

*I am always doing things I can't do. That's how I get to do them.*  
– Picasso

## **Lutheran Theological Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – an Agenda for Discussion**

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Writing this paper has led me down unexpected paths, taken me on an unplanned journey, and brought me to places not anticipated. The journey began with a simple desire to explore the subject of formation of people preparing for various kinds of service in the Lutheran Church. Beginning with my involvement with CPE – where formation for ministry is the heart-beat of the educational process – and then continuing with my ministry at ALC – where formation is regarded as an important aspect of our teaching – I have had a long-time interest in the differing ways people understand formation, and a desire to investigate the subject more fully at some time. The invitation to speak at this year's inaugural ALC lecture provided the impetus to follow through on this interest.

However, very early into research for this paper, it became obvious that the task I had set myself is not as simple as first supposed. For one thing, formation is a far more complex and varied subject than it might at first glance appear, and there is a wide and diverse range of views regarding the nature, focus and scope of formation.

Secondly, the subject of formation cannot be studied in isolation from its broader context of theological education. The two belong together. Not surprising, therefore, the intention to delve into matters of formation quickly took me beyond my own field of expertise and comfort zone, and into the specialized realm of theological education, where I unearthed this most wondrous discussion among mainstream Christian churches and theological institutions around the world. That discussion is about the purpose and nature of theological education in our contemporary world. It is a rich, challenging, and exciting discussion, and we need at least to familiarize ourselves with it in order to speak with any confidence on matters of formation.

This paper will be able to present no more than a bird's-eye overview of aspects of that discussion, for it is impossible to delve into it in depth in a presentation of this nature, so extensive is the conversation. Hence the emphasis in the title of this paper on 'agenda'.

One might assume that, simply as a matter of course, a conversation about the purpose and nature of theological education would be a natural and continuous activity in any theological institution. However, the truth is that much of the current discussion has been thrust upon theological institutions and churches by movements and forces, not within the

church, but outside of it, in the world. Because of the importance of this broader context for the discourse under consideration, our first agenda item therefore needs to be:

### **1) A sociological understanding of the modern world and of the church in the world**

Some of the movements and forces referred to above have been growing in momentum for a long time, as, for example, the process of modernization, the key features of which are 'industrialization, capitalist market economies, urbanization, ongoing technological innovation, and the institutionalization of large-scale systems of education, medicine, and social welfare, to mention only a few' (Osmer and Schweitzer: 35). Others, however, are unique to our generation, and include such phenomena as globalization, economic rationalism, pluralism, and post-modernism. Another of those forces is 'secularization', so-called, a concept which endeavours to explain the decrease of religious influence in society, but around which there is a divergence of views and a degree of fuzzy thinking at times.

Pertinent to this paper is the impact of these forces upon the church. Hill describes the effect as the marginalisation of institutional religion, 'in contrast with the old monopoly of Christendom' (39,40). Along with others, Poerwowidagdo views theological education in particular as becoming remote and losing its contextual value in relation to the changing world (58). Osmer and Schweitzer speak of religion and religious education as no more than 'a differentiated subsystem in modern societies, such that it no longer provides integration and legitimation for society as a whole' (44). These same authors also develop the notion of the church 'losing its audience' (chapt. 9, and *passim*), especially the most-treasured audience of the family unit, and the audience of the young and the educated. One cannot help noting the irony of the church, especially the Lutheran church, with its special educational ministry and programs, being unable to retain the attention of the educated.

In short, in ways that have not happened before, the church as a whole, and its schools and theological institutions, are losing their influence and respect within society. In the view of many people, theological institutions like ALC have become, or run the risk of becoming, 21<sup>st</sup> century anachronisms, irrelevant to the needs of modern society. Nor is the world always content simply to be indifferent to the church and its educational institutions; often its response is openly critical and even hostile. We are all surely aware of a current trend of antipathy towards the Christian church within Australian society, and of a body of evidence that suggests a tolerance in our society towards all religions and spiritualities except Christian.

This, in brief, is the broader context within which the discourse about contemporary theological education is occurring, and which is in many ways driving that discourse. The critical point for the church and its schools is the way in which they respond to the changed and changing world in which they function.

