

COLLEGES &  
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THE ANGLICAN  
COMMUNION



# Occasional Papers on Faith in Higher Education

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# *Occasional Papers on Faith in Higher Education*

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## INTRODUCTION

A common experience of those launching new periodicals is that the first one or two issues are relatively easily compiled, as there is a rich stock of submitted articles; after that, potential contributors' enthusiasm can wane, and the editors increasingly find they have to try to make bricks without straw.

*Occasional Papers on Faith in Higher Education* is still a fledgling journal, but, as we publish our third volume, there are some encouraging signs that our experience may perhaps prove to be otherwise. This is our most extensive volume to date. The theme of *Occasional Papers* is the place of faith in higher education, and the aim is to address it in as wide-ranging a manner as possible: from a variety of political and cultural contexts represented by CUAC member organisations; drawing on discrete disciplinary viewpoints; and with orientations ranging from conceptual discussions, empirical studies, and pedagogical practice, to surveys of history and to predictions of the future.

Five of the papers in this issue were first presented at the CUAC Triennial Conference in Chennai at the start of this year. The theme of the conference was 'Identity and diversity: citizenship, vocation and the common good'. Gavin D'Costa explores the long and rich tradition of Roman Catholic thinking about ecclesial universities. He emphasises that the place of such institutions as 'the heart of the church in a pluralist world'. For our largely Anglican readership, his paper well bears out his statement that 'in this ecumenical age we learn hugely from each other'.

Three authors treat the conference theme within the context of higher education in India. Monodeep Daniel examines the theological and pedagogical challenges of providing 'transformative education' in a country in which it is still the case that 'identity comes primarily with caste'. Two authors consider specific aspects of education and identity in this setting. Christel Devadawson discusses the powerful effects of cinematic representation, and contrasts 'the right to look' with 'the duty to see'. Suka Joshua reflects on her own experiences as

a chaplain, and the particular joys and difficulties of this ministry (which she dubs ‘momentous meaning-making’ in the highly diverse and complicated society of contemporary India. On the same theme, but from a different standpoint and context (Canadian higher education), Cindy Derrenbacker expounds the crucial role of the academic librarian—frequently simply taken for granted by other academic staff—in educating for citizenship, vocation and the common good.

A variety of settings, topics, and orientations is represented in the remaining three papers. Mike Higton adopts a highly innovative approach to the question of how to be good in higher education, employing a series of genres—jeremiad, sermon, apologia, appeal, and peroration—and ending with the hope and prayer that CUAC will be ‘amongst the most determined’ of those attempting to answer the question. Two authors respond, from an Anglican standpoint, to the form of secularism that is deeply entrenched in Western higher education (and, perhaps, increasingly elsewhere). Andrew Williams investigates the role of religion in a ‘self-consciously secular’ university, and its implications for Anglican chaplaincy. He concludes that, however officially invisible religion may be, it is alive and well, often living under other names, and challenges chaplains to ‘keep alive the rumour of God’ in secular and multi-faith universities. In a fascinating survey of modern attitudes as represented in popular literature, Frances Ward considers the ‘elephant in the room’ in the discourse of education: ‘how the church is (or ... is not) entering debates about the future of the natural environment in the face of the challenge of anthropogenic impact’.

This issue is thus a diverse, wide-ranging collection. We hope, and pray, that it will provide informative and generative reading—and stimulate many more contributions to the future development of our young journal.

# The Christian University: Identity amidst Religious and Cultural Diversity<sup>1</sup>

**Gavin D'Costa**

*University of Bristol*

I want today to bring a Roman Catholic perspective to the question of the role of ecclesial Colleges and Universities. I do this for three reasons. First, because I was invited as a Roman Catholic theologian who has written about these matters – and I don't want to be sent home on the grounds of not fulfilling my brief. Secondly, because what is being said by the Catholic Church is challenging, even if it not being put into practice by Catholic institutions everywhere. Thirdly, because I think in this ecumenical age we learn hugely from each other.

## **The Church in a pluralist world**

I want to step back from the actual question of the college or university, but only to frame the role and place of the college or university within society at large. I want to begin with a quote from Pope Benedict's great encyclical, *Caritas et Veritate* (2009, p. 56). Benedict, following St Pope John Paul II, promoted and recognised the importance of the social-political dimension of ecclesial life. Put very bluntly, if Christianity is true, then the goods of Christianity, for example its 'social teachings' regarding the 'common good', its vision regarding the meaning and purpose of human knowledge, its view of human wellbeing: all these 'goods' need a space in the public square. Not shrill and belligerent, nor proud or haughty, but genuinely engaged, listening and open, but with some definite things to say. Benedict says (and note his recognition of religious plurality):

The Christian religion and other religions can offer their contribution to development only if God has a place in the public realm, specifically in regard to its cultural, social, economic, and particularly its political dimensions. The Church's social doctrine came into being in order to claim 'citizenship status' for the Christian religion [n.135: citing John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, p.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was delivered at the CUAC triennial conference in Chennai, India, 2017.

