

**ORGANIZATION OR COMMUNITY: ANALYSIS AND ACTION**

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*1 Cor 13:13 "These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."*

**1| Introduction**

I quote from the mission statement of one Anglican school:

*This college "provides an education within a caring, ordered Christian family environment where the Christian values are maintained in an Anglican context, where each member of the college community is affirmed, valued and challenged....."*

This quotation is representative of many of our mission and vision statements.

Easy to say, but I put to you, very difficult to do.

This paper aims to make explicit what we are claiming and to provoke some practical ideas about achieving the ideals we claim for our schools.

When I browsed the schools' websites I was impressed see how explicitly Christian the aims and mission of most of our schools are.

To take two example from here in South Australia:

Woodlands claims to be a "*community built around the values and traditions of the Anglican Church.*"

Pedare: "*Our mission is to make known the love of God through Christ, to develop students spiritually, educational, physically and socially.*"

**2| Faith, Hope and Love**

These words are the theme for this conference but what do they mean?

In fact they may very well mean different things to different people and perhaps we should not presume we are talking the same language in using them. They may actually be phatic and sentimental rather than convey real content.

So as a starting point, let me define these words in their original context at the end of 1 Corinthians 13.

- The passage follows an extended discourse on the Body of Christ, which is used as a metaphor for the Christian community. Thus it is talking about the qualities of faith, hope and love as characteristics of Christians in relationship together. They are specifically Christian definitives.

- The primacy of **love** is asserted, and in 1 Cor 13 verses 4 – 6, love is defined in very practical terms – patient, kind, not jealous or boastful, not arrogant or rude, not insisting on its own way, not irritable or resentful, believing, hoping, enduring.”

Love is not here a feeling; it is **action**.

- What is **faith**? In chapter 13 it is not defined but assumed. However in chapter 15 it is looked at more substantially: “Christ died, was raised...and if Christ has not been raised, your **faith** is in vain.” Plainly the content of faith is Jesus Christ, especially resurrected and alive. Faith in New Testament terms is not a wish for the future, or belief in possible goodness, it is a commitment to Jesus being alive. Commitment is an action word; what you are committed to affects your actions.
- So what is **hope**? One particular (non-Anglican) school I once taught in, made much of being positive and hoping for the future. If you dreamed positive things, they would happen was a repeated message in a range of motivational talks. In 1 Corinthians hope is alluded to in v 10, “when the perfect comes”, but is more concretely defined in Paul’s other writing. Romans 8:23,24 states that “We wait for the redemption of our bodies, for in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope for who hopes for what he sees.” Hope in this context is also centred on actions, an active and patient waiting, an enduring of suffering and a turning to God in prayer (v26). Hope has a future orientation, in particular a belief in our resurrection.

In summary if we are talking in Christian terms and not sentimental touchy-feely jargon, faith, hope and love have very specific content, centring around Christ; around the salvation he offers, its behavioural implications as we follow him, and its future consummation in heaven, or the Age to Come.

If we are going to be practical about Christian communities in schools, we must have this concrete dimension clearly directing and motivating our relationships and organisations.

### **3| The tension of Community versus Organization**

Just as these terms can be used in a fairly emotive and contentless manner, so talk about community can avoid the hard issues of what happens in practice.

#### **a) Organization**

Schools, in fact, are not intrinsically communities. I want to explore briefly the meaning of schools as organisations, because that is what they are. They arose in their present form in response to modernist social forces. Although many were founded by Christian communities such as the religious orders, in the last 50 years no school operating like this has survived.

I remember when doing research at St Andrew’s Cathedral School in Sydney, at marveling at how tiny that little choir school was in the 1940s, and how the pressure of government requirements, particularly for science education in the 1960s, drastically changed the nature of the school. Within one generation it could have been characterized as moving from community to organization.

Organizations in the modern world are groups of people structured to achieve a **task**. Fundamentally, the modern organisation or corporation is in the business (and I use the word deliberately) of producing something.

Weber is the seminal thinker on this, and defined organization as a hierarchy or bureaucracy, where control is exercised through authority in order to meet the production goals. Thus channels of authority through which power is exercised are a defining characteristic of an organisation, which is why we have “school politics.”

Even a service organisation is dedicated to producing a product but in this case the product is consumed as it is produced and is intangible. (Hatch, 1997, p132) That is very much the nature of the “product” of education, especially the qualities of character that schools aspire to develop in students.

Schein, who is the guru on modern organizational culture theorizing, claims that organizations develop their patterns or systems in order to solve their problems of external adaptation and internal integration.

