

AARE 1994 Robert Long

The Search to Explain a New Schooling System

Introduction

.....teachers and education experts are living in a fool's paradise: they seem to believe that when they have labelled something as stupid, irrational, ill-informed and anti professional they have, by that labelling, weakened or destroyed it. (Mayer, 1979)

This statement by Henry Mayer formed part of the foreword to a case study of the MACOS/SEMP controversy in Queensland. This controversy centred around the banning of Man a Course of Study (MACOS) and Social Education Materials Project (SEMP) by the Premier of Queensland, Jo Bjelke Petersen and the Queensland Cabinet in February 1978. Mayer's warning has still not been taken seriously. There has been very little research or material published on the fastest growing system of schooling (non-government) in Australia since the 1960's. Concomitant with this is a widespread lack of understanding, if not indifference and confusion regarding the identity and uniqueness of this new generation of Christian schools. The only recent work published on this new generation of Christian schools in Australia does not contribute much in order to clarify the picture. Despite the recognition by educators and academics that these schools make all growth in the public and private sectors of education in recent history pale into insignificance (AEC, 1991; Speck and Prideaux, 1993) there has still not been an adequate assessment of their nature and development.

In order to discuss this collection of Christian schools I have given them the label "themelic", a Koine Greek expression used in the New Testament which crops up in language used to justify their position. The term "themelic" stands for a new kind of Protestant collaboration that has emerged as Christians of many Protestant theological traditions have begun to establish schools in Australia in a common conservative paradigm. The term "themelic" avoids the pejorative connotations of the label "fundamentalist" which is often applied unfairly to all of these schools. The use of the term "fundamentalist" simply does not capture the full orb of variety in this collection of schools and at best whilst describing the governing epistemology of these schools is far from the mark in describing their pedagogy.

It is the purpose of this paper to do several things. First I want to establish the idea of themelic identity. Secondly I will briefly explore the nature and developmental history of themelic schools.

Finally I want to address the problem of confused identity and express the need for greater research in this area.

Themelic Schools

The schools in this collection are mostly affiliated with the Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACCS), Christian Community Schools Ltd (CCS), Christian Parent Controlled Schools Ltd (CPCS) and Christian Schools Association of Queensland (CSAQ). There are some non-affiliated themelic schools and home school groups also in this collection which are generally small in size but collectively amount to a substantial portion of this collection.

Themelic schools are characterised by the following self understandings or claims to be:

1. A Christian school.
2. Christ-centred, particularly in ethos and curriculum.
3. Biblically based in pedagogy.
4. Confessors of the inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible.
5. Interested and consciously confessing an evangelical/reformed Christian world view with relationship to schooling, which is perceptible in a common piety.
6. Schools that are God's schools.
7. Schools that are not the same as church/denominational schools or Arnoldian schools.
8. A low-fee paying school.
9. Based on the biblical responsibility of parents for children.
(Rhetoric or references to 2 and 3 act as gatekeepers for the movement)

Currently there are approximately 290 schools, 4000 teachers and 60000 students in this group of schools. CPCS schools have 70 schools, 1740 staff and 19000 students. CCS schools have 76 schools, 1200 teaching staff and 15000 students. CSAQ have 49 schools, 700 teaching staff and 12000 students. Forty per cent of students in these schools are enrolled in schools over 600 students. In addition to the schools in these systems there are another 100 non affiliated themelic schools with an estimated student population of 5000. Most of these schools are not funded and some refuse registration.

Frank Marett of the Christian Family School Association of Australia (CFSAA) estimates 20000-28000 students are in themelic home schools. My conservative estimate of 9000 students is less than half that number but the nature of themelic home schooling is such that any accurate assessment is nearly impossible. The groups that deal with themelic

home schoolers tend to supply regional groups and families with support, newsletters and materials. The major supplier groups in this collection are Accelerated Christian Education (ACE), Australian Education Foundation (AEF), Kingsley Education (Families Honouring Christ), Light Educational Ministries (LEM) and CFSAA. Many of the students in thematic home schools are students who have left thematic institutional schools.

It is hard to credit that so little research has been published on such a significant number of students in Australia, a movement of schools that is larger than the Departments of Education in the Northern Territory or the Australian Capital Territory. At its current growth rate of 8.5% this system of schools will be larger than the Tasmanian government system by 1997. The thematic system of schools represents 7-8% of the non-government sector and over 40% of the Protestant sector. Why has such a significant system of schooling, a rising star, been overlooked? Why has such a large system of schooling been so misrepresented and poorly comprehended?

Historical Overview

CPCS Schools

The first thematic school to open in Australia was Calvin Christian School which started in at Kingston, Tasmania in 1962. In fact its story began much earlier with the formation of a Christian Parent-Controlled Schools Association in 1954 in the same area. Even

though the early schools of the Parent-Controlled model were initially started by Dutch Reformed (Nederlands Hervormde, NHK) migrants they were never intended to be the exclusive schools of that culture.

