

**The Inaugural Isaac Armitage Lecture
'Anglican Schooling in a Pluralistic Society'
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Introduction

I'd like thank Shore School, the headmaster Dr. Timothy Wright and school Chaplain the Rev. Matthew Pickering, for the enormous honour of inviting me to deliver this inaugural Armitage Lecture. I'm personally very touched by the invitation, and I am delighted to represent Moore Theological College in honour of Shore's first ordained graduate of Moore.

I wish I knew more about what happened for Isaac Armitage after Shore. After watching the suffering inflicted by the Western powers and the Boxer Rebels in China, what took him straight from his tour of duty to Moore College, and to a faithful lifelong ministry? Something of enormous significance happened to this young man, and as one who has also benefited greatly from the ministry of Moore College, I feel some affinity for the elderly Rev. Armitage, who even in his eighty-second year so fondly remembered both Shore and Moore that he endowed the scholarship that still enables men from here to study there.

May I also offer my welcome to heads, chaplains, teachers and administrators from our network of thirty-plus Anglican schools in the Sydney Diocese, and to every member of the audience this evening, who want to educate children as well as we can. Indeed I'm very aware that in such a gathering, I address people who have been wrestling with issues of schooling in general, and of Anglican schooling in particular, over entire careers; and so in many respects, are vastly more competent than I am. I'm hoping, though, that what I have to say might articulate, clarify and stimulate some of that wrestling.

The title of my talk, 'Anglican Schooling in a Pluralistic Society,' could of course mean anything. But I want to talk about what Anglican schools are *for*, in a world where many people believe many different things. Let me assume at the outset that a church school has some sort of intention to 'bless the world' somehow. I want us to think about how that 'blessing' might work. I'll put my discussion into the context of what seems to me an agonisingly difficult debate in modern Australia: the place of so-called 'values' in our school education.

Considering Armitage's love of the Old Boys Union, his endowment is, most likely, a remembrance of something powerful that happened to him while here, and in this way is a symbolic reminder that something way beyond the course curricula can happen to a child at school. For schools are places of *moral formation*.

When I say 'moral' tonight, I'll sometimes say it in a bad sense: there are modes of moral formation that are ruinous and destructive. But I also want to try and say this difficult word 'moral' in a good sense: Christian educators who seek to bless the world need to grasp *how* 'moral' can be as delightful a term as 'grace', 'forgiveness', or 'love'. To bless the world through our schools involves, I will argue, a kind of moral formation that springs from the gospel of Jesus.

1. I'll begin by describing why we can't avoid the term 'moral', even if we wanted to.
2. From there, I'll try to name some tensions and disagreements that I'm guessing would surface among us if we each had to put on the table what we thought Anglican schools are for, and how they should bless the world.

3. Then, I'm going to have a short tour of a word that everyone seems to think is important when we try and talk about what schools are for—something called ‘values’—a concept, I'll suggest, that cannot really get us as far as we'd like it to.
4. Then, I'll plunge you deep into a thinker whom I think can help us quite a bit.
5. I'll then say some interesting things that might help you in your daily work to bless the world. Then I'll throw a few grenades, and sit down.

1. Schools of moral formation

Every community that human beings are involved in, is a school of moral formation. *Any* organised group of people has some kind of wider blueprint that directs its affairs, which shapes us into *its* moral vision of how we should live. As we get caught up into any group, we are being asked to accept that blueprint, and to become the new architects of its moral vision, and the next builders of its future.

Nowhere is this truth about human beings more obvious than in the schooling of our children.

I'm amazed by the reflections of the fourth century theologian Augustine of Hippo, who reflects upon his own schooling with a mixture of pain, regret, anger and disbelief.¹ Augustine was very interested in the theatre, and his emotional responses as a boy studying drama left a deep impression upon him. In the same way as we might study Shakespeare's depiction of medieval English Kings, he studied dramatisations by Greek and Latin playwrights of ancient mythology:

[T]raditional education taught me that Jupiter punishes the wicked with his thunderbolts and yet commits adultery himself. The two roles are quite incompatible. (p36; I.16)

Of course such writing was just a system where human folly was divinised, and the net effect for people reading it was that

their wickedness would not be reckoned a crime, and all who did as they did could be shown to follow the example of the heavenly gods, not that of sinful mortals.

And yet human children are pitched into this hellish torrent, together with the fees which are paid to have them taught lessons like these. Much business is at stake, too, when these matters are publicly debated, because the law decrees that teachers should be paid a salary in addition to the fees paid by their pupils. (p. 36; I.16)

The more things change, the more they stay the same, and it seems that disputing about school funding and ‘values in education’ is not some recent Aussie invention! But more importantly, Augustine is noticing the way his school was also a school of *moral formation*. These playwrights are studied so that the boys will learn words, and the teachers don't care about the content of the plays because of the blueprint, the moral vision, that the school was working towards. He puts words into the mouths of his teachers to describe that blueprint:

‘This is the school where men are made masters of words. This is where they learn the art of persuasion, so necessary in business and debate.’ (pp 36-7; I.16)

It is a school to teach life-skills, and that sentence would go on the school's website as its aim. But the teachers—the architects and builders of this school—have not noticed that they cannot stand apart from the moral structure they are building, and a small boy can see all too easily the

¹ Augustine, *Confessions* tr. R.S. Pine-Coffin, *Penguin Classics* edition, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), 30-31, 36-40 (Bk I.9, 16-19).

way these teachers end up with a character shaped by their own blueprint, and then in turn, shape that blueprint in their own image.

