Address to the Christian Schools National Policy Forum, Canberra

'Revolution and Integrity'
24th May 2010

A Story

During the French Revolution (and for those who were not alive at the time, that was in c. 1789, three professionals were arrested and convicted of having bourgeois values. They were a doctor, a lawyer and an engineer. They were led to the Guillotine one by one.

The crowd was roaring with anticipated pleasure. First up was the doctor. How dare he enrich himself through other people's illnesses? Access to basic health and hospital care is a right, OK? The doctor was placed in the Guillotine and the lanyard was yanked. The blade started on its massive, implacable way down. Suddenly, it lurched to a stop. The official in charge declared that it would be inhumane to make the doctor suffer this way more than once, so he set him free.

The crowd howled. The executioner checked his equipment. All was in order. He put a small tree branch in and successfully lopped it in half. He re-sharpened the blade. Next up was the lawyer. Who needs an excuse to wish such a lying, cheating scoundrel dead? The crowd was thunderous in its applause. The lawyer was placed in the Guillotine and the lanyard was yanked. Again, the blade stopped part-way down! The presiding official once again declared that he would set this prisoner free because of the unusual circumstances.

The crowd screamed in frustration. It wanted blood and it wanted it now. Next came the engineer, a man whose innovations and devices were costing ordinary Frenchmen their jobs. The crowd fell silent. As the executioner checked and re-checked his equipment, the engineer was marched up to the guillotine. He looked carefully at it and said: "Wait. I see your problem…"

The Education Revolution

There is no doubt that the phrase "***The Education Revolution"*** as distinct from "an education revolution" or just plain "a revolution in education" coined by the ALP spin doctors before the 2007 election, has been very effective. For those of my vintage, I put this electoral epithet in the same box as Gough Whitlam's election winning theme in 1972: "It's time."

Some might say that the extension of the term to include "***Building the Education Revolution***" helped to keep the concept in front of a bewildered populous. In retrospect the Government might wish they hadn't been so clever by half!

Rudd's revolution

What Kevin Rudd and his Education Minister have sought to achieve under the banner of ***"The Education Revolution***" is, by modern standards, quite impressive. It includes the roll out of two billion dollars worth of computers, the framing of a national curriculum where others have tried and failed, the establishment of new standards, the introduction of NAPLAN, the creation of the ***My School*** website, the implementation of national partnerships and the progressive diminution of state sovereignty over school education. Most governments in the past have been content to tackle just one big initiative at a time realizing that even one initiative can take eons to implement. The Rudd Government has overwhelmed the educational community with a multiplicity of initiatives in one go.

Critique?

It's not my task this morning to critique these initiatives. There is a place for that and everyone here should be doing it. But I do want to question whether the initiatives, as we observe them coming to fruition, have in fact affected a revolution.

- If they have, what sort of a revolution have they affected?
- Is it the revolution we needed to have?
- Is it the revolution we would have had regardless of which political party controlled the Treasury benches?
- Is it a revolution which cannot be overturned by a counter-revolution?
- If Australia was ripe for an education revolution, was this the one that it needed most?

In so far as teaching and learning continues to occur in most schools today in much the same way (albeit with different technology) as it did when I was a student, I question whether the language being promoted by our political leaders (with the assistance of the media always on the lookout for a reductionist way of expressing it) has overstated the changes that have occurred or that could occur as a result of the multiple programs that constitute '*The Education Revolution*.'

<u>Has anything changed?</u>

- Students are still arranged in age-based classes.
- They progress (automatically) from one grade to another according to the sun and moon rather than on the basis of mastering the intended outcomes.
- Teachers deliver their messages in discrete key learning areas or academic disciplines.
- Teachers are trained in institutions away from the school to be either primary or secondary teachers.
- Schools continue to differentiate between teachers and those who are not (frequently and insultingly referred to as non-teachers).
- Academic performance continues to be viewed by parents, politicians and society at large as the real and most powerful definers of success.
- I saw an advertisement in a suburban paper recently for an Anglican school in which the only features mentioned were the caption "It's about their future" and the cryptic '2009 TOP ATAR 99.05.'

