

Third Isaac Armitage Lecture

Ethics and the Mission of Anglican Education

Shore School, 9 November, 2007

Introduction

I would like to begin by thanking Shore's Headmaster, Dr Timothy Wright and its Chaplain, the Reverend Matthew Pickering, for extending to me their invitation to present the Armitage Lecture for 2007. As some of you will know, St James Ethics Centre and Shore are related through a common connection with St James' Anglican Church, King Street, Sydney.

The precursor to the establishment of Shore was the establishment of St James' Grammar School which had been founded by Bishop Broughton in 1838 but only opened some years later. Originally, the St James' Grammar School was housed in the parochial school – and the clergy at St James' were actively involved in the life of the school. Indeed, Thomas Druitt – who succeeded Bodenham as Headmaster of the school – was ordained in Sydney, by Broughton, and assisted in services at St James', King Street. Following government resumption of the School's land, in Elizabeth and Castlereagh Streets, the funds provided by way of compensation were used for the erection of:

A school of the highest type, including departments of education for all classes of the community, in which the teaching shall be throughout in accordance with the principles of the Church of England, and which shall be placed under the direction of a governing body of clergy and laity to be elected by the Synod, the Bishop of the Diocese being ex-officio President.

For those who are interested, a vestige of the original stonework for St James' School can still be seen just outside the doors to the crypt at St James' in King Street.

For our part, the Centre was established by the parish in 1989 – an initiative that grew out of the parish's response to a sermon preached at St James' by then Archbishop Donald Robison during which he challenged the parish to find new ways in which to be relevant to the community it served. Like Shore, the Ethics Centre later took on a life independent of the parish of St James. Alas, there was no endowment fund to help us on our way, with the consequence that we experience an institutional 'near death experience' with disturbing regularity. The fact that we continue to exist is, to my mind, a constant reminder of the power of providence.

Tonight's lecture is, for me, something of an exploration – as I move from territory with which I am entirely familiar onto ground that is, quite frankly, most challenging for me to traverse. Having had the good fortune to read Andrew Cameron's and Grant Maple's earlier lectures, I have been struck by their great learning and erudition – especially in relation to questions of theology and Christian dogma. Cameron and Maple have initiated and developed a conversation that I hope to join – however inexpertly.

My plan is to begin my journey by outlining a basic framework for understanding the concept of 'ethics' and its relationship to our particular form of being – human being. From there, I wish to offer some remarks about Anglican education – both in terms of the gospel concerning Jesus Christ and the particular character of the Anglican Church. The journey will end as I draw together some important themes and relate them to education within Anglican schools.

So, let us begin ...

Ethics 101

Much of what I have to say about ethics will be familiar to you already – although various points of emphasis might vary amongst us. My aim is to establish the basic 'architecture' of ethics as the basis for a shared understanding of concepts such as 'ethics', 'morality', 'values' and 'principles'. I will not outline various ethical theories – or analyse their relative strengths or weaknesses. Nor will I seek, at this point, to outline a detailed account of what might constitute an ethical life¹. Rather, my more modest objective is to draw attention to the basic building blocks from which any comprehensive ethical framework must be constructed.

Of course, I should also note that nearly all of what I have to say draws on the philosophical project of the West. Although there are numerous points of contact and convergence with Eastern philosophy, I do not pretend any deep understanding of the canon. I mention this limitation in my account in the hope that those familiar with other traditions might be drawn to enrich my account with their own observations.

Finally, I should note that many of the distinctions that I propose to introduce require a degree of precision in the use of language that flies in the face of common usage. For example, many people use terms like 'ethics' and 'morality' interchangeably. While I wish to argue that there are precise and important differences to be observed in the use of such terms, when discussing theory and practice, I am happy to accept less rigour in the way such terms are used in the course of popular discourse.

Ethics

Some people employ the entirely reasonable practice of looking for a definition of 'ethics' by consulting a dictionary. While a reasonable thing to do, I think that this approach is mistaken because it fails to lead the enquirer to see the context in which the term 'ethics' emerged. In turn, this diminishes their understanding of the concept. I think that the dictionary definitions are best complemented by inviting people to reflect on the nature of the work that Ancient Greek philosophers were embarked upon at the time 'ethics' was defined as a separate area of enquiry. One of the achievements of the Ancient Greeks was to take up much older human questions and address them systematically – more or less as projects. In turn, each 'project' was given a convenient label – a convenient short form for identifying the larger conversation. Questions taken up for active consideration included:

1. What is truth?
2. What is beauty?
3. What is existence (being)?
4. Why is there something (rather than nothing)

The corresponding labels attached by the Greeks in relation to these questions are familiar to us today:

1. Epistemology
2. Aesthetics
3. Ontology, and
4. Metaphysics.

'Ethics' is best understood in a similar way – as a label attached to a particular question. Plato ascribes the question to Socrates which comes to us in the familiar form:

What ought one to do?