Now, the church may, and does, offer a variety of responses to its contemporary environment.<sup>1</sup> Despite the variety, however, in general, the church and its theological schools are responding in one of two ways. On the one hand, there are churches and theological institutions who are taking a stand against the pressures being placed upon them to change, becoming entrenched in their present theological positions and practices, and deeming their stance as necessarily counter-cultural to the world. On the other hand, other churches and schools are responding by seeking to engage the world, to learn from society new ways in which they may more effectively accomplish their mission, while remaining true to their own roots, identity, and special calling.

The literature on the conversation about theological education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is far and away aligned with the second response: an engagement with, learning from, and reaching out to the world in which we live. That response is, I believe, an authentic Lutheran response (about which I shall say more as the paper unfolds), and it is the response that informs the development of our agenda for further discussion at another time and place.

In selecting the essential themes to the debate, I confess to a personal bias in what I have chosen to present. My interest has been gripped by the preponderance of material on the importance of church, school and world connecting, informing and interacting with each other, and that is the bias in my presentation. The further agenda items themselves contain no bias: upon these as the agenda for discussion there is universal agreement. The bias occurs in the dot points under each item; and I have chosen to make dot points as a way of incorporating as much material as possible from the huge amount of available data.

## **2) *The theology of theological education***

- When the debate on theological education turns its attention to the theology of theological education, a rich collage of theological themes emerge. These include an understanding of education as nurture, discipleship, pilgrimage, and narrative.
- Associated with these theological explorations is the long-standing disputation about the root meaning of education, between those who view education essentially as the transmission of knowledge, and those who understand it rather as the leading-out or development of the innate capacities of the student.
- Of particular personal appeal are those authors who seek to root theological education in the wisdom theology of Scripture, and who promote education essentially as the getting of wisdom (e.g. Melchert, Hodgson).
- One of the strongest theological motifs emerging in the discussion is grounded in the concept of 'missio Dei', the mission of the Triune God in and for the world. Those promoting this notion as the heart-beat of theological education believe there needs to be a dynamic and intimate alliance or partnership between theological institutions and the rest of the Christian church in engaging in the mission of the church. Rightly or wrongly, many seminaries and other theological schools are considered to be isolated from mission and the mission of God-in-Christ to the world through the people of God. However, Banks is typical of those who wish for this situation to change when he echoes the claim that 'mission is the mother of theology' (131), and states that 'only by maintaining its close links with mission will [theological education] remain relevant to changing circumstances, and hold true to the missionary impulses that gave rise to the church and its theology (132).<sup>2</sup>
- Not surprisingly, therefore, the linking of theological education with 'missio Dei' is readily apparent in many of the summary statements on the nature and purpose of theological education that appear in the literature.

The central mission of Lutheran higher education is to prepare students for vocational service to society by maintaining a dialogical interaction between faith and learning. This mission entails helping students develop critical and informed reflection on the nature of the

world and the Christian tradition. (Simmons: 2. cp Christenson: 9-10, 21-22)

[T]he “missional” model of theological education places the main emphasis on theological *mission*, on hands-on *partnership* in ministry based on interpreting the tradition and reflecting on practice with a strong spiritual and communal dimension. (Banks: 144)

[The purpose of theological education is] to offer students an education shaped by a solid Christian theology – one faithful to the mainstream of traditional faith, alert to the movements of the Holy Spirit in our own time, controlled by the central image of the Incarnation, and enlightened by the example of the saints and sages who have been the best images of God, the best “imitators” of Christ... (Carmody: 22)

[I propose] a paradigm [which] engages parish, family and school in a collaborative and intentional conversation in order to form, inform, and transform persons and communities into apprentices of Jesus who are sent forth into the world to live their faith in the marketplace. (Groome: vi,1,2,7)<sup>3</sup>

### 3) ***‘Doing’ theology within a theological institution***

- The role and function of theology within theological education is a sensitive issue for us Lutherans, and this because of our identity as a confessional church. Bartsch, for example, reminds us that our confessions serve as a boundary between us and other denominations and us and the world, and that they stand as a guard against fundamentalism and sectarianism (7,8). As such, theology acts as a protector, and, in fact, must itself be protected from falsehood.
- Within this understanding, an essential part of the theological task is the faithfulness of the Lutheran church to its doctrinal heritage, as other denominations are to be faithful to their traditions. Thus, a part of the present discussion for Lutherans includes naming and exploring those teachings which we consider essential to a faithful understanding of the Christian faith.
- Nevertheless, as Simmons also reminds us, Lutheranism ‘is a confessional movement in the church catholic’ (22). He writes:

