

Fourth Isaac Armitage Lecture
Setting the Vision: The Calling of the Christian Teacher in the Twenty First Century World
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Introduction

I feel very privileged to have been invited to give the 2008 Isaac Armitage lecture. I have read the lectures of my predecessors, Andrew Cameron, Grant Maple and Simon Longstaff and am aware of the enormous challenge I face in following in their footsteps. I would like to thank the headmaster, Dr Timothy Wright, for the invitation and chaplains Nick Foord and Paul Dudley for their support in my preparation. I just pray that the thoughts of a humble Brit will be of some benefit in your deliberations on the mission of the Anglican school.

I also feel very privileged because my job with the *Transforming Lives* project has enabled me to work extensively with Christian teachers in thinking about the nature of their vocation. I have watched with great interest, although from afar, the developing work of Ian Keast and John Scott in the Anglican Education Commission as they have recruited and educated Christian teachers. My privilege is to have a parallel role in Britain where I am employed to champion the significant mission-role of the Christian teacher in the church at large. I hope that some of you might visit our website.

Initially the sponsors of the *Transforming Lives* Project were interested in recruiting more Christians into teaching. They valued teaching as an important mission activity of the church and felt that the more Christians there were in the profession the better. And of course they are right!

However the Project steering group was concerned that there is still little understanding of what it means to be an effective, holistic Christian teacher in contemporary Britain; by this I mean someone whose professional work is shaped by gospel thinking rather than someone who simply attends church on Sunday but whose professional work is shaped by the prevailing culture, which at best echoes its Christian heritage and at worst has lost all touch with it. So we persuaded the sponsor to allow us to do some missiological work developing and communicating a clear message about the role of the Christian teacher in contemporary society. What does it mean to be a mission-shaped teacher? This work ends in December this year. I am delighted to have the opportunity of the Armitage lecture to share some of the results of our deliberations as we reflect together on the vocation of the Christian teacher. My purpose then this evening is to address the question “what does it mean to have the vocation to teach in an Anglican school?”

The Sacred-Secular Divide

As a preliminary I want to make a few remarks about what has been dubbed the SSD virus by Bryan Cowling, who describes it as “the pervasive belief that some parts of

our life are not really important to God – work, school, leisure – but anything to do with prayer, church or chapel services, church based activities and evangelism is.” Let me illustrate from the story of a student of mine who used to be a youth worker in a church and then became convinced that God was calling him to be a religious education teacher in a community school. He was criticised by fellow Christians for “abandoning God’s work”. “Why would he want to teach in a school when he has a unique opportunity to work with those in church who want to hear God’s word?” That, sadly, is the SSD virus.

In my work with the Church of England, I have concluded that we struggle with this virus. On the one hand, as good Protestants we are committed to the priesthood of all believers. But when it comes to discussions of vocation there is ambivalence about whether the concept applies exclusively to a call to church-based ministry (particularly ordination) or whether it applies to all Christians in their life’s work. For example, this quote from the conclusion of a recent Church of England report reflects the challenge:

“We suggested that such language as ‘Monday morning ministry’ or ‘ministry in the home’, to refer to a Christian’s daily walk of discipleship, their witness and acts of charity, is not helpful. A term is needed to mark out the core tasks of the Church, and those who are commissioned to carry them out, from the life of Christian discipleship that should characterize all Christians at all times. *Ministry we propose refers to specific, God-given work for the kingdom of God, work that is assigned or acknowledged by the Church.*” (My emphasis.)

Allow me to relate two true stories that I suggest illustrate the consequence of such thinking.

In March 2006, I attended a major Church of England conference to celebrate the Church’s mission work through its schools. I was in a group where one headteacher told this story. She was delighted about her church’s new-found commitment to mission and was an enthusiastic participant in the preliminary audit to identify current mission activity through the parish. So she was somewhat bemused when her form was returned to her by the vicar; it hadn’t been completed properly. The problem was her answer to the question “Please describe your current involvement in church mission”. Her response had been “I am head teacher in a primary school”. “That’s not what the question is looking for” explained the vicar. “We want to know about things you do for the church, not your job.” Her school was the Church school in the parish.

My second story comes from Alison Brown who now works as the Deputy Schools’ Director in the Diocese of Derby. Here she describes her discovery, as a young mother, of her vocation to teach and the response of her church.

