



**THEOLOGY AND
PEDAGOGY OF HOPE:**

A VISION FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Christian Education is about formation... of a people who desire the kingdom of God, and thus undertake their vocations as an expression of that desire.¹

In New Zealand, the Christian schooling sector is an influential and growing sector in primary and secondary education, with over 400 schools in place across the country.² Certainly in these schools and in many state schools, there are Christian teachers invested in understanding how teaching and learning can be meaningfully embedded in Christian vision. There are many concerns at stake, particularly in reconciling how one might teach from within the Christian vision, and how to remain relevant to and in dialogue with the wider education sector, educational research and discourse and of course, the authorities and policy makers in New Zealand education, such as the Ministry of Education and the Education Council. Not only must teaching be authentically and meaningfully housed in a Christian philosophy of teaching and learning, but it must also (for the greater majority of Christian integrated schools) somehow align constructively with New Zealand educational expectations. These expectations include the NZ Curriculum, the Practising Teacher Criteria and Code of Ethics and the secular vision of New Zealand education that is currently oriented towards quality, future-focussed teaching and learning within a social justice frame.

Amongst the variety of approaches and methods concerning how to teach both as a Christian and from the place of Christian vision, a theological approach invites teachers into a discourse that powerfully interprets the values and virtues of contemporary teaching practices in light of 2000 years of theological discourse and application. Theology wrestles not only with the concept of God is but also with the nature of humanity and humanity's relation to God and World. Christian education richly imbued with theological depth has much to offer if aligned with critical pedagogy that focuses much of its weight on matters of social justice. A theological approach

that invites teachers to explore a pedagogy and theology of hope is an exciting space to realise a new social imaginary, such as critically and culturally responsive Christian schooling that successfully prepares the next generation for a changing world. A philosophy grounded in a Christian theology of hope has the potential to energize Christian teachers with renewed agency and purpose in the classroom and school community. It also nuances the way in which they encounter children and whanau, their valuing of teaching, life-long learning and the inherent value in knowledge. If this can occur with reference to a Freirean conception of education as the practice of freedom, teachers might make meaningful in their own practice the theological pillars of Christian tradition and concurrently integrate these resonant theological beliefs and values with such standards as the Practising Teacher Criteria. Together these lenses on the social practice of teaching work towards a transformative educational philosophy and orientation for teachers providing a platform for astute, hopeful and innovative teaching practices.

What follows in this article is one approach to a theology of teaching and learning centred on the New Testament values of Faith, Hope and Love (*whakapono, tu manako, and aroha*) of 1 Cor 13:13, and these interwoven with the theological concepts of Trinity, Incarnation and Resurrection.³ These three theological concepts are drawn into a Christian philosophy of teaching that shapes and defines the values, attitudes and beliefs. These can scaffold the flow of theory, professional knowledge and pedagogy through the lens of the Practising Teacher Criteria and the Code of Ethics into faithful, authentic, innovative and richly bicultural teaching practice.

TRINITY

...the three divine persons exist with one another, for one another and in one another. They exist in one another because they mutually give each other space for full unfolding. By existing mutually in each

THE CONCEPT OF THE TRINITY IS A WAY OF UNDERSTANDING LOVE IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT AND PRACTICE.

1 James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 34.

2 Currently there are over 332 integrated schools and eighty-eight private schools registered by the Ministry of Education. Almost all these schools are special character schools, and the vast majority of these are Christian. Catholic schools are the most populous in this sector, and the number of integrated and private schools in the Protestant Christian schooling sector is growing strongly. *Education Counts*, (Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2016), www.educationcounts.govt.nz.

3 This article represents the outcome of the Theological Framework for Teaching Project carried out in the School of Social Practice as part of the five-yearly programme report (Conceptual Framework for Teacher Education) presented to the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand in October 2016. I would like to thank the School of Social Practice and particularly the Education team for valuable time spent in discussion, debate and critical reflection. I would also like to thank Carl Becker of Kingsway Trust for his enthusiastic support and counsel.

