or more modern philosophies, conceptualities or problems as a way of integrating Christianity with contemporary culture. By using this method, Christianity is reinterpreted in terms of a contemporary idiom or concern. This approach can be seen to permeate the thinking of liberal theologians and educators who draw on liberal presuppositions¹⁶. The fifth approach that Ford delineates is where priority is given to some modern secular philosophy or worldview, and Christianity is only considered to be valid to the extent that it fits the selected criteria. The danger here is clearly demonstrated in the failed attempt by Marcion in the mid second century to separate Christianity from its Jewish roots – it led to an unorthodox understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. In our times we have witnessed liberationist theologians using Marxist philosophy to reinterpret Christianity. Its application to education can be found in the pedagogy of the oppressed by Paulo Freire¹⁷.

Some modern religious educators lie outside Ford's typology. James Michael Lee in his Social Science Religious Instruction proposal¹⁸ has denied that education has *anything at all to do with theology*. Religious Education without theology may strike you as something of an oxymoron! In fact Lee does have a theology, which remains unexamined. I believe it can be

¹⁵ 'Introduction' in David F. Ford (ed), *The Modern Theologians: An introduction to Christian theology in the twentieth century* (Second edition, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) pp. 2-3. Ford has adapted a schema first developed by Hans Frei.

¹⁶ The faith development theory of James Fowler and the moral development theory of Lawrence Kohlberg are of this type, drawing as they do on Socrates, Piaget and Dewey.

¹⁷ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. M. B. Ramos (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

¹⁸ See James Michael Lee, *The Shape of Religious Instruction* (Mishawaka, IND: Religious Education Press, 1971).

demonstrated that every social scientist has a metaphysical basis for his or her position. It is just that Lee, like Vardy, tries to develop a theory that is not limited to Christians. Also like Vardy, he depends on a liberal Christian theology as a foundation¹⁹. Lee's position is really an extreme form of Ford's fifth type, where priority is given to a modern secular philosophy or worldview. What we can observe at work here is what John Milbank has described as the 'false humility' of modern liberal theology. 'If theology no longer seeks to position, qualify or criticise other discourses, then it is inevitable that these discourses will position theology: for the necessity of an ultimate organising logic ... cannot be wished away'²⁰

I turn aside from my main argument for a moment to examine the most widespread view among English religious educators. The leading exponent of this view is John Hull of the University of Birmingham. Hull was editor of *Learning for Living* and then of the *British Journal of Religious Education* and has had a profound influence on religious education in England over the past thirty years. Hull led the movement to reject Christianity's central place in religious education (in spite of the intentions of the legislators of the 1988 English Education Reform Act). He held that religious education should not be used to teach that Christianity is true, nor should its presuppositions or content be allowed to dominate what is taught. He wanted RE teachers to be committed to rationality, sensitivity and integrity. Hull thought it was a 'serious injustice' not to treat all religions in principle as alike²¹. Students should learn from religion studied at a distance because religion aids in the process of humanization. Religions are to be seen as partners in the global search for spirituality, freedom, love and the living of an ethical life²². Hull coined the term 'religionism' as a pejorative label to describe those who see their own theology as normative. As Penny Thompson has argued²³, Hull's view of religious education is a restating of *essentialism*, the view that religions are an expression of a base essence that may be said to underlie them all. But as Thompson remarks, 'Not all Christians, Muslims and others are prepared to see certain beliefs (those that mark them out as different) reduced to the level of second order, and those that Hull selects (because they fit with his radicalism) promoted to first order.'²⁴ Yet this is the driving force behind what is being taught in Australian universities to teacher trainees and forms the basis for the NSW Board of Studies HSC Studies of Religion courses. It is clear that Hull, like James Michael Lee, his American counterpart, bases his philosophy of religious education on extremely liberal Christian assumptions.