“I had a real sense of excitement in a classroom and an odd certainty that this was the place for me. It did take time to think carefully about my calling though. A close friend and I, another Mum, helped each other a lot as we went through a process of testing the idea. She ended up being ordained and I decided to teach, but we both felt our respective callings very strongly. The irony is that on the Sunday before I started my teacher training and she went off to begin her ordination training, only one of us was called out to be prayed for in church. I leave you to guess who.”

The danger in seeking to distinguish between the concept of church-recognised ministries and personal vocations expressed in everyday Christian discipleship is that it perpetuates the medieval hierarchy which scorned ordinary work (the *via activa*) and saw the spiritual life of the monastic community (the *via contemplativa*) as superior. It is hardly surprising that Christians aspire to “proper” Christian work like ordination, being a youth or worship leader, or a missionary overseas when the daily walk of Christian discipleship is seen as “just a job” (my phrase) whereas Church-affirmed ministry is “God-given work”. This distinction was demolished in the time of Luther, but I know from years of working with Christian teachers that many of them feel that their professional work does not count for the kingdom as far as their churches are concerned. David Lankshear, a researcher from the University of Wales, discovered that only 17% of Christian teachers found their churches supportive in their daily work. This is scandalous. Somehow we Anglicans have to find a way of formally recognising the work of teachers if we are to really affirm their role in “kingdom-building”.

The SSD virus isn’t however just spread through Christian circles. No doubt you have seen adverts that extol the virtues of “good bacteria”. For some people the SSD virus is considered to be a “good virus”, because it keeps religion in its place. This virus is known as *the public-private divide* and is enthusiastically advocated by such organisations as the British Humanist Association (BHA). The truth is that the BHA believes that religion is at best an irrational idiosyncrasy and at worst a social evil. However humanists recognise that in a democracy they have to respect religious people’s human rights as citizens whilst containing the influence of religion. Their answer is to tolerate religion as a private matter, part of one’s leisure life, but to insist that public duties must be uninfluenced by it. So they campaign against “faith schools” on the grounds that public money should not fund the propagation of religion. The eminent missiologist Lesslie Newbigin identified this public/private divide as the most corrosive characteristic of western culture for the life of faith. It is SSD by another name.

The influence of the SSD virus in public life can be seen by looking at the recent behaviour of Tony Blair. Whilst in office he remained very quiet about his Christian faith, probably restrained by his communications director Alastair Campbell who famously said “we don’t do God.” On leaving office, however, Blair has become much more vocal about his faith, even converting to Catholicism, saying that he kept quiet before for fear of damaging his credibility as Prime Minister; he didn’t want to be dismissed as a religious nutcase. But look at what he had to say on the loyalty of British citizens to nation and faith whilst in office.

“Integration...is not about culture or lifestyle. It is about values. It is about integrating at the point of shared, common, unifying British values. It isn’t about what defines us as people, but as citizens, the rights and duties that go with being a member of our society.

Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and other faiths have a perfect right to their own identity and religion, to practice their faith and to conform to their culture. This is what multicultural, multifaith Britain is about. This is what is legitimately distinctive.

But when it comes to our essential values – belief in democracy, the rule of

law, tolerance, equal treatment of all, respect for this country and its shared heritage – then this is where we come together, it is what we hold in common; it is what give us the right to call ourselves British. *At that point no distinctive culture or religion supercedes our duty to be part of an integrated United Kingdom*” (Emphasis mine)

This view of citizenship might (possibly) feel comfortable in the context of current British democracy, but what about Nazi Germany? I share Simon Longstaff’s concern about Christians in business and politics who adopt an ethical stance in their working life that contradicts Christian aspirations. Such are the pressures of professional life that far too many Christians simply assume norms on the basis that “that’s business”, or “that’s law” or “that’s management”, as if these activities had an unchallengeable authority that superceded any religious convictions. For example, it seems to me that it is characteristic of academic life in Britain to make the assumption that faith-based scholarship and teaching is less credible than secular approaches. Academic rigour and (presumed) objectivity are confused as one and the same. So even in our Church universities, staff simply assume that a secular approach is the norm and that talk of Christian distinctiveness flies in the face of academic respectability and equal opportunities policy.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Christians succumb to the SSD virus when their experience of both public professional life and the church is that their faith is treated as, at best, of little relevance in their work and, at worst, as pernicious. Everything I now say in this lecture about the vocation of teaching is intended to provide an antidote against the effects of the SSD virus by proposing an alternative mindset that treats teaching as a vocation characterised by a sense of Christian calling and by a vision for Christian transformation.

