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'IN WHOLE OR IN PART?': THE CHRISTIAN CONTRIBUTION TO SHAPING EDUCATIONAL VALUES TODAY

I'm honoured to have been asked to speak today at this launch of the National Institute for Christian Education Research. And delighted to return to Canterbury where I spent 5 years living in the best clergy house in the Church of England, the Archdeaconry, where there's a bedroom called Paradise that I was told dates back to about 1170, and where the bedroom my wife and I slept in was rather evocatively called Heaven, and dates back to around 1380. So Canterbury is a place of good memories.

They were also days of innocence before becoming a diocesan bishop, and finding myself being asked to take on national roles like the one I have in education. That request came in somewhat unusual circumstances. I found myself clattering down the emergency stairs in the middle of the night with the Archbishop of Canterbury when the fire alarm was set off by a young woman who appeared in a corridor, drunk and naked, and had to be covered up by a passing member of the House of Bishops. Anyway, seizing the moment, the Archbishop asked if I would be interested in being Chair of the Board of Education and National Society and as we leapt on to the pavement I didn't have the heart to say no.

It's been fascinating of course, and I arrived in that role in February when the Coalition Government was in full flood with its programme of academies and free schools, its English Baccalaureate (without RE), a National Curriculum Review, questions around admissions policies and collective worship, an Education Bill just arriving in the Lords (and facing sustained secularist assault), a substantial reduction in PGCE places for RE, a Higher Education White paper, and so on.

It was baptism by full immersion and although I'm not a Baptist I think I'm grateful for the experience because it's made me think hard and soon about the different educational visions which underlie both government policy and the Church's high commitment to education. This has been the year, of course, in which the Church of England has been celebrating 200 years of church schools started in 1811 by Joshua Watson and friends over a glass of wine in Hackney. (Watson was in the wine business). The Church was there with its National Society for the Education of the Poor some sixty years before the State came in – and then only to complement our schools where they had not been set up or had run into problems. This is a record to be proud of and it continues now with over 4700 schools, a quarter of the primary schools in the country, and nearly a million children enjoying the benefits of church-based, Christian education.

So that's the background against which I come to this talk and the subject matter of the Christian contribution to educational values today. I want to ask four questions:

1. what seem to be today's prevailing educational values and how adequate are they?
2. what is a human person, a child, seen in the context of Christian education?
3. what is community, seen from a Christian education perspective?
4. what is a distinctively Christian approach to educational values for children, in community?

So first, what seem to be today's prevailing educational values and how adequate are they? Put at its most blunt, I think the danger we face is that education is becoming increasingly instrumentalist. The desired outcome is young people who are fit to contribute to the country's wealth. This requires an exam culture where students move along an educational assembly line from lesson to lesson and exam to exam until released into the economy as a unit of wealth-production. This is to put it over dramatically perhaps but the signs are there, and they aren't the product of only one brand of government. John Major was offended when Tony Blair listed as his three top priorities 'education, education, education.' 'Actually,' he said, 'they were my three priorities too, but not necessarily in the same order.'

My anxiety is that our educational policies have a myopic understanding of the task, narrowed down to industrial-style educational production. Peter Abbs in *Against the Flow* wrote 'the fear is that schools, colleges and universities have become no more than corporations run by managers... without character, charisma or charm.' And it doesn't even work. The PISA study, a major analysis of the 30 OECD countries published in December last year, showed that, between the years 2000 and 2010 the UK had dropped from 7th to 25th in reading and from 8th to 28th in maths. Nor can we retreat into the belief that at least our young people are happy. A UNICEF report in 2007 revealed that, out of 21 industrialised countries, the UK came bottom in league tables for child well-being.

Not only are students unhappy, so too are Inspectors. In 2010 Christine Gilbert, the retiring head of Ofsted said: 'the levels achieved by many children at the end of primary school fall stubbornly short of what is achievable.' Employers feel the same. Caroline Walters, Director of People and Policy at BT said: 'young people who join us from schools and universities lack many of the skills that are an everyday requirement in the world of work. We need problem solvers, people who can cope with uncertainty, people who can work with others who are different, and who ask the sort of questions that challenge not just what we do but how we do it.'

