

# **“I believe in the resurrection of the body”**

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“I believe in the resurrection of the body.” And because I believe this, I believe in holistic experiential education, as all there is functions in all aspects of life, in this respect always dependent on our bodies. I wish to explore the historical and contemporary denigration of the body – and all physical existence, for that matter, as matter matters – in Christianity specifically. Of course, our lives are ineluctably historical, rooted in time and space and Jesus now seated at the right hand of our equally eternal Parent, in communion with the Holy Spirit.

For as long as I can remember, Romans 12:1-2 has been for me one of the key texts of Scripture. As a budding academic, I focussed on “being transformed by the renewing of our minds” and Christian scholarship, so I was surprised when I learnt how radical a text it really is. Paul says, “Present your bodies as living sacrifices, for this is your spiritual (literally, “reasonable”) act of worship”, adapting terms having their natural place in Judaism or the Hellenistic mystery religions to take these out of doors, into the wide world of everyday life. In a flash, another phrase that was a mantra to me was newly illuminated: H. Evan Runner’s “Human life in its entirety is religion”, a conviction articulated in ICS’s Educational Creed. (By the way, *reasonableness*, Toulmin argues, is to be distinguished from *rationality*, the former grounded in whole of life experience with all its messiness in the swamps, the latter more distant, viewing life from the hard, high ground.)

This flash, this revelation, occurred when reading an article by Edwin Judge – my Ancient History Professor at Sydney University – about the early Christians’ view of pagan schooling. He noted there is only one mention in the New Testament of an act of worship occurring in a place where Christians were gathered (that is, as “church”), and this worship is offered by a hypothetical non-Christian wandering in and presumably knowing no other response than that modelled on Jewish or pagan religious assemblies. He was shocked to find Christians met primarily to share a fellowship meal, to sing psalms and spiritual songs with and to each other, to learn from one another of the Lord’s purposes and stir one another up to love and good works – to spiritual acts of worship in the world.

Note that it is indeed *acts* that are in view: God is pleased when we commit our “practical lives” to Him (Judge, “The Interaction of Biblical and Classical Education in the Fourth Century” 31). It is our bodies – and we can say, “our whole selves”, because all Hebrew anthropological terms are

relational rather than substantial – that are our due sacrifice. More than our thoughts are at stake; giving our all to God concerns the way we should live. These verses were a clarion reminder that the disciplines we study at university and the subjects we teach in schools are not neutral: they require inner, biblical reformation. Yes, our thoughts are of vital importance, and the way we think is too often shaped by the spirits of this and other ages rather than the Holy Spirit, by God’s “good, pleasing and perfect will”, too much distorted by idolatries – and their expression, theoretical reductionisms – that find the source of order and meaning in what is created instead of in the Creator.

Speaking of the University of Sydney, it’s forty-six years since I completed my Honours thesis, entitled “An Initial Formulation of a Reformed Christian Philosophy of Education” with a parenthetical subtitle, “Including the Particular Consideration of Apologetic Education at *L’Abri*” (where I spent two weeks in January 1973). No surprise that Francis Schaeffer (along with C. S. Lewis, of course) was my primary influence as a young Christian, teaching me the whole of life is touched by the song of the gospel. I had read many of the reformational texts – thanks in the first instance to a display of “Books for Thinking Christians”, mainly Wedge and Presbyterian and Reformed, at the University Co-op – so I spent the first year of my doctoral research reading methodically, doggedly, through *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*; I managed around ten pages per hour. I learnt much about what Dooyeweerd intended by naïve experience and in some respects its primacy over theory and the consequent accountability of theorists to the everyday life of everyday people. I then determined to study at the Institute for Christian Studies, which I did on a travel grant in 1975-76; disappointingly, Dooyeweerd featured little. I certainly did not envisage then working a total of eighteen years with ICS (when I include my four semesters in the 90s).