The particular “adaptation” which Anglican schools make is to accommodate the social demands of education by meeting society’s declared needs. The purpose of modern schools is to enculturate young people into the knowledge and values which will equip them to be contributing members of Australian society. Schools are about careers, high marks, producing confident initiators who can make their mark on the world and achieve things for themselves (mostly) although there are passing nods to achieving for the good of the greater society.

The societal embeddedness of schools is very obvious when governments state their aims for schools, whether it be the engendering of democratic ideas, being a “clever country” scientifically or fighting the war on child obesity.

In other words, our schools bear all the marks of the modernist organisation. They are:

- task-centred
- product-based
- complex and multi-dimensional
- based around hierarchies of power
- competitive and market-aware
- responding to pressures from outside such as governments and social context
- staffed by people with differentiated roles and functions
- departmentalized (extremely so in secondary schools)
- concerned with working conditions, pay and employment
- concerned with client satisfaction
- concerned with their image and to be seen as worthwhile enterprises.

My point is simply to recognize that the normal school is firstly an organization. There is nothing wrong with organizations *per se*, but we can be guilty of category errors when we talk “community” without recognizing the organizational reality.

**Modern schools are not naturally communities, and we have to be deliberate and intentional to turn them into communities.**

#### b) Community

By contrast a community is centered around common values and feelings among its members.

A community, according to the dictionaries, is “ a social group who reside together and have a common life, culture, heritage; like-minded people, a fellowship”. The latter term of

course crosses over into religious language – being fellows, “brothers and sisters”. That in turn leads to understanding community as extended family.

Although organizing goes on in families, (who buys the food, how the kids get to soccer, how the cars are used, queues for computers, internet, TV usage, or whether Mum and Dad go out to leave the house free for the teenager’s social night) – the purpose of all this organizing is not a product but the developing and maintaining of a set of relationships of mutual interdependence. Authority of position and power as such is not the prime mode of functioning. In fact, where power is prominent, we would say the family is dysfunctional and distorted.

So when we talk of community, we are talking of a grouping which has a very different set of priorities to those of an organization. In a community people and their relationships come first, while in an organization, the job or task takes precedence. In a community there is a common and genuinely shared set of values.

That is why community can be described in terms of the metaphor of an “organism”, a living system which has its own life and all its parts contribute to its life rather than its productivity. This is, of course, the Pauline metaphor with which we started – the Christian community as the “Body of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 12)

Moreover, people join communities because they share interests, values and relationships, whether it be the sports club, the church, the fishing fraternity in the caravan park or the gentleman’s club in town. Communities attract people in by their essence. They have a vision or mission even if it is not explicitly articulated. They are gathered together around something that exists. By contrast, the members of an organization are focused on something they will produce in the future. They are a team only for this production purpose.

The question then resolves itself into this simple one:

**Given that schools actually are organisations, can they also be communities?**

#### **4| Responses to the tension**

I discuss three possible different responses to the organizational paradigm, and its tensions with community or people-based values. On the first two I haven’t time to dwell, and the third one provides, I hope, a practical synthesis of organisation and community.

##### 1) Contrived collegiality

This is a term used by Hargreaves in several articles, and it refers to an imposed collaboration or working together. It is the type of collegiality where the principal says to do something together, and the agenda comes from administration. It appears consultative, but what is consulted about is not set by the teacher, and in fact the process can be seen as a form of control, whereby people are manipulated to contribute together, regardless of their actual individual priorities. Contrived collegiality is a means of effectively achieving the product goal through using human relationships. When staff complain about yet another meeting to discuss the school’s aims or the cross-curricular integration, you can be sure any collegiality is contrived.

There is of course genuine collegiality, which arises out of felt needs, and recognition of where others can share in accomplishing a mutually valued goal. It most typically occurs in secondary schools within subject departments where there is a genuine commitment to a

shared professional vision. Note that collegiality even when it is good, is a dimension of an organisation, not a community, because it is task-based. At times it develops the characteristics of community or fellowship, centring around shared interests and values.

Contrived collegiality, on the other hand, can look like “community” but it is really a set of behaviours and attitudes imposed by the administration or the culture of the place, but without inner commitment from participants.

### 2) Rebellion, passive resistance, assertion of individuality or “misbehaviour”.

Individuals do not want to conform to an organisation unless it meets their own objectives. They may submit to get their pay (staff) or their marks (students) but if their own priorities are significantly different, underneath the façade they will subvert the organisational aims. Students may cheat, or they may make a show of being caring in set scenarios, while bullying and bitching behind the scenes. Teachers may talk of high standards, but take short cuts with lesson preparation or supervision. This phenomenon is the focus of Ackroyd and Thompson’s book, *Organizational Misbehaviour*.