Luther never intended to form a separate church. Rather, he sought to reform the church by clarifying the nature of the gospel through debate in the public arenas of the university and society. In this regard then the character of Lutheran identity began, and to remain vital, must continue to be sustained as a matter of public debate and dialogue within the arena of contemporary intellectual and religious opinions... Lutheran identity is... born of a dialectic between faith and learning. (22)

And he concludes:

Confessionalism as a dynamic theological expression does not seek imposed doctrinal uniformity but rather a lively and healthy confessional dialogue between traditions. (23)

- Christenson suggests that '[w]e [Lutherans] should be concerned about being authentically Lutheran, not distinctively Lutheran' (15). His statement points us to the fact that, in the discussion in which this paper is earthed, key recurring words in relation to the doing of Lutheran theology are 'engagement', 'dialog', and 'dialectic'. Within that context, then, the authentic way of 'doing' Lutheran theology is to employ Lutheran confessional heritage as that which embraces us as we engage in dialog and dialectic with
  - our own theology (i.e. we practise theological reflection);
  - our students;
  - other faith traditions; and
  - the world in which we live.

This is the greatest challenge with which the present discussion confronts us.

#### 4) *What is happening in the classroom*

- A natural progression from the way a Lutheran theological institution works with its theology is the way its staff and students function in the classroom. I shall again cite Simmon's summary of this facet of our discussion. He writes:
 

The Lutheran model of higher education affirms the importance of diversity and the need to dialogue with multiple points of view. This means that all people are important and contribute to the character of a community of enquiry... Diversity within the bounds of common commitment to connecting faith and learning is not only desirable but sought out... To carry on [an] open reflection on religion is...one of the most important contributions Christian colleges and universities can make to the church's mission of enlightened understanding of the faith and educational service to society. (8,9)
- Christenson's summary is similar, but more fully expressed. He contends that, when we pursue the question, "What is a Lutheran college or university?" we arrive at three essential functions of such a place:
  - [1] A university is a place to pursue and preserve knowledge, understanding, perhaps even wisdom; it is a place of knowing and learning. That is why universities have, from the beginning, had libraries, museums, galleries, laboratories, etc.
  - [2] A university is a *collegium*, i.e. a critical community of learners and sharers of learning. That is why they are and have been places of argument, debate, deep discussion, disputation, public lecture, and publication.
  - [3] (Over time, universities) came to be places of human becoming, places to grow, develop, and mature...good places for people to train for professions, learn about the wider world and one's placed in it, and develop as thoughtful and useful persons in community. (9)
- These statements provide clear indication of the favored approach to educational activity within the present discussion. There is overwhelming consensus that the 'unilateral transmission model' (Harkness: 145), or the banking approach to education (i.e. as the depositing of knowledge into the student for later withdrawal), is to be kept to the minimum. Instead, there will be within the classroom a healthy process of shared praxis, critical enquiry and reflection, freedom of expression, argument, debate, deep discussion, disputation, and experiential learning.<sup>4</sup> In this

regard, it is important to note the stress in the discussion on action-reflection as the preferred method of learning.<sup>5</sup>

### **5) Qualities of theological teachers and student.**

This agenda item emerges as a natural extension to the classroom discussion.

- Obviously, if an institution accepts the validity of the thrust of the theological education debate, it will ensure that its teachers are able and equipped to teach in ways that enable the institution to be and achieve what it wishes in this new and changing climate. This will include the provision of ongoing research opportunities for those who teach.
- While further discussion of that task belongs to another time and place, it is significant to note the recurring emphases on teacher and students as 'co-learners' (Harkness: 150; Banks :174; Simmons: 21-2), or co-pilgrims (Steele:177-80).
- Likewise, many of the qualities of a theological student naturally derive from the discussion. Of special note, though, are comments by Bain-Selbo. He focuses on student's needs to rid themselves of the vices of pride (the vice of the dogmatic student) and cowardice (fearing and fleeing confrontation with others), and of nurturing the virtues of humility, charity, and courage.