So Augustine was expected to model himself, he says, upon men who rebuked each other if *innocent* activities were described in *awkward* language, “but [who] revelled in the applause they earned for the fine flow of well-ordered and nicely balanced phrases with which they described their own acts of indecency.” (p.38; I.18) And so

A man who has learnt the traditional rules of pronunciation, or teaches them to others, gives greater scandal if he breaks them by dropping the aitch from ‘human being’ than if he breaks [God’s] rules and hates another human, his fellow man. ... [A] fine speaker will stand up before a human judge, surrounded by a human audience, and lash his opponents with malicious invective, taking the greatest care not to say ‘uman’ instead of ‘human’ by a slip of the tongue, and yet the thought that the frenzy in his own mind may condemn a human being to death disturbs him not at all. (p. 39; I.18)

It becomes a system of institutionalised hypocrisy, with teachers blind to the hidden curriculum of the place:

[W]e enjoyed playing games and were punished for them by men who played games themselves. However, grown-up games are known as ‘business’, and even though boys’ games are much the same, they are punished for them by their elders. ... Was the master who beat me himself very different from me? If he were worsted by some colleague in some petty argument, he would be convulsed with anger and envy, much more so than I was when a playmate beat me at a game of ball. (pp, 30, 31; I.9)

“It was at the threshold of a world such as this that I stood in peril as a boy.” (p.39; I.19) And although as a boy he could see the hypocrisy and shallowness of what he was told mattered most, *because* he was a boy, he was swept up in it anyway. The school of moral formation did its work. “By these means I won praise from the people whose favour I sought, for I thought that the right way to live was to do as they wished.” (p. 39; I.19) Watching the hypocrisy of his masters, he would cheat and yet hate being cheated, would lie and yet use his word-skills to defend his lies. The victims of the blueprint become its new architects and master builders, and so, a society is born:

For commanders and kings may take the place of tutors and schoolmasters, nuts and balls and pet birds may give way to money and estates and servants, but these same passions remain with us while one state of life follows upon another, just as more severe punishments follow upon the schoolmaster’s cane. (p.40; I.19)

Every school *will*, one way or another, be a school not just of mere facts, but of moral formation. Some vision of society will guide its blueprint; and its board, its head, its teachers and its parents *will be building* to that blueprint. Also, and perhaps slightly alarmingly, the blueprint and its structures will shape board members and heads and teachers and parents just as much as the children who live within it. The morality of Augustine’s school is a long way from any kind of blessing for the world—but it did give life skills.

Perhaps we can see why Augustine became so interested a very different kind of ‘school’ of moral formation. In his 69th year, he sends instructions to a group of Christian women whose community is threatening to break down from quarrels and internal disputes.² His letter to them borrows from some of the teachings of the apostle Paul, that they might order their life together to share, to treat each other as sisters irrespective of their social status, to pray together, and to

² Augustine, "Letter CCXI," in *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustin*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. I (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988; originally published New York, 1886).

care for their sick. He wants the community's leaders to exercise authority well, and he seeks for a community where there is consonance between what is taught and learnt about Scripture, and the practices and habits that are lived there. This letter remains a major influence on monastic communities around the world even today.

2. Tensions and disagreements

In Augustine's rather jaded recounting of his own childhood, we can perhaps see some of the tensions and disagreements that are still played out amongst us:

- Is school a training arena, where I learn survival skills for a tough world beyond? Is it where I learn to be the most functional kind of citizen that I can be, with Christian faith a civic accessory?
- Or school a community of difference, where I live a different vision than stale world beyond? Is it where I learn to be the best disciple of Christ that I can be, with Christian faith central to proper human experience?

If I *am* to learn something about following Christ at school, what *form* will that take?

- Is the school more like a monastery, where to enter the school is draw aside from the waiting world, to be deeply schooled in the ways of a community committed to pleasing Christ?
- Or is the school more like a mission station, where to enter the school is to begin to experience the waiting world, with discipleship commended in the company of families and children who do not yet follow Christ?

You might know someone here who has a very different conception than you do, about what their school is for. Some are thinking 'life-skills!' while other are thinking 'no, evangelism!', Some are thinking 'civic training ground!' while others are thinking 'Christian counter-culture!' Some are thinking, 'monastic protection!' while other are thinking 'cross-cultural equipping!'

3. 'Values'

In thinking about what schools are for, you'll be reminded of a kind of discussion about schools that goes under the mantle of a word that I don't like very much. That word is 'values', and it seems to be the only handle that our community has on trying to make sense of the something 'extra' that parents want for their kids at school.

A 'values' discussion has rumbled along in Australian State and Federal government circles for the last five years. It flared into the public arena in 2004. In January, the Prime Minister suggested that some State schools were too 'values-neutral'. Then in the September lead-up to the 2004 Federal election, the Catholic and Anglican Archbishops of Melbourne and Sydney jointly questioned ALP schools funding policy (another chapter of a fascinating history, which I plan to steer well clear of!). The Archbishops' made an throwaway mention of 'values' in their opening declaration:

We endorse strongly the principle of parents being free to choose the kind of education they want for their children. Parents may choose education provided by government schools or may choose a school that more closely supports their family's values and beliefs.³

The statement fuelled both the funding debate, and the already mystifying values debate. I think I saw various fights happening: that religious schools did the real 'values' education, even though we couldn't seem to list what the values actually were; that State schools *did* have

³ George Pell, *et al.*, *Churches' Statement on Funding* (28 September 2004); online: <http://www.austparents.edu.au/PDF%20Files/catholic/churchesstmt.pdf> (accessed 3/11/2005).

‘values’, even though differing lists kept appearing; that religious school ‘values’ did not seem to inform their desperation for Federal funding; that State school ‘values’ didn’t mean very much in the first place.

