

# Sane Expectations

## a spirit in education

by Kim Beazley

How far are Australian parents concerned that schools should be places promoting the physical, intellectual, spiritual and moral well-being of the child?

I do not doubt that most parents are alarmed if there is, for instance, a suggestion of drugs in that environment.

Many are alarmed if there is a danger of moral decadence.

Those who send their children to a religious school, and all Church affiliated schools are not necessarily primarily concerned about the religious convictions of their students, will often hope that the student will develop a moral backbone and a spiritual sensitivity, but this is not universal.

If teachers were asked what moral and spiritual convictions, backed by personal discipline, they want their students to have, many would answer this is not their busi-

ness; but almost all of them want their students to have a grace in relationship which can only be based on the moral qualities of unselfishness and the caring involved in courtesy.

It is probable that most people want their children to develop intellectual and technical skills from education, at least skills of vocational value, but there are plenty of parents indifferent even to this.

There is probably a validity in Henry Drummond's statement: *'The mind of Christ is to be learned in the family. Strength of character may be acquired at work, but beauty of character is learned at home.'*

The student's attitude to school will mostly be determined at home.

I am sure that character—the qualities of grace, care, courage, perception, sympathy and selflessness projected onto other people



by an individual—depends upon deliverance from evil within the individual's own nature, from within my nature, for instance. The degree of deliverance from evil is the key question.

Deliverance from evil in our own nature is the very first and most valuable of human freedoms. Christ placed a request to God for deliverance from evil in His model prayer.

- Creative ideas come from deliverance from evil, from the unclouded mind. There are infinite aspects of this.
- Responsibility comes from deliverance from self.
- Compassion comes from deliverance from bitterness.
- Energy comes from deliverance from lust.
- Valid perception comes from deliverance from self-interest.
- Dignity comes from deliverance from self-concern.

Try to brush these propositions aside, to prove, for instance that you can see straight about the needs of others if you are driven by self-interest, and you will see they are sound propositions. You cannot live for self-gratification and take responsibility.

In Australia our faith tends to be in organisation, in resources, in fire-power and in the incentive of self-interest gratifi-

cation. We rate ideas and ideology fairly low and increasingly discount spiritual and moral factors.

Organisation, resources, fire-power and other factors we emphasise did not prevent the advance of an ideology in Vietnam. They merely seem to alienate the West from Asia.

We have traditions which are certainly the answer. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord of Hosts.' The full definition of character is found in the graces of the Holy Spirit and the method of development is in dependence upon Him.

This conference might validly be seeking to find upon what hinges the philosophy and thinking of this nation can be swung; what actions or ideas will swing the philosophy and thinking of the nation; where the philosophy and thinking of the nation are going and should be going.

It is possible to look at most of the history of Australian foreign policy in the colonial wars, in the Suez Affair, in Vietnam as mauling the lives of other nations at worst and dabbling in them at best. Many nations' foreign policies can be so questioned.

It is possible to ask by what philosophy and thinking the nation can be 'saved'. This involves answering the question what we do mean by 'saved' anyway—saved from mis-



Experiments in a high school science laboratory



Schoolchildren at the band festival in Sydney

used power, misused wealth, misused minds, from atrophy of spiritual sensitivity to the needs, sensibilities and dignity of other races.

If foreign policy is not meant to be mauling and dabbling in the lives of other nations, what is it meant to be? Is it meant to be actions to arrange a sane world, a less dangerous world, a more workable world, a more co-operative world?

In what ways does our foreign policy sustain what is spiritually right? What lifts the dignity of humanity? In what ways does it enter into defensive expedients for what most people know to be narrow self-interest and some might think wrong?

Where does power lie in the world and in this nation? What is power used for?

Quarrels of the Great Powers now could quite easily destroy every capital city in Australia. In the New Testament Christ shocked His disciples by saying that not one stone of the Temple would stand on another. That sort of traumatic forecast could be made of seven thermo-nuclear rockets from seven submarines on seven cities. We all have an immense interest in the world being sane.

