

A RESPONSE TO THE ARCHBISHOP

'Is there such a thing as Anglican Education?'

The recent Armitage lecture given by Archbishop Jensen has raised some very pertinent issues in relation to Christian education in this country. To begin with, I am in essential agreement with the perspective offered by the Archbishop. There are, however, one or two key issues which I believe warrant further comment.

From my perspective, one of the indispensable elements of robust Anglican schooling is the training of Christian teachers in a rigorous, self-consciously biblical world-and-life view. Such training will, of necessity, involve teachers in a course of study that will address all relevant issues of educational pedagogy – both philosophical and practical.

I wish to draw out a distinction that was hinted at, but not developed in the Archbishop's address. It is the contrasting distinction between Christians who are teachers, and teachers who teach Christianly. There is some confusion abroad on this issue, which needs attention. It must be said that for many Christians in the educational field – both classroom practitioners and administrators – this issue is not a contrast, but an equation. Such a conclusion however, reflects a significant misunderstanding of what it means to teach Christianly. I do not say this to direct any personal criticism towards, or attack the integrity of practising Christians in the teaching profession. It is rather to draw attention to what has been, and continues to be conspicuously absent in our teacher training programs – something which is entirely self-evident, but needs to be said: All of us who have maintained a Christian profession of faith throughout our educational careers in Australia are the products of secular-humanist teacher education systems. We maintain our Christian faith as teachers in spite of our training, not because of it.

The result of such a process has been more or less a dualistic approach to our vocation, where we may maintain a vibrant Christian faith and lifestyle, which is often reflected both inside and outside the Christian school community. When it comes to our classroom practice however, we teach the Board of Studies curricula in much the same way as a non-Christian teacher may do. And *in the teaching of our subjects* we may in fact look no different from such a teacher. This is not offered as an *ad hominem* critique, but a systemic one.

As far as the Anglican educational community is concerned, we need to raise our conceptual horizon above the mere teaching of Board of Studies curricula, and seek ways of teaching that material from the perspective of God's word. This is not a simplistic task, to be addressed, for example, by merely adding Bible texts to each lesson in an arbitrary fashion. Rather it is to seek to understand how one can teach Mathematics, or History, or Computing Studies, or Music etc. from a consistently biblical world-and-life view, in order to show our students that only by worshiping God as our Creator and Redeemer can we truly understand the world in which He has placed us. Such thinking may well invite criticism; but it is my firm conviction that by adopting such an approach to teacher training, Christian teachers will be able to offer a Christian education in Anglican schools that is both authentic and distinctive. As Archbishop Jensen observed in his paper: "The practice of education has to be re-thought from the ground up, presuppositionally".

This task is a daunting one, and the initiatives proposed here will not happen overnight. I am certainly not claiming to have all the answers. I am still on the journey of discovery – a fellow-traveller with still much to learn. Yet the task is not impossible. The grace and wisdom of God are sufficient in the end. My prayer is that God will raise up a like-minded body of men and women committed to the vision laid out for Anglican Christian education by the Archbishop.

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