

## Vision for education as we approach a new century.

The question I want to throw out to you is 'What vision do you have for your children?' Everyone engaged in education has a vision. The government has a vision. What is your vision?

What is in your vision for your children and the upbringing of your children? There must be something in your vision for what you want your children to be like when they're 16, or 18 or 20. If not – what's the point of it all?

When I was praying about what I was going to say to you, I wanted to bring you a verse from scripture, the verse the Lord gave me (which shows the Lord has a sense of humour) was a verse from Job chapter 13 and verse 15. It shows the Lord's understanding of all our realities, because I'm aware that if Trinity is like any of the other Christian schools in the UK, or any of the home educating families that I visit, then I know you have to sacrifice. There's personal sacrifice, financial sacrifice; a whole range of sacrifices. So let's be honest – on the black days it almost crosses our mind - is it worth it? Now this verse in Job - after his friends have really laid into him, talking about God, Job says – "Though he slay me, yet will I trust". Now, the implications of that verse are scary. Its easy to say that verse on a bright sunny day, but the test is to be able to say that when everything is going wrong, as it was for Job.

Now the reason I think the Lord wants me to share that verse with you tonight is this. We are involved in a form of warfare. World views are conflicting and clashing together. We want our children to have a right perspective in life as they grow up. Now I'm aware that for some of you Christian things are very new, but God is calling for us to walk the walk of faith when everything around us says you're stupid, you're making an awful mistake. God is calling us to walk this walk of faith whatever's going to happen over the next five years, the next ten years. I have to confess to you, that while I am not a pessimist, I am not optimistic about what is going to happen, either in educational terms or in Christian terms. But whatever the outcome, I believe our position should be that of Job and I believe that's not a position that you and I can adopt naturally. Because let's face it, none of you want to be slain, none of us even want to be hurt: yet Job was able to say - "even though He slay me yet will I trust him".

Some of us have that temperament that when God leads us into a difficult situation, we'll endure it, but not trust with any sense of confidence in our God, who is in control. 'I'm just going to endure this, it's a stiff upper lip job. I'm going to put up with it but don't ask me to rejoice Lord; don't ask me to really, really trust you, because it's hurting too much.' And I'm sure we've all been in that position, and I'm not preaching to you tonight as if I've cracked this one and this is how I do it because I know there are many times in my life when I know I haven't cracked it. But our calling tonight as we look towards the future is quite simply; to so trust the Lord whatever the future

brings to pass.

Now having said all of that, let's get into the main body of what I want to share with you, and we'll come back to the question at the end.

### **Changes in education over the last decade**

What has been happening to education over the last 20 years? I've tried to reminisce about what education was like when I started teaching. It was a totally different world then. No National Curriculum, no SATS. If I had a bright idea or if a child came into my class and said "Sir, I saw something on the television last night", - if I was quick enough off the mark we could do a lesson on it. Now it's a case of "Hard luck, Johnny - that was interesting but let's get down to the real education as the government has dictated".

What else? National Curriculum, SATs, education has become more and more of a commodity. You can trade it, you can sell it, you can buy it. There's a growing gap between those who are successful in our schools and the rest. The gap between the bottom 30% in terms of performance now and the rest is wider than it's been, certainly over past 20 or 30 years and it's getting wider. And that's however you define it, and whatever measures you use.

Now I have to say this - in terms of the Christian schools that I visit, and I know that Trinity is one of the successful schools in the Christian schools movement in the UK, but the movement has failed to capture the imagination of the church in the UK. I'm not blaming the Christian schools movement entirely because some of the church leaders that I rub shoulders with, to catch their imagination would involve using something akin to being hit by a sledge hammer between the shoulder blades, because they don't want to know. They're frightened, but nevertheless we've failed to capture their imagination. In other countries things are really moving on - in Eastern Europe, some things are breathtaking, and also in France, there are real encouragements. But not here.

Another thing that has happened, GCSE results have continued to improve year on year. There are more eighteen year olds going on to higher education than there have ever been, something like 35%. Many of them go on to do jobs that they would have done without GCSE's ten years ago. They are well qualified employees of McDonalds!