Vocation as Christian Calling

Perhaps I can be indulgent and reflect on my own “calling to teach”. Actually, there was never anything else on the cards; I just always knew that I was going to be a teacher. At secondary level my whole life was school. I was there from 8am in the morning until 6pm at night (usually six days a week as we had Saturday morning school followed by sports activities); spent a couple of hours travelling backwards and forwards each day; treated the Christian Union as my church since Sunday was spent catching up on homework; and spent my holidays on camps and other activities with my school friends. On the way I collected exam results rather like other people collected cigarette cards. School for me could have been called a total institution. I couldn’t imagine being anywhere else. So after four years at university, I was straight back and began teaching biology at Banbury Comprehensive School in the English Midlands.

I can sympathise with someone who might say that I had more drifted into teaching than been called into it. Perhaps my life perspective was so narrow that I could not conceive of life without school? Is the truth that I never really grew up and wanted to stay at school in perpetuity?

But let me finish the story. After two years teaching science, I went back to college to learn theology. The reason? Because in those first two years as a science teacher I had taught a little Religious Education and had been bitten. I loved it. Whilst at

theological college we had a Quiet Day. I had seriously begun to consider ordained ministry and I decided to go and talk to the visiting speaker about this. He asked me a very simple question: "What is it that thrills you, that makes your heart joyful, that you are passionate about?" I then had as clear a sense of vocation as I have ever had; I knew that it was teaching! As a friend once said to me, "one knows a vocation from what makes one's heart sing". If I am honest, my toying with ordination was actually me feeling the peer pressure that comes from the status given to church-based ministry in a theological college. I actually had a very clear calling to teach.

Christian calling then is a clear sense that to "go this way is to walk God's way". However there can be problems with such a strong sense of calling. Frank Kline and Sharon Hartnett, two teacher educators from Seattle Pacific University, published an important article which highlights the danger. From their experience of training aspiring Christian teachers, they express concern over trainees who come with an overwhelming sense that God has called them to a lifetime's ministry in teaching and yet it transpires that they simply do not have the necessary "withitness" (p10) for the job; putting it bluntly, they are not "classroom credible".

Even for those who do have the required "withitness", there can still be a sense of dislocation between the strong sense of calling they experience and the realities of the classroom. Teaching is an incredibly rewarding career; there is nothing that matches the exhilaration of leading successful learning. But let's make no bones about it; teaching is also a tough job and not for the faint-hearted. Recent figures from the General Teaching Council in England revealed that 40% of the people who trained in 2006 were not teaching a year later. That's a staggering attrition rate. And there are probably many Christians amongst them. Compare that with medicine where only 3% of those qualifying leave in the first ten years. When questioned, those who have left teaching cite the inexorable workload, the poor work/life balance and the increasingly aggressive behaviour of pupils and parents as their reasons for leaving.

Christian teachers who struggle with their inability to cope with school, be they trainees or experienced, may have a real crisis of faith. They may well experience what Parker Palmer calls "the divided self", a dissonance between one's inner aspirations and sense of calling and the realities of working life as a teacher. They often have to leave the profession, burdened with a sense of guilt that they have failed God in not persisting with their calling. This can be very destructive of both the person and their faith. The importance of positive resonance between teachers' inner life and their professional work is highlighted in a research project led by Mark Chater. Chater concludes:

"Teachers' inner lives, including their sense of vocation and their emotional state, are what count in changing the profession; this cannot be done without examination of the teacher's basic beliefs" (p. 256).

I suggest that the real problem is that most Christians haven't sorted out their understanding of what it means to have a calling. Their basic beliefs are leading them astray. In the next few paragraphs I will explore this issue.

Kline and Hartnett offer two insights in understanding the call to teach, which identify the misunderstanding which they saw in some of their students. Firstly they make use of Os Guinness' distinction between primary and secondary callings in describing the

concept of Christian vocation. The primary calling is to faithfulness to God. It is to seek that our entire life should be an expression of communion with God. Our secondary callings, and there may be many of them over a lifetime, are the means by which we express that faithfulness and include our career(s). In this sense the vocation to teach is a secondary calling. To treat one's job as one's primary calling is to mistake its significance. To change one's job is not to deny one's primary calling.

