Sermon for Bath Abbey, 9th September 2012

As a child I enjoyed school, but I never wished the holidays to end for I appreciated doing my own thing, and working things out for myself.

In ways which I didn’t understand I found “being taught” significantly less attractive.

Years later, when I was old enough to at least partly understand Einstein, I suddenly realised why I had felt like that.

Einstein wrote...

“It is nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not entirely strangled the Holy Spirit of inquiry; for this delicate little plant stands mainly in need of freedom...”

Then one of the least well explained of Sunday school lessons...the 12 year old Christ quizzing the priests in the Temple to his parent’s consternation, suddenly started to make complete sense.

Youngsters going into adolescence then and now need to ask questions more than they need to be told by us what we think they need to know.

It is here that Western education has a difficulty.

The English pride themselves on an education system being based on the Roman word ‘Educare’, often associated with the Latin word describing how a general lead his well- disciplined troops out of the security of the camp onto the battlefield.

Roman military success depended on every soldier doing exactly what he had been drilled to do. Roman soldiers were not expected to think things out for themselves. Drill and practice was the key to the Roman’s military success.
Roman education was based on that same ‘drill and practice’ model. Describing his time as a pupil in a Rome school in 325 A.D. a boy wrote in his diary...

“Oh my God how I suffered. I was told that, because I was a mere boy, I had to obey my teachers in everything. I did not understand what my education was meant to be all about and I was beaten for my ignorance”.

A lifetime later and that boy, now known to history as St Augustine, wrote reflectively....

“I learnt most, not from those who taught me, but from those who talked with me”.

**IF EVERY PARENT, TEACHER, PREACHER – or, dare I say it, POLITICIAN – put that into practice, this would indeed be the start of a brilliant new school year!**