Other Christian school associations were set up in 1954 at Mt Evelyn (Vic) and Wollongong (N.S.W.). In 1957 associations were set up in Blacktown (N.S.W.), Brisbane (Qld), Perth (W.A.) and Dandenong (Vic) in 1959. In the first yearbook of the Reformed Church of Australia (RCA) in 1956, most of the 20 churches listed had a representative for the local Christian school "association".

The foundation of the Christian Parent Controlled model of schooling is the local association. The local association of parent members govern the school through its elected representatives and an annual general meeting. CPCS Ltd is a registered company (N.S.W.) and acts as a national association for the local associations. The first stage of setting up a school in this system is to form an association. Sometimes an association can exist for many years before a school commences.

In 1967 there were 3 CPCS schools in Australia with 221 students. By 1980 there were 20 CPCS Associations, 6 schools with 1101 students. In 1989 there were 53 CPCS schools with 12726 students.

In promotional material in 1994 CPCS Ltd listed seven characteristics that together form the basic appeal for their schools:

- * Parents have their say.
- * The Scriptures are the central directing principle.
- * Schools that every parent can afford.
- * The Christian world view of the home is reinforced.
- * The school and home form a partnership.
- * Each child is treated as a person with valuable gifts.
- * Students are prepared by learning about the world, its ugliness and its beauty, in the light of God's word. (On Being, October 1994, p10)

Fellowship for Christian Education

There were signs as early as 1955 of others outside the Reformed tradition starting a themelic Christian school. A group called the Christian Educational Fellowship (CEF) was formed by Dr J. Upsdell, Rev E.T. Brailey and Murray Hogben in order to establish interdenominational Christian schools in Australia and a Protestant missionary teaching order, based upon the Roman Catholic model. Later this name was changed to the Fellowship for Christian Education (FCE).

This group produced a small booklet, "A Call to Christian People : For a New Approach to Christian Education". Armed with the booklet and tracts Dr Upsdell travelled extensively around the country endeavouring to promote the cause of seeking to establish fellowships/representatives in each state of Australia.

Dr Upsdell did manage to enlist some support in Victoria in the persons of Mr and Mrs Gilbert Bell. Land was purchased in 1962 with donations from Adelaide and Sunshine (Vic) but the school was not started. In 1982 the land purchased was sold enabling the beginning of two schools associated with the initial vision of Dr J. Upsdell at Sunshine and Belgrave Heights. The FCE never gained sufficient support in itself

and continues now only as a financial body to assist the starting of new themelic Christian schools.

Accelerated Christian Education

In the early 1970's Accelerated Christian Education, a U.S.A. based group, began to explore the Australian scene to measure levels of

interest in their brand of schooling and the response was significant. In late 1976 Accelerated Christian Schools (ACE) started in Australia and began with considerable energy. As many as 100 schools were formed over the next five years with ACE material.

The first ACE school was Mountains Christian Academy in Blackheath (N.S.W.) which was started in 1976 as a High School. Seven other ACE schools were started the next year. Some ACE schools have changed from this system to a more conventional school system after becoming more established. In 1992 there were 45 schools that used the ACE system or a modified ACE system in Australia.

Christian Community Schools

In 1974 the Christian Community School movement (primarily Baptist in foundation) began with the "vision" of two trainee Baptist pastors in Sydney (N.S.W.), Peter Hester and Robert Frisken. With the encouragement of David Magill (a local Baptist church secretary) they began to discuss the adverse influences of what was happening in state schools. Hester, a trained Mathematics teacher and Frisken, a trained Geography teacher, spoke together about a "truly Christ-centred school founded on Biblical principles where Christ would be Lord." (Magill, 1988) The school would be a part of the ministry of the local church in partnership with the home in "training" the children. (ibid)

The system devised as the basis for the school functioning and curriculum direction was known as GIFT (Grouped, Individualised, Focused, Teaching) which Frisken adopted from the Accelerated Christian Education model. (Hester, 1993)

This strategy for ensuring a "Christ-centred" curriculum was based upon the principles for Christian growth as written in the New Testament book of Ephesians.¹ These principles are:

- 1.The primacy of the Bible.
- 2.The rejection of a secularist/humanist world view.
- 3.The central authority of the local church.
- 4.Parental responsibility administered through the church.
- 5.The school viewed as a church "ministry".
- 6.Teachers are gifted "charismatically" for the equipping ministry of the church.
- 7.The church, parents and teachers form a three-way partnership in community.
- 8.Growth into maturity and personhood is growth "into Christ".
- 9.Protection from evil.
- 10.Preparation for life. (CCS Schooling, 1993)

In 1976 Regents Park Christian Community High School started with

fourteen students in year seven. A similar school was started at St Mary's in 1978. By 1980 there were four CCS schools with 300 students and six CCS schools with 500 students by 1981. In 1992 there were 76 CCS schools with more than 15000 students.