We have another nation, another people, in our midst. I refer to people of Aboriginal race. Accept that, for the moment, as a fact



Aboriginal children at school, Arnhem Land

rather than a point of view. Their defeat and utter disintegration may not alter the fact that in God's mind they may be a distinctive people and nation. I suspect that only when the fact of their distinctiveness and their right to be distinctive is accepted will policy become right. The Aboriginal embassies\*, so called, just possibly might be correct in principle.

This way of thinking may be foreign to the Australian way, but the Australian way has mostly produced nothing but disaster for the Aboriginal people.

We need a real peace between us and the Aboriginal people:

- not the peace of successful oppression;
- not a seeming peace, coming from inability to articulate feelings;
- not a peace of unchallenged exploitation;
- not a peace of never meeting;

but a peace of straightness of motive, sane expectations, valid aims, gentle intent, freedom from greed, jealousy, resentment, fear and deviousness. In history they have had a famine of goodness from us. Innocence may see deeper into the lack of goodness than cleverness or experience can.

\*A tent erected in front of Parliament House, Canberra, was called an 'embassy' by certain spokesmen for the Aboriginal people in an attempt to bring grievances to public notice.



If you accept the possibility of the guidance of God, you are accepting the possibility of a culture. The culture of the Holy Spirit—that would then be the aim for civilisation. The culture of the Holy Spirit as expressed in:

- the way you think;
- the way you treat people;
- the way you take responsibility;
- your attitude to possessions and the environment;
- the motive force in industrial and international relations;
- the treatment of resources;
- the way you behave.

What would be the meaning of the culture of the Holy Spirit in:

Personal and national goals and purposes?

- The use of the intellect?
- The use of gifts and skills?
- The accomplishments and sensibilities?
- The use of sex?
- The attitude to institutions?

Wilberforce's revolution of values (and hence policy and custom) on the issue of slavery, and Shaftesbury's on the position of children, were regarded by them as revolutions of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as their diaries, letters and writings show.

Australia badly needs a similar shake-up

of vision for the whole relationship to people of the Aboriginal race and from them. Our last shake-up involved the right to vote and drink—pretty puerile aims.

It is useless to ignore the fact that Australian society powerfully transmits its real values into Aboriginal society. That, if you think of it, is the problem. The problem for many Aborigines is that they have caught European values not worth catching. The problem for many Australians of European descent is that they transmit values not worth transmitting. Values which were death to sensitivity in Europeans may be physical death to Aborigines. Our developing values are also increasingly productive of physical death to our unborn children.

There are Old Testament references to the god Moloch, the archetype of materialist rejection of God, to whom the young were sacrificed. The young are always sacrificed to materialist insensitivity. That was Shaftesbury's problem.

Aboriginal infant deaths and child mortality; the massive and deliberate destruction of other unborn children in Australia are sacrifices to powerful, social indifference or powerful social values in Australia, and the rejection of laws which facilitate this destruction does not alter the power of growing social custom. The culture of the



Holy Spirit would revolutionise these values. To aim at the culture of the Holy Spirit is not merely to ensure the creation of a true culture. It may well mean the survival of peoples.

The theme indicated for me has been 'the development of character' through education.

A Minister for Education, especially a Federal Minister for Education, is somewhat remote from the classroom. There are nevertheless decisions which a Minister can make which are identical to decisions that a class teacher can make, but their application will be different.

These decisions are:

- 1 The needs of every child must be met.
- 2 The full dignity of the child is met by recognising the child is meant to be a temple of the Holy Spirit.
- 3 Every child has a need for confidence, competence and independence.
- 4 Every child needs a knowledge of the realities, and the feeling that the child is recognised and accepted as an individual.
- 5 Every child needs an education which gives such knowledge and competence in an environment in which spiritual, moral and physical hazards are minimised.