The tentativeness in my thesis title was echoed in my dissertation, completed in 1978: “The Development of Curriculum with Relation to the Philosophy of the Cosmomic Idea”, “with relation to” being somewhat “weasel words”. I didn’t know exactly what this relationship would be – not unusual, as research is not repackaging what is already known but the breaking of new ground. I came to focus on a theory of diverse ways of knowing, paradoxically a *theory* intended to *relativize* theory. The fundamental role of everyday experience and our bodiliness (“embodiedness” hints at dualism) led me to what I termed an “integral curriculum”, countering the integrated, thematic curriculum then in favour and more strongly, a subject-based framework. I married this with a problem-posing pedagogy, an orientation inspired by Freire and his grassroots literacy education among “peasants” in the Sao Paulo *favela*. I felt its proper roots were in the Creation-Fall-

Redemption ground motive, the integrally good creation in which God formed us so we would help the earth flourish and the radical antithesis between sin and grace: both pose problems, challenges to spark our growth in spiritual worship.

Freire grounded his pedagogy in the practical life of those Kuyper called the *kleine luyden*. It is often observed that whereas we tend to speak of “practising Jews”, we are more likely to talk of “believing Christians”. Many voices remind us of the need for orthopraxy as much if not more than orthodoxy, bearing out Paul’s emphasis. It is indeed a “practising Jew” who brought home to me the significance of this for our choice of schooling for our children. Svi Shapiro has been an outspoken advocate of public schooling and particularly of the need to ensure all American children – poor and rich, Black, Hispanic, and White – have access to education of high quality. When it came to choosing a school for his daughter upon graduation from the Jewish elementary school, however, he faced a serious dilemma. He knew being Jewish is a way of life; he also knew the daily routine of schooling inculcates a way of life, with much in it contrary to the ethos of Judaism. “Ethos” could well be a key term – more than ideas about society, but a way of being in a pervasive atmosphere, the air that we breathe.

Well, the air we breathe is first and foremost the breath God breathed into *adamah*, birthing Adam. Our lives are creationally, historically grounded in the earth from which Adam was formed. It is grounded also in the incarnation of Christ, a teacher of wisdom; in the resurrection of Jesus, who ascended but will return bodily to the New Earth. This grounding is the wellspring of wisdom. Parker Palmer encourages us to “let your life speak”, not from the head down but from the ground up.

It would take me a long time indeed to exegete the passage from the Teacher – or the Preacher, if you will – but it suffices me to say that he is thankful for his bodily life, animals as we all are, but uncertain about what comes thereafter. As we well know, Ecclesiastes is full of questions, doubts, the fear that all is but a breath of wind (*hebel*), even amidst the conviction God has made everything beautiful in its time. Are humans different from other animals, rising upward rather than going down into the earth? And is it but the human spirit who ascends? He poses questions to which Paul gives an answer, to the church in Corinth.

“I believe in the resurrection of the body” is a primary article of faith. Yes, the body of Christ, but also all those created by God *as* – not merely *with* – a body. Paul goes so far as to say that if we are not raised, then neither was Jesus. The resurrection is at the heart of the gospel: if Christ is not risen,

our faith is in vain. As the hymn has it, “Yet cheerful He, to suffering goes, That He His foes from thence might free.” “Cheerful” is not apt in our times, but when Crossman wrote in 1664, “cheer” suggested encouragement by words and deeds. And encouragement itself bears a stronger resonance, for it implies not just felicitous words but giving others courage, edifying, building them up. This, Jesus has done for us.

The significance of the resurrection for what educators call “the whole person” cannot be gainsaid. The spiritualistic asceticism of my early formation as a Christian niggled at me almost from the beginning. It was a stance of denial of the good creation, not affirmation. Yes, total depravity is also an article of faith for Calvinists, and for Lutherans even more strongly, and sin and the Fall are intricately intertwined throughout the historical Christian faith. Brubacher, in his *History of the Problems of Education* (one of my undergraduate texts), asserts the primary influence of Calvinism on education was the application of the rod. The sinfulness of we fallen image-bearers overshadows the glory of being the spitting image of God. Calvin did not intend this, nor does the ethos of contemporary Christian schools. They are to be spaces for learning in which the whole of life is celebrated.