Having expressed my doubts about the impact so far of the Rudd Education Revolution on the everyday practices of most schools, I feel duty bound to ask you: Does Australia need an education revolution? If so, in what domain or domains is such a revolution needed? You may well respond by saying, Australia needs a variety of revolutions in education, not just one big one. Who should or who can initiate such revolutions?

What do we understand by the term revolution?

In the manual for my turbo-charged Volkswagon Golf, a rev or rpm is described as the measured quantity of the output of the motor.

For those of you still using analogue clocks, a revolution is one full circuit of the clock face.

If I asked you to stand up and make one revolution you would end up where you have started. You've done a revolution but where's it got you?

Where you end up is where you started from!

Another form of revolution involves turning something on its head.

When most people talk revolution, they are talking about something that is radically different to what is or once was, and radically different in the positive sense.

In some realms, revolutions occur without anyone noticing. They occur ever so slowly often over a protracted period of time. Indeed most change, for better or for ill, occurs incrementally, almost imperceptibly, such that people have trouble remembering when it was ever different.

Imperceptible revolution number one: educating the whole child

There was a time, in western society, when schools of all kinds believed that their mandate was to develop the whole student – mentally, physically, morally, socially, culturally and spiritually. Teachers were trained in Teachers Colleges to incorporate these six domains in their everyday teaching. This approach was sometimes equated with a liberal education. I am not suggesting that any or all teachers were as effective in achieving this holistic approach as their College lecturers expected, but it was at least a documented platform for school education.

Parental responsibility

Of course in saying that, it was never assumed that the school alone should address each student's needs in these six areas. It was generally acknowledged by most parents that the final responsibility for nurturing and extending children and young people in all six areas belonged to them. The schools in which they enrolled their children were expected to play a secondary, partnership role with them.

The Great Transfer

Over time, two things have happened simultaneously. Parents in their thousands, perhaps millions, have consciously and with great relief transferred the major share of responsibility in these areas to their child's school. Schools, sometimes intentionally and sometimes not, have assumed a far greater share of the responsibility than they should.

Not enough time to do all six

The number of hours in the day and the number of school days in the year has not diminished very much but the amount of time and energy which schools devote to some of these domains has decreased significantly. In some schools the domains have been telescoped or jettisoned altogether. In order to protect the time needed for academic pursuits, some independent schools have quarantined a small amount of their time for 'religious observance and teaching' through which they hope that the moral and spiritual domains will be addressed. Satisfied and relieved that the school of their choice has all or most of these domains covered, parents have been happy to opt out of this responsibility altogether.

So, who is responsible for the education of the whole child in 2010? Forget the rhetoric, by and large, **no-one is and no-one really cares that no-one is**. If this is not an area in which we have already witnessed a revolution in abdicated and transferred responsibility, what is? Is it an area in which there needs to be an appropriate counter-revolution?

Imperceptible revolution number two: the absorption of utilitarianism

There's another area in which an incremental, imperceptible revolution is occurring. It's one in which each of us, in some way, is complicit. It's a big area in which, to paraphrase JB Phillips take on Romans 12.2, we've all been *"squeezed well and truly into the world's mould."* And what I am referring to is the normalization of pragmatic utilitarianism as the fundamental purpose of schooling in Australia. The bi-line of utilitarianism is the maximizing of happiness, the ends justifying the means. It's expressed by politicians and journalists in words like these:

> '*Schooling* is all about maximizing on our human capital, the one true resource we fall back on as a nation.' (Mary Ann Cauchi)

> *''The Australian economy needs an education revolution because of the critical link between long-term prosperity, productivity growth, our standard of living, growth and human capital investment."* (ALP New Directions paper, January 2007)

It's no surprise that the ***Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*** issued in December 2008 by all Australian Ministers for Education is premised on a utilitarian view of education.

Lest this be seen as me blaming our political leaders for taking us in a wrong direction, let me hasten to add, much to my own shame and yours, that there is nothing in what our politicians are asking us to do that we have not already built into our own leadership and school cultures. We are, at heart, utilitarian, consumerist, competitive, consequentialists. We judge our staff and our students, not in terms of their character, faith and moral development (that is, who they are and who they are becoming) but in terms of their productivity (what they have done) and its usefulness (for them and society).