5]. Denying the right to profess one's religion in public and the right to bring the truths of faith to bear upon public life has negative consequences for true development. The exclusion of religion from the public square—and, at the other extreme, religious fundamentalism—hinders an encounter between persons and their collaboration for the progress of humanity.

How does this passage relate to the role of the Christian higher education institution? In at least two ways. First, it claims that Christians might have something specific to say about the cultural, the economic, and the political. Note the ambitious scope, for the cultural also includes the scientific, the social sciences, as well as the traditional humanities and liberal arts. Culture is as much about rocket science, nano-technology, stem-cell research, or public architecture as it is about art, literature, dance, film and food. Benedict's claim raises the significant question as to where Christians are trained to engage with these vast array of disciplinary specialisms and where they are trained to form a voice to partake in debates and conversations in the public square.

We find that the answer about the 'where' for the Catholic magisterium is the Catholic college or university. It is the training ground for developing the capacity for a voice in the public square; and note this voice is not geared towards privileging Christians, but allowing for genuine plurality—of religions, as mentioned, and non-religions, which is the prevailing ethos in the West. (In India we find different dynamics operating, as one does in each different political-social context.)

Second, Benedict claims that the denial of this freedom (that comes from ideological secularism as much as ideological mono-religious groups, loosely called 'fundamentalism' in the encyclical) negates the 'progress of humanity' and 'true development.' This is an incisive point which is deeply germane for Christian educational (and charitable) institutions where their very existence is problematic to governmental powers. But note, the denial of this freedom to all religious and non-religious groups leads to curtailing the 'progress of humanity.' Who wants to be responsible for such a serious crime: negating the progress of humanity? The stakes are high for the claim is that if Christianity fails in forming

Christians and others to make a contribution to the public square it fails the public square and itself.

To put it biblically, Matthew 5.13 reminds us: 'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.' So we are stuck between trampled underfoot and being responsible for crimes against humanity. Christianity was not designed to be comfortable! But it was designed for training and educating Christians to worship the one true God, form communities where this worship can be sustained, and form institutions like Colleges and Universities so as to facilitate serious Christian engagement in the public square. How it might form those who are not Christians in its institutions is a point to which we will return.

To conclude: Christian colleges and universities are required to serve the public square in promoting genuine dialogue, real plurality, and informed and committed people who wish to serve the public good.

### **The University as the heart of the church in a pluralist world**

We are now nearing the central issue: the role of the Christian university or college amidst diversity. The main magisterial document (an *Apostolic Constitution* to be precise) on the nature of the Catholic University comes from John Paul II. It has a great title, unlike some Latin tags for Roman documents: *Ex Corde Ecclesia* (1990), 'Born from the heart of the Church'. It expresses the deep organic connection of the worshipping community to the place where intellectual enquiry must flourish. It expresses the organic vision that the worshipping person and community also have hearts, intellects and wills that operate both inside and outside of the Church. And it is one of the church's main duties to engage in this education.

*Ex Corde* is clear that, for the enterprise of an ecclesial higher education institute to be successful, it will have a vast array of elements that need to be present: five to be precise. I'd like to focus on one of these elements in the final part of my paper, but it will be worth looking briefly at all in regard to our theme at this conference regarding identity and diversity. It is also worth listing these five as many of these elements are being discussed in other parts of the conference programme and if



they are not, naming them is important to get a sense of the complexity of the challenge before us. So what is the recipe for a Catholic university or college, which makes it a functioning body arising from the heart of the Church?

The first is the intellectual life of the university and the curriculum. This might come as a bit of a shock, and so it should. One might imagine that prayer or social action would come first, but it does not, precisely because the ecclesial character of the institution is assumed and it addresses *the main function of the university*, which is the role and value of the intellectual life. This is the most challenging and exciting part of the document, for it demands that the Church should not simply duplicate the best secular universities, but that its intellectual curriculum be ordered with different priorities: seeking wisdom; and employing that wisdom for the common good, and especially those who are least privileged. This is a kind of sacrificial call to most Vice Chancellors, Principals, and leaders! They are often busy ensuring enrolment figures and are now suddenly told that aping the Ivy League is not the order of the day. Aping Jesus Christ, intellectually configured, is the tall order of the day. To this I will return after commenting on the other four elements.