The discussion, though intense, reminded me of a slightly frustrated amnesiac trying to name something that mattered, if only he could remember what the thing was. The *idea* of ‘values’ generates a weird intensity among adults; yet at the same time, our eyes glaze over at this word ‘values’. We can’t seem to focus on it for long: we shake our heads and blink ourselves awake and drink black coffee and try to ignore more interesting distractions, like the stock market; and these ‘values’ are *so* important, and we explain them *so* well, that our children prefer to fall asleep, or run away, or SMS their friend, or poke them with a pencil.

Alasdair MacIntyre famously pictures peasants in a post-apocalyptic Mad-Max landscape, picking up bits of ruined wreckage from a culture that has long since been destroyed, and ignorantly arguing over them. That is his picture of modern people when it comes to moral and ethical ideas, which are picked up and argued over with little idea of where the ideas have come from, and how they once fit into a whole.⁴

I think something like that has gone wrong in Australian discussions of ‘values’. We are trying to talk about a blueprint, a moral vision, for what kind of society we want to inhabit, and how we might best pass that on to our children; but the only word that we can remember by which to have that discussion is this worn-out word. For what, exactly, is a ‘value’?⁵

The Australian Government has recently attempted to articulate what that vision is for State schools in its *National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools*.⁶ A Government poster has been issued listing nine values (actually there are thirteen-ish, but they are conceptually grouped to become nine): ‘care and compassion’, ‘doing your best’, ‘fair go’, ‘freedom’, ‘honesty and trustworthiness’, ‘integrity’, ‘respect’, ‘responsibility’, ‘understanding’, ‘tolerance and inclusion’.

⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 1-2.

⁵ Professor Brian V. Hill, Emeritus Professor of Education, Murdoch University, who has thought a lot about the way various sets of values derive from different worldviews, helpfully defines values as “the priorities individuals and societies attach to certain beliefs, experiences, and objects, in deciding how they shall live and what they shall treasure.” Although I will go on to suggest that the concept of ‘values’ has serious limitations, Hill’s definition is a perceptive summary of the way the term is used in modern debate. However, I am also quite sure that many who speak of ‘values’ would not be able to articulate anything like Hill definition, and if asked for an account of what ‘values’ actually are, would only be able to list some norms. [Brian V. Hill, “Values Education in Schools: Issues and Challenges” (paper presented at the National Values Education Forum, April 2004); online: <http://www.cces.org.au/index.php?type=14&id=299> (accessed 3/11/2005).]

⁶ I was interested to note that any school receiving government funding is required prominently to display the poster showing the nine Government values:

The Values for Australian Schooling poster highlights the nine values listed in the Framework: care and compassion; doing your best; fair go; freedom; honesty and trustworthiness; integrity; respect; responsibility; and understanding, tolerance and inclusion. It is a condition of Australian Government financial assistance to the States and Territories for government and non-government schools in the period 2005-08 (with funding worth \$33 billion in total) that the Values for Australian Schooling poster is displayed prominently in every school. [Australian Government, *Values Education for Australian Schooling* (Canberra: Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005), website; online: <http://www.valueseducation.edu.au/values> (accessed 3/11/2005).]

Again, like Augustine, we notice the way values and funding can’t seem to stay away from each other. I am not addressing issues of funding in this lecture, but some may want to pursue whether any deeper issues are at stake for Commonwealth funding to be made contingent upon displaying the Government’s account of values.

Similarly a NSW Government Ministerial Statement⁷ identifies nine values that “represent the aspirations and beliefs of the Australian community as a whole” that are “common to a range of secular and religious world-views and are found in most cultures”: ‘integrity’, ‘excellence’, ‘respect’, ‘responsibility’, ‘cooperation,’ ‘participation’, ‘care’, ‘fairness’, ‘democracy’.

Likewise the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority listed ‘respect’, tolerance and understanding’, ‘responsibility’, ‘care’, ‘excellence’, ‘social justice’, ‘freedom’, ‘honesty’, ‘inclusion and trust’ and ‘being ethical’,⁸ but that last one is a bit of a cheat to cover whatever the other ones miss. If we axe it we’ll get nine again, which seems like the magic number.

These lists got me to thinking that I could probably compile a good list of nine fair-dinkum Aussie values. After careful consultation with a variety of authoritative community sources, here they are: ‘Put a sock in it!’ ‘Have a go ya mug!’ ‘C’mon Aussie C’mon!’ ‘Up There Kazaly!’ ‘Shoot straight ya bastards!’ ‘She’ll be right mate!’ ‘How’s the serenity!’ ‘That goes straight to the pool room, that does!’ ‘It’s the vibe! I rest my case.’

Returning to our government’s more reserved efforts, we notice that these ‘values’ are, in the technical language of ethics, actually sets of ‘virtues’. Virtues are settled patterns of action and feeling that have become a habitual part of a person, and add up to comprise their ‘character’.

Each list of nine is open to at least two criticisms.

- Firstly, it is imprecise: as a child, which ‘value’ helps me, and in what way does it help me, when my best friend confides in me that her stepfather is doing bad things to her, but that she wouldn’t be at this school if he wasn’t paying for it?
- Secondly, each ‘value’ can lay claim to overlapping terrain and so they can sometimes seem inconsistent: what happens when ‘honesty’ seems to conflict with ‘compassion’—do I tell the teachers about my friend? We can easily think up dilemmas that bring two or more values on the list into conflict.

The Commonwealth Government says, a little desperately perhaps, that it has drawn its ‘values’ from “a range of philosophies, beliefs and traditions”. ‘Values’ are being used here to try and put all State schools under a common moral ‘roof’ in a pluralistic society.