Secondly, drawing on Parker Palmer, they introduce the concepts of *fit* and *fulfilment* as central to discovering our secondary callings in life. . "Finding fulfilment in our work occurs if the particular tasks of the job fit our skills and competence" (2005, p15). By fit they mean the match between a person's gifts, personality and abilities and the requirements of a job. By fulfilment they mean the nebulous but important idea that one's passions in life are matched in the job that one does. Where there is both fit and fulfilment there is a secondary calling, or a vocation. That is when one's heart sings.

In using the concepts of fit and fulfilment, Kline and Hartnett are echoing the substantial work of the Croatian theologian Miroslav Volf on work. Volf puts forward what he calls a pneumatological understanding of work, by which he means that a person's work becomes their vocation when it enables them to draw on and use, in their daily tasks, the spiritual gifts with which God has endowed them. In Volf's view it is a Christian duty to discover and develop these gifts, or charisms as he calls them, and the more one does that the more one is (to use language that is not Volf's) fulfilling one's primary calling through participation in the secondary callings that we experience in life.

"The pneumatological understanding of work... revolves around the individual's gifts... One discovers what work God is calling one to do by reflecting on the gifts one has received, not simply by examining one's life setting. This reflection should of course always take place within a given community. God does not call a person to do anything for which God does not give her the ability. It is not, therefore, her duty to do whatever morally acceptable work the situation in which she lives might demand of her. It is her privilege to do the kind of work for which God's spirit has gifted her." (p. 200-201)

Here Volf is challenging the idea that one should accept "one's station in life" whatever that happens to be, on the grounds that that is the nature of vocation. So he is disputing the influential view that a secondary calling is "for better or for worse, until death do us part"; that leaving a job to which you have been called is to be unfaithful to God. Rather he is saying that a person has a duty to aspire to "better things" in the sense of desiring to use their God-given gifts to the greatest effect for work of the kingdom of God. For Volf it is the maximal use and exploitation of the gifts that God gives to each that gives true fulfilment in life.

Kline's and Hartnett's contribution is important because it offers an alternative to some unhelpful understandings of vocation. For one thing, it makes the seeking and finding of our vocation the responsibility of each and every Christian and not just those who are called full-time to a "religious" career like priesthood or missionary service. It also places responsibility on the individual to understand well both themselves and any job that they might be considering. Furthermore, in contrast to

those who see vocation as entailing discovering a divine, but hidden, blueprint for your life which exists “out there”, they portray the discovery of vocation as a life-long, ongoing journey of growth in personal understanding. Kline and Hartnett sees this as particularly important in their role as teacher educators where there are always students who they have to advise are not suited to the job. “Leaving teaching, then, does not necessarily mean that someone did not live up to their primary call” (2005, p11). Rather it is fulfilling the primary calling by taking care to ensure that one has found a suitable secondary calling. Such a view gives permission both for leaving an “unsuitable” secondary calling and for seeing that as a positive learning experience, part of the lifetime journey of “being on vocation”. They quote Parker Palmer:

Vocation does not come from a voice ‘out there’ calling me to be something I am not. It comes from a voice ‘in here’ calling me to be the person I am born to be, to fulfil the original selfhood given me by God at birth (p13).

The primary calling of the Christian is not then to a specific occupation for life (the traditional understanding of the missionary calling and ordination) but to a lifelong journey of “introspection” (p19) where one looks to serve others and engage in kingdom-building in occupations that enable you to be the person that God has made you to be.

In concluding this section, I suggest that there are five important points that derive from this discussion of teaching as a Christian calling.

Firstly, teaching needs honouring as a Christian ministry if we, as a Christian community, are not to be assimilated into the prevailing secular-sacred divide beloved of Western democracies. Christian teachers should bring something *distinctive* to their work. Teaching is a challenging task of cross-cultural mission; training and support are essential if Christian teachers are going to be able to undertake this effectively. We provide this for our overseas missionaries, but what about our teachers?

