## The Inaugural Isaac Armitage Lecture 'Anglican Schooling in a Pluralistic Society'

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I'd like thank Shore School, the headmaster Dr. Timothy Wright and school Chaplain the Rev. Matthew Pickering, for the enormous honour of inviting me to deliver this inaugural Armitage Lecture. I'm personally very touched by the invitation, and I am delighted to represent Moore Theological College in honour of Shore's first ordained graduate of Moore.

I wish I knew more about what happened for Isaac Armitage after Shore. After watching the suffering inflicted by the Western powers and the Boxer Rebels in China, what took him straight from his tour of duty to Moore College, and to a faithful lifelong ministry? Something of enormous significance happened to this young man, and as one who has also benefited greatly from the ministry of Moore College, I feel some affinity for the elderly Rev. Armitage, who even in his eighty-second year so fondly remembered both Shore and Moore that he endowed the scholarship that still enables men from here to study there.

May I also offer my welcome to heads, chaplains, teachers and administrators from our network of thirty-plus Anglican schools in the Sydney Diocese, and to every member of the audience this evening, who want to educate children as well as we can. Indeed I'm very aware that in such a gathering, I address people who have been wrestling with issues of schooling in general, and of Anglican schooling in particular, over entire careers; and so in many respects, are vastly more competent than I am. I'm hoping, though, that what I have to say might articulate, clarify and stimulate some of that wrestling.

The title of my talk, 'Anglican Schooling in a Pluralistic Society,' could of course mean anything. But I want to talk about what Anglican schools are for, in a world where many people believe many different things. Let me assume at the outset that a church school has some sort of intention to 'bless the world' somehow. I want us to think about how that 'blessing' might work. I'll put my discussion into the context of what seems to me an agonisingly difficult debate in modern Australia: the place of so-called 'values' in our school education.

Considering Armitage's love of the Old Boys Union, his endowment is, most likely, a remembrance of something powerful that happened to him while here, and in this way is a symbolic reminder that something way beyond the course curricula can happen to a child at school. For schools are places of moral formation.

When I say 'moral' tonight, I'll sometimes say it in a bad sense: there are modes of moral formation that are ruinous and destructive. But I also want to try and say this difficult word 'moral' in a good sense: Christian educators who seek to bless the world nee

way these teachers end up with a character shaped by their own blueprint, and then in turn, shape that blueprint in their own image.

So Augustine was expected to model himself, he says, upon men who rebuked each other if innocent activities were described in awkward language, "but [who] revelled in the applause they earned for the fine flow of well-ordered and nicely balanced phrases with which they described their own acts of indecency." (p.38; I.18) And so

A man who has learnt the traditional rules of pronunciation, or teaches them to others, gives greater scandal if he breaks them by dropping the aitch from 'human being' than if he breaks [God's] rules and hates another human, his fellow man. ... [A] fine speaker will stand up before a human judge, surrounded by a human audience, and lash his opponents with malicious invective, taking the greatest care not to say ''uman' instead of 'human' by a slip of the tongue, and yet the thought that the frenzy in his own mind may condemn a human being to death disturbs him not at all. (p. 39; I.18)

It becomes a system of institutionalised hypocrisy, with teachers bli

care for their sick. He wants the community's leaders to exercise authority well, and he seeks for a community where there is consonance between what is taught and learnt about Scripture, and the practices and habits that are lived there. This letter remains a major influence on monastic communities around the world even today.

In Augustine's rather jaded recounting of his own childhood, we can perhaps see some of the

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'values', even though differing lists kept appearing; that religious school 'values' did not seem to inform their desperation for Federal funding; that State school 'values' didn't mean very much in the first place.

The discussion, though intense, reminded me of a slightly frustrated amnesiac trying to name something that mattered, if only he could remember what the thing was. The idea of 'values' generates a weird intensity among adults; yet at the same time, our eyes glaze over at this word 'values'. We can't seem to focus on it for long: we shake our heads and blink ourselves awake and drink black coffee and try to ignore more interesting distractions, like the stock market; and these 'values' are so important, and we explain them so well, that our children prefer to fall asleep, or run away, or SMS their friend, or poke them with a pencil.

