

THE SOPHISTICATION OF OUR SOCIETY

When I was in my first year at Sydney High School the students walked each week from the Moore Park campus to Cleveland Street Boys High School for a double period of woodwork. Sydney High was an academically selective high school without teachers for woodwork and metalwork.

I can just remember making very amateur pieces of woodwork – useless creations that must (I guess) have provided elementary lessons in craftsmanship.

On a recent pastoral visit to Lakes Anglican Grammar School at Warnervale I visited a Year nine class in Design and Technology. It had vague similarities with my woodwork class at Cleveland Street.

However, the work undertaken by these students was very sophisticated, as you can observe from the accompanying photo. Let me describe what the students at Lakes Grammar did. They designed and made functioning wall clocks.

The clock-making process was made up from the following elements. The students had to research and test their ideas to create a suitable shape for a clock face.

Then they employed a computer aided design for laser cutting the clock shapes. They undertook further computer-aided design for creating stick-on vinyl decals.

The finishing is a two-part mix of a thick high gloss clear coat resin. This process required the students to mix equal parts of resin and hardener. The resin was carefully poured over the clock face. Then a heat gun was used to remove air bubbles.

The resin has around 30 minutes of working time in which the students had to ensure (almost nurse) that the resin was evenly coated over all edges of the clock. The resin takes 24 hours to cure fully leaving a clear high gloss finish.

The clock mechanisms were then fitted to create a functional wall hanging clock.

The professionalism of the students' designs and work amazed me. This project was light-years away from the simple woodwork projects that I and my contemporaries undertook in 1958!

The work that our schools now undertake with their students is very sophisticated.

I relate this story of my visit to Lakes Anglican Grammar because Anglicans of my generation (and maybe most Anglicans) have to realise that longing for simplicity in Christian belief flies in the face of the sophistication of our society.

We cannot think about the Christian Faith and speak about it in the ways we might have done 50 years ago.

To do that is the equivalent of doing woodwork in school in the 1950s whilst the community undertakes the kind of projects that I witnessed at Lakes Anglican Grammar.

I watched in awe as the students made their wall clocks. I had memories of the trivial pieces of woodwork I made all those years ago.

Even though it may seem daunting, each of us has to live as Christians and to think as Christians in 2011 and not from a past era.

So we do need to gain deeper understanding of what Christian belief is, what the Bible is and what our mission as a Church is today.

This requirement is not new. Every generation of Christians has had to respond to the context of their times.

We see this process even in the New Testament as Saint Paul thinks through Christian belief in the context of the Graeco-Roman world, a world much different from the thought-world of Galilee and Judea where Jesus taught.

And the thinking of society now differs from that of the golden era for the churches in Australia of the 1950s.

We have to recognise this difference if we are to speak to our society in ways that connect with people. We do not want to become a quaint religious relic. We are called to be God's missionary people.

Bishop Brian Farran



Bishop Brian Farran with students from Lakes Grammar.