### **6) Beyond the classroom: engaging the world**

- Some of the most refreshing and stimulating thinking in the theological education discussion is taking place around consideration of what occurs outside the classroom, in fact beyond the very walls of the theological institution. This element of the discussion embraces field education as an indispensable aspect of all theological education, but moves far beyond what we generally understand field education to be.
- At the extreme end of this aspect of the discussion are those who advocate the abolition of all seminaries as such, and their replacement with theological and vocational education only in the field. Within the materials researched for this paper, this suggestion receives no serious consideration at all, and I have only anecdotal information on this aspect of the discussion, and on unsuccessful attempts of churches that have experimented with this approach. By far the greater emphasis is placed upon the retention and enrichment of places of theological education.
- The mainstream in this discussion is represented by those advocating a missional approach to theological education (e.g. Banks, Harkness, *et al*), which is grounded in a 'symbiotic partnership between seminary and church' (Harkness: 152), with the heartbeat for that partnership being provided by the church part of the relationship. In other words, theological education begins with an involvement of the theological community with the mission of the church 'out there', and moves from there into the classroom. Theological education is thus anchored within the life of the church, and the classroom becomes a crucible, working model, or laboratory of the world out there (Banks: 161-2).
- What might this look like in practice? While the literature floats a variety of possible scenarios, it is ultimately somewhat 'thin' in its response to the practical question. It

does, however, open the door to a wealth of creative possibilities which demand that our fullest attention be given to them in later discussion.

### **7) *The theological education curriculum***

- In the conclusion of his 1957 study of theological education, H Richard Niebuhr wrote that  
    [t]he greatest defect in theological education today is that it is too much an affair of piecemeal transmission of knowledge and skills, and that, in consequence, it offers too little challenge to the student to develop his *[sic]* own resources and to become an independent, lifelong inquirer, growing constantly, while...engaged in the work of the ministry. (Farley: 23)
- Almost 30 years later Edward Farley, an early participant in the current debate, criticized the fragmentation of theological studies into the fourfold pattern of biblical, systematic, historical and practical theology – the ‘cafeteria approach’ to theology, as he describes it (5). He urged instead an integration of the curriculum within itself, and with the life of the church.
- That line of thought has gained strong support within the discussion, with the result that the current consensus is that the curriculum for theological education is best conceived within the pastoral and missional practice and life of the church, and then integrated within the mission and life of the theological institution, which is itself in constant dialogue with the mission of the church. In other words, the life and mission of the church determine the shape of the theological school’s agenda and curriculum.
- Again, therefore, the direction of movement in the development of theological education is not from the institution (‘in here’) developing what it believes its curriculum ought to be, and then moving ‘out there’, to the church, with its pre-packaged expectations for church leadership training. Rather, the curriculum grows ‘out there’, in the life of the church, to ‘in here’ where the institution, in dialog with its church, forms that curriculum which is genuinely and authentically connected to the mission of the church.

### **8) *The community of the theological school***

- The literature is insistent about the importance of community in theological education, and stresses the development of community and the sense of community as foundational to all else that occurs within any institution. Harkness speaks on behalf of all such voices when he states that the theological school is to be  
    an existential expression of a community of God’s grace, reflective of the church as a community of *generosity* and *sharing*, *friendship* and *belonging*, *mission* and *identity*, *freedom* and *risk-taking*, *passion* and *partnership*. . . *counter-cultural*. (150)
- There is a consensus view that geographical proximity is necessary for the development of such community, with one author claiming that community can only really grow within a residency context (Benne: 194).

- All authors highlight the importance of the community giving serious attention to its development as a caring, nurturing, learning community. Two special ways of addressing these needs are through
  - i. personal pastoral care for the individuals and families that comprise the community; and
  - ii. the provision of mentors for all members of the community.
- In addition to the community's sense of community within itself, it is important that the community's sense of its being within the wider Christian community is also attended to. However, if *missio Dei* both fashions and embraces the life of the community, this broader aspect of community will be fully present within the community.

### **9) *Worship and theological education***

- For the theological school, community and worship are inseparable, and worship is therefore indispensable to the life and work of theological education. On this truth, too, there is overwhelming agreement among all participants in our discussion. Pfatteicher graphically describes the worship liturgy as the 'church's school' (90), which 'challenges the self-centredness of the human race by radically expanding our horizons' (99).
- In fact, worship is the heart-beat of the theological school, providing the life rhythm and unity of its daily life. This means that worship is, therefore, much more than a subject to be taught, and worship leadership much more than a skill to be learnt, an attitude that easily creeps into such an institution.
- An imperative for the theological school, and related to its worship life, is its attention to the personal devotional life of each its members. Rather than assume that each one in the community is attending to this aspect of life, the community actively sponsors healthy individual devotional practices.