Coming back to Peter Vardy, how may his approach be classified in terms of Ford's typology? He clearly would not see himself as belonging to either type one or type two. Although he uses a traditional approach in the Aristotelian and Thomist Catholic tradition, it is Aristotle not the Bible that is shaping his theology. Nor does he really belong to type three. He is not attempting to correlate the doctrine of original sin with a neo-Thomist (Aristotelian) understanding of the human person. In fact his method sits closer to type five – the inconvenient bits of Christianity are jettisoned in the search for common ground across major

¹⁹ For a detailed analysis of Lee's position see Edward J Newell, *"Education Has Nothing To Do With Theology": James Michael Lee's Social Science Religious Instruction* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006).

²⁰ John Milbank, *Theology and social theory: Beyond secular reason* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1990), p.1.

²¹ *Learning for Living*, Vol. 13, no. 4, March 1974, p. 130.

²² See J Hull 'Christian Education in a Capitalist Society: Money and God' in D. F. Ford and D. L. Stamps, *Essentials of Christian Community* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

²³ Penny Thompson, *Whatever Happened to Religious Education?* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2006), p. 137.

²⁴ *loc.cit.*

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

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

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

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

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

First, let me say that even the greatest thinkers have had difficulty with these questions, particularly as they apply to children. Let me illustrate how the great Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430) changed his mind on the issue of whether children are innocent before God²⁷. The more he thought about it the more he moved from a simple humanist to a more profound approach. In 396 shortly after his ordination he preached on Matthew 2:16, Herod’s slaughter of the innocent children of Bethlehem. At this time Augustine believed they were ‘martyrs’, although they had not been baptised. He was certain God had some ‘good compensation’ for them²⁸. Within a few years, after reflection on his own childhood in relation to biblical teaching, he came to the opposite view that ‘none is pure from sin before you, not even an infant of one day upon the earth’ (Job 14:4-5 LXX). He concluded ‘So the feebleness of infant limbs is innocent, not the infant’s mind’²⁹. In 415 in writing to Jerome he was confirmed in his belief that the Holy Innocents were condemned because they died unbaptised. He did not find this position easy, but had no answer for the penal sufferings of children³⁰. In the last decade of his life he was involved in controversy with the Pelagians, especially Julian of Eclanum. His mature position is outlined by Stortz as: infants show sinful tendencies; Adam’s transgression, which implants in his progeny alien sin, accounts for these tendencies; and baptism remedies these damnable tendencies and should be conferred as early as possible.

²⁵ This is in the face of the warnings given by Nicholas Lash (*The beginning and end of ‘religion’*, Cambridge University Press, 1996) that the modern concept of a ‘religion’, which Vardy adopts, distorts Judaism, Christianity and Islam as well as the religious traditions of India, China and Japan.

²⁶ Debra Dean Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), p. 50.

²⁷ This discussion is based on Matha Ellen Stortz, “Where or When Was Your Servant Innocent?” Augustine on Childhood” in Marcia J. Bunge (ed.), *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 78-79.

²⁸ Augustine, “On Free Will”, 3.23.68.

²⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.7.

³⁰ Augustine, “To Jerome, Letter 166” in *Letters of St. Augustine*, trans. And ed. John Leinenweber (Tarrytown, NY: Triumph Books, 1992), p. 190.

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

Not all will take the path that Augustine took. Ron Buckland, who trained at Moore College and who worked for many years with Scripture Union, has reflected deeply on these matters. In his recent book *Perspectives in children and the gospel: Excellence in ministry with children and their families*³¹, Buckland demonstrates that his views have developed away from an Augustinian position over time. Traffic along the path is in both directions. Educators need to be aware of what is driving them and in which direction: the Bible or contemporary understandings of the human person³².

(a) The Bible's teaching about the nature of the child and his or her potential

We saw previously that Vardy was reluctant to specify this. The reason is not hard to find. First, he discounts the Bible's clear analysis of the human predicament for those outside Christ. Second, he is not prepared to engage with what the Bible does say about human potential because he is trying to develop a religious and moral education package based on what will be common among and acceptable to all religions in a plural society.