It is very easy, then, for critical Christians quickly to assume that any imprecision or internal conflicts in the list are due to its mongrel heritage. But that is not quite fair, is it, because we could also point to a list in the Bible where we find nine virtues, the fruit of the Spirit: ‘love’, ‘joy’, ‘peace’, ‘patience’, ‘kindness’, ‘goodness’, ‘faithfulness’, ‘humility’, and ‘self-control’ [Galatians 5:22]. These are also imprecise, and can also be made to conflict in some situations.

In fact the problem with ‘values’ is not that their imprecision or possible conflict. Rather, MacIntyre’s observation of modern morality suggests that ‘values’ are *disconnected from any real roots*. ‘Values’ seem to ‘accessorise’ ethics, as if people ‘value’ ethical ideas a bit like one person values opera and another person values big engines. The whole concept of ethics is therefore cut off from any sense that we inhabit a wider order that needs to be known and

⁷ Andrew Refshauge, "Values in NSW Public Schools," (Sydney: NSW Department of Education and Training, 2004); online: http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/media/downloads/schoolsweb/homepage/minister_vnswps.pdf (accessed 10/11/2005).

⁸ State Government of Victoria, "Values Education and Victorian Schools," (Department of Education and Training, 2005), 3; online: <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/sose/docs/AppInJune2005.doc> (accessed 11/11/2005).

respected.⁹ But some think that ‘values’ are as good as it gets in a pluralistic society, since we cannot agree on the wider order.¹⁰

Another problem is that when used wrongly, ‘values’ simply sound Pelagian (a problem that also arises with other kinds of moral language, such as rules). That is, they can all too easily carry the whiff of ‘legalism’ or ‘moralism’ about them—an overbearing moral earnestness that is deeply unpleasant. Too many adults sound to too many children like the Pharisees of old, preaching what we do not practice, giving out burdens that we do not bear [Matt. 23:3-4].

Augustine’s teachers had ‘values’ they sought to impress upon wayward students between beatings and acts of hypocrisy. It is easy for adults to forget just how oppressive this language can be for children. I flinch a little myself at the list on the National Framework, and I can’t imagine any child being mesmerised by the Commonwealth Government poster.

Therefore I never feel that ‘values’ discussion is the kind of terrain where moral formation consists, in the words of Oxford professor Oliver O’Donovan, in “the consistent regard and delight elicited from us by the order of the real world which God has made.”¹¹

4. O’Donovan’s account of Christian ethics

O’Donovan is an evangelical ethicist of some note whose ideas have permeated several aspects of our ethics curriculum at Moore College. Students there find his thought very helpful, and they keep urging me to make it available to a wider Christian public.

I say he is an *evangelical* ethicist, because he has given much thought to the way truly Christian morality is, in fact, an aspect of Christian good news:

A belief in Christian ethics is a belief that certain ethical and moral judgments belong to the gospel itself; a belief, in other words, that the church can be committed to ethics without moderating the tone of its voice as a bearer of glad tidings.¹²

This statement meant a great deal to me when I first came across it. It came at a time in my life where I had finally understood the gospel of Jesus—that in his work on the cross, Christ had won the total forgiveness of all my sinfulness, and expressed the free and total grace of God towards me. But still I couldn’t understand why the call to live in different ways felt so much like an *unpleasant* kind of law, and nor could I understand how Christian ethics could mean anything useful to people who had not yet experienced God’s forgiveness in Christ. O’Donovan gives us a way of knitting together the freedom of the gospel with that “consistent regard and delight” which is, for O’Donovan, the core of truly Christian morality. O’Donovan reminds me of that slightly mad Psalmist, who says to God “I will speak of your statutes before kings … for I delight in your commands, because I love them.” [Psalm 119:46-47]

I’m hoping that you’ll bear with me for the next few minutes as I expound Oliver O’Donovan’s Christian ethic. He helps us with those tensions and disagreements I mentioned earlier; he’ll

⁹ I also have in mind here the argument of Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (London: IEA Health and Welfare Unit, 1995).

¹⁰ The conceptual ancestors of values, the ‘virtues’, needed other kinds of moral language in order to make sense. What makes some action tolerant, caring or respectful? Or peaceful, patient or kind? The very fast assessments that you make, minute by minute, in your everyday life about kindness or peaceableness or whatever, rely upon a rich depth of knowledge about what other people are, and what they need.

¹¹ Oliver M.T. O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Leicester: Apollos, 1994), 195.

¹² Ibid., 12.

give you some ideas perhaps about how to conduct your daily work with students; and he'll bring a sense of liberation to task of thinking up your school's 'values'.

a) 'Moral codes'

I've been a bit rough on values so far. I've talked about their limitations so much as almost to scorn them, but now I'll say why I haven't been quite fair.

Helping children think about how to live with others, and then helping them to live it, is not like helping them to think about mathematics or nuclear physics. In those cases, the teacher is more like a tour guide to unfamiliar terrain, as if I've gone to Brunei for the first time.

But unlike mathematics and nuclear physics, *living with others* is something that children have already been doing from the day they've been born, so in some respects they are already as close to the topic as they can get. When a teacher helps them to think about that, the teacher is a tour guide in an already familiar terrain. I love reading what reviewers and commentators say about movies and books and paintings *after* I've seen those things, because those commentators help me to see more clearly. Likewise, when it comes to showing how to live with others, the teacher is more like a botanist guiding me around a field that I thought was familiar.

This guiding task does have to start somewhere. Our lists of 'values' (or virtues) are an example of a *moral code*. A moral code is a first attempt to describe what is already familiar, and it is useful because it does sum up some aspects of what we know to be true.