Secondly, if Christians are to take seriously the idea that teaching (or any other so-called secular work) is a Christian vocation, then we have to stop creating a sense that church-based ministry is somehow more significant. This means ensuring that the spoken and unspoken messages about vocation don’t create a hierarchal divide between Church-recognised ministry and day-to-day Christian discipleship.

Thirdly, Christians need support in developing their understanding of what it means to have a vocation. We need to move away from the idea that, somehow, this is God’s responsibility and accept that it is our responsibility. God has made us with gifts and potential. To fulfil our vocation is to engage in a process of discovering, developing and exercising those gifts in the many circumstances of life. It is to capitalise on the opportunities of life to serve God by using those gifts. For would-be teachers this means engaging in a process that involves both discerning one’s own God-given potential and ensuring that you understand the requirements of being a teacher. The key question is “has the way God made me equipped me to flourish and serve in teaching?”

Fourthly, churches need to take the notion that discovering one’s vocation is a journey of discovery as seriously for lay vocations as for church-based vocations. This has huge implications for youth workers, school chaplains and Christian studies teachers,

because if the Church isn't helping teenagers to understand their Christian vocation, then we will have missed the boat by the time they are young adults. Considerable effort is invested by the Church in identifying and developing those who have a calling to ordained ministry. But what about our teachers (and doctors and business people and journalists)? This certainly requires public recognition of a teacher's calling, through commissioning services and other strategies. It also requires a strategy for working with those who are in process of discerning their calling. This can be a painful process, as we all have illusions about how God has made us.

Finally there needs to be support for Christian teachers who find that teaching is an experience that, to quote a young primary teacher friend of mine, "stretches them where they don't feel stretchy". Two responses are possible here. On the one hand it needs to be recognised that all Christian ministry is seriously demanding. As one young Christian teacher expressed it recently:

"Who wants this job? Me? I don't want it mate. But I need it. I feel as if I have moved from the dead to the living. For the first time I have a job where I feel connected to life rather than detached from it"

Christian calling is not to a life of ease. The church expects that its missionaries will find their work demanding. So we support them. We seek to build resilience, not simply to encourage a survival attitude which views one's work as something you get through and church is where life really happens. We want to nurture achievers for God. And that requires targeted support.

On the other hand, it may be that someone is actually trapped in a form of work that is out of synch with the way God made them. It may have become an alienating experience. In those circumstances people can easily feel that their Christian responsibility is to persevere; to resign is seen as failing to honour one's calling. However what they actually need to do to honour their vocation is to seek another opportunity where they can use their God-given gifts more effectively in service of God. Indeed it is a Christian duty that they do this. To move on is not to fail; it is to be obedient. However discerning when it is right to persevere and when it is right to move on is far from easy. Everyone needs fellow travellers on this journey. Kline and Hartnett are clearly fulfilling this function in their role as teacher trainers at Seattle Pacific University.

Vocation as Christian Transformation

One of the questions often asked about human work is this – is all work potentially a vocation. The answer must surely be no. Human trafficking, producing pornography and genocide can never be Christian vocations. But can *secular* work be a vocation or does the fact that it is secular rule that out? I suggest the answer is "it depends". On the day I write this, the Church Times carries news of a Christian journalist who has recently committed suicide. The writer of the obituary leaves his readers in no doubt that he thinks that the expected norms of journalism and the consequent demons unleashed in this journalist's mind were what killed him. Some secular jobs seem to require people to sell their souls (to coin a phrase). But there is much in secular work that can be celebrated and much that is open to transformation if we put our mind to it. Work becomes a vocation, I suggest, when we see it as a means for contributing to the transformation of society in ways that build the Kingdom of God. To quote

Miroslav Volf again:

“A theological interpretation of work is valid only if it facilitates transformation of work toward ever-greater correspondence with the coming new creation” (p. 83)

“The expectation of the eschatological transformation invests human work with ultimate significance. Through it human beings contribute in their modest and broken way to God’s new creation” (p. 92)

To view vocation in this way is to actively combat the SSD virus.

At this point I must offer an apology to those who were present at the AASN conference in Perth a few weeks back as I will now use some of the ideas that I explored there in my plenary presentation to elucidate the implications of the view of teaching as a vocation that I have developed in this lecture. I can only pray that you will forgive the repetition of ideas when you see their importance in supporting Christian teachers in their significant ministry.