### **10) *Lifelong theological education***

- Two truths emerge when we take up the matter of the necessity of life-long theological education.
  - i. It is impossible for any theological institution to provide their students with everything they will need for ministry in their years at the institution. As obvious as this statement may seem, it needs to be repeated in the face of the strident criticism such institutions at times received because they have been perceived not to have equipped their students as fully as others think they ought to have equipped them.
  - ii. Equally, it is impossible for the wider church to attend to the ongoing, lifelong theological education of its pastors, teachers and other leaders through any kind of piecemeal, haphazard continuing education program.
- In view of these truths, it is encouraging to see evidence that in the present ecclesiastical climate much serious attention is being given to this matter.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in keeping with the resolve to develop the partnership between the theological school and the wider church, the responsibility for ongoing theological education is increasingly being incorporated into the programs and life of the

theological school. This move makes good sense, because, as an umbrella for lifelong learning, the theological school is able to provide, or over-see, a better resourced, cohesive, and integrated ongoing theological education than the fragmented approach that occurs in the general church scene.

These, then, are the dominant themes running through this marvellous discussion on theological education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is both against the background and within the context of that discussion that we can now take up again the matter that instigated this paper in the first place, and which becomes the next item on our agenda:

### **11) Formation**

Earlier in this paper we noted that formation is a complex and diverse subject. Yet, notwithstanding this complex diversity, there is within the literature informing this paper a large degree of consensus regarding certain basics of formation. For example, that formation is about shaping and moulding; that it is an activity of God (i.e. God forms, shapes his people); and that formation is not about conformity – or, to borrow a phrase from Christenson, it does not take the ‘cookie-cutter’ approach (137) – but rather about information and transformation.

The diverse complexity arises when adjectives are attached to ‘formation’. Thus writers speak about spiritual formation, personal formation, and vocational, theological, ministerial, priestly formation; and determining the sometimes subtle distinctions between each of these is not always an easy task. Therefore, there is a great need for much further discussion on this aspect of life within a theological institution.

As a way of drawing into a cohesive whole the various views on formation, I find Les Steele’s approach helpful. He equates formation with the life of sanctification. To quote him:

When we speak of Christian formation, we are speaking of the process of becoming what we were first intended to be and are now allowed to be by the justifying work of Christ. The work of sanctification is at the heart of Christian formation. Nothing less than the transformation of the person is the result of justification. There is no formation without transformation. (24)

For the most part, this view is compatible with the approaches taken by many other authors. Theological nuances aside, a Lutheran understanding of formation also sits well with this approach.

Thus, in the life of the baptised child of God, we can say that formation happens! As Pryor says, it is ‘an inevitable part of the human life journey’ (2). Thus, when students arrive at a theological institution, they have already been formed, and are already being formed. As they become involved in their theological studies, regardless of what those studies are, they will continue to be formed, shaped, even if there is no conscious attention given by them or others to the formation process.

If we grant this kind of thinking as a valid framework for formational concerns, then the tasks of a theological institution in the formational processes of its students become at least these:

- By diligent attention to the agenda items we have listed, to provide the best possible conditions within which the formation of each student may continue.

- To ensure that each member of its community is provided with a mentor, or guide, whose task it is to assist in the awareness, evaluation, and ongoing enhancement of the other's formation, and to take responsibility for the supply, training and care of such mentors.
- To promote a philosophy and practice of formation which is wholistic and integrated. If we incorporate the Lutheran understanding of vocation into our thinking, it is possible to encompass all aspects of formation within four dimensions of each person's life:
  - i. the personal (dealing with one's personal identity, story, and psychodynamics);
  - ii. the vocational (focussing on all stations and places in life into which God has called a person to live and serve);
  - iii. the theological (one's beliefs, creed); and
  - iv. the spiritual (the personal relationship with God, and the application of that relationship to each of the other life dimensions).