There are three features of this question that are worth noting.

First, the question encompasses all forms of human conduct. That is, Socrates' question is not limited to what might be called 'Capital E' ethical questions. Examples of these include questions about: euthanasia, the destructive use of embryos for research, capital punishment, what constitutes just war etc. Rather, Socrates' question extends to everything that a person does – including those mundane acts that constitute the bulk of daily life.

Second, Socrates' question can be distinguished from the first four in that it is a practical question. Socrates recognises that life 'presses in' on us and that this requires us to choose and to act (rather than defer decisions indefinitely). However, Socrates' question is practical in a second sense – that it assumes that whatever we decide we ought to do will be, in fact, what we actually do. Socrates (and many others) would think it very odd that any person should be certain that they ought to do 'x' but continue constantly to do 'y'.

Third, Socrates' question employs the impersonal pronoun 'one' – rather than 'I'. The effect of this is that we are prompted to ask what any person ought to do in relevantly similar circumstances.

In passing, I might note that some people argue that Aristotle offered a variation on Socrates' question in the form: 'What ought one to **be**?' My view is that Aristotle's approach ultimately sees him return to Socrates' question for the simple reason that one only becomes virtuous (attaining *phronesis* – practical wisdom) by emulating the conduct of a virtuous mentor. In the end, Aristotle argues that what you are is a product of what you do ... which brings us back to Socrates.

Values and Principles

In my opinion, there is broad misunderstanding of what is meant when we speak of 'values' and 'principles'. Again, in ordinary conversation, it is common for people to use the terms 'values' and 'principles' with little or no sense of the relevant distinction. I regret to say that the same lack of understanding also pervades much of the debate about 'values education'.

Socrates' fundamental question, "What ought one to do?" generates two further pairs of questions that must be addressed. The first pair is posed in the form:

What is 'good' or 'evil'?

I should make it clear that the term 'evil', as used by philosophers, does not denote (or require the existence of) demonic forces or some kind of malevolent intelligence

or force within the world. 'Good' and 'Evil' perform a much more mundane function in ethics. A core assumption, giving rise to the question of 'good' and 'evil', is that in most cases where human beings are given a free choice between options, then they will choose that option that they think to be 'good' (or at least better). Indeed, it is probably an axiom of human nature that we prefer what we deem to be 'good'. What we disagree about is the definition of what is 'good' (or what should be included in the list of things deemed to be 'good'). That we should prefer what we think to be 'good' and shun what we think to be 'evil' (whatever that happens to be) seems to me to be uncontroversial.

Properly understood, 'values' is the label we attach to the basket containing those things that we say are 'good'. Our values shape our choices amongst competing options. If for example, I value 'trust' as being something 'good', then I am most likely to choose amongst the options before me that which builds or secures an increase in trust. If on the other hand, I value 'cunning', then I will make a very different choice.

I will come back to the question of what should or should not be included in a list of values a little later in this lecture. At present, I am content to clarify the concept of a 'value' and to identify the work that each value does in driving our conduct through ordering the choices we make.

If 'values' help to order the 'ends' we pursue, then what of the means we employ in order to attain those ends? It is at this point that the second pair of questions arise. It is not enough to ask what is good or evil. One must also ask:

What is 'right' or 'wrong'?

This pair of questions gives rise to 'principles' – best recognised by their 'thin' content and remarkable power to regulate the means by which we seek to secure or express the things that we say are good. Consider the following examples:

- Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
- Only do those things that you would be prepared to see published on the front page of your local newspaper – knowing that a complete, unvarnished account will be read by those whom you most respect and admire.
- Act always according to a well formed and informed conscience.

I am sure that each of these principles is familiar to you. However, have you ever noticed how 'thin' they are in terms of content? For example, 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you' tells you absolutely **nothing** about what you should have done unto you. The 'sunlight test' tells you absolutely nothing about what you should (or should not) be prepared to see on the front page of the paper or on the evening news. What exactly would a well formed and informed conscience decide? We are not told.