Light Educational Ministries

Light Educational Ministries first began in South Australia as Australian Christian Schools with little or no knowledge of other themelic school movements. In the early seventies the founder, Peter Frogley, was a teacher at Risdien High School when he began to realise that students could be taught in a school where God could be the central factor. Like so many of the other movements to themelic schools he reacted to the "secular humanism" that was coming to dominate the state school system. He, like the other pioneers of the movement towards themelic schools was aware of church denominational schools but believed them to be only Christian in foundation and not significantly Christian at a philosophical base. (Frogley, 1992) The perception from many Christians at this time like Peter Frogley (particularly in reaction to the social developments of the 1960's and 1970's) was that society was going the way of the Devil. (Light of Life, 1980, p9; CCS prayer letter)

Peter Frogley started Fountain Centre Christian School at Booleroo Centre (S.A.) and began

LEM through the services of a magazine that generated an attack on the philosophical foundations of secular education. The association of people interested in LEM was a loose network arranged through conferences and common vision which began in 1978.

In addition to these schools and systems of schools there are seven themelic approaches to establishing tertiary educational institutions.

It was not until 1978 that the real burst in growth of themelic schools began. Of the 290 themelic schools that existed in 1993 over half commenced in the period after 1978 to 1983. There is little doubt that post Karmel report funding enabled the private sector of Australian schooling to expand and develop, but this does not explain why themelic schools expanded at a rate many times that of the national average of any other private school system.

Reasons for Themelic Growth

The reasons for the development and growth of themelic schools are due in part to changes in society and socio-political events in the 1960's and 1970's. All of the founders of themelic schools refer to a perceived loss of "family values", declining moral standards, an increased secular and humanistic attitude in education as well as

references made to specific schooling changes over this period of time. There is little doubt that thematic development and growth has been fostered by the conservative social agenda of its adherents.

Another vital ingredient for understanding the development and growth of thematic schools is a theological one. The founders of these schools were operating out of a theological perspective which was primarily individualistic and pietistic. As it happened the changes of the 1960's and 1970's shook the ground on which many conservative Christians had stood comfortably for a long time. This is an argument which is particular to these schools and supplements the argument which follows that is, that the agenda of thematic schools is congruent and coexistent with a "back to basics" movement.

For the purpose of this paper I have listed some of these major changes in a brief way in order to express a general feel for the kinds of

things which trouble the thematic person. Whilst it may be argued that change bothers conservatives in general it is my point that the combinations of changes listed had a particular triggering effect for this particular theological mindset. I will not make any reference to the socio-political or theological ramifications of these changes at this stage but simply wish to tag them as historical factors that need to be explored in order to understand thematic development.

These changes have been:

1. Government education legislation that seemed to foster the increased development of traditional enemies of the thematic disposition e.g. greater openness to secular humanism and general sympathy for ethical relativism.
2. Continued climate of political anxiety over Communism/Socialism exacerbated by Cold War and post Whitlam conservatism. Concerns were heightened by strike action by teachers and students in schools (particularly Victorian schools) during the late 1960's and early 1970's.
3. Changes to the government school system in moves to comprehensive schools, more coeducational schools and "open-planned" schools.
4. Increased moral permissiveness in society perceived in trends in fashion, the arts and media. The contraceptive pill serves as a symbol for these changes.
5. Changes in government schools in curriculum reconstruction, the eradication of examinations, open space classrooms and indirect/process teaching methods.
6. The drive to outlaw corporal punishment in schools.
7. The declining strength of the church and the churches' inability to lobby successfully to halt change.

8. The implementation and trial of new curriculum and pedagogical practice such as MACOS and SEMP in Queensland.
9. The move in several states to discontinue Religious Instruction (RI or Scripture teaching as it was also known) in government schools.
10. A growing convergence in Protestant denominationalism and the effects of the Charismatic movement upon denominational loyalty.

Back to Basics

The fundamental concern of themelic school founders was about changes made in education in Australia and changes in society. The familiar patterns of schooling after WW 2 had altered radically and this worried conservative Christians. An understanding of this position of concern is sometimes referred to as part of the "back to basics debate". Brodinsky (:1977) notes that at various times and in different places, back to basics advocates have demanded:

1. Emphasis on the four R's of reading, writing, arithmetic and religion, especially in the elementary grades. Most of the school day is devoted to these skills. Phonics is the method advocated for reading instruction. (It is particularly worth noting at this point the manner in which Spalding Phonics dominates the pages of Light of Life the journal for Light Educational Ministries).
2. In secondary school, most of the day is to be devoted to traditional subjects taught from 'clean' textbooks, free of notions that violate traditional family and national values.
3. At all levels the teacher is to take a dominant and controlling role, with 'no nonsense about pupil-directed activities'.
4. Methodology is to include drill, recitation, daily homework, and frequent testing.
5. Report cards are to carry traditional marks and numerical values.
6. Discipline is to be strict, with corporal punishment an accepted method of control. Dress codes regulate student's appearance and hair styles.
7. Promotion and graduation dependent on mastery of skills and knowledge demonstrated through testing.
8. Elimination of 'frills' such as non traditional sports and sex education.
9. Eliminate elective courses.
10. Ban innovations. No new curriculum reconstructions such as new maths, language arts, instruction through media. Emphasis on facts rather than concepts.
11. Elimination of anything outside the basic curriculum such as career guidance, driver education, drug education.
12. Put patriotism back in schools. The love of country and God.