### 3) Christian organisational counter-culture.

A third approach appropriate for Christian educators is a reconceptualization of the relationship of organization and community. I am indebted to the theologian John Stott for the term “Christian counter-culture”. This involves a deliberate intent and concrete action directed at turning the school into a community.

This response, which is the ideal Christian educators aspire to, involves questioning the organisational paradigm and its production and power priorities on the basis of Christian values. It is actually a way of transforming an organisation from the inside, by deliberately making relational choices rather than ones for worldly success. It is a conscious approach whereby the organisational structures and roles are acknowledged, but the priority is given to relationships.

We have to actually be committed to faith, hope and love, not as nice-sounding words, but as a way of living and acting.

The word “we” is problematic. Not all in any school will actually be committed Christians in any personal sense. Mostly not even all the staff, definitely not all the students and parents!! Therefore we can often use words about community almost manipulating people into positions they don’t hold.

So as a starting point let us encourage the self-aware Christians to be a “community” within the bigger organisation. If it is an Anglican organization, they should not be exclusive. A great strength of Anglicanism is inclusivity. But you cannot force people to be communitarian – that is contrived community and it will be hollow.

Rather those who believe in this communitarian vision have to start attracting people to join in. In other words, instead of assuming that the organisation is a community, we have to start to fulfil whatever organizational role we hold according to the principles of faith, hope and love – giving people, not profit, priority.

I think that practical love (in the 1 Corinthians sense of being “patient, kind, not jealous or boastful, not arrogant or rude, not insisting on own way, not irritable or resentful, believing, hoping, enduring.”) is energised by the other two. Love is energised by faith and hope

because if we truly and fully believe that Jesus is alive and that ultimate reality is to be consummated in our own future resurrection, then we can give other people priority. On this basis we can stand aside from the organisational imperatives and begin to sacrifice our present interests for the good of all. This is the essence of community. We can also find out what we share together instead of consolidating our power bases or hierarchical turf.

Here are some communitarian scenarios, some of them I have experienced:

- the principal who explicitly rejected it as being “his” school; it is “your” school, he said to staff and students, and it is defined by your interests and commitments, not mine. I am an administrator passing through. (Incidentally a parallel has been observed by a friend of mine as to the relationship of priest or minister to the church congregation.)
- students leading a huge number of their peers as well as staff in meeting to pray for a terminally ill fellow student.
- teaching and non-teaching staff together working on staff development and exploring the valuable contribution of each other.
- refusing to say “they” of anyone in the organisation; instead using “we” because what we have in common is explicit in the thinking.
- executive staff sitting with the others and praying as equals together under the leadership of priest.
- subject departments giving up their territory because they are aware of others’ needs. (Can you imagine the English department cheerfully accepting streamed classes, or the maths department adjusting their methodology to mixed ability groupings or to long periods?)
- turning the other cheek when the newest member of the staff threatens and criticises a revered tradition.
- the Year 11 student in a state school who reminded me that God is in control on an occasion when I was visibly upset about an administrative decision.
- listening and respecting the views of other religions, not to prove how “tolerant” we are, but on the basis that we respect the other person and we don’t have to indoctrinate because if Christ is alive, we can leave the converting to him and concentrate on educating.

In practice making a community involves some mental shifts:

- Looking hard at reality and not pretending words make an organisation a community
- Actively making the mission statements working documents. Decisions have to be tested against these communitarian claims.
- Where there is conflict, people have to have priority not the system, because it is relationships that define community.
- Accepting and expecting that any individual can be a leader through personal example in shifting attitudes and values. We do not have to follow bureaucratic models of power.

For administrators I offer two practical recommendations:

- Staff need help to identify their common interests, sometimes even their common humanity. This needs to be regularly talked about, and pointed out. Say what the PR department does for the school, talk about what the secretarial staff do which has student well-being at its base, explain how the Human Sciences Department is actually trying to validate different learning styles with their bizarre assessment

scheme. Make explicit points of connection, in language which reflects the commonalities.

- Learn how to identify applicants for positions who can care for others. It is very hard to have a community when everyone is a high-flying professional dedicated to accomplishing a task. That is a great aim for an organisation; one must question if it is the priority for a community. Too often staff are appointed on the basis of what they have proved they can do in task terms, and little account is given of what they may contribute in terms of relationships.

There is one final quality which a genuine Christian community must be transfused with.

**That is forgiveness.**

If every person committed to this idea of community were to act with forgiveness it would indeed be a very attractive community that those on the permeable edges would want to share in.

We need to be very careful that we are encouraging real Christian communities if we use that language, and not just exploiting warm words to serve goals which may be quite worthy and justifiable but are really organisational and market-driven.

*Ephesians 4:32: "Forgive one another just as Christ forgave you."*

*John 13:35: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

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