I might add, in passing, that we who profess to be Christians, have, perhaps without realizing it, compounded this problem by the heavy individualizing we have done to the gospel. How often do we say to a young person: You are a sinner, God loves you, Jesus died for you, You need to be saved, God has a plan for your life and so forth." All true of course, but reflect on Jesus teaching, not least in the Lord's prayer: Our Father, … give us today our daily bread, Forgive us.. Lead us not into temptation…" Christianity is first and foremost, a relational faith, but we have converted it into an individualistic thing. [May I commend the writings of Dr Michael Schluter and Mark Greene in UK on the power of Jesus' relational thinking to create a narrative of the gospel that connects with a fractured world of individualism and consumerism.]

A serious consequence of this unconscious yet comfortable accommodation of utilitarianism is our neglect of the real 'relational dimension' in education. We may have the most up to date buildings, the best technology and the best curriculum, but if the relationships between and amongst teachers and students, principals and staff, are not our greatest strength, our schooling is worthless. Indeed, if I may point you to the wisdom of Psalm 127: *'Unless the Lord builds the housse, its builders labor in vain, Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain.*' Or to translate that into school-lingo: Unless what we are striving to do through our schools is to enable our students to know God through Christ and to grow in their knowledge of and love for him, then our efforts, no matter how high our school is rated by society, everything we have done will be in vain.

In short, the inspid acceptance of utilitarianism as the dominant paradigm for schooling and the neglect of true relationalism, represent two challenges to which each of us must respond pro-actively and imaginatively.

A more perceptible revolution is occurring: the implications of new atheism

Sweeping across the world, and Australia is no exception, in the wake of the 'new atheism', is a very angry and impatient anti-Christian sentiment. Although, within the privacy of their own home, at census time, 70% of people may tick the box to say they have a religion or they believe in God, it does not take these same people very long to react viciously when they are scratched by someone who identifies Christ for who he is.

Those who champion 'tolerance' and 'having an open mind', respecting all religions and beliefs, frequently show no love, no respect and no tolerance towards someone who confronts them, even in the most winsome of ways, with the truth that is in Christ.

The airwaves in Sydney have been awash since Easter with self-described atheists and many more secularists, making no secret of their philosophical commitments. It has made some Christians very uncomfortable, and I am glad that this is so! The rise of the new atheism under the canopy of pluralism is a challenge to every Christian to abandon the comfortable compartmentalism that we engage in by treating our faith commitment as a private matter. Christianity, following Christ is not a private past-time. We need to put our faith claims into the public arena, in the media – yes, and also within our school communities.

We need to train our teachers to engage as public intellectuals and as public apologists for the God who has called us to live for him. This will not be inexpensive nor will it be easy but it must be done.

Some of the Big Issues

As I look at Australian education through the lens of what I'll call from the Christian schools sector (if I can call it that) I see at least nine big issues in which some revolutionary thinking, talking and action is needed. In addressing each one of them, there is a significant place for integrity.

You may regard the future funding of schools as the biggest and most difficult challenge you face over the next five years and you may well be right, but I propose to talk about others.

1. **Creating an Authentic Australian Christian Approach to Education**

I think there is a need for us to work at creating an authentic Australian Christian approach to education that impacts education, formal and informal, from the cradle to the grave, that includes early childhood education, primary and secondary schooling, tertiary education of all kinds, formal and informal adult education, credentialed and non-credentialed.

A Christian approach

You should note that I did not say an approach to Christian education but rather a Christian approach to education. I think the term "Christian education" has become a cliché devoid of quality. It used to be said that it did not matter whereabouts in Australia (at least) but ideally anywhere in the world that you bought a Macdonald's hamburger, the quality would be the same. That may still be the case for all I know! I think that Christian education has come to mean almost anything you like that has to do with Christianity. On the other hand, a Christian approach to education is one that is deeply informed by a biblical theology and worldview.