The Reformers' call was *ad fontes*, to the biblical sources. To them we must turn. In doing so we need to observe the Bible's theological structure, which John Calvin succinctly described in this way:

Man being at first created upright, but afterwards being not partially but totally ruined, finds his entire salvation out of himself in Christ, to whom being united by the Holy Spirit freely given, without any foresight of future works, he thereby obtains a double blessing – viz. full imputation of righteousness, which goes along with us even to the grave, and the commencement of sanctification, which daily advances till at length it is perfected in the day of regeneration or resurrection of the body, and this, in order that the great mercy of God may be celebrated in the heavenly mansions throughout eternity³³.

The key biblical passages for Christian theological anthropology are Genesis 1-3 and Romans 1-8. In a single lecture, where I have felt it wise to lay so much groundwork, it is not possible to say all that could be said about these passages. Therefore I shall confine myself to the Genesis account of the creation and human deviation (most commonly known as the fall) and Paul's development of this in Romans 5. I must acknowledge my indebtedness to the theological precision and insight of the French systematic theologian Henri Blocher.

Genesis 1:26-31 introduces us to mankind in the creation event. Genesis 2 elaborates on this, while Genesis 3 seeks to explain the situation in which we now find ourselves.

³¹ Ron Buckland, *Perspectives in children and the gospel: Excellence in ministry with children and their families* (West Gosford: Scripture Union, 2001).

³² A helpful aid in this respect is the May 2004 issue of the *Journal of Christian Education* (Vol. 47, no. 1), which carried a series of responses to the International Scripture Union's *Theology of Childhood: A Theological Resource Framed to Guide the Practice of Evangelising and Nurturing Children*.

³³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke, 1957), vol. 1, p. 30.

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

As Blocher remarks, 'the Bible excludes the pagan theme of the divinization of man and all the dreams of hidden divinity and self-creation'³⁴. Note that God addresses himself (that is his Spirit who is both distinct yet one with the Father {Genesis 1:2}) when he says 'Let *us* make man in *our* image'. 'Image' (Heb: selem) means a concrete image or statue. 'Likeness' (Heb: demut) specifies the nature of the image, one that resembles and has analogical features that are not identical. Man therefore is made as God's concrete likeness. It is a constitutive relationship: mankind is to be the created representative of his Creator, the image of divine glory (so 1 Cor. 11:7; 2 Cor. 3:18), which he both reflects and beholds³⁵. If man is the image, we can see why other images of birds and animals are forbidden.

Blocher detects two other elements in this: first, it is *all* mankind, everyman and not just the king (as was taught in other contemporary cultures), whom God has made in his image. Second, Genesis 1 does not specify the attributes by which mankind resembles God. Genesis 2:7 reveals that the image of God is partly found in his spirituality. But man is a unity of body and spirit (in contrast to Greek thinking) and in both aspects he represents God. Genesis 5:1-3 records that Adam begot his son after his own likeness, as his image. It is when we turn to Colossians 1:15 that we find that the Son is the Image in a pre-eminent sense. He is the New Man in indissoluble relationship with the Father and truly represents him.

Genesis 2 has more to say about the image. We are obliged to note that true humanity, as God intends, finds its full realisation only in community. The Lord God said: 'It is not good for man to be alone' (Genesis 2:18). The passage goes on to show that our encounter with the other allows us to become aware of ourselves. True selfhood only emerges in relation with another. The Greek *androgyny* myth of undifferentiated man is not supported by this passage³⁶. Instead mankind only exists as male or female in relation to others³⁷. Neighbour love can only flourish where we recognise the other person also as God's image. This understanding also leaves no room for the Eternal feminine, or for the Romantic notion of male and female as the two poles of being, or for the various forms of patriarchy. Rather difference and otherness in true proportions gives rise to positive correspondence and complementarity. At the same time the Scriptures are clear that the privilege of authority, which represents God, lies on the side of the male (see 1 Corinthians 11:7-9, 1 Timothy 2:13). Nevertheless, it is also clear that fulfilment in marriage is not indispensable to the fulfilment

³⁴ Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), p. 82.

³⁵ *ibid*, pp. 84-85.

³⁶ There are traces of this in Ray Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 1991), pp. 36-37.