Though these descriptions of Brodinsky's are based on his observations of the American scene, many of these values are the domain of the more extreme thematic schools such as the ACE system, LEM position and that of Mrs Joyner's Society To Outlaw Pornography (STOP), Committee Against Regressive Education (CARE) and Association for Community Tutorial Services (ACTS).

Whilst all of Brodinsky's descriptions capture the general feeling in thematic schools about education, it should also be pointed out that the greatest anxiety and militant reaction to elements of these demands underlay the concerns of the more extreme right wing of the thematic school movement. Nonetheless, as Smith and Knight note, the underlying success of groups like STOP, CARE and ACTS rely upon the passive support of other less extreme thematic groups. (Knight and Smith, 1979, p225)

A call for a return to a 'golden age' when academic standards were higher and moral principles surer is a common theme in the back to basics debate. To many 'progressive' educationalists, this whole notion of back to basics seems absurd and comical. The reality is that the call for "back to the basics" is quite serious which is evidenced by the success of Mrs Joyner's STOP, CARE and ACTS groups. Mrs Joyner and her groups were instrumental in raising the consciousness of the thematic community in the late 1970's and early 1980's resulting in the successful banning of Man a Course of Study (MACOS) and Social Education Materials Project (SEMP) by the Premier of Queensland, Jo Bjelke Petersen and the Queensland Cabinet in February 1978.

This action and time marks a very significant place in the history of thematic school development. To dismiss this episode as an isolated or regional incident peculiar to Queensland fundamentalists reflects a profound misunderstanding of the nature of the thematic school community. It has been this dismissiveness by academics, bureaucrats and educators which has led to the current confusion in Australia about the nature of these schools.

Though many people of thematic persuasion rejected the extremes of Mrs Joyner they were nonetheless agitated by her, excited into action by her and empathetic with the basic thrust of her perceptions. Support by finance and letters came from a broad spectrum of mainstream denominations. It was her work which helped focus the attention of thematic minded people on the changes at work in the state education system in the 1960's and 1970's.

Like the Scopes trial in the U.S.A. the MACOS/SEMP controversy,

although not of equivalent national exposure or intensity, nonetheless serves as a significant national event which marks the watershed of thematic school development in Australia. Like the modernist versus fundamentalist clashes of the late 19th century and early 20th century in the U.S.A., the MACOS/SEMP controversy illustrates a reaction against theological modernism, social liberalism, evolutionary relativism and the rapidity of social change in an urbanised society.

The Thematic Tradition as a New Paradigm

It is my thesis that part of the reason for the development of a new schooling tradition in Australia is due to a growing trend of Protestant denominational disintegration that has occurred in recent Protestant church history in Australia and church in the West in general. For the past thirty years large sections of the Protestant church in Australia have experienced a growing levelling effect with regards to denominational loyalty. Winds of Change (Kaldor, 1994) and work by the Australian Christian Research Association collaborates this. More young church goers are less interested in the traditional belief issues related to denominational identity and tend to "shop around" more than ever before.

The effect of the Billy Graham Crusades of the 1950's and 1960's has been one contributing factor. Another factor has been the growth and influence of Koorong Books Pty Ltd which has become the largest Christian book retailer in Australia over the past twenty years. Koorong Books Pty Ltd maintains a policy of supplying Christian books that are theologically conservative and low in price.

It is my argument that the pedagogical dynamic i.e. the pragmatic and utilitarian business of running schools, has altered and combined theological traditions forming a new Christian tradition/paradigm. This new tradition is most observable in the work of thematic schools. The thematic associations have broad statements of faith or as the CPCS schools call them "educational creeds" which tend not to tread on doctrinal territory which would alienate any particular theological tradition. This means that a great deal of collaboration can be embraced at all levels. The difficulty with such a general collaborative approach is that it does not suitably explain the individual distinctives of each school or the idiosyncrasies of each system.

The reality is that each thematic school and system tends to be dominated by one or more theological tradition more than others thematic schools or systems. This means that each school whilst speaking the same language often performs quite differently from the thematic school down the road. It is therefore imperative to understand how each theological tradition functions and then determine

which tradition is in dominance at the school concerned.

Theological Traditions in Thematic Schools

Anabaptist/Separatist

Separatism is the touchstone of Anabaptist thinking. The Anabaptist tradition stresses the “free church life”. Anabaptists are ancestors of the “Particular” Baptists and Mennonites. The educational ideas of

the tradition reverts to the doctrine of separation (Absonderung). There is a palpable sense of “over-againstness” toward the rest of society.

Charismatic

Pentecostalism entered a new stage after WW2 with the appearance of “neo-Pentecostalism” in traditional churches. The word “charismatic renewal” was used in the early seventies to designate the difference between the older, more separatist Pentecostal movement and the experience and theology characteristic of Pentecostalism that was developing in the mainline churches which was softer and less dogmatic in its declarations. The charismatic emphasises the more emotional and dramatic expression of God’s “charisma” (spiritual gifts). They tend not to insist that their experience should be normative for all to be truly Christians.