I have taken to saying to teachers that their work is important because it has “eternal consequences”. I am fairly certain that many of them interpret that as meaning that their witness results in some of their pupils coming to know Jesus as their personal saviour. And yes I do mean that, because I believe in the importance of evangelism. But, actually, I don’t mean that. Miroslav Volf makes, I suggest, a hugely significant observation when he suggests that an adequate theology of work is not only pneumatological, but is also eschatological. By this he means that our understanding of human work is shaped by our understanding of the last things. The influential theologian and current Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright picks up the same idea arguing that many (perhaps most) Christians have been seduced by ideas of disembodied souls existing in some heavenly state in their thinking about eternal life. Wright’s biblical exegesis leads him to propose that this is a myth; the biblical view of the future is not an escape to a heavenly realm, but the renewal of creation. The resurrection of Jesus is central to Christian faith because it is the first fruits of something that is going to happen to the whole of creation. “With Jesus the future hope has come forwards into the present” (p. 163)

Why is this important? Because, as Wright says, what we believe about the last things fundamentally effects our practical theology, which he describes as “Christian reflection on the nature of the task we face as we seek to bring God’s kingdom to bear on the real and painful world in which we live” (p.xiii). In other words our eschatology will fundamentally affect how we think and how we act. It has huge implications as to how we view our work.

“The point of the resurrection... *is that the present bodily life is not valueless just because it will die.* God will raise it to new life. What you do with your body in the present matters because God has a great future in store for it.....What you do in the present – by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbour as yourself – all these things *will last into God’s future.* They are not simply ways of making the present life a little less beastly, a little more bearable... They are part of

what we may call *building for God's kingdom.*" (p205)

The relevance of all this for Christian teachers is that they are literally "agents of transformation" (Wright, 2007, p214), kingdom builders who shape the future through their work with pupils. As Miroslav Volf puts it, teachers work is of eternal value for their pupils because "it leaves an indelible imprint on their personalities" (2001 p. 98). Christian teachers carry forward the mission of the church, are outposts of God's Kingdom and co-workers with God in the world through the work of teaching and learning. That is what makes it a vocation.

Transformation in Teaching

There can be little doubt that teachers can make a huge difference to their pupils' lives. The weekly *Times Educational Supplement* in England carries a feature where well-known personalities reflect on one of their teachers when they were at school. It is humbling to read. Always there is a deep sense of gratitude for a very significant contribution; often one which changes the direction of that person's life.

One of the profoundly significant insights that comes out of Tom Wright's book is that all the things that Christians do that make a positive difference to other people's lives, that promote a form of life that resonates with the values of the Kingdom of God, that promote human flourishing and well-being, have eternal value. So, for example, the headteacher friend of mine who went to great pains to break the nicotine addiction of many of his pupils by arranging for professional intervention was contributing something of eternal consequence to these young people. It is not just the visiting evangelist who saves souls that is doing that. To transform people's well-being through one's work is an integral part of having a Christian vocation.

Sometimes people question whether this approach is actually *distinctively* Christian. Could not people from other religious traditions have come up with it? The answer is yes – and no.

The assumption behind the question is that for an approach to be *distinctively* Christian it must be *uniquely* Christian; no-one else could come up with it. However, what makes an approach distinctively Christian is that the teacher consciously sets an idea like well-being within a framework of ideas *derived from* the Christian faith. In other words they are being biblically faithful in how they interpret the shared idea. This may well mean that they come up with approaches which other people applaud; for example Christians have much in common with environmentalists in relation to the appreciation and care of creation and the responsible stewardship of resources. For Christians this concern is inspired by and rooted in a desire to be faithful to the biblical doctrine of God as creator, whereas for atheists, for example, it probably is rooted in a more pragmatic view of human survival. However there is still huge potential for working together despite these differences in belief. I like the way David Smith from the Kuyers Institute at Calvin College expresses his approach to Christian distinctiveness when he says: "For me, the question 'am I being faithful?' takes priority over 'am I being different?'".

A current hot topic in England will illustrate the point. In 2004 the government launched an initiative called *Every Child Matters* (ECM) in response to the horrific murder of an eight year-old girl that happened because the various agencies involved

were not talking to each other This has five desired outcomes, namely that every child should:

- 1 Be safe
- 2 Stay healthy
- 3 Enjoy and achieve
- 4 Make a positive contribution
- 5 Achieve economic well-being

Every school is now inspected on the contribution that it makes to achieving these goals.