There are other kinds of moral code. In the Bible, we don't just have 'the fruits of the Spirit'. There are ten commandments, and six hundred and thirteen commands in the Pentateuch, and ten other lists of NT virtues, and seventeen lists of vices that people do well to stay away from.¹³

My best friend confides in me that her stepfather is doing bad things to her, but that she wouldn't be at this school if he wasn't paying for it. In that case, *no* moral code on its own can enable me to solve the moral dilemmas. What makes it a dilemma is that *reality itself is complex*. Here is a sentence from O'Donovan that is slightly scary but very helpful:

The order of reality holds together a multitude of different kinds of moral relation, and orders them without abolishing their differences. Moral codes must teach a moral law which corresponds to the order of reality in its differentiation and complexity.¹⁴

b) The 'pluriform' 'moral field'

Let us name two aspects of reality's differentiated complexity. On the one hand, the reality that God has placed us in is *morally orderly* – it is not chaotic; it has regular features from person to person, from situation to situation, from generation to generation. But as you well know, the ingredients of each new situation are, on the other hand, *always slightly different*, and each new situation that confronts us is differentiated from the last.

O'Donovan has a name for reality as it meets us: he calls it the 'moral field', and like any field in the countryside, each moral field is a slightly different arrangement of things in relation to one another, a complex 'moral ecology', if you like, just like a field has a complex natural ecology. He invents a word to describe the moral field: it is 'pluriform'—on the one hand, *uniform* enough that similar moral truths always apply, but also such a *plurality* of relations that those truths apply slightly differently wherever we go.

¹³ Cf. Burton S. Easton, "New Testament Ethical Lists," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932). The lists are Mk 7:21-22; Rom. 1:29-31; 1 Cor. 5:9-11 & 6:9-10; 2 Cor. 6:6-7; Gal. 5:19-23; Eph. 4:31, 5:3-5 & 6:14-17; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:5, 3:8 & 3:12-14; 1 Tim. 1:9-10, 3:2-3, 6:4-5 & 6:11; 2 Tim. 3:2-4; Ti. 1:7-8 & 3:1-2; Jas 3:17; 1 Pt. 4:3; 2 Pt. 1:5-8; Rev. 21:8 & 22:15.

¹⁴ O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 199.

Moral codes are needed for didactic purposes, but they are only the tip of an iceberg, and we can use them to explore the iceberg. There is a place for trying to apply a moral code to specific situations, such as the girl, her friend and her friend's stepfather. Our struggles to apply the code to specific cases deepen our moral knowledge:

We penetrate behind the straightforwardness of the moral code through which we first learnt the moral law, to discover that that law is as complex and pluriform as the created order itself which it reflects.¹⁵

c) *Wisdom*

This struggle, where we wrestle with moral codes in the moral field, is where *wisdom* comes from.

The items in a code stand to the moral law as bricks to a building. Wisdom must involve some comprehension of how the bricks are meant to be put together.¹⁶

Wisdom is the perception that every novelty, in its own way, manifests the permanence and stability of the created order, so that, however astonishing and undreamt of it may be, it is not utterly incommensurable with what has gone before.¹⁷

Wisdom, in other words, is a knowledge of how the created order, and our place in it, is meant to work. Wisdom is all about discovering in closer detail what we already knew in broad outline.¹⁸

d) *The Bible*

Of course O'Donovan is not so foolish as to think that this grip on the created order is instantly accessible to us. He knows that only by the Spirit, through the gospel, and then via the Bible, can fallen people really begin to see the created world and our purpose in it.

Therefore we have to be careful about how we approach the Bible. Many Christians think that it is basically a book of commands. They have various ways of deciding which commands have 'passed away' since the Christ completed his redemptive work, and which commands remain applicable to us today. But they are still left with two problems. Firstly, in areas where there is no command, they either don't know what to do, or they think that there is nothing Christian to say about it. And secondly, they are not able to work out whether the Bible has any relevance to those who aren't Christians: they should obey God's commands, but they don't, so what more is to be said?

But these problems have arisen from a wrong understanding of how the Bible does its moral formation. Even if we distilled from the Bible every command, every exhortation, every virtue such as are still binding today—even then, such a catalogue would not give us what God wants us to see.

We will read the Bible seriously only when we use it to guide our thought to a *comprehensive* moral viewpoint, and not merely to articulate disconnected moral claims. We must look within it not only for moral bricks, but for indications of the order in which the bricks belong together.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., 195.

¹⁶ Ibid., 200.

¹⁷ Ibid., 189.