Christian Reconstructionism

The roots of Christian reconstruction extend back to opposition to Presbyterian liberalism and the perspective of Cornelius Van Til . As strict Calvinists they believe that “the elect” know and have the ability to understand life in the light of God’s laws. All of life must come under the rule of God. The emphasis is on correct training, correction and God’s lordship. Reconstructionists criticise and hope to undermine institutions that they see as usurping God’s rightful place. The chief among these institutions is the modern state. They look to the Old Testament and the model of Israel for teaching on blessing and cursing.

Creationism

Christians differ on their understanding of the mode of creation. A creationist is simply a believer in creation. In contrast to a loose understanding (neo evangelical and liberal) of creation stands “scientific creationism”. “Scientific creationism” is a position that is founded on the literal interpretation (biblicism) of the biblical account of creation.

Evangelical

The term “evangelical” simply comes from the New Testament Greek word for gospel (euangelion), meaning “good news”. Central to the evangelical is preaching about salvation, the proclamation of God’s “saving work” on the cross, man’s need to personally trust in Jesus for eternal salvation and the authority of the Bible.

Fundamentalist

The term “fundamentalist” was first coined in the 1920’s to apply to the movement against evolutionism in public schools in the U.S most publicised by the famous Scopes trial. Fundamentalism is the result of a coalition between “Princeton theology”, dispensational premillennialism and the Keswick (holiness) movement. Historic fundamentalism is rooted in the literal (inerrant) exposition of all the affirmations and attitudes of the Bible and the militant exposure of all non-Biblical affirmations and attitudes. Fundamentalism in Australia has been influenced by its counterparts in England and the U.S.A.

Neo-Evangelical

The neo-Evangelical like the charismatic represents the soft option within the evangelical tradition. The neo-Evangelical tends to hold their evangelicalism lightly in reaction to the perceived extremes of fundamentalism. The neo-Evangelical does not wish to alienate people from Christianity by dogmatism. The neo-Evangelical is concerned about relevance and tends to be convinced by historical and literary arguments about the Bible and Christian history. Fundamentalists and evangelicals would label this perspective as “wishy-washy” or “backsliding”.

Pentecostal

Pentecostalism is an evangelical charismatic reformation movement which usually traces its roots to an outbreak of “tongue-speaking” or glossolalia in Topeka, Kansas, in 1901 under the leadership of Charles Fox Parham. Basically Pentecostals believe that the experience of the 120 on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), known as the “baptism of the Holy Spirit”, should be normative for all Christians. Most Pentecostals believe, furthermore, that the first sign of “initial evidence” of this second baptism is speaking in a language unknown to the speaker. The major milieu out of which Pentecostalism sprang was the worldwide Holiness movement, which had developed out of nineteenth century

American Wesleyan Methodism.

Puritan

Puritanism is a loosely organised reform movement originating during the English Reformation of the sixteenth century. The name comes from the drive to “purify” the “Church of England” by those who felt that the Reformation had been incomplete. The theological roots of puritanism may be found in continental Reformed theology, in a native dissenting traditions descending back to John Wycliffe and the Lollards, but especially in the theological labours of first-generation English reformers of the sixteenth century. From William Tyndale the Puritans took an intense commitment to Scripture and a theology which emphasised the covenant; from John Knox they absorbed a dedication to thorough reform in church and state and from John Hooper they received a determined conviction that Scripture should regulate ecclesiastical structure and personal behaviour alike.

Puritanism generally emphasises four basic convictions that:

1. personal salvation is entirely from God
2. the Bible provides the indispensable guide to life
3. the church should reflect the express teaching of Scripture, and
4. society is one unified whole.

Reformed

The reformed tradition finds its roots initially in the theology of Ulrich Zwingli, the first reformer in Zurich. The key figure in this tradition was John Calvin of Geneva, who in his biblical commentaries, pamphlets and especially in his Institutes of the Christian Religion developed its theological framework. Calvinists, whilst basically agreeing with each other and resembling each other in many ways, have certain differences produced by historical and even geographical circumstances.

The reformed perspective is characterised by its emphasis on the sanctity, veracity and priority of the Bible in practical piety and theology. The theological themes most dominant and intertwined in this tradition are the covenant, creation, election, sovereignty/authority.

The Task of Clarifying the Nature of Thematic Schools

This brief history and explanation of development draws us back to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper which asked why such a unique and significant development in Australian education has been

overlooked in contemporary educational research. Hill expressed the situation with this system of schools in this way:

It is rather surprising that it doesn't get more of a mention in national theorising. The mainstream is uncomfortable with it and doesn't mention it much but it is a significant political factor which people ought to take into account. (Hill, 1993)

Entering the fray in 1962 against Catholic, Arnoldian, non-government and government systems of schooling yet sharing structures common to all has been a difficult margin of differentiation for themelic schoolers. Other schools such as Montessori schools, Steiner schools, progressive schools, ethnic schools and non-Christian religious schools fare better with more clearly established distinctive characteristics and histories.