This all seems commendable; who would object to schools promoting children's well-being? The problem is when you examine the initiative more closely it becomes clear that it is set within a particular framework of understanding of what is meant by well-being. Putting it crudely it is materialistic, with the assumption that well-being is largely to do with economic and physical matters. The spiritual figures not at all. If one were cynical one might suspect that the motivation might well be to do with cutting government healthcare costs by, for example, promoting healthy eating, and increasing tax income by creating a more employable workforce.

How does a Christian teacher respond to this initiative in a transformative way? I suggest firstly by welcoming the concern for child well-being and offering enthusiastic support. Secondly by critiquing the initiative to identify its fundamental worldview, which is certainly materialistic. Thirdly by offering a re-interpretation of the initiative which transforms it in a gospel-friendly way. For example the Diocese of Lichfield has added a sixth outcome for its schools, *Be spiritual*. Finally by ensuring that the new framework permeates the way the initiative is implemented. For example the outcome *Achieve economic well-being* makes no reference to the notion that one cannot serve both God and mammon. A Christian transformation of this outcome must include helping pupils to develop a balanced understanding of the place of money in life and a sense of the responsibility that the wealth they enjoy through living in a rich country should bring. To respond in this way is to offer a *distinctively* Christian transformation of the *Every Child Matters* agenda by setting it within a framework of biblical values. It is not, however, to offer a *uniquely* Christian response as other people whose worldviews are also non-materialistic will come to the same conclusions by setting ECM within their own framework of beliefs. One of the privileges of working in a religiously diverse context is building coalitions with people of different faith who share some Christian concerns. Another privilege is to share with them the gospel message which leads us to see things differently. At that point we offer something unique.

Vocation: Daniel - a Biblical Role Model

I find teachers respond warmly to the story of Daniel. In his address to the 2007 General Assembly of the United Reform Church, Stephen Orchard commented:

“We have not yet understood what is asked of us as disciples to make sense of a British society in which we are strangers.”

Daniel spent most of his life as a stranger. Snatched into exile as a young man he

found himself a *resident alien* in Babylon. He must have wondered how he could sing the songs of Zion whilst in this foreign land. His challenge was how to remain faithful to God, whilst in the service of a godless empire. How could he make a distinctive contribution as a believer? How were his gifts to be used in service of God's kingdom? What did it mean for him to have a vocation here? How was he to avoid being assimilated into Babylonian beliefs?

Many Christian teachers identify with these feelings. Stephen Orchard puts his finger on the point. Christians in western democracies feel less and less at home as the world around them increasingly embraces the values of celebrity lifestyle and the "me-at-the-centre" culture. You can read his story for yourself, but you will find that Daniel struggles to remain faithful and to fulfill his vocation. Sometimes it's very tough and he finds himself in prison and, eventually, in the lion's den. At other times the quality of his gifts are recognized and he has a huge impact on those around him, including the emperor. He sought the well-being, peace and prosperity of the city in which he found himself. But in his daily work Daniel offers a distinctively Jewish perspective by remaining faithful to God in his own behaviour and by offering God-centered advice to his superiors. And the quality of his advice was indeed recognized and led to transformation in the attitudes of some of those around him.

Daniel wasn't for ever sitting under the trees weeping with homesickness for Jerusalem. He wasn't forever lamenting the state of society around him. No he was in the thick of things, using his gifts to make a difference and to offer a transformed vision of what really mattered.

Christian teachers can look to Daniel for inspiration. Increasingly we work in a culture that does not share our worldview. However we can use our God-given gifts to promote the well-being of those we work with and to offer a transformed understanding of the meaning of human existence. We can be light in this context as people who offer a distinctive contribution. No doubt we will also face very challenging circumstances. But to be inspired by Daniel is to fulfill the vocation of the Christian teacher.

The Church's responsibility is to stand with teachers in this calling. We should be actively seeking out and encouraging those who have the gifts for this vocation. Sydney Diocese is a beacon in this respect. I know of no-where else in the world where such commitment is shown to this task. But there is no room for complacency. We should redouble our efforts to offer targeted support and training for those involved in the ministry of being a Christian teacher in a world which would rather keep Christian faith out of public life.