I am well aware that the very mention of the term 'worldview' is a turn-off for many people in Australia, including Christians. It is interpreted by some people as being too cognitive, or too clinical. But the reality is, each of us views the world, what we teach, what we read and what we hear through a lens that is shaped more than we realise by what we desire. What we desire above all else frames our priorities and our behavior, in schools and in our teaching.

A Christian approach to education includes

- how we present the curriculum that is prescribed for us,
- how we choose between the myriad of options provided for in the syllabuses,
- how we explain the purpose of learning,
- how we regard our students (sponges to soak up knowledge stuff, automatons to be programmed to think and speak in a certain way, clones to be shaped in our image, eternal creatures made in God's image to love and serve him forever, devils to be disciplined)
- how and why we assess what has been learned.

A Christian approach impacts the way we nurture and challenge students' talents and abilities for the benefit of the class and community. A Christian approach to education gives a different meaning to pastoral care, a different meaning to service, a different meaning to quality and a different meaning to leadership.

A Christian approach to education is integral to making people whole.

A Christian approach to education challenges two of the gods of this age: individualism and consumerism and emphasizes a fundamental principle in God's world to which I have already referred and that is ***relationalism***.

We need an authentic species that is Australian, not a transplant from somewhere else.

But more than that, we need to frame it in a language that enables us to talk about it into the public market place, into the wider educational community. So it needs to be plausible. It needs to make sense even to those who might ultimately reject it.

You can read more about the characteristics of an authentic Australian Christian approach to education on the Anglican Education Commission's website: www.aec.edu.au/resources.

2. We need to engage with the Curriculum

I have no doubt that between sessions at this conference, the issue of curriculum, and in particular, the evolving Australian curriculum, will dominate many conversations. I don't propose, in this address, to say very much about the national curriculum. I confess to having been an active player at the state and national level in the cause for a national curriculum since the early 1980s.

Balance: nation and school

It is important in the refining of the curriculum documents that an appropriate balance is found and maintained between what is important for us as a nation and what is important for each school and teacher to deliver.

Address major issues of principle

In our responses, our arguments should be restricted to major issues of principle, which if implemented, will cause us to compromise our allegiance to Jesus Christ or get in the way of our practice of a legitimate Christian approach. Let others pursue the issues of preference and taste, the addition of this piece of content, the omission of something else but let us address the big issues of principle.

Though we are Christians, we live, work, lead and teach in a fallen world, a world of competing ideologies, a world of education and scholarship that is pluralistic in the best sense of the word, and in which a modernist or post-modernist view of the world is pervasive.

Supports and does not impede

I think it is important that the curriculum supports the spirit of curiosity, the promotion of humility in the face of the abundance of what we do not know. It matters to me that the quantity and complexity of what is included in each syllabus does not impede students' acquiring a life-long love of learning, a warm and respectful relationship with each of their teachers, and a positive disposition towards exploring God, his world, his revelation of himself, and the purpose for which we have been created.

And in particular it ought not to be what we censor that distinguishes our schools from others but how we address what is prescribed for us.

3. Take Seriously the Integration of Faith and Learning

One of the features that distinguishes Christian schools per se, from say Anglican schools generally, is the use of language such as 'the integration of Christian faith and learning.' By and large this sort of language does not appear in the publicity material for most Anglican schools, but it does appear in the prospectuses for many Christian schools.

In practice

But if I may say so, with respect, when it comes to examining what 'integration' means in practice, the differences between our schools are not so large. And this is despite the vast amount of literature that has been written on the theory and the theology of integration and has been accessible for many years.

What it requires

This is a significant issue in its own right and I do not have time to develop it here. Suffice to say, a genuine integration of God's truth claims as revealed in the Bible and through Christ and the truth claims of each and every one of the academic disciplines studied in our schools requires an intentional, thorough, accurate and carefully thought through understanding of biblical theology and doctrine and an equally purposeful study and understanding of how academic knowledge claims are made and the worldviews underlying those claims.

We cannot hide behind rhetoric in this area. In fact, we need to put behind us the fumbling, trivialized and often pious efforts of bygone decades and promote, practice and showcase radically different, holistic, integral approaches to thinking, teaching and learning.