other, they form their unique Trinitarian fellowship.⁴

The concept of Trinity is a way of understanding love in Christian thought and practice. It includes an appreciation of the particularity of persons, but also an appreciation of the relatedness of persons in community. In Trinitarian theology, the divine persons “mutually give each other space for full unfolding.”⁵ This mutuality and sharing of space incorporates the value of reciprocity equally vital in the teaching-learning relationship. The concept of Trinity also embodies the dynamics of relationship or relatedness between subjects. This relationality leads to a theological view of relational anthropology that highlights such values as authenticity, the importance of encounter in which “self is never lost in the face of the other”⁶ and where the uniqueness of persons is celebrated. The social Trinity, with its emphasis on illuminating the uniqueness of each person while drawing them together, can be understood as the ground of the Christian practice of relational communion. Christian approaches to teaching and learning as “communion” can be explained as an enriched orientation to the other that values “being with” (rather than “for” or “in spite of” the other). Communion is a concept embraced by Paulo Freire in his educational philosophy. He conceives of communion as the value of “being with the other”—to be “in communion”—which requires authentic, genuine encounter in the learning environment in the spirit of inclusion and embrace.⁷ However, this kind of teaching practice founded on a social and Trinitarian understanding of communion needs to be reflective; “those who commit themselves... must examine themselves constantly.”⁸ It is an eminently dialogical and critically reflective practice in which for Freire, the Word has the potential to transform the World.

Being in communion with the other in Christian thought aspires to the kind of love represented in the

4 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 298.

5 Ibid.

6 Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyn King & Kevin S. Rimer, *The Reciprocating Self* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2016), 36.

7 The celebrated work of Miroslav Volf is of value in understanding how the theology engages the experience of otherness and difference, and how this might be applied meaningfully to the educational concept of inclusion. See Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

8 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope* (London: Bloomsbury, 1994), 60.

Trinitarian fellowship. The Trinitarian paradigm of love is expressed in the educational values of *whaiwāhitanga*, relationality, commitment to community, encounter and responsive reciprocity in practice. *Whaiwāhitanga* refers to learning environments that are characterised by participating and contributing. These environments are inclusive, invitational spaces where teacher, children and whanau are connected “via a sense of place and space.”⁹ It is this belonging, ownership and self-efficacy developing in learning environments that constitutes *whaiwāhitanga*. *Whaiwāhitanga* coalesces productively and responsively with the Christian theological conception of trinity.

Recognition of teaching and learning as *Ako* is embedded in a core trinitarian quality of reciprocity and mutuality in this conceptual framework. *Ako* designates teaching and learning as a relationship that requires a responsive and reciprocal flow between teacher and learner. In this relationship,

both must teach and learn from the other in a shared space that makes way for a full unfolding of potential in authentic encounter. These teaching practices are informed by research, and are “deliberate and

reflective” in ways that lead to increased achievement outcomes for all learners.¹⁰ In this conception of teaching and learning as *Ako*, the teacher is responsive to whanau and community as a vital part of and resource for the learning world of ākongā. On this platform transformative and innovative teaching and learning can take place.

INCARNATION

The incarnate one is the glorified God. ‘The Word was made flesh and we beheld his glory.’ God glorifies himself in man. That is the ultimate secret of the Trinity. The humanity is now taken up into the Trinity. Not from all eternity, but ‘from now even unto eternity,’ the Trinitarian God is seen as the incarnate one. The glorification of God in the flesh is now at the same time, the glorification of man, who shall have life through eternity with the Trinitarian God.¹¹

9 Angus Macfarlane, “The Experiences of Maori Students in the Middle Years,” in *Big Fish, Little Fish: Teaching and Learning in the Middle Years*, ed. Susan Groundwater-Smith and Nicole Mockler (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 175.

10 *Ka Hikitia*, (Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2013), 15.

11 Deitrich Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 105.

Incarnation is the Christian basis for faith. Incarnation refers to the life, birth, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Christian teachers are people for whom Christian faith grounds identity. In the theological conception of incarnation, social reality is alterable in Jesus Christ. A Christian social imaginary is not a flight of fancy, but is in Christ a realisable future. Christian teachers see that their lives are shaped by encounter with the incarnate Christ through engagement with scripture, prayer, worship and community. Incarnation facilitates Jesus' identification with humanity and through this identification, in reciprocation, humanity also actualises a new identity. With this new identity, agency in society can be realised and recreation enacted. For Bonhoeffer, this is the beginning of Christian ethics, which go beyond the reality of self, norms or values but are invested "in the reality of God in his self-revelation Jesus Christ".¹² Further, these ethics are educational in that teaching is by nature a social activity.

If Christian teachers have developed critical consciousness grounded in Christian ethics then they are capable of acting constructively in the world, such as realising a socially-just imaginary, breath by breath and space by space. Bonhoeffer's connecting of Christian ethics and social agency intersect with Freire's notion of incarnation in education. For Freire, incarnation is necessarily present between theory and practice, inviting authenticity into the teaching and learning relationship. A rich understanding of the theological concept of incarnation invites teachers to participate authentically in education as an ethical practice. Christian teachers can participate in the possibility of new educational realities where ākongā are drawn into the pursuit of education as the practice of freedom "calling us out of and beyond ourselves".¹³