Despite this, each of these principles is extremely powerful. For those who adopt them, there is absolute guidance for what is right or wrong. If you would not have it done to you (whatever that might be) you should not do it to another. If you would not be prepared to see your actions published in the full light of day, then you should not so act. If you cannot act in good conscience, then you should not do the thing contemplated. If you do, driven by necessity, weakness or whatever, then there is no hiding ... you do wrong.

A comprehensive Ethical Framework

A comprehensive ethical framework must therefore include an espoused set of values and principles. Values order our preferences and principles regulate the means by which these preferences are realised. Indeed, it is the relationship between values and principles that provides the framework required to answer Socrates' question, "What ought one to do?". Furthermore, it is only by reference to a person's espoused values and principles that we can have any basis for evaluating their conduct.

The world in which we live is, to a considerable extent, the product of human choice. Our institutions, our architecture, the myriad things that we take for granted with every day – all could have been different if only another set of choices had been made. At the heart of every one of those choices is a value or principle – shaping the way the world is, often doing so without anyone paying attention to their extraordinary power. Values and principles are rightly compared to DNA in biology. For my part, my physical form is profoundly shaped by DNA (along with a few environmental factors like chocolate). It does not take a very great change in my DNA to cause a quite different organism to arise. So it is with values and principles. There is a profound difference between an individual or organisation that values trust and one that values cunning. There is a profound difference between an individual or organisation that operates according to the principle of 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you' and those that apply the alternative principle of 'do unto others before they do it to you'!

Ethics and Morality

As noted above, some people use the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' interchangeably. I do not. Indeed, I think that it is quite possible to be a highly moral person without being at all ethical. Let me explain what I have in mind.

Let us imagine that an extended conversation starts in response to Socrates' question. Over time, distinct voices emerge from the crowd – each offering a distinct account of what one ought to do. There is a Christian voice, a Jewish voice, an Islamic voice and a host of others including: Jains, Utilitarians, Kantian formalists and so on. In some cases, advocates for a particular answer to the question of what one ought to do draw on revealed truths, exemplary lives and a rich theological framework. In other cases, the claims will be based on the application of reason, or experience, or on some other ground.

Obvious and important differences will separate alternative voices in the conversation. Indeed, some will make rival claims to truth that are mutually exclusive. However, what each voice will offer is a morality – a package of values and principles (often embedded in a deeper structure) that people can take up 'lock, stock and barrel' and apply in their daily lives. Indeed, this is what all moralities have in common – they offer a ready-made package of values and principles; offered as an authoritative (or at least persuasive) answer to the question of what one ought to do.ⁱⁱ Those who apply those values and principles live a moral life.

However, like Socrates, I do not think that such people necessarily live an ethical life. To live an ethical life, something more is required.

The key to understanding the distinction that I am making is to be found in Socrates' claim that:

The unexamined life is not worth living

In making this claim, I do not think that we can take Socrates to have been making the relatively trivial claim that life would be better if people thought about what they do. There is certainly something in this idea – my experience is that some of the greatest damage caused to individuals and organisations arises not from the actions of ‘bad’ people. Rather, basically good people wreak havoc by acting without thinking about what they do. They stand in thrall of ‘unthinking custom and practice’ and if challenged to explain the inexplicable will simply say, “Well, everybody does it” or, “That’s just the way we do things around here”. The failure to reflect – to tie one’s proposed course of action back to an explicit set of values and principles is one of the greatest threats to the possibility of living an ethical life. However, I think that Socrates has in mind a deeper point.

I believe that Socrates’ real point is to draw attention to what is distinctive of our particular form of being – human being. Human beings have a capacity to transcend instinct and desire and to make conscious ethical choices. Although other creatures may have this ability, there is (as far as I know) no clear evidence of this capacity. Indeed, I would argue that it is the capacity to make conscious, ethical choices that is most distinctive of our form of being – human being. If this is so, then those who fail to examine their lives also fail to engage in the fullness of their humanity – a diminished life that, in a very real sense, is not a life worth living for a human being.

The trouble is that it is possible to live an entirely conventional, moral life without ever thinking too much about what you do or why you do it. If you ask me if I would rather live in a world in which people are routinely kind to each other simply as a matter of habit – or one in which there is great cruelty, then I would opt for kindness. However, for me this purely moral world would be something less than I think we should aspire to as humans.

