

# Wholeness of Life (1)



We conclude this morning our consideration of what wholeness and well-being can mean in relation to what we are doing in the classroom.

## Learning and knowing together

In our second session yesterday, we saw how relationships come to the fore. Nick Wolterstorff said that 'Shalom is enjoyment in one's relationships' so we teach for shalom as we develop a community of learning in our classroom.

A few weeks ago, I went to have my hair cut. Yes, I can hear you saying, 'What hair?!' My eyebrows seem to take longer than my hair these days! I do have photographic evidence that it was not always thus! I found that my regular barber was on holiday and a young man was standing in for him temporarily, a locum barber, if you like. He asked me if I had the day off. I told him that I was self-employed so could pick and choose when to go to have my hair cut. He asked what I did and I explained that I worked with teachers. At the mention of the word 'teacher', he launched into an enthusiastic report on a teacher he had at college who was just great. She could motivate you to learn - she was amazing!

I thought of how, a few years ago, the then TTA had a slogan in its efforts to recruit teachers which was 'Nobody forgets a good teacher'. Before we go on, I want to test this out. I want you for a few moments to think about the best teacher you ever had - in school or college or church or even home. Think about him or her. Picture them in your mind's eye. Listen to them in your mind's ear. Write just a few words to sum up what it was about this teacher that made you choose them from all the teachers you have ever had.

What kinds of things did you write?

Parker Palmer tells of how he often does this exercise with teachers. One day, a teacher put her hand up and said she couldn't sum up her good teachers because they were all different. But her bad teachers were all the same! They were like cartoon story characters with their words somewhere in the air near them. They were disconnected from what they were saying, what they were teaching, and they

were disconnected from those whom they were teaching.

When I say 'teacher' and 'Christian teacher', can I make it clear that I am not thinking only of professional teachers - Timothy had a great teacher in his grandmother Lois.

John then read from **John 10:1 - 18**

Ever since Miss Thompson, my teacher in primary school, got me to learn this passage off by heart, it has been one of my favourites.

And I have seen the reality of what is talked about here in my brother, a dairy-farmer, and his knowledge of his cows and theirs of him and his deep care for those animals that he has known from birth. They know him but they get uneasy when I go in as a stranger.

Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full". (John 10: 10) Or, as it is in the AV from which I would learned it as a boy, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly".

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*"At the mention of the word 'teacher', he launched into an enthusiastic report on a teacher he had at college who was just great. She could motivate you to learn - she was amazing!"*

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Life in all its fullness! I googled this phrase to see what translation it came from but without success. On the second page up, Google told me that there is a conference in Coventry over the weekend 19-21 September. Perhaps I could ask somebody there!

We quote this verse often, especially in evangelism. What did Jesus mean? Long life - mere length of days? Would it not be acceptable to paraphrase it as "I am come that they might have shalom"?!



## Wholeness of Life (2)



### Three dimensions of teaching for wholeness

We turn in this final session to the third dimension of wholeness, the wholeness of our lives, the different phases of our lives and all the different activities in which we engage in our lives.

Think of all the different phase of our lives from birth to death.

Think about all the diverse kinds of activities in which we engage in the course of a year.

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*We need to see life as a whole,  
a whole which finds its unity  
in God our Creator.*

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Homemaking, sports, work, worship, holidays, ...  
Our lives are have such variety in terms of kinds of activity and of ages and stages..

- Work
- Leisure
- Family and social life
- Private and public life
- Inactivity and illness
- Retirement and old age
- Living and dying. . .

Is there any of these in which God is not interested? Is there any of these to which his shalom may not extend?

Is there any of these to which education should not relate?

I remember when I was working on my MA, there was another student, Rev Eric Lindsay, an Anglican vicar who was known to all as 'Eric the Cleric'. His MA dissertation was on 'Education for Death'. I remember hearing when I was a lad

growing up in Ireland that there used to be a saying in Cork: 'These Protestants die well'.

And as with our perspective on God's world and the development of the whole person, there are twin problems that tend to affect our thinking and action.

Once again, the first problem with our approach to teaching is that we compartmentalise our lives, we separate the different kinds of activity and we lose sight of the wholeness of life.

For example, we separate the spiritual activities of worship and prayer from our working lives or our leisure activities.

The book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible shows us that each of these aspects considered on its own is meaningless. We need to see life as a whole, a whole which finds its unity in God our Creator.

And once again, the second problem is that we make certain aspects important at the expense of others, the problem of reductionism.