The themelic school tradition after 32 years of life in Australia still does not have a clearly defined character or history and this constitutes a problem for them and for the education community which wishes to deal with them. The inability of scholars and contemporary researchers like W.F. Connell, David Prideaux, Cathy Speck, Don Anderson and Simon Marginson to determine the nature of these schools with clarity is evidence of this problem.

Why has this been so? Some developments have simply worked against establishing any clear research on the matter.

The reactive response of themelic schools has tended to isolate themelic schoolers from the rest of the educational community. This has been exacerbated by the size of themelic schools and a complementary level of insecurity. This has been further complicated by an uncritical busyness in accelerated development with much time devoted to keeping the machine going and little time for reflection. The general lack of combined theological and educative analysis seems to have also inhibited research. This has been complicated by assumptions made about the nature of historical/social understanding in the academic community committed to materialist/positivist frames of reference. There also seems to be a level of fear/uncertainty by the research community of an academic framework which would allow researchers to explore the theological and socio-political world of fundamentalism. Mayer, Smith and Knight commented about this which I believe contributes to the clouding of the task of understanding themelic schools.

The Confusion Continues

Don Anderson has recently argued, from a sociological perspective, that the growth of the private school sector has destabilised the Australian

system. He argues that:

the private sector has grown over the years in response to two long-standing characteristics of the state public education systems - the limited development of academically selective secondary schools and the growth of large centrally controlled educational bureaucracies (Anderson, 1993, p217)

It is my contention that Anderson's explanation for the development of the private sector of schooling in Australia does not provide an adequate explanation of the origin and growth of thematic schools. These schools have not started and grown entirely for the reasons that Anderson puts forward.

Anderson's perspective on private schools tends to gloss over this substantial new development in non-government schooling and fails to take account of its complex nature. In his paper he makes no mention of Christian Community Schools Ltd (CCS Ltd) or other similar schools in his six school types yet later mentions that CCS Ltd schools are "by far the fastest growing group under the government's New Schools Policy". Anderson classifies schools as elite schools, schools which are committed to the maintenance of particular subcultures, reform or alternative schools, Community (parochial) schools, private venture schools (for a profit) and charity schools.

Anderson is right in his assessment of schools that seek to maintain a particular subculture. This new generation of Christian schools does foster a unique subculture but my contention is that this is only indirectly one of their characteristics. What is foundational for these schools is their ideological and rhetorical commonality. Anderson's understanding of the Christian Community School system is an example of how the unity and breadth of this new movement is misrepresented.

The attitude of dismissing this group of schools is common with many academics. Anderson confirms this when he states that:

In Australia, it appears that the registration of non-government schools by the states is now less perfunctory than it has been and that some practices regarded as objectionable, such as the Australian Christian Education curriculum, have all but disappeared. (ibid, p223)

The truth of the matter is that the Australian Christian Education (properly the Accelerated Christian Education system) curriculum group alone is growing, with 45 schools and more than 4000 home schoolers using their material. (Risser, 1992) The labelling, the dismissive

attitude and the complacency of teachers and education "experts" has done nothing to help establish an understanding of one of the fastest growing education movements in Australia since World War II.

The recent example of Speck and Prideaux (:1993) continues to highlight the failure of academics and educators to explain this new paradigm in schooling. Speck and Prideaux, whilst labelling these schools collectively as fundamentalist, have no explanation of why these schools have survived without the same highly voluble, public and accepted fundamentalist presence as in the United States. Their claim that the "general ethos of fundamentalist schools is one of quiet conservatism" (:1993, p279) runs counter to much of the established research on how militancy constitutes a basic foundation block for

fundamentalism. (Marty, 1991) Their claim that fundamentalist Christian schools were established initially in the 1970's is simply inaccurate and highlights the complete misunderstanding in general of the nature and history of these schools.

Speck and Prideaux make only one mention of CCS and CPCS schools in their paper and concentrate on the curriculum, philosophy of ACE schools and Creation Science as if each is one and the same. Whilst their findings on the ACE system are reasonably accurate, their overall presentation of what constitutes a fundamentalist curriculum completely overlooks the major sectors of the thematic group of schools. The numbers of students in ACE schools constitutes barely 8% of the thematic school movement. The largest thematic school groups of CCS schools and CPCS schools are brushed aside in the paper in one reference.

Some recent histories do not fare much better. Connell in *Reshaping Australian Education 1960-1985* makes next to no mention of these schools yet devotes a substantial section to Christian fundamentalism and the MACOS controversy. In the section Connell devotes to growth in the late 1970's and 1980's he makes one mention of "a proliferation of fundamentalist Christian schools". (Connell, 1993, p634)

Marginson notes that "there was a 41 per cent growth in the number of non-Catholic and non-Anglican schools between 1978 and 1982" (Marginson, 1993, p210). Thematic growth over this period increased from 20 to approximately 150 schools! This rate of growth declined rapidly after the Ryan regulations of 1985. Despite Marginson's point he still makes no mention of this group of schools.

Confusion from Within the Thematic Movement

The difficulty of clarifying the thematic paradigm has been further complicated by some perspectives offered from within thematic schools themselves and this further confuses the picture.