It was for the sake of this idea of an examined, ethical life that Socrates chose to die. Condemned of impiety towards the Gods (heresy) and corrupting the youth of Athens, Socrates was sentenced to death by the Athenian democracy. The Athenians hoped that Socrates would choose exile over death. However, Socrates chose to abide by the laws of his city and accept the penalty imposed – requiring the Athenians to confront the consequences of their choices. Plato would have us believe that Socrates’ death was an easy thing – a kind of creeping death moving up from the toes until reaching the heart. I gather that death by hemlock is far more of a trial. Socrates must have known this. Yet, true to his sense of what was good and right – Socrates chose death over exile.

I believe that the aspiration to create an ethical (rather than a purely moral world) is one that should be embraced by educators. But before considering the implications of this in fuller measure, it is time for me to leave the relatively safe territory of philosophy and venture into the far less familiar world of theology.

As indicated at the outset, I wish to make some observations about Christianity and then the Anglican Church – in particular – before tying all of this together in some remarks about the mission of Anglican schools.

On Christianity

I hope that you will understand that what follows are the reflections of a layman – untutored and unskilled in biblical exegesis, theology and all of the other skills needed to develop an authoritative position concerning the matters about which I speak. I

have read some of the great theologians of the past – and have probably incorporated many of their simpler ideas. The views I offer are probably crude and wrong-headed. However, they are the best I can do at present.

In most circumstances, I would avoid venturing further. However, I am at a loss to know what I could say about the mission of Anglican schools if I do not say something about Christianity and the Anglican Church.

From time to time, I meet Christians who tell me that they have passed beyond faith to a state of certain knowledge. They tell me that they 'know' Jesus in the same way that they know me. Part of me envies such souls for their ease in relationship to God. For my part, I remain stuck at the level of faith. With this comes all manner of doubt – a condition that constantly pits my reason against a deeper (but only occasional) experience of the numinous. In the last couple of years, I have found myself able to reconcile reason and instinct as various moments of understanding have come to me – often at night, often in a state that some would call reflection, and that others might call prayer.

In any case, I have come to a position in which I feel that I can understand the nature of Christ and the relationship of the Gospel to the rest of the Bible. In order to explain this, I need to offer you my rather simplistic account of everything from Genesis to the present. In attempting to do this, I do not mean to offer the equivalent of a three-minute version of *Hamlet*. I know that the things about which I speak are more complex and that I will not do justice to them. However, this is where I am up to in my thinking.

Creation

It seems to me that until there was Man there was no creation. What we see, in Genesis, is a process of 'extension' in which all that is, in God, is extended in order to create the heavens, the earth, time, the fishes, the animals and so on.

It is only when God makes Man in His image that a true act of creation occurs. Why do I say this? Because, God makes Man in His own image. My friends amongst the Rabbinate tell me that in the Old Testament Hebrew, the meaning intended is that Man is made in the moral image of God – that is he is given the capacity to exercise free will.

In that moment, God creates a being who is genuinely new – related but separate from God who is no longer alone. No wonder God loves mankind. Of course, in creating humankind with free will, he also opens up the possibility of good and evil – the inevitable and necessary price of creating a being who is other than God. As we know, humans waste no time in trying out their freedom – and in a blink we have the Fall.

The Old Testament

While the Old Testament is many things for many people, I read it as a series of frustrated attempts, by God, to lead his beloved creation back onto the paths of righteousness. As far as I can see, God tries every trick in the book – prophets, miraculous interventions, overwhelming acts of kindness, overbearing acts of wrath, covenants with a chosen people ... on and on it goes ... and nothing worksⁱⁱⁱ.

Jesus

This leaves but one alternative. God must become Man, to live and walk amongst us as an uncompromised and uncompromising example of how we are to live. This is what I believe Jesus meant when he said, "I am the way, the truth and the life". For me, this is Jesus saying what he actually **is**. When he says, "I **am** the way, the truth and the life" he speaks to me as saying I am God (the way, the truth, the life) made man. It is, of course, an extraordinary claim, a claim so breathtaking that I doubt any person would make it unless it were true. Of course, if there is any doubt about the veracity of the claim, then this is answered by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Given my reading of the Bible (which I admit may be quite mistaken) I have found myself deeply fascinated by the life of Jesus – what he did, what he said and how he taught. I realise that the Bible must be read as a whole. However, if it is true that Jesus is the Christ, and that He fulfils all of the Law, then what he says and does must be given priority.