The application of these decisions for a

Minister are infinite. For instance, take the point that the needs of every child must be met.

Some of these needs are financial.

I remember applying this deep conviction financially in a number of instances:

- Isolated children received grants.
- All Aboriginal secondary and post secondary scholars came under a system of grants.
- Vth and VIth form children of widows and young people from other low income families received grants.
- Students and pupils who were Vietnamese and Cambodian, when cut off from home, received post-graduate scholarships, clothing allowances, tertiary scholarships, isolated children's grants, the payment of board and pocket money at boarding schools.
- Children who fled Darwin received book and clothing allowances.

There are some children, born blind and deaf, whose education is founded on the fact that, initially, like Helen Keller, all they can tell is the difference between a loving touch and a touch which is other. This involves, virtually, a one-teacher-to-one-pupil ratio. It is a tremendous affirmation of the value of the individual and in this sense has a spiritual



**'Actions to arrange a sane world'**

meaning. The increase in all forms of education expenditure by the Commonwealth on all forms of a handicapped education, teacher formation and research from about \$5 million in a biennium to about \$67 million was an affirmation, contrary to the growing philosophy in the opposite direction, of the value of the impaired life.

This is, in a sense, affirmation of spiritual values. It is obviously not specific religious instruction. Denominational schools make their own arrangements about this. State Ministries decide what may happen in State schools. Without much support from some churches, I did not accept advice to terminate religious instruction by denominations on a weekly basis in schools of the Australian Capital Territory. For some churches there is now a lack of clear purpose, or an effective curriculum, in this field. Others find it a valuable form of pastoral care and contact with families. I took the view that it was a freedom which should continue, and if churches were too indifferent, or otherwise powerless, to organise it properly it should not be because of impediments placed in their way by Government.

If a child is regarded as a temple of the Holy Spirit, the child as far as possible has a right of access to dignity. I was disturbed at

the extent of disadvantages in nutrition, health, hygiene, moral protection, social acceptance and educational opportunity for children of Aboriginal race in certain sections of Australia. For this reason, certain mission schools were totally financed and the beginnings of a nutrition and parent education programme through schools were made.

For this reason also, where Aboriginal parents wished it, Aboriginal languages could be used as the medium of instruction in the Northern Territory. Aboriginal art, music, dancing and stories in Aboriginal languages can be used in schools.

If you have a conviction which you are convinced is of the Holy Spirit, that the needs of all children must be met, and that every child is meant to be a Temple of the Holy Spirit, the specific applications of these convictions are endless.

A teacher who has the authority of knowing what is right for the full well-being and dignity of the child, morally, spiritually, materially, educationally, should let it be known.

The teacher needs to take time to find by the most penetrating thinking and insight:

- What needs of this child must be met?
- What stands between this child and the child's full dignity?

- Am I centred in the needs of the class and child or myself? It was terribly easy to be centred in oneself in a Ministry and I faced that failure often enough.
- What is needed to enable this child to cope?
- Is this a child living in disaster? What am I meant to do about disaster?

The answers to all these questions will be highly individual—the dignity of the child is closely related to confidence in coping with the difficulties of life, and these difficulties vary enormously as every teacher knows. No bluff counts; children, I believe, respond to genuine concern. I make again the point that innocence sees deeper into the nature of goodness than cleverness or experience, and when children are spiritually injured, they are injured by real spiritual hazards put in their way by others.

I remember a most distinguished Papuan New Guinean teacher saying how much inspiration he, a poet, got from the lines of the hymn:

*Oh Thou who camest from above  
The pure celestial fire to impart  
Kindle the flame of sacred love  
On the mean altar of my heart.*

Perhaps that is the key to be an effective educationalist.







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*The Age* wrote of him, 'Kim Beazley is not a man who can or will silence his conscience—regardless of whether it might be politic to do so.'

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