In 1993 Christian Community Schools Ltd organised "The Bicentennial of Christian Schooling in Australia 1793-1993". (CCS Bulletin, 1992) An exploration of the events and celebrations planned for this occasion serve to highlight the differing perspectives amongst thematic schools, particularly the differences between CCS schools and Christian Parent-Controlled schools. This event also serves to draw out the distinctives of thematic schools in contrast to other Christian school models. This comparative investigation also exposes the ways in which thematic schools are different from other Christian private school patterns established in previous eras in Australian history.

It is my contention that any ideological or historical comparison made between modern thematic schools and private schooling established in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries stands on very tenuous grounds. In many ways such a comparison distorts and confuses the distinctiveness of the thematic model.

CCS Ltd believes that the first Christian school in Australia was established by Rev Richard Johnson in 1793 on the 25th August at the dedication of the first school house. (CCS Curriculum News, 1993) Though CCS Ltd acknowledges the existence of education prior to this date there is a clear effort to identify CCS Ltd with this tradition. Johnson's evangelical motivation to establish moral, religious and secular education of the first fleet generation children is

particularly noted. (ibid, p9) At the same time CCS Ltd wish to maintain that this first attempt at Christian schooling was very different to CCS schooling and also modern Anglican schools. (ibid)

What is clear is that this historical anniversary provided an opportunity and justification for CCS Ltd to announce and publicise their existence to the wider community, (Educare News, 1993) which in itself testifies to the nature of the CCS Ltd schools. CCS Ltd schools with their strong Baptist, Evangelical and Charismatic traditions had found an opportunity to have a "rally". One of the central characteristics of this tradition is its charge to "witness" and promote the gospel.

The major event in the "The Bicentennial of Christian Schooling in Australia 1793-1993" sponsored by CCS Ltd and the National Alliance of Christian Leaders (NaCl as in the scientific elements for salt) included a "march of witness" on Friday 17 September where students,

parents and staff marched from the Sydney Domain to a rally and symbolic reenactment at the Opera House via Johnson Square. Students in uniform, floats, banners, bands and placards helped to generate this into a major media event. The rally on the steps of the Opera House, a "service of thanksgiving", included combined choirs and bands, a prominent celebrity host, politicians and a talk by the winner of the Richard Johnson sermon competition. A prayer breakfast and commemorative book and documentary video also helped to engender further community attention to CCS Ltd and their schools. CPCS schools were not committed to this venture.

The summary of the stated purposes of these events (CCS Bulletin, 1992) were to:

1. Celebrate God's faithfulness and to thank Him for those who have laboured before us in Christian education.
2. Remind Australians that our society is founded on Christian beliefs based on the Bible.
3. Celebrate 200 years of Christian education in Australia and to highlight to our community the vital role of Christian schooling in the training of young Australians.
4. Remind government at all levels of the important contribution Christian schooling has made and is making to Australia through its educative efforts and to emphasise that education should not be based on pragmatic or economic expediency.
5. Draw attention to the ongoing need for Christian education today and to challenge parents, teachers and church leaders to become involved in Christian schooling.
6. Challenge all involved in Christian schooling to commit themselves to the vision on which their school was founded and to teachers in particular to manifest that vision in their teaching.

R.J. Frisken, the visionary founder of CCS Ltd, states that the tradition of Christian schooling in Australia has developed in several phases. In the first phase which Frisken calls, "the Christian church faces the problem of the rising generation", he identifies Johnson's evangelical status, support from the church and religious societies, the Christian status of "most" of the early teachers and the moral piety called for by Rev Samuel Marsden in appointing a school master to emigrate from England as somehow precedents common to modern Christian (themelic) schools. The second phase, of "denominational rivalry and

state attempts to bring compromise solutions", recognises the strong influence of the Church and Schools Corporation in the early development of schools in the 1820's. Frisken recognises that in this phase seeds were sown for the future foundation of a state system. He draws attention to the Irish national scheme making careful note that

under this scheme the Bible would be “severely censored”. Frisken asserts that the gold rush era brought in a new wave of irreligion and democratic demand for public education.

In the third phase, of “the 1880 Public Instruction Act and the principle of religious neutrality”, Frisken surveys the beginning of secular education in Australia and the corresponding response of some churches to establish private schools which originally had a strong Christian base. Frisken asserts that in time these schools have lost, through a sacred/religious dichotomy their potential to present Christianity in a holistic and relevant way. Frisken’s survey highlights the remnants of a Christian base that still remained in state schools in the 1960’s in Primary curriculum and was manifest in such traditions as school prayers, hymns and scripture classes in N.S.W. Many of Frisken’s perspectives are gleaned from Allen S Robert's small pamphlet Australia’s First Hundred Years: The Era of Christian Schools. (:1980)

Roberts states in his preface:

It is not widely known that education in Australia was first established not by government, but by the Christian church. In this brief survey, the history of Australia’s Christian day school movement is traced from its colonial beginnings to the year 1880 when government education officially began. The survey reveals that the Bible-based church-related school in early colonial times was remarkably successful in meeting the academic and spiritual/moral needs of the younger generation of that day. It also shows that when certain principles undergirding this Christian school movement were disregarded, Australian education began to lose its dynamic. It suggested that this Christian dynamic can and must be restored to Australian education today. (ibid)

This perspective reveals several factors worth noting for discussion concerning the distinctives of thematic schooling and differences in thematic schools as well as between thematic schools and other Christian schools. These factors are:

- 1.The idea of “Bible-based and church-related” particularly appeals to the CCS school tradition.
- 2.A simplistic approach to history permeates the thematic school movement.
- 3.The so called “deterioration of education” with the introduction of a secular perspective.
- 4.A naive and narrow understanding of successful education that is unrealistic about historical context and transposition.
- 5.The concept of revivalism more common to the evangelical tradition present in this perspective would not appeal to the CPCS school model.