There is an increasing domination of what I call *technicism* and *economism* in the educational system. In fact the whole decision making system in education seems to revolve around these two areas. Look at the secondary school curriculum in most schools and nearly two days a week are given over at Key Stage 4 to science and technology. That's 40% of the timetable, and it's often greater. The traditional humanities are under attack and are being eroded as the curriculum is being

squeezed by literacy and numeracy. This is due to the *commodification* of education; something that can be boxed and tested. Literacy and numeracy are easy to test if you are just talking about basic skills, but understanding, a love of reading, that's a much more difficult thing to test. It means that language and literacy become the measurable yardsticks.

And then there's the increasing secularisation of education. Some of my colleagues were involved in a Schools Curriculum Assessment Authority (SCAA) consultation on values and morals in the curriculum. All sorts of people from all sorts of different positions, humanist, all the faith based communities were brought together. Everybody was there, and they were going to sit down and try to work out what common morals and values could they come up with which could be taught to our children. Now I'm sure you can imagine it's a pretty horrendous activity, but the worrying thing was - when they came up with their conclusions - there was a mention of god, but it was an airy fairy god, that almost anybody could say yes or no to. But when Anne Holt, CARE for Education's Director got up and said - "Now hang on a minute, I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, because He's my personal Saviour", the response to that was - that's OK for you, but you can't impose that on the rest of us. That doesn't exist in objective reality. That's a personal opinion and you can't say that because the Jews and the Muslims would disagree. So that was out. So you can see how education has become more and more secularised.

So these are some of the key things that have been happening in education over the last ten years. Let's talk about where we are now in the context of the government and education and what they are mainly concerned with. I've highlighted about six things that I believe the government is concerned with.

1) **Life long learning.** Most of you won't have seen the government paper on life long learning. Now as it happens I object to the title to start with - "Life Long Learning : A Renaissance for a New Britain". The subtitle sticks in my throat a bit because even when the Renaissance took place during the 16th century they didn't call it that themselves. People called it that afterwards, looking back! This is all about their plans for life long learning (adult education as we used to call it). In this document (and the national grid for learning, and a whole range of documents; green papers, white papers), it's very obvious that they are obsessed about a number of things. I've mentioned literacy, numeracy and baseline skills. But you may say what's wrong with that? Surely it's good that children are literate, numerate and have other basic skills. Now I'm not convinced that I would want to go any further than saying it's just a good thing. The real worry I have is that it is part of a whole bundle of 'lets try and make education completely measurable'.

We know that when our children are little, we realise they can do something now that they couldn't do the last time you noticed. You don't know when exactly they learned it, and to be in a nursery class and to put a tick in a checkbox, to say that they've mastered that certain skill... that doesn't seem to convey to me what the

process is all about. They have learned something, they are different from what they were before. But just to put a tick in a box doesn't seem to me to be entirely adequate, and does it prove anything? We have noticed with our younger son that he'd learn something one day, come back to it the next day and it's almost as if he can't do it again. It's not important to him anymore. Now, if we were putting ticks in boxes, would we have to rub it out and wait for him to do it the second time? Once we are bogged down in this simplified notion of learning then we regard the educated child as the one who can do the party tricks that we ask them to do. And there are plenty of children who are not educated who are capable of reading and capable of numeracy skills and basic skills but not necessarily in the way you and I would want them to be.

2) **Economic competitiveness.** Up until the middle of last year when the 'Pacific Rim' economies went down the pan, all our education was being compared to those countries. How we had to do it like them or our economic competitiveness was going to disappear. Then, all of a sudden, when their economic competitiveness disappeared we are now compared with the Germans and with parts of America. This is Tony Blair, "Education is the best economic policy we have". Education now is all about economics, or so it seems. Another report says "our single greatest challenge is to equip ourselves for this new age with new and better skills with knowledge and with understanding". Now do you and I honestly believe when we look at life, when we look at what's going on in society, and its needs, that our single greatest challenge is to equip ourselves for this new learning/information age? It seems incredibly arrogant. Surely our greatest challenge is to deal with a whole host of problems which are caused by sin in this world. That's our real challenge.