In other words, we need an education that is 'in whole' and not 'in part', an education of the whole child. It seems that, instead, we have a process which instructs children in the passing of tests, with failure built into the system. In the Sir John Cass Foundation Lecture last year, Anthony Seldon said: 'Schools do not properly encourage the young to think or reflect deeply... [They] no longer teach academic subjects: they teach exams: not history, but history GCSE; not mathematics, but mathematics AS Level; not chemistry, but chemistry A level. Schools are narrowing the young.'

The danger I'm seeking to spell out is a narrow educational vision, instrumentalist in character and functional in nature. And parents often willingly buy this anaemic product, believing that good exam results are the purpose of education, rather than what John Milton called a 'complete and generous education' which fits a person 'to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously'. In Christian terms, education is intended to draw out the full human potential of each child of God. The educational provocateur John Abbott goes straight to the point when he writes of children being 'over-schooled but under-educated.'

If these seem to be today's prevailing educational values, what then of my second question: what is a human person, a child, seen in the context of Christian education? The danger is that a child is seen by society primarily as a consumer. Not only is that child properly destined to be a unit of economic production, he or she is also, already, and increasingly, a consumer to boost the nation's GDP. This poverty of ambition in both society, and sadly in some families, was once illustrated by Archbishop William Temple, who told the story of a father who sent a note to his son's school saying, 'Don't teach my son poetry; he's going to be a grocer.'

Children don't respond to micromanagement in any arena of life, and particularly not in education. It de-motivates them, makes them restless and frustrated, angry even. What does motivate them is passion and trust. Teachers don't need to be as wacky as in Dead Poets Society or The Mona Lisa Smile, but teachers with passion for their subject will achieve more than those with technique any time. Young people long to be inspired and to believe that some things are so important they might just change the world. Working their way through a system and fitting themselves for market efficiency isn't going to make any young person take to the barricades.

What then is a human person, a child, in this context of Christian education that some of us consider so important? Surely this: a human person, *a child, is a spiritual, embodied being, living in community*. The Christian tradition has always insisted on our essentially spiritual nature. If we are dust, then we are dust that dreams. Our origin is in the mind of God and our destiny is bound up in God also. The materialist who allows no more to human life than that it's an accidental collocation of atoms has missed the grandeur and the wonder of a human being. Maybe it's a kind of colour blindness. 'There is one sin,' said GK Chesterton, 'to call a green leaf grey'.

Reductionism is a voracious consumer of holistic readings of reality. The error goes like this: if you can take it apart, you can explain it; and if you can explain it, you can explain it away. Jonathan Sacks puts the alternative view very neatly in his new book *The Great Partnership*. He says that the task of science is to take things apart to see how they work, and the task of religion is to put things together to see what they mean. A child's education needs to engage in both tasks with their complementary language, signifiers and metaphors. But don't let's sell them short by pretending there's only one form of knowledge and only one way of exploring reality.

Each child is a *spiritual* being, but equally each child is an *embodied* being, living with all the joys and limitations of a particular time and culture, a context full of possibility and frustration. Finitude is a cage swinging through space, but it turns out to be a Tardis; there's so much there to explore. But we need to be located, earthed, possessed of particular gifts and disabilities. Children are stuck with their parents, the British are stuck with their weather; I'm stuck with Blackpool Football Club, where I was brought up. No matter, we had our day! And we all have a specific day and a setting for our lives – we're spiritual, but embodied.

And it's this complex, multi-layered life of a young person that's in our care during the educational process. The 1944 Education Act charged schools to promote the moral, cultural and spiritual development of children as well as their mental and physical development. Education was to be 'in whole' rather than 'in part.' Without some grounding in the values, disciplines and habits of the heart that good faith offers; without some appreciation of the

beliefs that drive 75% of the world's population; without some religious literacy, in other words, a child is impoverished and their holistic education is seriously under-developed.

