

ARMITAGE LECTURE RESPONSE
18 September 2009

In one sense I apologise that this response is based on conversations with Peter rather than a direct engagement with his text. However, I will try to speak to some of the ideas he has presented.

Firstly Your Grace, thank you for your lecture this evening. Those of us working in education are constantly mindful of your personal interest in and support for education in this diocese. It is an encouragement to us all.

The need for us to think through a philosophy of Anglican education is now an imperative. On the pragmatic level, the tens of thousands of young people in our schools and their associated families, and for longer established schools our former pupils, constitute the largest group of unchurched people that voluntarily puts itself in contact with Anglican Christians. There is a trust here that is not lightly dismissed. We are regarded as good schools: good morally/ethically; good intellectually; good with creativity and aesthetics; as Peter rightly identifies respectable. But also a little “too religious”, a bit “over the top”.

However, as we explore this space we realise that there are different “understandings” or “readings” of Anglican School. In part this arises from history – a school such as Shore was founded at the height of Empire – muscular Christians for a muscularly Christian mission. More recently, Schools founded in the post-modernity of the past twenty five years arise as countercultural and perhaps prophetic voices. This history does influence the self-concept of such institutions and perceptions by society.

It is at this point that I see a possible synthesis of mission within traditional Anglican thought frameworks. Anglicanism sees the world as God’s world. Despite the world’s fallen state Anglicanism has sought to engage with and speak to its society as a critical friend. Other non-Catholic traditions have often tended to outright unfriendly criticism or unalloyed identification – neither in the end leading to a transformational relationship. Anglicanism, particularly I dare say Evangelical Anglicanism, stands in a close but not cloyed relationship to this world and can speak prophetically as it tells and retells the narrative of Christ.

Stanley Hauerwas spoke in Cambridge on Tuesday evening and again said “the chief job of the church is to make the world the world.” I am not sure that I can say I agree entirely with him, but certainly I agree that Anglican schools represent a *via media* in education: they offer a means of speaking prophetically into the world, whilst acknowledging and teaching that it is fundamentally God’s handiwork – the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it. They form a bridge between a Christian and culture polity too often hiding behind its walls and a world seeking for a means to understand itself. Our task is to articulate that bridge in such a way as to faithfully present Christ to a world seeking “a reasonable” working hypothesis for life.

Alrsept09/jj