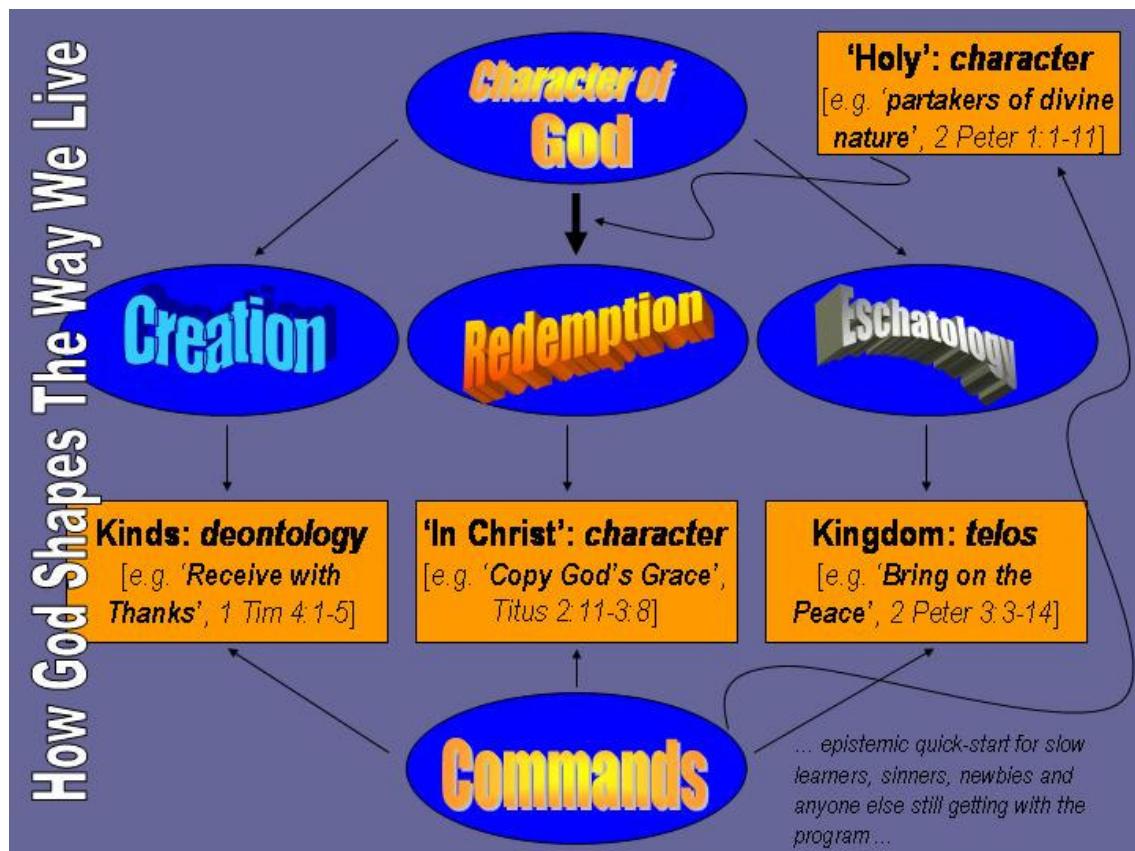
¹⁸ Ibid., 195 & ch. 4.

¹⁹ Ibid., 200.

And what is the order within which God has placed us? The order that God reveals in his world is what theologians call ‘salvation history’, and “[e]ach area [of our lives] has to be given, as it were, a salvation-history of its own.”²⁰ My own way of thinking about various moral issues is to try and brainstorm from what I know of the Bible, and then read other books and articles to find biblical material that I’ve missed, to discover:

- What does creation tell us about it?
- What does the redemptive work of Christ tell us about it?
- What does the purpose of humanity, and the future history of the world, tell us about it?
- What does the character of God tell us about it?
- Are there any commands that shed light upon it?

I picture this as follows (the verses exemplify how, in the pages of Scripture, moral action is seen to spring from each of these various aspects of reality):



It is this kind of use of the Bible, I think, that Paul has in mind when he says that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” [2 Timothy 3:16-17]

Although Scripture truly is God-breathed, the emphasis here is not on its God-breathedeness.²¹ It is upon the way Scripture teaches, rebukes, corrects, trains, and equips *towards righteousness, and for good works.*

²⁰ Ibid., xvii.

²¹ Cf. Edward W Goodrick, "Let's put 2 Timothy 3:16 back in the Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25 (1982).

e) Love

How is this approach to moral thought as liberating as words like ‘grace’, ‘forgiveness’ and ‘love’? O’Donovan reminds us that God has made a *good* world. Even though it is now fallen, God vindicates the goodness of his world by physically resurrecting Christ, and by remaking a good creation. (If God had only spiritually resurrected Christ, then Gnostics, Manicheans and Docetics are right: God rescues people *from* the world. But Christ’s physical resurrection, as harbinger of new bodies [1 Cor. 15:1-58] shows that God’s redemption is a redemption *of* the world.)

Therefore we who participate with God in his world are free to have joyful responses to the moral field before us. The structures of God’s world are good, and God unveils to us the excellence of so much of his world. We can delight even in fallen people. We can give thanks for food and marriage and friendship and bodies. We live in hope of a good future, not the dread of extinction. We notice abundance, and are freed from endless voracity.

People who know the world in this way are able to know other people in a new, and distinctively Christian, way. The whole OT law, and we may say the whole ‘moral law’, is summed up by *love*.²² Love *interprets and unifies* what we find in the Bible’s moral material. The proper response to God and to others bubbles up as love. Love is ‘a kind of summary term for virtually the whole range of proper attitudes and action dispositions with respect to God and neighbour.’²³ For O’Donovan,

Love is the unitary orientation that lies behind all the uniquely varied responses to the generic variety of the created order.²⁴

For O’Donovan, our love for others is a mixture of wisdom and delight.²⁵ Love wisely perceived what the other needs, and we can also delight in them, because now we know their preciousness as made in the image of the One who also offers to redeem them through Christ.

5. How to bless the world

So what do Anglican schools have to offer, in order to bless the world?

a) Anglican values?

I’ve been referring to ‘moral formation’ of children at school, and that *all schools* do moral formation, whether intentionally or not, and form their children according to some kind of moral vision. ‘Values’, unfortunately, have become the nation’s main word by which to try and describe the various moral visions, or blueprints, that govern the moral formation that is going on in every school. Anglicans will feel the pressure to pick up this discourse—but should we?

On the one hand, I’ll suggest that to be a Christian school in a pluralistic society is to have something much richer to offer than a list of values. Our gospel gives us a more detailed picture of the world than can be confined to a ‘values framework’.