However, I offered a description of a human person as a spiritual, embodied being, *living in community*. That takes us on to my third question: what is community, seen from the perspective of Christian education? I suppose I start by suggesting that the educational enterprise is a three legged stool – it's the task of the home, the school, and the community. The home clearly has enormous educational power, for good or ill. Broadly speaking, society lets us get on with it, giving us support when things go wrong but relying on a mixture of instinct, parental guidance, peer information and good luck to get our children through to adulthood. How do they ever survive? School is a much more intentional arena of teaching and learning but we run into all the problems I was mentioning earlier of the underlying educational values that can be so functional and unimaginative.

But what about community as a source of learning? The African village has long been held up as the golden paradigm of community, typically with the wisdom that it takes a whole village to raise a child. *A community can be seen as a system or network of mutual learning and responsibility*. A village, a school or a church can all be that kind of community, and at its best such a community will be a place of life-long learning and exchange. When education is seen as a front-loaded passing on of knowledge, it's hardly surprising that very many children are alienated from the process and need to be weaned back to learning very carefully later on. Christian teaching and learning is essentially communal, located in the fellowship of faith (school or church), and learnt from how people live, worship, make decisions, handle difference, and generally how they behave, as well as from intentional teaching and learning programmes.

And this is why I believe in church schools – they offer the experience of a community of faith in which people of all ages are learning what it is to be made in the image of God. They're learning about being centred and held in a faith tradition, and how that works out in practice. They're learning to look beyond the here and now, to look underneath the stone. They're being encouraged to wonder at the breathtaking nature of nature itself. They're learning how to integrate, not separate, and how all things are connected. They're learning the limits of materialism as a philosophy and consumerism as a way of life. And they're learning to recognise authenticity.

When I was vicar of a parish in Taunton I used to go every week to our church school where I was chair of governors. The children would see me looking fairly relaxed and informal in dress. Occasionally the children would come up to the church but it was quite a distance away and so their visits were rare. On one occasion the youngest children had come up to church and I was dressed in my cassock and seeing them out at the door. One little six year old looked up at me with surprise and, seeing me looking rather different, she said innocently, 'Mr Pritchard, are you pretending to be a vicar?' The question has gone deep!

You can't pretend for long in a church school or any Christian community. Character shows, for good or ill; beliefs and values are validated (or not), the reality or superficiality of faith-commitment is soon demonstrated. But ideally the school's ethos soaks through into everything that happens, so that the sacred centre that sustains the school is visible.

Which brings us to my last and most important question: 'What is a distinctively Christian approach to educational values for children, in community today?' In the diocese of Oxford sits Wellington College, and there sits (occasionally, because he gets about a bit) Anthony Seldon, the Master. He says that each of his students has 8 aptitudes in four sets of pairs – the logical and linguistic, the creative and physical, the moral and spiritual, the personal and social. That's not a bad starting point for assessing educational values for today, and in a system where 'teachers can be reduced to technicians, students to secretaries and schools to factories', they require quite a bit of adjustment in conventional approaches to teaching and learning.

But if that offers a useful general framework for educational values, what's special about a Christian approach? Of course to a Christian all truth is God's truth, so God is very much in the good sense of the framework that Wellington College has adopted. But Christianity is, again, both a spiritual and an *embodied* faith, so it insists on the inconvenient truth of a particular historical life and asks us to make that life a lightning rod by which to judge the Christian nature of any enterprise. *So a distinctively Christian approach to educational values is one that's demonstrated and focused in the narrative of the life, death and new life of Jesus of Nazareth, and on that basis, seeks to enrich the whole educational experience.*

If anything is to be labelled Christian you can't get away from that fascinating, compelling, disturbing, evocative life of Christ. A Christian approach to education, as everywhere, has got to start with that life. Of course there will be huge overlaps in the values of Christian and non-aligned schools because, as above, all truth is God's truth, but the

difference lies in the distinctive starting point, the source of those values. And I would say, in passing, that I'm more than somewhat alarmed at the prospect of those values being cut off from their roots for very long. I'm not sure that it's possible to sustain for more than two or three generations a free-floating set of values removed from the Christian roots that gave them life. A religiously illiterate society hasn't reckoned with the pervasive influence the Christian faith has had on every corner of our common life, from our democratic process and legal system to our approach to science, education, philanthropy, art, literature, music and much more. Christian schools at least know the basis of their uniqueness and the source of their strength.

