

THE SUMMATION: Mr Patrick Wallas, Headmaster, All Saints Anglican School

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to begin this brief address which we might perhaps call an epilogue of sorts, by saying how delighted I am to have been afforded this unlooked for opportunity to mount the stage and thus share the limelight with those glitterati of the Anglican community who have preceded me, not to mention that wonderful ring in from the Lutherans – welcome home, Jill. That is how I would like to begin, but of course given the theme of the conference, you all know that I would much rather be sitting with you, busily preparing my ‘active listening’ face, as in ‘Now that’s something I’d never thought of before’, so instead I shall simply graciously thank the redoubtable Stephanie, whose competence I have to say inspires rather than unsettles, for dobbing me in.

I stand before you a relieved man. My brief was potentially disastrous. Can you imagine what it might have been like finding a positive spin on a conference constructed around ‘Rhetoric and Reality’ if the weekend had been disappointing? There is only so much one can say about the catering. Instead of which I can stand before you with a head still spinning with ideas, and a genuine excitement at the possibilities those new ideas might engender, and, hand on heart reflect upon what has been a most memorable and productive weekend.

Perhaps the most exciting thing about the conference for me has been the positively startling lack of butcher’s paper and coloured marker pens. Unless the Archbishop is planning to somehow incorporate these essentials of modern conferencing into the Holy Eucharist, I am daring to suppose that I have achieved my first ever butcher’s paper-free weekend conference. I don’t know about you, but I find it rather frustrating, having suffered the ignominy of the necessary genuflecting in the bursar’s office which accompanies my requests for attendance at a conference, only to be confronted at my first session by a well meaning and depressingly cheerful presenter bearing butchers paper and asking for my ideas.

I suspect most of us came to this conference confident of fellowship, hoping for guidance and praying for inspiration. The programme looked impressive, the speakers seemed well-credentialed and we knew it would be superbly organised. But I’m not sure how many of us would have anticipated the energy of those opening moments in the Augusta room. Mark set the scene by affirming the simple truth that we are judged more by our actions than our words, and it then fell to that most talented group of students to expose how our actions in schools can often be found wanting. By this stage I think most of us were hooked.

We were soon treated to a fascinating critique of post-enlightenment individualism by the Primate, as he sought to represent society as essentially inimical to our pursuit of individual fulfilment. I’m sure I wasn’t alone in finding our first keynote speaker’s theme quite riveting, and I find myself still bristling slightly at his call for interdependence as an Anglican community, whilst also sensing the rightness and boldness of his challenge. As a representative of an affiliated rather than a diocesan school, and I accept that the distinction is a tenuous one, I fear the loss of manoeuvrability that might result from any formal declaration of interdependence, whilst at the same time longing for the moral leadership that such an alliance might espouse. I think one of the catalysts that promoted the Enlightenment, and one of the reasons why we still remain suspicious of centralised authorities whichever barrow they may be pushing, is that they have so often let us down in the past. The individual can still somehow be trusted in a way that the Government or the Church or Microsoft for that matter, can not. The individual, it seems to me, is less drawn towards expediency, less compromised by the need for damage control. And when we talk about the integrity of an institution like the Anglican church to which most of us proudly belong, it strikes me that our challenge is to somehow together find our way back through our theology, and our differences and our human frailties, into the heart and mind of our one redeemer, Jesus. It requires an act of faith, which for me was the message underpinning Peter Carnley’s address.

This mention of faith reminds me of the story of the cockney who couldn't make up his mind which girl to marry. Sharon had blonde hair and blue eyes; Maria had black hair and green eyes. Sharon had a quick tongue but she was funny; Maria was sweet natured and serious. Over and over again he compared the two girls. The trouble was both of them loved him, and he loved both of them. One day he was passing a Catholic Church, and although he wasn't very religious, he decided in desperation to go in and pray.

"Oh God" he cried, falling on his knees. Oo should I marry? I know I ave to make a choice, so elp me Lord. What d'yer say, Sharon or Maria, Maria or Sharon?
His faith was rewarded by a remarkable miracle. He looked up and there above the altar, in letters of gold, was the answer he'd been looking for: 'AVE MARIA'. So he did!

I won't dwell on the Elective Seminars, as we all attended different ones, but I do hope you found your chosen presenters to be enlightening and their material helpful. Yesterday morning was extraordinary. You have to remember I'm new to the Gold Coast. I'd never heard of Professor Robert Lindgard, and if I'm honest, I was decidedly uninspired by his chosen theme, possibly because I had no idea what it meant. *Robust Accountabilities Beyond Performatives: Purposes, Principals, Pedagogies and Schooling*. It's not as if anyone is ever likely to buy the movie rights.

And yet the moment Bob began speaking, we all began listening. It was a remarkable address and a disturbingly challenging one. I find it unsettling to hear someone say that schools are creating the imagined community of the nation. But then isn't that why we go to conferences like this – to be unsettled? It seems inevitable that before long a school somewhere, and it might be one of ours, will do something quite breathtaking to reflect the changing circumstances of our world, and then, after much tut-tutting we shall all reluctantly follow. It doesn't take a genius to work out that a 14 year old boy is not physiologically designed to sit still for seven hours a day, and one wonders what they might be losing by being forced to do so.

One thing that did occur to me while Bob was talking, was the need to challenge the dominant belief amongst our generation (huge liberties taken there) that the world inhabited by the young, the world of chat lines and computer games and fast food is necessarily limiting and destructive. My experience suggests that perhaps we should trust them more; that perhaps they are more discerning than we might imagine. And that their reluctance to go on bike rides and have picnics and play Twister or Scrabble doesn't necessarily represent some kind of moral regression. When we sit down and talk to our students, how often are we amazed by their maturity, their generosity of spirit, their willingness to engage with their world? Is it possible that with our mistrust of their chosen pursuits we are actually doing what we vowed we never would when we were their age – expressing the conservatism that comes with middle age?

And what about that mysterious triple bottom line, sitting in state at the base of the successful school? The overriding bottom line will always involve our capacity to inspire, engage and care for our students, but it was refreshing to consider just what we can do to encourage the development of a faith community in our schools. The need for sustainability in our planning and development is a given in the modern era, but it was good to be reminded so eloquently of our responsibilities in this area.

Let me end by simply stating that I believe it has been a most absorbing conference, and we should all be grateful to Mark and Stephanie and their legion of helpers for dreaming it into reality. The students at the outset said 'Remember, it only takes one to make a difference'. So let's together go back to our schools and, building upon what we have learnt here, do our very best to make a difference so that the lives of the students and staff in our care may be immeasurably enriched.