³⁷ But the image does not reside in mankind's sexual differentiation as Karl Barth held, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), Vol. 3, part 2, p. 285.

of humanity (1 Corinthians 7:7, 26-40), as Jesus himself showed. The first couple's nakedness was a mark of their openness to each other in their exercise of freedom for good. Therefore there is no ground for the sort of anxiety that Kierkegaard discerned in the ignorance associated with innocence. Kierkegaard's starting point, like so many others, was with the creature, rather than with God. A proper reading of Genesis 2 is that true liberty is the response of human love obeying sovereign love³⁸.

YHWH, the God of the covenant intervenes in Genesis 2. Reformed theologians refer to this as the covenant of nature, life or works. God shows his grace and generosity by installing mankind in paradise. Mankind displays the image of God in the work he has been commissioned to do (Genesis 2:15). He is to humbly serve by imitating God in pleasant, not onerous, work. Superabundant grace permits eating freely of all the trees in this paradise except one. The prohibition shows him his limit and, unlike the animals, he is made responsible for his choice – he is on probation, his loyalty and obedience to God are being tested. To disobey has juridical consequences – death rather than life (Genesis 2:17).

To return to our original question: What is the nature and extent of human potential? We can summarise it by saying that human potential is fully realised when a person exercises his or her liberty in accordance with God's will by choosing to love and obey God and to creatively model God to the rest of creation. On the negative side, it is not to be found in self-assertion, self-aggrandisement or in isolation. Since this is a creation covenant affecting all mankind for all time, it still applies today as Paul argues in Romans 1-3. As you can see this treatment is illustrative, not exhaustive.

(b) What limitations are there to human capacities?

The key issue that follows from this is whether the image of God was totally lost by what has become known as the Fall and can only be restored by Christ as Colossians 3:10 seems to imply. The answer to this must be found in Genesis 3 and those later passages that comment on it.

Hosea 6:7 states that Adam broke the Eden covenant of nature, life or works. Paul speaks of it as disobedience and transgression (Romans 5: 14-19). In covenant terms, the king's subject or vassal overthrew his authority and broke the personal relationship implied by the covenant. John equates sin with *anomia*, the violation and rejection of the law (1 John 3:4). It is significant that the blame is laid on Adam as the federal head of the human race because it was with him that the covenant agreement was made (Genesis 2:15-17). Although Eve was the first to sin, Adam was to blame (Genesis 2:19). So Paul can argue 'For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ will all be made alive' (1 Corinthians 15:21-22, see also Romans 5:12, 14). Adam took the determining decision to follow Eve. Why? It is an enigma that we cannot fully penetrate, but the evil rebellion is shown to be inexcusable³⁹.

The problem of evil is seen to lie, not in the good that God has created, but in the rejection of the order that God had instituted for the enjoyment of the world. Was the sin of a sexual nature as many, including Augustine, have thought? The Hebrew verb translated 'done' in Genesis 3:13 never carries sexual connotations. Blocher carefully argues the case against such

³⁸ Blocher, *In the Beginning*, pp. 96-110.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 146.

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

Blocher sums up the effects of sin in this way:

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

This begs the question of whether the biblical material at this point is mythical, historical or some other literary genre. I do not have the time to consider this. The full range of positions taken on this issue can be found in the major commentaries. Your answer will depend on your doctrine of Scripture. However, it should be noted that later biblical writers regarded it as historical – see Job 31:33, Hosea 6:7, 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:14. Jesus' teaching in John 8:41-44 and on the question of marriage (Matthew 19:3-8) indicates that he also accepted it as historical. What is of greater importance is to recognise that, for the author of Genesis, evil is not inextricably linked to the metaphysical composition of mankind. Good is primordial, evil is derivative and parasitic entering into human history because of human misuse of freedom.

I want to turn to the question of what is the effect of this deviation and fall from grace on children and young people today. To what extent are their capacities limited?