The historical denigration of the body, within Christianity and beyond, foments the intellectualisation of education. Well, not so much beyond, but before it, due to many influences, not the least the legacy of Plato and Classical philosophy more broadly. I am not going to rehearse the heresies that have assailed the Body of Christ, but mention two contemporary examples. The first was the devotional introduction to a meeting of Christian educators. The text was Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness. The concluding, resounding affirmation was that Jesus was incapable of succumbing to the Accuser. Why? Because he was God. The second was the occasion of a theological student’s graduating examination. When asked to explain the two natures of Christ, he said, “That’s simple. In his body he was human, in his soul he was divine.”

Turning briefly to how this influence infected early Judaism and thence Christianity, I look to the scholarship of one of my mentors, the recently departed Duncan Roper, in this instance concerning rabbinical teaching. As my reference to “intellectualisation” indicates, one of my major concerns has been the relation between theory and practice and more specifically, the theory-into-practice paradigm, a perennial concern at ICS. This is actually the theory-*determines*-practice paradigm, effectively meaning theory *should* determine practice, whereas there are myriad instances in which theory *does* not and *should not* do so. When Roper (13-27) explores the nature of discipleship, he suggests one of three fundamental differences between Israelite religion and Greek culture is how

Israel could nurture and disciple the people of God in honouring God's will. The philosophers' analytical, theoretical perspective significantly influenced how the Rabbis conceived of discipleship, each in turn making authoritative announcements, their disciples subjecting themselves to their master's interpretive framework. This had a marked impact on how Christians through the ages and to the present day not only learned to think, but learned to live. In Roper's words, "the problem raised by theory" gave rise to "typical answers" to life's problems (15), i.e., answers that were the same everywhere, independent of context.

Conversely, God's will is revealed in His word, directing Israel's efforts – ever stumbling – to do what we all were created to do: glorify God in this very act by developing wisely our human social and cultural life. This spiritual direction could not rightly accommodate the Classical-Hellenistic tradition. But Paul directs his readers to be transformed by the renewing of their minds; the conformity he demands be abandoned echoes the Greek term (*euschemon*) for the cultivated, well-informed person representing the cultural ideal; elsewhere, he scandalously parodies this ideal by revelling in his own weakness (2 Cor. 11:22-33) (Judge, 1983a, 1983b). Thus, while we cannot say the Newer Testament (Seerveld's coining) lays out a vision for education, it does have a great deal to say about what constitutes a Christian counter-cultural vision of humanness. The People of God's life-course (*curriculum vitae*, as Calvin first said) depends upon its relationship with Jesus Christ, Lord in all of life. Yet in the high mediaeval period, theology became the "queen of the sciences", its theorising determining what ordinary people should do.

An image of the mature person is central to the formulation of educational conceptions. Bill Andersen (supervisor of my BA and PhD theses), on the assumption that education is a process of guiding the development of persons so they come to "an ideal stature", proposes that

the mature person and the mature community are expressions of worthy stature in Christ; and the related process of intervention is edification or upbuilding, its transforming factor being love or *agape*. Both person-building and community-building are achieved through involvement in personal relationships, which, together with understanding, are central to a Christian view of education. (29-30)

Andersen contrasts *edification* with classical and modern conceptions, wherein *cognitive* transformation of an individual promotes a progressively more effective intellectual perspective (19-20). Yes, Paul discerns a cognitive dimension to a Christian's transformation, but this is by no

means an autonomous reason, as it is the growing capacity to subject one's thought patterns to the will of God, to accomplish God's purpose(s). Paul's admonition is addressed not to individuals in isolation but to the Christian community, which he describes as one body in Christ, each a member individually one of another (Rom. 12:4). As he asserted that worship is a whole-person act, so is this body to be active in the whole of life: the gifts of prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading and showing mercy are not limited to particular contexts. The Church manifests itself in cultic form, and also may express itself corporately in political action, aesthetic production and performance, family life and many other ways – not least of which is schooling. The Christian school will thus be the Body of Christ gathered for learning and teaching; “Christian practice” is not restricted to “sacred sites”, for all of life is sacred.

Yes, “Human life in its entirety is religion”, a contemporary expression of Paul's understanding of worship. Schools themselves are a religious arena, serving either God or a substitute. Whereas this will be denied by proponents of secular public schools, we need to keep it clearly in view when interrogating such schools, recognising that the outworking of faith commitments is far more subtle and pervasive than suggested by red-flag issues of creation/evolution, school prayer and celebration of religious festivals. This conviction that faith is life-encompassing is no doubt held by many Jews, Muslims and others, who understand the practice of their faith in similar terms.