I know that the death and resurrection of Jesus are of critical importance. However, I cannot help think that we pay too little attention to His life. After all, in my simplistic account – Jesus was God made Man in order to teach us how to live – to demonstrate the Way, the Truth and the Life. We should never forget that, like any man, Jesus had a choice. He was free not to make the ultimate sacrifice. As Karl Rahner argues, at the end, Jesus was alone. Even the Father had turned His face away – yet, alone, Jesus chose to continue to the end.

It is for this reason that I am often struck by how little time is given to Jesus in many Christian churches. Again, I am open to correction on this point. However, it seems to me that there is a little too much Paul and not enough Jesus – who struggles to be heard.

If the core truth about Jesus and His ministry is to be found anywhere, then I guess that it is to the New Testament where we must turn for a glimpse of the man. I am intrigued by the figure that I find there. Although, I find it interesting to read what others have to say about Jesus in the Epistles, Acts etc., most of my attention is directed to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – where I can find Jesus speaking and acting on his own terms. So, for example, I make a point of going back, each year, to the *Sermon on the Mount* – without doubt the most radical response to the problem of evil ever proposed. Jesus knows that if we adopt the traditional response to evil (an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth) then we risk becoming the thing we oppose. Thus, he would have us turn the other cheek. But Jesus requires much more than that – so much so that very few can actually bear the force of his teaching.

So how does Jesus proceed? Well, for a start, he requires of us a ruthless honesty with ourselves. He does not come to overturn the law – but to fulfil it. Yet he does not lay down countless injunctions. He rejects legalism in favour of love. So, he offers his two great commandments. He preaches using parables. He dabbles in paradox.

I find great significance of Jesus' mode of teaching. Rather than adopting what might be termed a legalistic perspective in which 'black letter law' is used to obscure the complexities of human life, Jesus invites people to recognise the genuine complexity that is part of our lot in life. For example, anyone listening to Jesus when he offered his parable of the Good Samaritan would have known that the choices faced by those on the roadway were not simple ones. Jesus would expect his audience to know that any Priest or Levite stopping to touch the wounded traveller

(perhaps already a corpse) would have become ritually impure – rendering them unable to discharge their duties until cleansed. I do not think that Jesus sets up the Priest and Levite as ‘straw men’ – only to knock them down. Instead, he wants His audience to recognise how much is at stake for each of them – and for the community they serve. It is only then that the action of the Samaritan can be seen in its revelatory light. Jesus’ contemporaries would have known that the decision to pass on by would not have been a simple one – even if ultimately mistaken. As the scribe observes, the priest and the Levite have ‘kept the law’ – or so it seems until the point of Jesus’ teaching becomes clear. Beyond the immediate point of the teaching, what Jesus highlights, in this parable and in others, is that although we are given the capacity to transcend instinct and desire, in order to make ethical choices, we are required to do so in conditions of radical uncertainty. The human predicament is at its most challenging not when we are asked to choose between good and evil, right and wrong, but when the choice is ‘good’ versus ‘good’, ‘right’ versus ‘right’.

Jesus’ cross bears many meanings. I would include amongst them its role as a powerful symbol for the genuine ethical dilemma. No religion, no moral code can give direction when the choice is between equally weighted values and principles. At that point, we are alone in making our decision. In the fullness of His humanity, Jesus, knew how tempting it is to lay down the burden of responsibility associated with the exercise of free will. Jesus knew that to seek refuge from uncertainty in the arms of the hedonist (let’s get drunk and hope that the complexity has gone away when we sober up) was no better than to surrender to the siren call of the authoritarian who is only too willing to tell us what to do and how to do it. To adopt either course is to deny the foundation of our human being. Angels have certainty – but they were not made in the image of God. God loves Mankind because we are of Him and apart from Him – blessed and cursed with free will in conditions of radical uncertainty. Jesus did not come to show us how to abandon our humanity – but how to live it.

I think it no accident that Jesus chose to teach in a manner that invites us to think for ourselves – to look within and to find the deeper truths embedded in his teaching and example.

Yet, Jesus is quite clear that it is not enough that we think or feel in a particular fashion. Our piety is not enough – it must be expressed in action. Many of Jesus’ stories promote conduct that, at first hearing, would have struck his audience as counter-intuitive, if not conventionally ‘wrong’. And then there is Jesus himself. He might have sat on a hill and preached. Instead, his recorded life is one of action – taking a position, acting in the face of risk and opposition.

