

Stuart Piggin at the launch of *Engaging Rome and Jerusalem: Historical Essays for our Times*

With us tonight are three of the four editors of collections of Edwin's effusions. Jim Harrison edited *The First Christians in the Roman World*. It is monumental scholarship. Alanna edited *Jerusalem and Athens* and prefaced it with an exquisite introduction: faultless scholarship.

By contrast I surely do not qualify for the task of editing any of Edwin's effusions. I am neither in the Club of Rome nor do I have more than a toe in the door of Jerusalem. My contribution is a third city: audacity.

Why then did I do it? I think the best explanation, to be honest, is that I like being happy and editing this book made me very happy. Epicurus had the key: Working in the Department of Ancient History at Macquarie is very pleasurable, but the purist pleasure was experienced in editing this. And the pleasure comes from the abiding sense that Edwin's writings make more sense of the world than any one else's.

What I have written about each of the forty Judge effusions in this book is the result of a four-fold process.

My first ever tutorial at Sydney University was in Ancient History and Edwin was the tutor. I had arrived at University in a state of terror and Edwin did absolutely nothing to assuage that terror. We were presented with the code of Hammurabi and Edwin growled 'read nothing into it, only find what is in it'. Exegesis – yes; eisegesis no. So when I had these effusions before me I first of all tried to work out objectively what was in them.

But objectivity was quite impossible and a second part of the process was that I found myself approaching each Judge effusion with strong emotion really, because I had vivid

memories of having heard some of these papers in my youth, and I had been indelibly affected, such as the treatment of Jesus outside the gospels and the marvellous table on p.88 where the sources are all put side by side. Such memories of lights coming on in the past shaped my interpretation of Edwin's thought in the present.

Further, precisely at the time when I began at Mac Uni at the beginning of 2005, the Australian commentariat was waxing hysterical debating the values which make Australians who they are: the scholars said it is all too hard, and ridiculed what they could not understand.

Enter Edwin: the best explanation of our values is that they are formed by the tension between Classical and Christian values. This made more sense than any other explanation and I began to think that Edwin might know more about the modern world than any one else, just as he knows more about the ancient world.

And that became the theme of the book: the modern world seen in the light of the ancient world through the eyes of the one who has spent a lifetime making ancient history modern. So I think my commentary owes much to the expectation, based on early and late acquaintance with Edwin, that I would find pay-dirt in every Judge mine I prospected. Pay-dirt means gold, and in no other single book will you find more gold on the essence of Australian culture.

Then, third, best of all – an unimaginable privilege - I would sit down with Edwin and he would tell me his version of how each particular piece came into being – so good, in addition to reading what is in a document, to be able to talk with the author of that document – no-one has been able to experience that with the code of Hammurabi.

Then fourth, when I presented Edwin with my construction of what he had said, apparently without changing anything, he would correct it - an incredible skill. And just as Macaulay's marginalia is worth more than any book in the margin of which he doodled his thoughts, so Edwin's corrigenda are more valuable than the text of mine he corrected. Being corrected by Edwin is to be made the beneficiary of the highest pedagogy.

For example, at the last minute, Edwin did change one word. In the blurb I wrote for the back of the book, I summed up Edwin's thought in terms of 'the creative tension between Classical and biblical thought'. Edwin asked gently if we might change 'creative tension' to 'unresolved tension'. Creative tension is Piggistic piety about the world as I would like it to be; 'Unresolved tension' is Judgean reality about the world as it actually is.

So let us allow Edwin the last word. One of my favourite pieces in the book is an address he gave at the annual service for Fort Street Boys High, the public school which I attended and which was remarkably similar to the ethos of the public school which he attended, Christchurch Boys High School.

The first two paragraphs of that address which he entitled 'The conflict of faith and education' (p.274) is:

Is there a conflict between faith and education? Perhaps you hope not. But there certainly should be. Classical education, as we inherit it from the Greeks, was meant to mould one to the established order, consolidating it. Biblical faith responds to the Creator who will transform us for the world yet to be. One can try to merge them, as we all do, but they pull in opposite directions.

These rival imprints keep our inmost being in suspense. And now the dynamism this has generated in the West imposes its distinctive vitality on all the world. Educationally speaking, everyone now needs to understand the conflict between Athens and Jerusalem.

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