But come back to competitiveness. More and more we are told what our children must be able to do. The government is now considering plans to convert to a four or five term year. I'm concerned that if we go down this route then we could get a situation where the children get ten weeks on, three weeks off for the whole eleven years of their education... The argument for it is that children forget too much over the summer holidays. Now what then have we all been doing for the last 130 years or what has the independent sector been doing which has even longer holidays in the summer than the state sector? And the government is also looking at lengthening the school day. Now I suspect that the agenda here is to do with working parents. School, after all, is the best free child care that we have, but why lengthening the school day? So many children are now attending after school clubs, so the thinking goes - then why don't we formalise that by giving them more lessons? And the reason - as another document has said - we are in danger of falling behind economically.

Now my MA was in the history of education and what interests me is that the first Education Act that really had an impact on the UK was in 1810, introduced by W.E. Forster, the Education Minister, and the argument he used to justify the state becoming involved in education was economic competitiveness. We were frightened of falling behind Prussia. (the Germans). Nothing has changed in one sense, but you

can use economic competitiveness to justify almost anything if that's the yardstick by which you want to measure educational success.

3) Another obsession is **quantifying and measuring** the educational process. We want to reduce education to everything that is measurable as I said earlier.

4) **Information.** The documents are obsessed with the fact that we are moving into the information age. Information will become the new currency. If you don't have information - you will be bankrupt, or disenfranchised. We need to equip our pupils as necessary to survive in the information age. My background over the last five years has been in new technology. I know a lot about the new technology, and I also know that people have been talking about the information age for many years. I've no doubt that we are on the verge of substantial changes, but the thing that worries me about information, is that it is usually spoken about in disembodied information terms – a bit like the Greek way of 'knowing'. The Greeks could know something and it would not change their behaviour one bit, it was an abstract thing, in their heads. The Hebrew way of knowing was different. To a Hebrew, you couldn't claim to know something until your behaviour had changed, until you were different. They couldn't understand the notion of knowing something in your head and behaving just as if you didn't know it, it wouldn't have made any sense at all. It seems to me that the Biblical way of knowing, that carries on through the New Testament, talks about not knowledge or information being currency, but about knowledge, knowing, in such a way that our lives are no longer the same. And it's bound up in relationships. It seems to me that so much Christian education is concerned with relationship, with how you and I relate to the people, yet the government is talking about – information.

5) **Performance of teachers.** For people who have knowledge about state schools they will know that their performance as a teacher has been increasingly measured and quantified and it's going to become more so. I suspect that the educational process in schools could well change so that the role of the teacher in coming years will modify so they become much more like the teachers in the old monitorial system. And what you will have in classrooms are classroom attendants, who are engaged in various basic activities but who are answerable to the teacher. That will mean you will only need to have one teacher between, maybe three classes, and classroom attendants to support the teacher. And the reason - very simply, it's cheaper! Once you've reduced education to quantifiable basics you can measure and put ticks in boxes in, an attendant can do that, it's stuff that in some respects you don't need to have a degree in.

6) And finally – **performance of pupils.** The last government made an appalling error in my judgement. It set targets for what percentage of pupils were going to get A-C grades in GCSE by 2000. Now, how can the government achieve that when the government isn't even directly employing the teachers? How can they set targets and say we're going to do this? The best you can do is to influence policy, but once

you've set those targets the danger is you've got to produce them, and it worries me from a statistical perspective that year on year on year the exam results get better! Why don't they just for one year stand still or even go down? Why every year do they seem to get better! My suspicion is if we make the goals big enough we can all be as good as Alan Shearer. This is a big debate in educational circles. We are talking about sixteen years of year on year improvement in GCSEs. Now that doesn't make any sense, especially when you yourself are not responsible for how these targets we achieved. I can set targets for myself, but I can't set targets for my wife, and certainly not for my next door neighbour!