Incarnation as a formative theology and pedagogy flows into teaching practice via the values of *wairuatanga*, inclusion and diversity, context and culture, knowledge and praxis. Children are unique, relational human beings living and learning in the context of a changing society. Children are society's hopeful future. Christian teachers impact communities through their faith when they celebrate diversity and educate inclusively from the place of an authentic, dynamic and hopeful orientation towards society and the world. In this way teaching is incarnate and embodied and embedded in a rich social imaginary. Christian education becomes a

holistic endeavour that engages the whole person, whānau and community in a process of becoming, through desires and dreams, imagination, awakening knowledge and in our active relation with society.¹⁴

Wairuatanga refers to a belief in teaching that seeks the flourishing of the whole child in education of which spirituality is at the centre. This theological approach emphasises a holistic engagement of the child in teaching and learning. A teacher's motivation towards *wairuatanga* is embedded in a theological conception of incarnation which invested in the holistic potential of all ākongā.

RESURRECTION

That is why faith, wherever it develops into hope, causes not rest but unrest, not patience but impatience. It does not calm the unquiet heart, but is itself this unquiet heart in man. Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it. Peace with God means conflict with the world, for the good of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present.¹⁵

Resurrection is the Christian basis for hope. The Christian school could be a place where teachers might be described as people of hope who, in community, strive towards a new and creative reality characterized by beauty, justice, freedom and rest – "...perception born of hope perceives the possibilities of the new day, of the new life and of the new creation".¹⁶ In a theological approach, these beliefs centred on resurrection hope lead to values of *waikanaetanga*, flourishing, creativity, justice and freedom. Christian teachers can richly develop and critically engage professional philosophies, knowledges and practices of teaching and learning framed by a theology of hope. Hope is a dynamic concept but becomes even more powerful and productive when it is grounded in teaching practice and in the teaching and learning environment. A theology of hope, inspired by resurrection, motivates teachers to value curiosity, creativity and critical problem solving in their students. This approach privileges a teaching practice that is holistic not mechanistic, an art rather than simple set of

¹⁴ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 39.

¹⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 22.

¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Living God and the Fullness of Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 184. See also, the Laidlaw Graduate Profile available at <https://www.laidlaw.ac.nz/about-us/graduate-profile/>.

¹² Bonhoeffer, *Christ the Center*, 33–34.

¹³ Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 25.

techniques, because it is not enough to only develop the intellect and the behaviour of the child, but the child's very potentiality.¹⁷ Christian teachers are in the critical role of drawing the next generation to their potential and this is facilitated most when they are passionate about teaching and learning and the teacher-learner relationship. Christian teachers operating from a rich, dynamic and hopeful theology of teaching provide innovative, creative and participatory learning environments where children might flourish along multiple dimensions. This is an outworking of Christian philosophical emphases on a pedagogy of hope that originates from a theological centre of resurrection. A theology and pedagogy of hope empowers Christian teachers to persevere, inquire, reflect and act in often challenging school settings. Teachers are encouraged to create learning environments in which curiosity is "encouraged, developed and sustained" and furthermore, to be curious and inquiring of their own practice, activating a critical consciousness of culture and contexts, with reflection on action that facilitates "opening up thinking, changing practice and creating dramatically more innovative approaches to teaching and learning".¹⁸

Waikanaetanga refers to the aspiration of creating teaching and learning spaces that provide equilibrium, balance and bring peace and freedom to learners. Deep and constructive awareness of contextual factors that impact on *waikanaetanga* in the classroom is characteristic of a richly theological Christian philosophy of teaching. Critical consciousness is an important mediator in reflection that transforms teaching practices towards creating a learner experience of affirmation, celebration of diversity, liberation and justice. *Waikanaetanga* aligns with the theological conception of resurrection. The hope that is made meaningful by the resurrection empowers teachers and learners to act on the world in such a way that the goal of *waikanaetanga* can become a reality.

A philosophy of teaching is important because it has the potential to energize and focus teaching practice. When teaching practice is meaningfully embedded in Christian vision, a world of opportunities enters the realm of the possible. At the core of this particular theological approach founded on faith, hope and love, is the authentic connection

of thought and practice so that as Kathryn Tanner writes in *Christ the Key*, Jesus Christ as Word becomes "more than a paradigm for what is involved here; he becomes for us the very means."¹⁹

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17 Deborah Fraser, "The Work and Artistry of Teaching," in *The Professional Practice of Teaching in New Zealand*, eds. Deborah Fraser and Mary Hill (South Melbourne, Vic: Cengage Learning, 2016), 56-78.

18 H. S. Timperley & J. Halbert, *A Framework for Transforming Learning in Schools: Innovation and the Spiral of Inquiry* Melbourne, Australia: Centre for Strategic Education, 2014), 4.

19 Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14.