The consistent witness of the Bible is that sinfulness is *the* human problem. It separates us from our Creator (Isaiah 59:2). No-one escapes from sin and no part of the human person is left untainted (Proverbs 20:9; Psalm 14 and Romans 3:10-20). Furthermore, as the French Protestant theologian Francis Turretin taught: original sin flows from originating sin, propagates itself in each person's origination, and becomes the origin of actual sins⁴². Blocher points out that original sin is universal sinfulness found in all people in all areas of their lives, belonging to our nature, stemming from Adam and inherited by each human being⁴³. Augustinians affirm, and Pelagians deny, that it entails an inability to turn towards God.

Our question will be: Do infants suffer from this, and do they deserve condemnation for the propensity born in them? The Bible is quite clear in its answer to this question, although many seek to mitigate its force. Genesis 6:5 states that 'every inclination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil all the time'. Genesis 8:21 applies it to every human being: 'The Lord ...said..."Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though the inclination of his heart is evil from childhood"'. As Turretin observes this applied not only to the antediluvian world God had just destroyed, but to *all* who were the offspring of righteous Noah. The Hebrew word, *n'vrym*, signifies from infancy (c.f. Lamentations 3:27; Jeremiah 22:21; Ezekiel 4:14, 16:22; Hosea 2:15), not only from youth. For those interested in pursuing this further, Turretin's eighth, ninth and tenth topics deal fully with the issue⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 146-154.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp. 154f.

⁴² Henri Blocher, *Original Sin: Illuminating the riddle* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), p. 19.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.18.

⁴⁴ See Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. G. M. Giger, ed. J. T. Dennison (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R Publishing, 1992), Vol. 1, pp.569-685.

This is an unattractive doctrine for those brought up on the current Darwinian perspective on human origins. Some are as bold as French philosopher Paul Ricoeur in declaring 'What we know, as men of science, about the beginnings of mankind leaves no place for such a primordial event'⁴⁵. Time does not permit a discussion of this conflict. The crux of the matter that we have to address is, in the words of Blocher, 'not whether we have a historical account of the fall, but whether or not we may read it as the account of a historical fall'⁴⁶. I refer you to his discussion.

St Paul in Romans 5:12ff definitely attributed to an individual Adam the blame for our present situation. This passage is the burr under the saddle for many exegetes. Two of the leading commentaries by Cranfield and Dunn attempt to loosen the link that Paul makes between Adam and Christ, while at the same time maintaining the responsibility of the individual for his or her sin. On the other hand it is just as easy to miss the nuanced way Paul deals with the subject and to tighten the link. Turretin suffers to some extent from this. Blocher in his 1995 Moore College Lectures carefully argued an intermediate position that tries to be faithful to Paul's thought. Blocher's hypothesis is that

the role of Adam and his sin in Romans 5 is *to make possible the imputation, the judicial treatment of human sins*. His role thus brings about the condemnation of all, and its sequel, death.

If persons are considered individually, they have no standing with God, no relationship to his judgment. They are, as it were floating in a vacuum. Sin cannot be imputed. But God sees in Adam and through Adam, in the framework of the covenant of creation.⁴⁷

I refer you to Blocher to see how carefully he argues his case from Scripture. Because of this connection, St Paul is able to argue that

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. (Romans 5:18)

Here we have the heart of the gospel the gracious act of the Father in sending the Son to live a righteous life and die as our substitute bearing the penalty for our sin. His resurrection testifies to the efficacy of the new life that is to be had by those who respond to him in faith and obedience. 'You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness' (Romans 6:18). This must be at the very core of our educational task. In Paul's words:

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

I fear that we often want to simplify what is involved and take short cuts. *Transformational learning*⁴⁸ is hard work for both teacher and student!

⁴⁵ P. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. E. Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1967), p. 235 cited by Henri Blocher, *Original Sin*, p. 38.