On the other hand, there may be a place for listing some virtues, and/or some policies and rules, as an initial ‘moral code’. The watching world is desperate for some sense of what

²² **The OT law of itself:** Lev.19:18, Deut. 4:29, 6:5-9, 10:12, 11:13, 30:6. **Jesus:** Luke 10:25-28, Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 22:34-40. **Paul:** Romans 13:8-10, Galatians 5:14 and 6:2. **James:** James 2:8. It is very significant that these NT statements come at pivotal or even climactic points in the arguments of each epistle where they occur. The religious personnel of Jesus’ time clearly acknowledged, to some extent, the overarching nature of love (see e.g. Luke 10:25-28), but it seems that Jesus’ approach radically expanded its reach.

²³ Robert C. Roberts, "Emotions Among the Virtues of the Christian Life," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 20 (1992), 43. Cf. *agape*, love, in Gal. 5:22; 2 Cor. 6:6; Col. 3:14; 1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Pt. 1:7.

²⁴ O'Donovan, *Resurrection*, 223-24.

²⁵ Ibid., 26.

matters. Most Christian would guess that ‘tolerance’ appears on all three lists of ‘values’ above, and that all the other ‘values’ were fairly random. But consider Table 1 and think again:

*Table 1: Government ‘values’
listed by conceptual similarity per row:*

Commonwealth:	NSW:	Victoria:
responsibility	responsibility	responsibility
respect	respect	respect
care, compassion	care	care
honesty, integrity	integrity	honesty
fair go	fairness	social justice
doing your best	excellence	excellence
freedom	democracy	freedom
inclusion	participation, cooperation	inclusion
understanding		understanding
tolerance		tolerance
trustworthiness		trust

The second half of this table, beneath the split, are concepts about which I’d want to engage in some gentle discussion about what is meant by the terms, and whether an unqualified use of them can be very helpful. But it certainly seems very harsh to say that our State schools, and the communities that generated these virtues, are on the wrong track to yearn for the first five—responsibility, respect, care, honesty and justice. I can see no good reason why Christians schools would not ardently stand for the first half of the table, if not also some aspects of the second half, all the while offering the joyful gospel underpinnings to these qualities that our communities long for. It is perhaps disturbing that so many of our schools might not stand for these things, if their websites are anything to go by. If we do stand for them, and if they genuinely govern our dealings with students, parents, staff and community, there is no problem in saying them in a language that the watching world can understand.

That said—and this next comment will sound like a put-up job (which it is not)—I was interested by Shore’s ‘school aims’:

To equip boys to participate in the wider community through a broad and well-rounded education of the highest standard:

- With a Christian perspective of the world in which they live.
- As responsible citizens.
- With academic achievements commensurate with their ability.
- With a knowledge of themselves, how they should live and how to relate to others.
- With a questioning mind and a continuing desire to learn.

I like this statement better than a ‘values’ list, because it has more purchase upon the ‘pluriform’ nature of reality; and in this particular case, it pictures learning as happening within a Christian moral vision, while being sensitive both to the community, to differences in each boy, and to the ongoing task of wisdom in living alongside others. It looks to me like a statement that a lot of thought has gone into, although the next layer of hard thinking would needed to ask questions such as:

- ⇒ ‘what does a Christian perspective say in subjects X, Y & Z?’
- ⇒ ‘What constitutes a “responsible citizen”?’
- ⇒ ‘To what extent does a truly Christian environment push people to their “best”, and what does our understanding of human sin, frailty and falleness have to say about the

- concept “best”? (Shore has avoided the Pelagian overtones of the associated the term ‘best’, but I include it because all schools, and Shore by implication, seem to think they need to offer the ‘best’ education, and to ask children to do their ‘best’).²⁶
- ⇒ ‘To what extent is “education of the highest standard” a partnership with, and a disagreement with, whatever the State expects?’.

b) Interpreting the world

The first Shore aim is particularly helpful, because it pictures teachers and chaplains and heads as ‘theological interpreters’, or ‘theological decoders’, of the world in all their engagements with children.

This perspective, I think, is the best way to think of how our schools can bless the world. All staff have ample opportunities to display that perceptive wisdom about the world that surrounds us which springs from the Christian gospel. Also, all staff have ample opportunities to show forth that deep perception, and real delight in the pupils which equals Christian love. All staff can, unlike Augustine’s teachers, take great care to ‘watch their life and doctrine closely’ [cf. 1 Tim. 4:16], so that students can learn by watching, and not have to suffer the pain of being asked to live something that is obviously not believed by those who teach it. There might also be some specialist ways in which staff go about their role as theological interpreters of the world.

The teacher, most obviously, interprets the world to the students as befits each subject. In a recent and very interesting paper, Dr Trevor Cooling, Secondary Schools Adviser for the Diocese of Gloucester in the U.K., described how he and others were able to develop even mathematics and modern language courses that interpreted the world Christianly for students. It is not that there was some special form of mathematics for Christians; that is not the way it works. Rather, permeating the curriculum were examples of mathematics being used to calculate giving, sharing, and benefit to others (rather than endless discounts and stock profits), and of language being used to communicate respect, interest and love for others (rather than endless tourist demands). Dr Cooling has noticed that every school is a school of moral formation, and has shaped his curriculum material accordingly. His approach is in direct contrast to Augustine’s teachers, who simply force-fed their experience of a fallen world to their children. I commend Dr Cooling’s online article to you.²⁷

The chaplain is also an interpreter of the world. Chaplains sometimes struggle with a perceived dichotomy between evangelism and other duties, but if O’Donovan is right, every moral dilemma a child has, every pastoral struggle a child is in, every classroom exercise in how to live or how to respond to a social issue, can be an opportunity to point to God’s grace in creating, redeeming and renewing the world. There is a seamlessness between Christian ethics and the Christian gospel that we pastors seek to discover, and help others become wise to. We are the ones who seek to articulate the ‘salvation history’ of each aspect of human life: singleness, marriage, friendship, work, the environment, and so on. I commend to you O’Donovan’s essay at the start of *Resurrection and Moral Order*,²⁸ and also the work of the Social Issues Executive.²⁹ Of course our evangelism is our final, greatest interpretation of the

²⁶ I am tempted to say, although I know that to do so would be to utter a form of heresy, that our schools’ websites should offer gospel liberation to children by providing them with ‘a good enough’ education. In this way children will be freed from the awful burden of another favourite website phrase—‘maximising their potential’.