These four aspects of being encompass the whole of life. They also form the approach to formation that is typical to CPE. Within the typical CPE process, the twin concerns in the formational process are, then, the ability to articulate the issues and themes of each of the dimensions, and the growth of a person's capacity to evaluate and move forward the integration of all of the dimensions.

The final task I wish to attempt in this paper arises from a concern to draw together all aspects of the discussion into a cohesive unity. Is it possible to develop a paradigm holds together all the issue this paper has presented?

In response to that question there are two educational paradigms which appear with regular frequency within the theological education discussion, and which speak directly to the question. Therefore, these two paradigms warrant the final item on our agenda.

## ***12) Transformational learning/education/pedagogy and Paideia***

Both of these paradigms stand in their own right within the discussion, yet they share much in common, and overlap. Therefore, they merit a consideration in tandem with each other; and, again, we can take only the briefest of looks at each of these within the restrictions of this paper.

*Transformational education* places emphasis upon education as an undertaking of meaning-making through the processes of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. It has roots in a concern for the marginalized and oppressed, and therefore sits easily with liberation and feminist theology. A transformational pedagogy stresses a practice of mutual education (i.e. between teacher and learner) which takes its direction and form from the bottom up (i.e. the place where the student and student's needs are). Its desired outcome is the empowerment and liberation of the student (transformation) for service in the world, and as an agent for the transformation of society. It places value upon an integrated learning process, which within the context of the Christian community includes integration of learning, faith, and practice.

Peter Hodgson is one author who has given special attention to the interface between transformational learning and theological education.<sup>7</sup> His work leads him to the conclusion that, applied to theological education, a transformative pedagogy works with five principal themes, or elements. These are:

- i. education and life formation; i.e. education is intrinsically bound to the processes of humans being formed and transformed for life in the world;
- ii. the rhythm of education; i.e. education is a life-long repetition of learning growth cycles;
- iii. constructive and inter-active knowledge; i.e. education is a disciplined, critical process which recognizes that knowledge is constructed through interactions with multiple 'others' (including God);
- iv. education as the practice of freedom; i.e. education is liberation from bondage to ignorance and parochialism, resulting in openness and connection to the world;
- v. education as connected and imaginative teaching and cooperative learning; i.e. education is a shared activity, understood 'as much in terms of the connection between truth (God) and knowledge (humanity) as in terms of the connection between teachers and students (Hodgson: 80).

*Paidea*<sup>8</sup> is a notion that derives from the Greek, παιδεύω and παιδεία (variously translated as upbringing, instruction, education, discipline – including punishment – training, correction). Drawing upon the earlier work of Werner Jaeger – whose voluminous work explores paideia as the wholistic, integrated, liberating and formative process of human personality, character, and becoming – the present discussion on theological education appears increasingly to champion paideia as an all-inclusive paradigm for such education.

Thus, Kelsey locates the paideia paradigm at the heart of his Athens model of theological education, and understands its function in that place to be the process of culturing the soul into God and Christ (9-11). Banks defines paideia as the 'cultivating of a person's spirit, character, and mind so that their faith is deepened and they are better prepared for the practice of ministry' (19). Hogson's discussion of paideia (which he also links with the notion of education as wisdom-getting) follows as a natural logical extension to his discussion of transformational education, which we outlined above.

Christenson's summary of the paideia paradigm provides a comprehensive overview of this approach to theological education. He perceives paideia to be the kind of education that takes seriously the connection between knowing, teaching, and human becoming, a perception that equates with his understanding of what makes Lutheran theological education unique. The emphasis within such education is upon integrated, wholistic learning, with a commitment to four specific dimensions within the educational process:

- i. the learner as a whole person;
- ii. the human development of persons;
- iii. the exploration of the larger, human-related dimensions of knowing; and
- iv. the relationship between knowing and the larger issues of living in the world.<sup>9</sup>

My personal understanding of the current state of play in the great theological debate is that transformational education and paideia make available a worthy set of concepts which, woven together into a paradigm of its own, provide the foundation and framework for an approach to Lutheran theological education which will truly enable both the Lutheran church and its educational institutions fulfil their God-given mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Conclusion**

In concluding this paper, I shall make several comments about some of the implications of this paper for ALC and the LCA.

First of all, we can all recognize that most of the agenda items I have listed are not new in our circles. We are all familiar, I am sure, with them, and we can all see how we at ALC already have in place many of the pieces of the puzzle that make up the picture of theological education. Therefore, there is much that we can celebrate about who and where we are at ALC.