⁴⁶ Blocher, *Original Sin*, p. 50.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴⁸ Trevor Cooling (*A Christian vision for state education* [London: SPCK, 1994], pp.127ff.) has posited three distinct approaches Evangelical Christians might use to bring their theology to bear on their educational thought and practice. The first is the *compatibilist* approach. Its fundamental premiss is the autonomy of the discipline in question. This means that knowledge remains the same across cultures and religions. Rational Christians are expected to ensure their beliefs are compatible with an autonomous body of knowledge. We have seen how Peter Vardy's program demonstrates this approach as does Thomas

4. To what extent do we allow our theology impact on our professional understanding and practice as educators?

Engendering transformational learning in our classrooms is especially difficult because we live in a material universe that languishes in a state of dysfunction (Romans 8:20-22). The Bible teaches that we ourselves are in Luther's words *simul justus et peccator* – both justified and a sinner. The Christian is not partially righteous and partially a sinner, but completely both at all times. Paul's call is 'to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed ... So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light' (Romans 13: 11-12).

Part of this slumber among evangelicals is that of the mind. Each Christian educator has a working doctrine of sin and redemption that he or she brings to the teaching and learning situation. Most are unaware of the extended debates that have taken place over such matters, of the huge differences that exist between Luther and Calvin, John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards, Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, Hans Kung and Karl Rahner, or liberation and feminist theologians. Many have imbibed a form of Protestant liberalism that had its genesis in the nineteenth century theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher and educational theory of Horace Bushnell⁴⁹. This unreflective adoption of other people's presuppositions has been married to a simple evangelical piety and tendency to moralise. Such intellectual inertia, sometimes torpor, affects the teaching in our schools and hampers the impact of the gospel on our students.

Groome's shared praxis. It is curious that this approach still has so many advocates when it is clear that even in the so-called hard or empirical sciences, as Thomas Kuhn has shown⁴⁸, the discipline has a framework of beliefs and a methodological approach that give knowledge its significance and meaning. This is even truer of the social sciences, including education.

The second approach noted by Cooling is the *reconstructionalist* approach. This line of thought rejects the idea there can be an independent rationality or an autonomous discipline. They argue that all intellectual activity is based on theological presuppositions. Their catchcry is 'We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.' (2 Corinthians 10:5) Their task is to radically reconstruct a discipline on fully biblical foundations, and do away with all others. This is a powerful driving force behind Christian schooling on the Dutch Reformed or Dooyeweerdian model. If the first type is the 'hand-over' model, this is the 'take-over' alternative. There has been a reluctance among Anglican educators to embrace this approach, not least because of the open enrolment policies of Anglican schools and the commitment to allowing students space and time to explore various possibilities and to make mistakes. Nevertheless, there are features of this approach that should be of interest to Anglican educators.

The third is the *transformational* approach. This recognises that God has revealed himself in nature and in the Bible. There are often shared assumptions between theology and a particular discipline but the ultimate horizon and the question of meaning and purpose may be radically different. Theology has a distinctive and a critical role in assessing the assumptions and methods of the disciplines. This is the work-with option, where the findings of a discipline are examined and, where appropriate made integral to the way Christians approach their educational task. The key concern is to do justice to God's revelation of himself and his saving purposes in and through his Son, Jesus Christ. Knowledge will be transformed in the light of this and scope is given for the Holy Spirit to transform the hearts and minds of our students.

I am not entirely convinced that each of these is a self-contained approach. I think my own position is part reconstructionist, part transformational. You might like to think about where you fit in this schema.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of the views of most of these see Marcia J. Bunge (ed), *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).

This slumber also constrains our ability to address the big issues in education, since Christians have not seen it to be desirable to be in the forefront of educational thought and research. The field has been largely left to the secular humanists or theological liberals who have accommodated their theology to the prevailing culture. Teachers and educational leaders need a level of critical awareness to see whether in their educational practice they are screening out key Christian doctrines. If this happens, then their practice is sub-Christian and there is a distortion of the truth that may have eternal ramifications for those they teach.

Let me illustrate how damaging it can be when we employ teachers who are not prepared to make this effort that I am advocating. I want to draw upon some recent research on Australian Roman Catholic schools, but beforehand one needs to understand something of Thomas Groome's thought, since he is the leading contemporary Catholic educational theorist.