So where might education be going over the next ten years and particularly through the context of new technology?

### **1) Information and Communications Technology**

We are on the verge of substantial changes, to do with computers, digital television and telephony. (i.e. Information and Communications technology, ICT) that will affect an awful lot of what goes on in the lives of an increasing number of people. In Manchester, one of the electricity companies is piloting a scheme to deliver the internet to a primary school over electrical cables! These could carry vast amounts of data, as much of the space in electrical cables is redundant. The internet now is a snail in comparison with this development.

### **2) Mobile Telephony**

Motorola and Microsoft, Teleste and others are currently engaged in massive plans to put hundreds of satellites up, from this September and by 2001/2 we will have two or three competing networks delivering mobile phone type telephony via satellite from anywhere in the world. The BBC over the last nine months has spent over £5million on it's website. By 2002, the DfEE said they will no longer be sending paper based documents to any schools, everything will be over the web. But those of you who use the web know that it is slow. The real breakthrough will come later this year with digital telephony, and soon after we will be in the position where people will be able to receive the internet via their TVs and you will be sending e-mail to each other via your TVs. I've no doubt that in five or ten years the internet via your TV will be as common as Teletext. Tesco has run a successful pilot scheme in West London where you can buy your groceries on line and have it delivered free. To Tesco - it's vastly cheaper and other British stores are following. I often buy books over the net from the USA and can often get them quicker than from bookstores in the UK (and cheaper even allowing for postage costs).

### **3) Virtual Reality**

The third thing to mention, and which concerns me more is in what's happening in the area of virtual reality. If you have children aged 0 to 8. this will potentially have a substantial impact on their lives. By the time they get to teens, the Saga/Nintendo stuff of today will look like Pacman to our children today. What am I talking about? Note, this is already in prototype. Work on this type of technology to produce virtual

reality suits, with suit and visors to give you the total experience of reality is already well advanced. Some of the biggest names in entertainment are involved - including Time Warner, Disney, Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft. My daughter recently asked this question – “What happens if you play one of the shooting up games and you get shot?” Now what happens depends largely on the programmers, but if it’s programmed this way, you would look down at your body and see what had happened, see blood pouring down. She then said “What sort of message is going to your brain?” and “What happens if your brain tells your body you’re dead?” I said – “I don’t know and I’m not sure anyone else knows!” That may so far be theoretical but sexual relationships ‘on-line’ are already going on through role-playing games between adults.

You will not have a virtual memory through playing these games: but you will come out with real memories of what happened to you in the game, and how do you differentiate between the memories? I can’t begin to imagine. There will be the domain of fantasising relationships whereby you can create the girl/boy of your dreams and do whatever you like with him/her. It will be the ultimate safe sex machine - no disease! These scenarios are unfolding, which is why this is an area which the church desperately needs to get its mind around. All this is still not the worst. Have a look at a magazine called ‘Wired’ to see something of the current trends in these areas. For these people, virtual reality is another form of reality, just as real as the reality that you and I experience. Just as valid, just as meaningful. Now can you begin to appreciate the spiritual implications of that, because people can make a world in their own image, make their god in their own image, do whatever they like, and it’s a nice place, where you can be selfish and obnoxious with no apparent consequences. We are not meant to be pessimistic, but we need to ask how are we going to prepare our children now for this kind of scenario?

Now to finish by asking this question - “Where is Trinity going to be in five years time, ten years time? Where are your children going to be? I don’t know the answer to that question but I will share with you some thoughts from David Hargreaves, Professor of Education at the University of Cambridge. He wrote an article last year that created a bit of a storm - entitled – ‘*A Road to the Learning Society*’ (1) In it he sought to anticipate where schools would be some time in the future. This is what he suggested - schools would fall into four categories - a) Private schools, espousing traditional values. b) There will be a growth in specialised schools, and in that category he would include schools like Trinity. (For specialised, he includes subject specialisms and special interest groups i.e. for religious reasons or whatever) c) he foresees a massive growth in home schooling. (It’s growing in the UK now, but on nothing like the scale in the USA with over 1 million families home educating). d) custodial schools. In this fourth group he’s talking about state schools, and it was the term he used that caused the storm. He called them custodial schools, because he perceives that if current trends continue the only kids that will go to state schools will be those whose parents can’t get them in anywhere else.