Jesus asks of us many things – including that we live an ethical life – in the sense I outlined when discussing Socrates’ claim that the unexamined life is not worth living. What else could Jesus have had in mind when he instructs us to look to the log in our own eyes?

The Anglican Church

All of my comments so far could be said to apply with equal force to any part of the Christian community. Given this, I have been giving some thought to what, if anything, distinguishes the Anglican Communion from other Christian denominations. In thinking about this question, I have dipped into various early histories of the Protestant Reformation – and its rather particular, measured course within England.

Developments during the reign of Henry VIII seem to have proceeded (at least from his perspective) on the basis that the break with Rome should be the minimum required to secure his preferred outcomes. Yet, despite Henry's tendency to conservatism, I really think that a more radical set of ideas were unleashed by the likes of Wycliffe, Ridley, Latimer and of course, Cranmer.

Thomas Cranmer has not been kindly served by history. He is often remembered for his acquiescence to Henry's schemes – often involving the brutal treatment of people who had formerly been Cranmer's friends and patrons. However, there is something in the life of Cranmer that, to this day, infuses the spirit of the Anglican Church at its best.

Although, I know that some will see a weakness in what I consider to be a strength, I think that the Anglican church is especially well served by its 'open texture' and the absence of any overwhelming force for orthodoxy. I am not so naive as to think that the break with Rome was primarily driven by spiritual concerns. However, this should not detract from the fact that deep issues of principle were at stake – not least of which was that ordinary people should have direct access to the scriptures which should have an authority at least equal to that of any man.

The challenges to the Anglican Communion are as great today as they have ever been. However, I would hope that there endures something of the old regard for the integrity of those who disagree sincerely and in good conscience. Although, Cranmer became an out-and-out Protestant after Henry's death, we should not imagine that he cast off every aspect of his Roman Catholic heritage. In my view, he imbued the Anglican church with one of the enduring gems mined from the earlier dispensation – the idea of the supremacy of a well formed and informed conscience.

Despite recent attempts to undo Aquinas's work, it remains the case that even within the Catholic Church no person – not even a Pope – can claim sovereignty over the individual's conscience. This is not to say that a person may do whatever he or she pleases. The well formed and informed conscience needs to give proper regard to church teachings. For Protestants, the conscience should be informed by a deep engagement with Holy Scripture. However, in the end, each person must decide, freely. And so it must be if we are to be true to our nature – made in the image of God, endowed with free will, able to choose, as Christ chose.

There are many things for which we might remember Thomas Cranmer (not least the Book of Common Prayer). However, I cannot go past the way in which he embedded the idea of conscience within Anglicanism at the time of his death. Having been stripped of his Archbishop's robes, Cranmer was dressed in a poor yeoman's garment and Townsman's Cap and required to sign seven submissions in which he recanted his Protestant beliefs. He was then required to read the last of his recantations (all of which by then had been published) before being burned. Instead of reading the agreed text, Cranmer summoned up his courage, defied his judges and said:

... And now I come to the great thing that so troubleth my conscience, more than any other thing that I said or did in my life: and that is my setting abroad of writings contrary to the truth, which here now I renounce and refuse ... As things written with my hand contrary to the truth which I thought in my heart, and written for fear of death, and to save my life it might be; and that is all such bills which I have written or signed with mine own hand since my degradation; wherein I have written many things untrue. And forasmuch as my hand offended in writing contrary to my heart, it shall be first burned ...

And that is what he did. As Foxe recounts^{iv}:

And when the wood was kindled and the fire began to burn near him, stretching out his arm he put his right hand into the flame, which he held so steadfast and immovable, saving that once with the same hand he wiped his face, that all men might see his hand burned before his body was touched. His body did so abide the burning of the flame with such constancy and steadfastness that that standing always in one place without moving his body, he seemed to move no more than the stake to which he was bound; his eyes were lifted up into heaven; and oftentimes he repeated 'this unworthy right hand', so long as his voice would suffer him; and using often the words of Stephen, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,' in the greatness of the flame he gave up the ghost.

So ended the life of the first Archbishop of Canterbury – a man conscious of sinfulness but ultimately one who did examine his conscience and find, with faith, extraordinary moral (and physical courage) to act in conformance with what he believed to be good and right.

It is Cranmer's example that, for me, helps to establish the character of the Anglican Church as one in which every person is recognised as having the opportunity (and responsibility) to live a conscientious, ethical life – responsibly engaging as an individual with Scripture and not depending, uncritically on the dictates of others – no matter how well-intentioned, or well-positioned they might happen to be.