Groome is the exponent of a 'humanitas' anthropology. In it 'the tenets of Catholicism are loosened from their theological, ecclesial, and liturgical moorings so that they might help promote this humanizing education and contribute to the nurture of all people as spiritual beings'⁵⁰. His concern is to bring Christian beliefs into congruity with the best insights of sociology, psychology and philosophy. His program is one of 'shared praxis'. He believes there is no religion-in-general only 'specific historical manifestations'⁵¹. Christian religious education is simply a particular expression of religious education. Religion is defined as the human quest for the transcendent. He sees the church itself as *polis*, rather than as a challenge to the culture, society and state in which it is located. Groome understands Christian freedom as spiritual, transcending the mundane and reaching out for union with the transcendent, personal, allowing the autonomy of the will, and social/political, the struggle to overcome sin in the economic, political and cultural arrangements of our world. Education is about human emancipation, human autonomy and becoming self-determining⁵².

In some respects Groome's views are an improvement on those of Vardy, Lee and Hull. His attempt to correlate Christianity with the social sciences places him in Ford's third category. On the other hand his view of human potential takes him well into the fourth and fifth types.

What does this liberal, and ultimately non-biblical, view of the nature of the human person lead to in Catholic schools? Buchanan and Hyde in a recent article⁵³ have shown a high degree of agreement between official church pronouncements and the views of RE coordinators on the role of the religion teacher in Catholic schools. Both see the Catholic teacher to be, *inter alia*, a witness to faith, a portrayer of the image of the Catholic school, and as a deliverer of high quality curriculum.

It must be of more than passing concern to the Catholic hierarchy therefore that Denis McLaughlin has demonstrated in an extensive survey⁵⁴ of teachers', students' and parents' beliefs that only 45% of Roman Catholic school teachers believed that God is three persons

⁵⁰ Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms*, p.51.

⁵¹ Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), p. 23.

⁵² *ibid.*, pp.96-98.

⁵³ Michael T. Buchanan and Brendan Hyde, 'The Role of the Religion Teacher: Ecclesial and Pedagogical Perceptions', *Journal of Christian Education*, Vol. 49, No. 2, September 2006, pp. 23-34.

⁵⁴ Denis McLaughlin, 'The Dialectic of Australian Catholic Education' in *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, Vol. 10, No. 2, August 2005, pp. 215-233.

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

What resources are available to help us to avoid such pitfalls? Our hope is that the Anglican Teacher Education program will, over time, produce more critically aware teachers with a deeper grasp of biblical theology. For those who prefer self-directed learning, Robert Pazmino's two books *God Our Teacher*⁵⁵ and *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*⁵⁶ are a good starting point. Trevor Cooling's 'Transforming Hearts and Minds' address⁵⁷ to the 2005 Australian Anglican Schools Network Conference provides a way into the resources that have been developed by the Stapleford Centre at Nottingham. Tom Wallace's as yet unpublished address to the same conference dealt with resources from the Anglican tradition for the development of young people's spirituality. Two journals, *the Journal of Christian Education* and the *Journal of Education and Christian Belief* carry numerous reflective articles on the Christian approach to education. I have found the works of Canadian evangelical philosopher Elmer Thiessen⁵⁸ to be both stimulating and helpful in developing a coherent Christian philosophy of education.

In conclusion, I have concentrated on one fairly narrow area of biblical teaching about the nature and extent of human potential and the limitations to human capacities. Much more could have been said by drawing from a wider range of the rich resources the Bible offers us to understand God and our relationship to him. My wake up call is to all Christian educators in Anglican schools. It is a call to improve their theological understanding of the child and adolescent learner in order to be more effective teachers. By doing so we will do much to fulfil our vocation as Christ's people in this fallen world.

Thank you for your patient hearing of my case.

⁵⁵ Robert W. Pazmino, *God Our Teacher: Theological Basics in Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

⁵⁶ Robert W. Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997).

⁵⁷ Trevor Cooling, 'Transforming Hearts and Minds: The Contribution of Christian Values to the Curriculum', in *Journal of Christian Education*, Vol. 49, No. 2, September 2006, pp. 35-50.

⁵⁸ Elmer Thiessen, *Teaching for commitment: Liberal education, indoctrination and Christian Nurture* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993) and *In defence of religious schools and colleges* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001)