In one sense this should break our hearts, because there is a principle in the Old Testament isn't there - that the people of Israel should be concerned for the widows and orphans? Now the pupils of these schools will be the equivalent of those widows and orphans, they will be from single parent families, and the disadvantaged. The thing that greatly disturbs me (and we talk about this a lot in CARE) is that the bottom 30% who are failing today, are the same 30% who were failing before comprehensive schools, and that's not so much a criticism of comprehensive school, as a recognition that we still haven't reached them.

The life long learning scheme talks about adults opening individual learning accounts, putting a bit of money in and the government will put some money in and then the adults will use that money to buy into a course. Now you and I know that for many poor people there is no hope of them putting money into those individualised learning accounts. They haven't even got the money to buy a pair of socks! As a church we really need to wake up to the fact that there are going to be really needy people, and just as in the past the church showed it was profoundly concerned about the disadvantaged and the weak then we must re-awaken that.

So let's come back now to your vision.

What's the vision you have for your children? Do you want them to have GCSEs? How many? How many is enough? I would suggest if that is your vision alone for your children then you are missing the point. Your children will only need GCSEs if the Lord is calling them to the situation that needs GCSEs. Now you may say that's glib. But the important thing is that GCSEs are only a means to an end. Let me share with you our vision for our girls. Our desire - was that they come to know the Lord, that they had a good godly grasp of what the world is like, that they understood it for what it is, warts and all. That they had good friends that they were able to relate to, and they were prepared before the Lord as to what He wanted them to do. Now the jury is out in one sense. I don't know what they will turn out like, but I still have the same vision for them.

We have a lot of discussions in our house. Meal times are noisy and I never get a word in! One of our girls has recently been reading a novel that features mixed marriages - a black girl and a white guy. And the white guy's parents didn't approve. I was asked "Dad would you mind if I married a black guy?" My reply - "It depends!" "It depends on what?" I replied - "on what his qualifications were, or what job his parents did."

"Are you winding me up?" she asked. "I might be". "But would you mind?" "There is only one condition for you to marry anyone that concerns me - what is his spiritual standing. Is he a Christian who is trying to get on with the Lord?"

Trinity is an exciting place to be in, having seen some of your students today. The relationship they have with their teachers is quite remarkable. There is no 'them and us' in the way they talk to each other. In many schools, pupils regard their teachers

like prison warders, that's not the case here. It seems to me that it's an exciting place to be – but the price you pay for excitement in the kingdom of God is living on the edge. It's scary yet it's the safest place! As you chart out where you might be in the next five years, ten years, - with the government changes and new technologies, what is your vision for your children? Your calling has to ensure that you provide them with an education and prepare them to live Godly lives in Christ Jesus, irrespective of what comes afterwards – no GCSEs, or a hat full of GCSEs, no A-Levels, or all straight As, Oxbridge or whatever. Everything else is dross in comparison.

Some useful areas for discussion:

- a) Should the Christian school be positively discriminating in the favour of the disadvantaged 30%? What would be the implications for teaching GCSE? How many are really necessary? What else should we be building into the curriculum? How trapped have we become by economism and the performance driven mind set? What would the implications be for the issue of mixed ability teaching and setting?
- b) Is Christian education and the Christian school, with their concern for 'standards' whether of behaviour or academic success, being subtly drawn into the area of 'commodification of education'?
- c) Is the increase of 'Technicism and Economism' in the education system occurring in the Christian School's curriculum? Do we see a decline in the take up of 'traditional humanities'?
- d) The whole issue of technology seems critical. The philosophical challenge to examine again what we mean by 'knowledge' seems equally important as the moral dangers of virtual reality.

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