²⁷ Trevor Cooling, "Transforming Hearts and Minds: the contribution of Christian values to the curriculum," in *14th Annual Australian Anglican Schools Network* (Launceston Church Grammar School: 2005); online: http://www.aasn.edu.au/zone_files/Conference_2005_Papers/dr_trevor_cooling.pdf (accessed 4/11/2005).

²⁸ O’Donovan, *Resurrection*, 11-27.

world—that it will all come to completion under God’s Christ, and that awestruck wonder at this Lord truly is the beginning of wisdom.

And **school headmasters**? They, firstly, are protectors of the kinds of interpretations that teachers and chaplains bring. You school heads cannot lose your theological nerve, because you make it safe for the rest of your staff to keep theirs. You are also interpreters of the world to the parents of your children, and to a watching world. You are the ones to whom it falls to keep stating that since every school is a school of moral formation, yours will be a school of Christian moral formation, and that this formation takes the form of your staff interpreting the world Christianly. Your task, I take it, is to keep on saying that if parents are paying for anything, this Christian moral formation is what they are paying for.

Please, then, don’t fall into that trap of telling them that they are paying for the ‘best’ education, or that they are paying for a future network with connected people, or that they are paying for their children to have more options to choose from. None of those comments reflect a Christian school, just a school that is taking the blueprint of a competitive, unjust and consumerist fallen world, and force-feeding it to children.

This perspective, where we are ‘theological interpreters’ of the world, might help us to see that some of our tensions and disagreements were overstated. We will be teaching children *theologically interpreted* ‘survival skills’, from within a community that does have its own moral vision of the world. Christian faith understood as central to proper human experience can produce *the most functional* kind of citizen, who is in turn able to go out and wisely interpret the world to those around them.

c) Assisting the world

But will you regard your school as being a bit like that monastery that Augustine addressed, to which he brought a set of ordered Christian practises that shaped people’s thought and behaviour? Anglican schools might think, like monasteries, that the way they do mission is to draw children out of the world, into a community of Christian moral formation, and then send them back into the world.

I actually think this approach can have merit. There are certainly times and places where schooling people in how to live together Christianly is a valid response to a hostile world. But as we know, of course, such places regularly become too insular, and can lose any real sense of what it is to bless the world through mission. Professor Brian Hill, who has thought a great deal about ‘values’ in Australian schools and whose name should have appeared long before now in my lecture, sees some serious risks before us in this respect

Most [state] school staffs are value pluralistic, and the families of the children they teach even more so. Many people believe that this will inevitably lead to value hiatus, and their desire to protect their children from such an environment has led them to prefer non-state education. But to the extent that such schools become strongly protectionist, they are likely to contribute to increasing social fragmentation, which *is* on the increase.³⁰

Therefore Anglican schools would do well, I think, to include in their mission to the world some ways of giving something back to the State school system. I was grieved by Guy Rundle’s bitter comment during last year’s debate,

²⁹ The Social Issues Executive of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, with whom I am involved, has begun to produce a series of booklets and other resources to help people think theologically about various aspects of ethics, and offers a free semi-regular ‘Social Issues briefing’ by email. Further details of these services will be published at <http://www.sydneyanglicans.net/socialissues>.

³⁰ Hill, “Values Education” .

If [Christian schools] really believed their own mission statement they would be knocking back grants and sharing their facilities with state schools, but that would directly contradict their customer appeal, which is to provide what others do not get. It is surprising and disappointing that more actual Christians have not broken ranks ...³¹

Can we break ranks? Can we look for ways to share with the State system, and so cross-pollinate it with all the blessings we know? I won't go so far as to suggest that mature Christian children, who are well supported and academically able, might actually be encouraged to enrol in a State school, to support ISCFs and Christian teachers there. After all, I do believe with the Archbishops' that parents are free to choose the kind of education they want for their children; and your task is to work with the children that God sends you.

However—might Anglican schoolkids find extracurricular activities with state school kids, with their school faculty and staff working to make that happen? Might Anglican schools pay Christian youth workers to run after school clubs for *all* the local kids? Might school councils think up ways to participate with the nearest state schools, hosting activities, joining together in excursions, paying for joint teacher training days, or offering other forms of free support to state school staff? Could heads, teachers and even chaplains plan to do a few stints in the State school system during the course of their careers, with support from Christian others? Can Anglican schools speak highly of other good schools, not caring about the effect on their income?

If all my suggestions are somehow unthinkable, we would need to think very hard about what kind of school of moral formation is being built. We would need to worry, I think, if there were no willingness to 'break ranks', because schools of moral formation are forming their builders every bit as relentlessly as they form their pupils.

But a school staff who watch their life and doctrine closely, who know reality for what the gospel reveals it to be, and who know how to love and bless the people of world, can build schools where Christ stands out among the 'gods', embodying, empowering and explaining what this community so desperately longs for in its various lists of 'values'.



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³¹ Guy Rundle, "When Christian schools bear false witness," *The Age*, September 22, 2004; online: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/09/21/1095651321673.html> (accessed 22/9/2004).

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