Like Socrates, like Jesus, Cranmer stood in the face of authority (Athens, Rome, the Pope) and chose to act in good conscience.

The mission of Anglican education

I imagine that, by now, the line of my argument is plain for all to see.

In relation to Anglican education, I would begin by saying that although the moral formation of students is necessary, it is certainly not sufficient.

I believe that an ethical life – an examined life; is the kind of life that Christ taught us to live so that we might realise the potential of our particular form of being – human being – made in the image of God.

An ethical life is not just a life of reflection – above all it is a life in which we come to act. Socrates' question was not, "what ought one to think?". It was, "what ought one to do?" Christ admonished us, in the *Sermon on the Mount*, not merely to proclaim our faith but above all, to act. Cranmer's final act was to endow the Anglican church with this ideal.

Some people think that to live an ethical life is to be like a small, furry bunny standing on the roadway of life as a huge juggernaut, called REALITY, closes in. I have spoken to some deeply committed Christians, working in very senior positions in business and politics, who have this view and who have told me that they reserve their faith for their personal life. From Monday to Friday they apply the accepted morality of their workplace – perhaps secure in the fact that they will ultimately enjoy forgiveness in

Christ. I must confess that I have to restrain myself from judging such people hypocrites.

I reject the idea that ethical people are warm and cuddly types destined to be 'roadkill' on the highway of life. Instead, I think of ethical people as strong, courageous, nimble and creative (just to name a few qualities). Ethical people should never accept the world 'as a given'. Each of us has the capacity to engage with the world in a creative way – finding 'inflection' points that allow us to act as we 'ought' and not merely as we think we 'must'.

In my opinion, the Anglican school should be an environment in which students develop their capacity for conscientious action. This objective is achieved, in part, by their education in the traditional curriculum. There is little point in being a committed ethical agent if you cannot read – or if you have not mastered the basic forms of knowledge needed to be able to engage with and co-create the world in which we live. However, I would urge Anglican schools to be far more proactive in integrating the ethical dimension into both the core curriculum and extra-mural activities of the school.

There is an obvious ethical dimension to most (if not all) subjects taught at school. In most cases, the reference points are obvious – in history, literature and science. Let me give just a few examples of questions drawn from the current curriculum in New South Wales and being posed to a group of year 8, 9 and 10 students attending schools participating in the trial of a technology called the Values Exchange (VX), that the Ethics Centre is currently sponsoring.

- The rapid increase in digital media has enabled consumers to download products which are normally for sale without having to pay. Is it ethical to download copyrighted material for free?
- Consumers are getting more conscious of the impact on the environment of the products they buy. As global warming takes greater toll on the environment, should businesses be given tax incentives to provide goods that are more 'green friendly'.
- Imagine you are President Truman and have been asked by General Groves in July 1945 to approve an order to drop an atomic bomb on either Hiroshima, Kokura, Niigata or Nagasaki. Would you agree? It is your call.
- Australia - like all other mixed race countries - has had notable successes and failures as it has tried to integrate different cultures. Should the federal government reintroduce restricted immigration in response to the Cronulla riots and other negative social impacts?
- Scientific technologies such as DNA typing are creating new moral challenges. A genetic test reveals that two girl children are very likely to have a gene that predisposes them to breast cancer - should they be told the result?
- Cosmetics magnate Ronald Lauder reportedly paid US\$135 million for Gustave Klimt's 'Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer' (1907) but the New York State Government has to underwrite its insurance. To save public money, is it better to display a less expensive replica?

If Anglican schools are going to make a conscious commitment to the promotion of an ethical life then part of the challenge will be to help students recognise the intrinsic dignity in every person – irrespective of class, colour, gender, race or creed.

Christians believe in a universal ethic of love based on the belief that all people are made in the image of God – and not just those within our immediate circle of familiarity. Thus the founding injunction that the money provided to Shore be used to establish “departments of education for all classes of the community”. I think it important that Anglican schools reach out to the widest possible community – enabling their students to learn, in the most immediate way, the truth of our common humanity.