We need a revolution in the way we think and the way we speak in this area. It will manifest itself in a more authentic representation of Christian teachers as genuine educators and learners.

4. Invest more in the professional development of teachers

It follows, therefore, that every teacher we place in front of students needs to be as highly equipped in their knowledge and application of the bible as they are in the subjects they teach. I realise that this may place an onerous burden on many schools to bring their teachers up to a suitable benchmark of theological knowledge and commitment (as well as pedagogy). But the price we pay and the price our students now and in the future will pay if we don't do this is much greater.

A reasonable expectation

I think it is reasonable to expect all of our teachers to be engaged in on-going personal and professional development. In typically Aussie style, we tend to say that this is a matter for each individual to determine.

A communal matter

The professional credibility of our schools is a communal matter. All of our teachers need to be true life-long learners for the sake of the body to which they belong. Lifelong learning is integral to life in God's kingdom. As I often say to people, in God's new world we will all be engaged in gifted and talented programs and applied biblical studies. Get used to it now, get hooked now.

Again, all I can do in this paper is flag the importance of our schools taking a more pro-active role in deepening and broadening the skills and knowledge base of all of their staff, and doing everything they can to facilitate it. Just think how far $2million per school could have gone if it had been applied to this instead of to bricks and mortar!

How important an investment is your school or the schools you know making in this area? When the going gets tough, is it your professional development budget that is the first to be slashed? How strategic is your deployment of time and money in regards to professional development?

5. **Prepare the Next Generation of Leaders**

In Anglican schools across Australia, as no doubt in other sectors, we will see many school leaders retire over the next five years. There is no shortage of literature in this country and overseas of the reluctance of good teachers to put their names forward to lead big schools. We have never done succession planning very well in Australia, no less so, in our school sector.

Tomorrow's school leaders need more than school experience and secular higher education qualifications. In my view, they need applied theological training so that they can exercise the ministry to their staff which the churches are not able to do. This presents as a major challenge because it is costly in terms of money and time, every school and current Head says they don't have enough of it, so it does not happen.

In our respective sectors we are trying hard to identify, mentor, challenge and encourage aspiring leaders – not just for our own schools I hope, but for the whole range of schools. In our Diocese we have a particular heart for our Christian brothers and sisters in government schools who need Christ-centred leadership development just as much, if not more, than the folk in our own schools.

Unless we invest more in the preparation of our future leaders, our schools will suffer badly.

6. **Support a revolution in scholarship**

It goes without saying that we are facing (and have been facing for some time) a desperate shortage of home-grown scholars in education who think, lecture, write and advocate Christianly.

- Where are our philosophers of education?
- Where are our outstanding leaders of education who also have a sound theological background and experience?
- Where are the Brian Hills, the Anna Hoggs, the Bill Andersons of the second decade of the third millennium?
- Who is doing the seminal and scholarly thinking about education who can take on the pragmatists and reductionists at their own game?
- Where are the career paths in Australia for a teacher in your school who aspires to pursue a Ph.D or an Ed.D in education and theology?

In September last year our Archbishop Peter Jensen delivered the Isaac Armitage Lecture in which he asked the question: Is there such a thing as Anglican education? If there is, he asked, where is the literature, what are its foundations and how is it manifested in Anglican schools? Out of this has grown a small think tank of theologians, educators , academics and others who have been charged with the responsibility of writing a seminal book, creating a 'school of thought' that forms the basis for a more conscious, rigorous biblically-based philosophy and practice in education. This initiative is being supported by a serious campaign to encourage a score of our best thinkers and teachers to undertake post-graduate study/research.

We have a lot of catching up to do.

7. Recruit more Christians into teaching

I understand that there are 279,000 teachers in Australian schools. It is predicted that over the next five years, 110,000 of these will resign or retire.

It is the policy (and I assume the practice) of many of the schools in this sector to employ only committed Christians, or at least to give preference to the employment of Christians. This practice has been facilitated in some jurisdictions by an exemption from certain anti-discrimination laws. I don't believe these concessions will last forever.