Several simple factors have been overlooked in the perspective of CCS Ltd schools in this matter, which smacks more of opportunism and wishful projection than good historical method or sense. The assertion by CCS Ltd and its Executive Director, Bob Frisken, that the first schools in Australia were uniquely like the new generation of Christian “themelic” schools and somehow comparable passes over some very

significant evidence:

1. Johnson, other clergy and the affairs of the church were payrolled by the state.
2. The early schoolmasters were put on the pay-roll of the N.S.W. corps.
3. The early schools set up by the London Missionary Society were directly funded by the colonial government.
4. The general interest and some funding of education in the 18th century was also generated by considerable philanthropic, not necessarily Christian or evangelical, interests.
5. In the period of the first settlement of Australia the Church of England was the Established church, the national church. The early schools did not have to compete in a pluralistic or a denominational market.
6. The motive of social transformation of the convict class was an important factor in the establishment and modification of educational practice. In 1792 80% of the population were considered criminals including the first school teachers, who were mostly women.
7. Governor Phillip set aside 1000 acres specifically for schooling, as well as contributing grants and administering fees. Such grants of land were awarded to the church under its state church monopoly.

8. The concept of evangelicalism and fundamentalism after the 1920's which is present particularly in themelic schools is significantly different than the idea of an evangelical (missionary) of the 18th century.
9. The notion of education and schooling in the 18th century was primitive and is not wisely compared to the educational context of the 20th century.
10. The changed nature of society, politics, technology, anthropology, psychology, theology, science and ecclesiology over a period of 200 years prevent any real comparison, especially with themelic schools.

The rise of themelic schools simply cannot be understood within this kind of comparison. Themelic schools since 1962 and comparisons with the development of the first church school in Sydney in 1793 made by Frisken are historically and theologically unsound.

New Low Fee Paying Protestant Christian Schools

To date the only scholarship which has come close to a thorough and clear analysis of themelic schools has come from Murray Oswald of the University of South Australia. His paper delivered to the ATEA Conference in Adelaide in 1990 entitled *The Growth of the New Low-Fee Paying Protestant Independent Schools in South Australia: 1972-1989 (:1990)* serves as a useful starting point for any outsider wishing to explore and understand these schools. Oswald's masters thesis *The Emergence of New Low-fee Protestant Independent Schools in South Australia Since 1972 (:1990)*, explores the characteristics of these schools in depth and makes sound judgements about their reasons for development.

Oswald's work is important for several reasons. First because he recognises the distinctive difference of these schools and some of the causes for their development. His main characteristic of identity is attributed to their fee level rather than a difference in tradition, theological and epistemological foundation. Secondly because he intentionally groups these schools together in a comparative study. The third thing Oswald does that is valuable is his statistical and demographic work and some projections he makes about possible future developments in themelic schooling in South Australia. The fourth

important matter which Oswald establishes is that these schools are not to be grouped with other systems of Protestant church schooling.

Conclusion

It has been the purpose of this paper to map out the development of a new schooling system in Australia which has developed since 1962. I have attempted to give a brief analysis of the general character of this new generation of Christian schools. I have argued that this new system of schools is unique and different than other school systems in Australia. It is my view that the convergence of Protestant theological traditions since the 1960's and the movement to establish new Christian schools has created a group of schools that are "themelic" in character.

It is my contention that these schools ought to be understood within a socio-political, historical, educational and theological frame of reference. I have argued that an understanding of the development of themelic schools in Australia has been clouded by several factors not the least of which is current research in the educational community which has not helped to clarify the picture. I have also made it clear that some factors in themelic schooling have been just as confusing in establishing an understanding of themelic schools.

It is my hope that further research into the nature of these schools

and the establishment of a thematic history will foster better understanding between thematic schools and the educational community. The fact that thematic schools have centralised systems, substantial financial interests and political will and are currently moving into the teacher training market warrants the attention of educators and education policy makers.

At this stage of the thematic story there has not been an adequate assessment of the effect of educational policy on thematic movements. There is still insufficient understanding between thematic schools, the academic community and the government. Much more needs to be done to clear the air, reduce confusion and induce productive dialogue.

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1These principles are stated despite the fact that there was no canon of the Bible or modern notion of schooling at the time of the writing of Ephesians. Such difficulties do not concern the thematic hermeneutic which tends to see the Bible as universal/beyond time.