**God is concerned with all aspects of our lives, not just our working lives**

But God is concerned with our whole lives, with all the different kinds of activity in life, and not just with our working lives.

Governments tend to view education merely as a means of producing an educated work force because they see the national economy as the most important thing.

And as teachers, we find the main justification for teaching certain subjects as being that they will help us in future employment or they will provide entrance to 'better jobs'.

But education is important for our leisure activities too, for our family lives and our wider social relations, for the retirement phase of our lives after we have ceased from employment.

And what about Eric the Cleric's education for death as well as for life? Would you say to a child with a terminal illness that schooling was no longer of any importance to him or her?!



## Wholeness of Life (3)



**God is concerned with all aspects of our lives, not just our personal devotional lives**

As Christian educators, we may go to another extreme. We make the spiritual aspects of life the most important.

What we do in our places of employment is only important if it is a means of witness to Christ.

In his very helpful booklet entitled *Supporting Christians at Work*, Mark Greene quotes a teacher who says, "I spend an hour a week teaching Sunday school and they haul me up to the front of the church to pray for me. The rest of the week I'm a full-time teacher and the church has never prayed for me."

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*"Two men from a local church go abroad. We pray for the missionary. We regret the businessman's absence from the mid-week meeting."*

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Rob Warner of the Kairos Church in Wimbledon says this: "Two men from a local church go abroad. We pray for the missionary. We regret the businessman's absence from the mid-week meeting."

Along the same lines, John Smith ... now there's a name! This is the John Smith who is UK Director of the Evangelical Alliance! He says that we need a paradigm shift, a total change in the way we think about ourselves as church. "The paradigm shift from gathered to dispersed is about a change from focusing on meetings to releasing people to be Christians where they are: office, factory, school or shop."

### The Great Divide

Mark Greene of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity writes, "SSD Syndrome ... is, I believe, the greatest cultural challenge facing the church". I think he is right.

He goes on to say, "SSD Syndrome pervades the whole church. And pretty much everyone I know has had it and

is a carrier. I've had it. And I struggle against it all the time." Again, I think he is right.

Here is Mark Greene's definition: "SSD is the sacred-secular divide: the pervasive belief that some parts of our life are not really important to God - work, school, leisure - but anything to do with prayer, church services, church-based activities is." (By the way, you can find this article on the London Institute's website at [www.licc.org.uk](http://www.licc.org.uk).)

Contrast that view with what Martin Luther says. "In making shoes the cobbler serves God, obeys his calling from God, just as much as the preacher."

Brother Lawrence said in *The Practice of the Presence of God*, "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess GOD in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Supper."

I once heard of somebody who had a sign over their kitchen sink: "Divine service is performed here three times a day". I guess the same applies even if it is only a matter of filling the dishwasher and emptying it again!

Do you remember that moment in the film *Chariots of Fire* when Eric Liddle is depicted as saying to his sister Jenny, "God made me fast and when I run I feel his pleasure".

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*"We need a sense of the holy in the humdrum, the sacred in the everyday."*

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### Colossians 3:23

We need a sense of the holy in the humdrum, the sacred in the everyday. In Colossians 3:23, Paul writes, 'Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.' Whatever you do, ... it is the Lord Christ you are serving!



## Wholeness of Life (4)



### Work is ...

We have too narrow a view of work. Work is reduced to paid employment but John Stott defines work as "... the expenditure of energy in the service of others which brings fulfilment to the worker, benefit to the community and glory to God". We find fulfilment in our work and rightly so. We serve the community in our work and it is good, very good, that we do. And in all of this, it is Him that we serve and glorify.

All of life is sacred - the holy is in the humdrum!

What we have ended up with here is a more holistic view of life and work where work is not reduced to mere paid employment and life is seen as service in relationship with God's world and other people and God Himself.

*Question: How can we better educate our children and young people towards this more holistic view of life and work, life in all its fullness?*

### Teaching for Wholeness

So in conclusion, I would appeal to you to teach for all three dimensions of wholeness.

#### Teaching for a whole perspective on God's world

Teach so that your students have a whole perspective on the wonderful world into which God has put us in all its many and varied aspects.

#### Teaching for the development of the whole person

Teach so that your students are developed as whole persons, not merely as brains or souls that inhabit bodies.

#### Teaching for the whole of life

Teach so that the whole of life and all its varied activities are seen as being important.

Don't let the world squeeze you into one of its many moulds that distort God's world, that deform human beings and reduce life to activity in employment.

### Session Ends