Five Years of Work

For over five years in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney we have been actively promoting teaching as a worthy and strategic vocation for Christians. For the first three years we focused primarily on senior students in government and independent schools as well as students in University. For the past two years we have been sharing our message with teachers and with potential career changers. We have a full time person, Ian Keast, who is the Director of the Christians in Teaching Project. Your schools and government schools have benefitted, perhaps even more than Anglican schools, from Ian's tireless efforts.

A Serious Task

We take seriously the need to recruit more highly competent, enthusiastic, mission-oriented, bible-believing Christians into teaching and into the leadership positions in schools, and for that matter into tertiary education institutions.

Our target is large: 110,000 vacancies over 8 years.

If we think it is important that the students in our schools are taught by committed Christian teachers then we need to expand our efforts collectively to put before Christian people the challenge and opportunity of teaching.

But we need to do more than that, and that's where the revolution comes into it.

A question of integrity for schools as employers

We need to conduct our schools in such a way that justifies the claim that only committed Christians can do the job. That is to say, unless we adopt a Christian approach to teaching (and pastoral care and relationship building) in which there is such an authentic integration of faith with learning that only a bible-believing and practicing (applying) Christian with the requisite quality professional knowledge and competence can do the teaching, we forfeit the right to the exemption. If all we want is teachers who are caring and work as professionals and don't deliberately undermine what our schools are about, then why should we say we only want committed Christians?

But let it also be said, that just because a teacher professes to be a bible-believing Christian does not guarantee for one minute that they think, live, speak and teach in an authentic Christian way.

8. Take the revolution to the churches

God has entrusted us with an enormous responsibility within our school communities, within the wider educational fraternity and also within the bible-based churches of Australia. We give thanks to God for the faithful preaching and teaching of His word by theologically able pastors and ministers.

Equipping the laity for Monday to Friday

But when it comes to equipping God's people to be effective teachers (doctors, social workers, lawyers, journalists etc.) and lifelong learners within their Monday to Friday jobs, I don't think they have done it very well. There are at least three reasons for this.

First, most clergy have an undeveloped understanding of what it means to educate people in a voluntary community. It is summed up in the dictum: anyone can teach, and the dictum: so long as I declare it (sermon, lecture) I assume people learn (that is hear it and do it).

Second, I think most churches under-appreciate, underestimate, take for granted, or just ignore the ministry that the paid teachers in their congregation have from Monday to Friday for 200 or more days per year not to mention the educational opportunities (mostly lost) which individual congregation members who are parents or grandparents have on a lifelong basis within their own families. If only some-one had explained to me how best to teach my son such and such, what a difference it might have made to his attitude towards …

Third, I think, across the board, as Christians regardless of denomination, we have gone soft on what John Stott has been saying since the 1950s, that all those serious about following Jesus must be 'whole life disciples' and whole-life disciples are radical disciples.

If we do not pray for and encourage our brothers and sisters within our churches to join us as disciples of Christ, the effectiveness of our ministry in the work God has called us to, will be impoverished.

9. Stand Together

There is a ninth revolution which I think all of the foregoing points put together require us to have. I think it is one that our minds will tell us we should promote, but our hearts and hands might take a bit longer to embrace. Almost every one of the exhortations I have delivered this morning impacts in some way on each of our constituencies.

I will be the first to say that there are still lots of misperceptions, misunderstandings, distrust and certainly prejudice and stereotypes held amongst us of each other. Sometimes these go back generations and need to be debunked.

Our different organisations have their own histories and these must be respected.

I am looking forward to our continuing the conversations that we begin today at the local and at the macro-levels.

- We need to work together.
- We need to encourage our brothers and sisters who are striving to serve as modern-day Daniels in government schools. In many cases, they do not have around them supportive and praying Christians.
- We must talk together, we must pray for each other, we must stand together and where possible we must act together.

To do less is to squander the opportunities and resources God has given to us.

Conclusion

Putting all these challenges together, we are faced with an agenda for change much larger than Kevin Rudd could ever imagine.

At the heart of our revolution (or all nine of them) is **the need for authenticity**, or if you like, integrity. We cannot, in all honesty before our Lord, whose claims on us are total, pretend to be about his work in education and not subject all that we do to his **lordship.**