

EDITORIAL

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Christian schools are essentially faith-based learning communities. If I were limited to selecting only two defining characteristics of Christian schools, what would they be?

First, Jesus is their corner-stone. And every member of the learning community represents a building block that contributes to or diminishes the authenticity of the school's mission and the effectiveness of its program. Long before social systems theory¹ was contemplated, the apostle Paul—using an anatomy analogy wrote:

The whole body depends on Christ, and all the parts of the body are joined and held together. Each part does its own work to make the whole body grow and be strong with love. (Ephesians 4:16, New Century Version)

In contrasting language, Nobel Prize winning Irish poet W. B. Yeats, reflecting upon the chaotic state of society in his mystic poem, *The second coming*, declared: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold”. Indeed, the centre of Christian schools “cannot hold”, unless Christ is *their centre*; without that centrality they will have lost their *raison d'être*.

Second, Christian schools are staffed by Christian teachers. I am convinced they play a pivotal role in Christian education; without them it is a hamstrung enterprise. I would like to propose several traits and qualities that characterise Christian teachers in their various roles. Christian teachers, I believe, are:

- **committed**—serving students, parents and the extended school community, to whom they are accountable in their ministry of teaching.
- **caring**—providing effective pastoral nurture and care²; and also seeking to develop authentic and appropriate relationships with students, parents and colleagues.
- **Christian**—having a personal relationship with their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and possessing a faith grounded in biblical Christianity, as presented in the canon of Old and New Testament Scripture. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, teachers should be able to introduce others to Jesus.
- **competent**—exhibiting proficiency in knowledge, understandings and skills, as well as in teaching-learning strategies and assessment methods relative to their specialist subject area/s. They are also able to integrate faith-related perspectives into their classroom teaching and personal lives.
- **critical-reflective**—thinking deeply about their

teaching-learning practices and willing to make changes to benefit learners.

- **collegial**—acting as team players, who promote a sense of community and inclusiveness in learning, professional and social environments.
- **creative and culturally aware**—teaching topics and subject content by engaging learners through interesting, motivating and effective teaching-learning strategies; presenting the everlasting Gospel in fresh ‘packages’ relevant to students who live in a post-modern world.
- **contemporary-workplace-oriented**—understanding and responding positively to the challenges of a changing society that include, among other things, legislation and directives ranging from privacy issues, child protection matters and internet filters, to accountability, documentation and allergies awareness—just to name a few. All of these impact schools.

Teachers of such qualities and stature will transform “the kingdom of nothingness”³ into a kingdom of nothing less than one ruled by the principles of Him who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. These teachers will make “a world of difference”⁴, and contribute to building a different world. **TEACH**

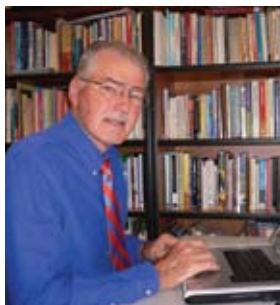
Endnotes

¹ The theory conceives social systems (e.g. schools) as being “comprised of interdependent parts, characteristics and activities that contribute to and receive from the whole”; Hoy, W. & Miskel, C. (1991). *Educational Administration*. New York: McGraw Hill.

² One of Jesus’ most severe criticisms was reserved for professionals who exhibited affective neutrality, or just common disregard for others—as made abundantly clear in the story of The Good Samaritan.

³ An interesting term used by historian Manning Clark to portray sections of Australian society in the 1870s and 1890s. See Cathcart, M. (1995). *Manning Clark’s history of Australia*—abridged from the six volume classic. Ringwood, Vic: Penguin Books Australia, p.372, p.392.

⁴ Refer to Don Roy’s article in this issue.



Postscript—It has been a pleasure and privilege to act as editor of *TEACH* for its first year of publication. Lana Hibbard will be taking on this role henceforth.

“The two defining characteristics of Christian schools are their Christ-centredness and their Christian teachers”

[Photography: Janet Rieger]