People of self-aware faith bind themselves to whom or whatever they worship. The processional hymn is one I have long loved, but sadly not much heard or sung since my time in the Anglican Church, so many years ago. The first line, “I bind unto myself today,/ the strong name of the Trinity/... The Three in One and One in Three” is a profession of religious faith, faith that Jesus the Christ is forever incarnated in the heavenly places, yet to return full-bodied. Etymologically, binding ourselves to God is at the very core of what we mean by religion. *Ligare* also gives us “ligament”, the cords that bind our bodies together. Figuratively speaking, it is the bond between people. If we do not bind ourselves to the one true God, we tie our lives to an idol. Our whole mission, then, is to uncover the religious roots of all we read and learn, what another of my mentors, Stuart Fowler, coined, “religio-criticism”. Yes, I continue to honour the insights of those who have helped form me, as is only proper. He later argued that I coined the term, but as we were bound so closely in our pursuit of Christian scholarship, neither of us could be certain about the origin. We also recognise the binding of the Three in One, a mystery we may never comprehend, but in which we are called to dwell. There is one true God, inexorably in relationship, within the Godhead but also in God's love

for all he has created – “the star-lit heaven, the glorious sun” – and his image-bearers especially, the crowning glory. The doctrine of the Trinity is not a proposition in Scripture, but an articulation thereof and focus of worship for all who invoke God’s name. We bind unto ourselves “the wisdom of [our] God to teach; the Word of God to give [us] speech”; Christ with, within, behind, before me... “Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger” – yes, even in the mouths of strangers, among “the least of these”, for God speaks wisdom through those in his image.

Binding, what we may call “relationality”, is at the heart of the gospel, and should also be at the heart of education. “Learning, by heart”, is my play on the common command from teachers to “learn this by heart” – it will be on this week’s quiz; woe betide if you fail to memorise what has been assigned. No, what is important is what we learn to the root and core of our beings, flowing out through our whole experience.

Curriculum is fundamentally about relationship too and should be communal. It is not just a plan or prescription for schooling. We may speak of the enacted or lived curriculum, developing organically and responsively. It is a matter of relationality between students, teachers and subject-matter – though for the latter one would do well to say “topics”, places, sites or foci for learning, lest our thoughts are drawn to the packages known as “school subjects”. Curriculum as a triangulated space in which people live and move freely, within boundaries that maximise freedom. *Curriculum vitae* is the organic course of our lives, not merely a collection of courses, fragmented, thus fragmenting the integrality of our experience. Ramus, however, developed a logical, binary schema for the organisation of schooling, a perduring prescription destined to sap the life out of learning, dampening and stifling the joy.

For several years in the eighties, I was Vice Principal (Curriculum) at Mt. Evelyn Christian School (MECS). Yes, I am a philosopher by vocation, but my approach was not to formulate a specific, theoretically-grounded framework teachers would faithfully implement. In such a model, curriculum becomes a straitjacket, not a liberating force. Teachers are policed at various levels, right up to provincial or national government ministries. MECS was committed to school-based curriculum development, growing from the community in which it was rooted. Teams of teachers met with me every two weeks to record and refine what they had actually been practising for years. In a sense, it was a narrative, “narrational rather than paradigmatic”, to paraphrase Jerome Bruner. It was not so much curriculum development as curriculum documentation, providing guidelines only for future projects, taking teachers’ accumulated experience and reflecting on and refining this; an organic

project, open-ended, incorporating in each cycle of review developments initiated by teachers in interaction with students. I must confess that the last chapter of my first dissertation, was a plan guided by my often highly abstract theorising of the 440 pages that had gone before. (My second, published as *Wisdom and Curriculum* in 2007, was much more grounded in my concrete experience of schooling; as Harry Fernhout said, it was quite autobiographical, thus “narrational” rather than “paradigmatic”, a narrative conjoined with theory.) Well, all such projects start with a certain tentativeness, as I’ve said. The obsessive-compulsive didacticism of Dickens’ Gradgrind demanded only the facts “if we are to form the minds of reasoning animals”. Teachers have been counselled to read *Hard Times* once a year, as an antidote to this regime.