Alasdair Macintyre famously pictures peasants in a post-apocalyptic Mad-Max landscape, picking up bits of ruined wreckage from a culture that has long since been destroyed, and ignorantly arguing over them. That is his picture of modern people when it comes to moral and ethical ideas, which are picked up and argued over with little idea of where the ideas have come from, and how they once fit into a whole.<sup>4</sup>

I think something like that has gone wrong in Australian discussions of 'values'. We are trying to talk about a blueprint, a moral vision, for what kind of society we want to inhabit, and how we might best pass that on to our children; but the only word that we can remember by which to have that discussion is this worn-out word. For what, exactly, is a 'value'?<sup>5</sup>

The Australian Government has recently attempted to articulate what that vision is for State schools in its National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools.<sup>6</sup> A Government poster has been issued listing nine values (actually there are thirteen-ish, but they are conceptually grouped to become nine): 'care and compassion', 'doing your best', 'fair go', 'freedom', 'honesty and trustworthiness', 'integrity', 'respect', 'responsibility', 'understanding', 'tolerance and inclusion'.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue

Similarly a NSW Government Ministerial Statement<sup>7</sup> identifies nine values that "represent the aspirations and beliefs of the Australian community as a whole" that are "common to a range of secular and religious world-views and are found in most cultures": 'integrity', 'excellence', 'respect', 'responsibility', 'cooperation,' 'participation', 'care', 'fairness', 'democracy'.

Likewise the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority listed 'respect', tolerance and understanding', 'responsibility', 'care', 'excellence', 'social justice', 'freedom', 'honesty', 'inclusion and trust' and 'being ethical', but that last one is a bit of a cheat to cover whatever the other ones miss. If we axe it we'll get nine again, which seems like the magic number.

These lists got me to thinking that I could probably compile a good list of nine fair-dinkum Aussie values. After careful consultation with a variety of authoritative community sources, here they are: 'Put a sock in it!' 'Have a go ya mug!' 'C'mon Aussie C'mon!' 'Up There

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respected. But some think that 'values' are as good as it gets in a pluralistic society, since we cannot agree on the wider order.  $^{10}$ 

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Moral codes are needed for didactic purposes, but they are only the tip of an iceberg, and we can use them to explore the iceberg. There is a place for trying to apply a moral code to specific situations, such as the girl, her friend and her friend's stepfather. Our struggles to apply the code to specific cases deepen our moral knowledge:

We penetrate behind the straightforwardness of the moral code through

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And what is the order within which God has placed us? The order that God reveals in his world is what theologians call 'salvation history', and "[e]ach area [of our lives] has to be given, as it were, a salvation-history of its own."<sup>20</sup> My own way of thinking about various moral issues is to try and brainstorm from what I know of the Bible, and then read other books and articles to find biblical material that I've missed, to discover:

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e) Love How is this approach to moral thought as liberating as words like 'grace', 'forgiveness' and 'love'? O'Donovan reminds us that God has made a

matters. Most Christian would guess that 'tolerance' appears on all three lists of 'values' above, and that all the other 'values' were fairly random. But consider Table 1 and think again:

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concept "best"?' (Shore has avoided the Pelagian overtones of the associated the

If [Christian schools] really believed their own mission statement they would be knocking back grants and sharing their facilities with state schools, but that would directly contradict their customer appeal, which is to provide what others do not get. It is surprising and disappointing that more actual Christians have not broken ranks ...<sup>31</sup>

Can we break ranks? Can we look for ways to share with the State system, and so cross-pollinate it with all the blessings we know? I won't go so far as to suggest that mature Christian children, who are well supported and academically able, might actually be encouraged to enrol in a State school, to support ISCFs and Christian teachers there. After all, I do believe with the Archbishops' that parents are free to choose the kind of education they want for their children; and your task is to work with the children that God sends you.

However—might Anglican schoolkids find extracurricular activities with state school kids, with their school faculty and staff working to make that happen? Might Anglican schools pay Christian youth workers to run after school clubs for all the local kids? Might school councils think up ways to participate with the nearest state schools, hosting activities, joining together in excursions, paying for joint teacher training days, or offering other forms of free support to state school staff? Could heads, teachers and even chaplains plan to do a few stints in the State school system during the course of their careers, with support from Christian others? Can Anglican schools speak highly of other good schools, not caring about the effect on their income?

If all my suggestions are somehow unthinkable, we would need to think very hard about what kind of school of moral formation is being built. We would need to worry, I think, if there were no willingness to 'break ranks', because schools of moral formation are forming their builders every bit as relentlessly as they form their pupils.

But a school staff who watch their life and doctrine closely, who know reality for what the gospel reveals it to be, and who know how to love and bless the people of world, can build schools where Christ stands out among the 'gods', embodying, empowering and explaining what this community so desperately longs for in its various lists of 'values'.

I would like to thank Rev. Dr Andrew Ford, Dr Greg Clarke and Mr Darren Mitchell for their invaluable comments on an earlier draft of this lecture; and Ms Tracy Gordon for her generous research assistance and administrative support.

[This paper: 'draft 4' of the lecture, with minor changes and corrections to the paper given out at the Armitage lecture.]

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Guy Rundle, "When Christian schools bear false witness," The Age, September 22, 2004; online: http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/09/21/1095651321673.html (accessed 22/9/2004).

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