Despite that, however, it has to be said that neither the LCA nor ALC is a very active participant in the discussion in which this paper is grounded. If we are, it can only be within cosseted circles, for there is certainly no evidence of any widespread, cohesive and organised discussion going on within our circles.

My personal view is that this debate are critical for the ongoing mission, ministry and well-being of both the LCA and ALC, and that ignore it at our peril. Therefore, we ought to be involved in this discussion as a matter of absolute necessity.

In order that this might happen, three things are necessary, as I perceive the situation.

1. Those responsible for the leadership and well-being of ALC must take initiative to commit us at ALC and the wider church to ongoing participation in the discussion from which this paper has drawn its material. We have spent incredible time, energy and resources on ecclesiastical reviews of the economic rationalist variety, and on the issue of women's ordination. The theological education debate deserves – possibly even demands – our spending at least the equivalent time, energy and resources on it as on these other foci.
2. We at ALC need to accept that we can and do become isolated in our little world here, and that we are nowhere as near in touch with the rest of the church and the world as we need to be if we are going to be effective as an authentic Lutheran theological school in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We therefore need to come out from any hiding we may be tempted to do, and engage far more than we do with the LCA and other churches and theological institutions in this incredible discussion.
3. The LCA needs to be more serious than it is in supporting ALC as the tertiary institution of the LCA. Evidence abounds that many in the LCA strongly support non-Lutheran institutions of theological education in preference to ALC, and promote sometimes dubious alternates to the kind of theological education and pastoral formation that are offered at ALC. Such attitudes and action serve only to detract from the great discussion that is occurring, and are destructive to both ALC and to genuine Lutheran ministry within Australia. I personally am saddened by these kinds of things, as I hope we all are, and would much prefer that we work together as closely as we can to develop ALC as the kind of community that naturally grows from committed partnership in the dialog on theological education.

Study at a place like ALC ought to be one of the most exciting things in the world, and a place like ALC ought to be one of the most stimulating and challenging and exciting places in the world to be. I would urge us all to work together under God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit to make ALC that kind of wondrous learning community. After all, it is only through such a community – one which, under God, we have worked to develop together – that there will emerge those kinds of pastors, teachers, and lay people who will most effectively serve the ministry of God through the Lutheran Church to the people of this region of the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Benne's recent book, *Quality with soul*, which is a study of how six theological institutions are working to keep faith with their religious traditions in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> So also Poerwowidagdo laments 'the divide between theological studies and the mission of the church in society and world' (58). And Christenson reminds us that the church and its institutions exist 'for the sake of the world's health' (23).

<sup>3</sup> Of personal interest to the Australian Lutheran scene is a statement produced by the Luther Seminary faculty in 2002, *Theological education at Luther Seminary*, which includes references to the partnership between the theological task and the mission of the church.

<sup>4</sup> So, e.g., Groome, Banks, Mudge, Hodgson, Kelsey, Melchert, et al.

<sup>5</sup> Compare the concept of reflective teaching, as described by Johannes van der Ven and Dean Manternach, for example.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., the websites for *Healthy Church*, *Lutheran Partners Online (ELCA)*, and *Company of Pastors and Order of Elders*.

<sup>7</sup> See also, e.g., Astley, Martin, Shults, Steele, Winkelmes, as well as Mezirow, Taylor.

<sup>8</sup> In this paper, Paideia is understood as a concept providing a broad paradigm for an understanding of theological education, and is to be differentiated from the specific paideian methodology expounded by Mortimer Adler, *at al*. This methodology emphasizes 'cooperative learning in which the intellectual development of each student depends on the development of the others, and the quality of the individual's learning depends on the quality of the whole group discussion. Instead of defining academic success in terms of one student's competitive advantage over the others... [it redefines] educational achievement in terms of how students relate to each other and their world, or what has been called "democratic egalitarianism".' (From the article by Burton Weltman, 2002, 'Individualism versus socialism in American education: rereading Mortimer Adler and the Paideia Proposal', *Educational Theory*, 52/1 (Winter), 61-80.)

<sup>9</sup> See his discussion on this on pp 144-6 of his book, and compare this with his earlier comments on pp 9-10, 21-22.

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