I thank God I was invited to apply for a Senior Secondary position at MECS, where I took up teaching with a vengeance – or a less violent metaphor – and thoroughly enjoyed my years in the classroom, not so much implementing my neat and tidy plan as tinkering, adjusting and then more comprehensively re-adjusting. I learnt so much from mucking around in the mud; I learnt from my students, which is how it should be. Luther learnt from the school of marriage; I learnt from my experience in school, as student and teacher – and yes, in marriage. Just over a month ago I attended the funeral of a student in the class of ’84 who died tragically; most of the class were there to support one another, bound together as they were, many for the full thirteen years of schooling. I too, with my colleagues, was welcomed, and had treasured conversations with many. These bonds exemplify the Body of Christ, at work in the world – back then, in schools.

There can be no experience without the body, yet that young man died long before three score and ten. Our hope is in the resurrection, but where is the hope? I learnt this from the Book of Job, in a severe time of trial; I learnt especially about wisdom. In him, suffering is incarnated, an archetype of Jesus. He had no assurance of resurrection, yet he persevered, importuning, nagging God to bestow his grace. Was Job’s “a song unknown”, that God in Christ would give his life for our sakes? Why should Christ’s healing, making “the lame to run and giving the blind their sight”, engender “rage and spite”? Why would the Prince of life be slayed, yet a murderer saved? “Where is wisdom to be found?”, Job cries out at a pivotal point. The hard truth is that wisdom is birthed in suffering, more often than not. It requires and engenders humility. Humility is literally “on the ground”, from *humus*, the earth. So too are humans. Should it be that we too celebrate our humanness, frail as it is, in schools also. We should honour those who seem weak, so-called under-achievers, perhaps due to the regimentation of schooling. We should devise curricula and pedagogy oriented to prepare students



for healing the wounds of the world. We should think first of the upbuilding of others, not our own aggrandisement.

I am privileged indeed in this time of retirement to be mentoring five PhD students, in Canada, the US and Australia, and supervising an MA student. No Junior Members have earned a doctorate in Education through ICS, though several have completed Master's degrees in that field and took their doctorates elsewhere. (I did co-supervise Shinae Won Kim's VU doctorate in Education – quite some time ago, now!) It is an important milestone for ICS. What struck me in the current dissertation proposals is a recurring theme of a sense of place, and often, bodiliness. For Jon Andreas, his focus on “re-indigenization” emphasises our earthly/earthy and cultural roots, the imperative to get grounded again in spite of a world seemingly hell-bent on destroying our planet. Joonyong Um is deeply concerned about Korean schooling, in an ethos of individualistic competitiveness and materialistic aspirations with deeply painful outcomes, and (re)searches for a remedy in his homeland. Helena Hoogstad starts with the challenges faced in South Africa, where she lectured in philosophy – reformational philosophy, at that – hoping to break the bonds remaining in post-apartheid education. Jason Mills, at USMC, researches the limitations of online platforms and has a strong conviction about the importance of bodily presence in pastoral formation – and no doubt, elsewhere. In the last few weeks, Jon, Joonyong and Jason completed their written and oral exams and are beginning to write their dissertations. Justin Cook's MA focusses on project-based learning, encouraging students to immerse themselves in everyday experience as the wellspring of wisdom. As Fernhout once said to me, Education has always been a field on the periphery at ICS. Is this because it is too concrete, too much rooted in the practical lives of teachers? Our reformational convictions persuade us that this is not at all a bad thing. Those I have mentioned are committed to effective change, philosophy for the art of living – and specifically, the art and craft of teaching.

In my presidential inaugural in 2015, I chose to close with “Be Exalted, O God”, as I have for this evening. We pray the Glory of God be over all the earth, the glory being humans doing what we were created to do. This is sacrificing our whole selves to God, our spiritual worship. May we – our whole selves – be resurrected. May we continue to grow and learn on the New Earth, when Christ has come again. Hallelujah!

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