I've asked four questions. The first was about the adequacy of our prevailing educational values and I suggested that current and recent educational vision is too narrow and partial – not the 'complete and generous education' that John Milton wrote about, and which he said fits a person 'to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously' in any office. But then how do the answers to my other three questions join up?

If a human person, a child, is a spiritual, embodied being living in community; and community, seen from a Christian education perspective, is a system or network of mutual learning and responsibility; then a distinctively Christian approach to educational values is offering pupils and students (those spiritual, embodied beings) an experience of community (that network of mutual learning and responsibility) an experience of community based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. That's the deal.

But can it be done? Well, that's where we need a National Institute for Christian Education Research. I'm delighted to see the birth of this important venture and to know it's in the safe hands of Trevor Cooling. We need to be fed with the best research and the clearest evidence. But as a parent (twice over), a school governor (four times over), an Assistant Diocesan Director of Education (Bath and Wells), a theological college principal (Cranmer Hall), a chair of a Diocesan Board of Education (Durham) and now Chair of the national Board of Education (none of which I've done brilliantly I hasten to add), I would want to affirm that I've seen the future and it works! Letting the narrative of Jesus colour the whole character of a school's life gives the distinctive results parents understandably want. Whatever secular beliefs they profess, huge numbers of parents instinctively recognise that Christian education offers a framework that they want their children to inhabit. And that framework comes, whether they like it or not, in story form. It's the story of Jesus Christ, a first century Jew who lived so closely to God that many of his contemporaries could think of no more adequate description of him than that he was the Son of God.

H.G. Wells once wrote: 'I am a historian. I am not a believer. But I must confess, as a historian, that this penniless preacher from Galilee is irrevocably the very centre of history.' The Church may constantly disappoint people, but Jesus very rarely does. His teaching has attracted and tantalised countless millions of people ever since it was spoken. Likewise his parables have got under our collective skin and seriously disturbed the peace. His subversive association with all kinds of low-life has challenged our personal and social agendas time after time. His heavily reported healings have had us scratching our heads whenever we read the gospels. His death has brought us to our knees, and his resurrection has opened up a vast range of unexpected possibilities. In short, this life has been the most influential life ever lived. It's been the hinge of human history. It's the perfect point of reference for schools that dare to take it.

In 1946 John Maynard Keynes said: 'The day is not far off when the economic problem will take the back seat where it belongs, and the arena of the heart and the head will be occupied or reoccupied by our real problems – the problems of life and of human relations, of creation and behaviour and religion.' That interesting possibility still seems depressingly far off. Economics dominates our global thinking – understandably at the moment. But in order that the world can breathe again we need more than good economists and financial technocrats. We need thinkers and prophets and innovators and social activists and poets who'll 'tell it slant' and artists who'll make us look at life differently. We need people, in other words, with a wider, comprehensive vision, people who'll see 'in whole' rather than 'in part.' And key to that will be an educational economy that values Christian education as a major contributor to holistic teaching and learning.

Ultimately Christian education will insist that what matters is the shaping of character in community. We have the tools; in particular we have the life, the life of Jesus of Nazareth, to act as a touchstone and inspiration. I often encourage young confirmation candidates to think of being a Christian as a form of extreme sport. They look a bit puzzled at first, but how else could you describe following Jesus today?

In the shifting sands of educational theory, Christians are fortunate indeed to have a clear rationale for their educational enterprise and a clear point of reference. We seek human flourishing for every child of God through holistic educational practice, and we see the means of that being the One who said 'I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.'