One of the most significant challenges to flow from what I have argued will be for teachers. Although hardly inspirational, I imagine it is possible to teach Pythagoras’s Theorem without too much concern about whether or not a student will ever apply the theorem in life. The same can be said for much that is taught and learned at school – whether it be the structure of a Shakespearean sonnet, the attributes of sedimentary rocks, that force equals mass times acceleration, and so on. Yet, the same cannot be said in relation to the teaching of ethics. There would be something profoundly odd about a teaching community that strove to have students understand a framework of values and principles without ever intending them to develop the dispositions to apply them in practice. It would be passing curious for teachers to explain the importance of an examined life without any commendation that such a life is worth living. What we should expect, instead, is that students not only obtain knowledge about ethics but that they also develop the relevant dispositions. I would argue that this is almost impossible to achieve unless the teachers care about this outcome – and care enough to exemplify this approach to life in their own conduct. This inevitably raises the vexed question of what kind of person should be employed to teach in an Anglican school. I would hope that teachers are not only expert in their discipline and capable of inspiring a lifelong love of learning but also committed to the ethos of the school in which they work.

Above all else, I think that Anglican schools should prepare their students to take up the burden of their own freedom – to accept that there may be occasions when there is no simple answer, when their only choice may be the ‘least bad’ option, when values and principles will be so finely balanced that no immediate answer can be discerned. Yet even then, they will have to choose and to act.

Students must come to know that escaping responsibility by losing themselves in hedonism, unthinking custom and practice or false certainty is to be less, much less, than we are called to be.

Conclusion

This brings me to the end of my journey – marked, I now realise, with three deaths in which life is ultimately to be found. I am almost certain that I will have failed to provide a compelling account of **the** mission of Anglican Education, largely because its missions will be many and varied. However, I hope that I have added to the conversation stimulated by the Armitage Lectures by proposing what might at least be considered **a** mission worth undertaking. Socrates and Plato lived well before the historical time of Jesus. Yet, Socrates’ idea of the examined life being the proper life for human beings would have resonated with Jesus of Nazareth. If we believe that each person is made in the image of God, endowed with free will and a conscience, and that this is the essence of our humanity – then there can be no greater mission than to help each student realise this aspect of their being – not just through reflection but through the conduct of their life^v. As all three of my examples show, this is no easy thing for humankind to do. It requires moral courage, a creative engagement with the world, the support of our companions and faith – even one as imperfect as mine.

It has been a great privilege to deliver this lecture. I offer thanks for your engagement and forbearance.

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ⁱⁱ Different religions may disagree about core issues such as the intrinsic nature of God and God's relationship to human beings while sharing a common morality. That is, contending religions will often promote identical values and principles for application in daily life. This observation has struck a number of writers as being noteworthy. For example, C.S. Lewis makes much of this in his book, *The Abolition of Man*. Indeed, a broad spectrum of opinion (ranging from people such as Lewis to secular communitarians) argues against relativism and in favour of a view that some things really are good and bad (evil). I share this view. Although human beings may choose amongst a broad set of potential values, that choice is 'bounded' by objective limitations – most importantly concerning what allows for any individual or community to sustain their life. Those who claim that violence, force or fraud are 'good' ultimately fail – often crumbling from within. We should not be surprised that those things that tend to destroy or diminish the life of the individual or community have been regarded traditionally as 'evil'.

ⁱⁱⁱ I am indebted to the Reverend Martin Robinson, Rector of St Martin's, Killara, for drawing to my attention a complementary narrative structure for understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. This is that the relationship between God and human beings should be seen as a 'love story' in which God's love goes unrequited by His beloved, the mass of humanity. Rather than responding in kind, human beings are feckless and unfaithful. Yet, the story of the Bible is one in which God does not give up on the relationship – persisting in the offer of a loving relationship through 'thick and thin' – ultimately culminating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This is, I think, a more constructive analogy than the one that I have used. However, the central point is the same.

^{iv} There are various accounts of the death of Thomas Cranmer. Although varying slightly in terms of detail, they all confirm the major details concerning Cranmer's last minutes and in particular his conscious commitment of his right hand to the flames. A selection of these accounts can be found collected in, *Notes and Queries* H. B. C. s1-IX (235): 392., Oxford Journals.

^v Although I do not 'flesh out' a substantive morality in this lecture, I think that it is indeed possible to do so. Indeed, I think that the concept of human being that I attempt to outline – and its relationship to the idea of an ethical (examined) life offers a very promising starting point. It seems to me that anyone adopting the core idea would then be led (almost directly) to embrace a number of values and principles that would include: the exercise of moral courage, acting according to a well formed and informed conscience, love, hope, and so on. To demonstrate the deep connection that I have asserted is beyond the scope of this lecture – a piece of work that I may turn to at a later date.