The second element is the liturgical life of the university community. Without this, the community loses its umbilical cord to the church. *Ex Corde* puts the matter clearly and while doing so also attends to the question of diversity on the campus:

As a natural expression of the Catholic identity of the University, the university community *should give a practical demonstration of its faith in its daily activity*, with important moments of reflection and of prayer. Catholic members of this community will be offered opportunities to assimilate Catholic teaching and practice into their lives and will be encouraged to participate in the celebration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist as the most perfect act of community worship. When the academic community includes members of other Churches, ecclesial communities or religions, their initiatives for reflection and prayer in accordance with their own beliefs are to be respected. (39)

Remember, these documents understandably operate at the highest level of generality, for the circumstances of each university or college is going to be vastly different, as is their demographics *viz.* cultural and religious groups that are part of the community. What is central is a liturgy that feeds those who are Catholic Christians and within this, of course, the inclusivity that is an appropriate part of these sacramental and parasacramental occasions.

Prayers commencing a graduation ceremony for instance cannot exclude half the graduands, but neither can it exclude the character of the institution conferring such degrees. I recall when I graduated in my doctorate from Cambridge University, an entirely secular university, the entire ceremony was in Latin and the Vice-Chancellor muttered a Trinitarian prayer in receiving each graduate:

*Auctoritate mihi commissa admitto te ad gradum [name of degree], in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.*

By the authority committed to me, I admit you to the degree of [name of degree] in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

The Trinitarian formula may be omitted at the request of the graduand. The Muslim woman from my college, the only Catholic foundation, St Edmund's House, was granted an exemption regarding the Trinitarian prayer. This practice still continues at Cambridge, a secular university, and has not been challenged. Of course, each instance requires discernment regarding local contexts, but also a calling to the universal nature of the ecclesial institution.

The Catholic campus must also be a place that honours religious freedoms, thus allowing for other Christian denominations and religions carrying out their own cultic acts or para-cultic acts. While that is almost an aside in the document, its inclusion is critical, for there is a serious recognition of the pluralist nature of the campus community and the need to enhance, facilitate and support the formation of those pluralist religious identities.

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<sup>2</sup> See: <http://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/your-course/graduation-and-what-next/degree-ceremonies/ceremony>

The third element is the social action and outreach that the university facilitates. Social justice is central to the existence of the university because it is not purely education for education's sake, but a witness to Christian identity, which is marked by social justice. Activities related to the particular location of the university are specified as well as the international dimensions, the wider context, for the college is always part of a wider more international network of relations. *Ex Corde* explicates:

The Christian spirit of service to others for the *promotion of social justice* is of particular importance for each Catholic University, to be shared by its teachers and developed in its students. The Church is firmly committed to the integral growth of all men and women (32). The Gospel, interpreted in the social teachings of the Church, is an urgent call to promote 'the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities; of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfilment' (33). Every Catholic University feels responsible to contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works: for example it will be capable of searching for ways to make university education accessible to all those who are able to benefit from it, especially the poor or members of minority groups who customarily have been deprived of it. A Catholic University also has the responsibility, to the degree that it is able, to help to promote the development of the emerging nations. (34)<sup>3</sup>

Most importantly, while social projects should always be aimed at the benefit of the powerless and those who suffer and are persecuted, this action is anchored in the Church's social teaching, one of the best kept secrets in some Catholic communities. The point I would underline is

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<sup>3</sup> The notes refer: 32. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, nn. 27-34: AAS 80 (1988), pp. 547-560. 33. PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 1: AAS 59 (1967), p. 257.

that praxis is always related to 'theory' and vice versa, such that the reflective component of social action is integral to the university.

Obviously, not everyone taking part in such social outreach would agree with Catholic social teachings. That in itself is not a problem for the activities of social outreach, for the latter might serve very different pluralist visions and I recall in my CND days marching with quite a few Buddhists and Hindus (and fewer Catholics at that time). One does not have to have doctrinal agreement to engage in common service, but at the same time, the underlying social outreach of the institution would be informed and shaped by Catholic social teaching. There are tensions here especially related to gender and life issues.

The underpinning of the University's mandate, the structural vision of outreach, is in fact part of the Church's patrimony that it passes on through such educational institutions, again without being exclusive and desiring to serve the common good.

The fourth element is the academic teaching staff within the University. This is an area that generates canon law and can be very difficult to implement in some circumstances but it clearly establishes the resource base required to make the nature of the university or college work. *EC* is forthright: it asks that non-Catholic staff should respect the Catholic nature of the institution and be willing to support it appropriately (again envisaging other Christians, those from other religions, and also no religion). Canonically, it then faces the big question: how many teaching staff should be Catholic to ensure the institution retains its special charisma? It answers, with canonical and mathematical precision:

In order not to endanger the Catholic identity of the University or Institute of Higher Studies, the number of non-Catholic teachers should not be allowed to constitute a majority within the Institution, which is and must remain Catholic.' (Norms: 4. s. 4)

It does not specify administrative staff because the intellectual project of the university is central to its concerns. It assumes the leadership will be Catholic. The requirement is related to the curriculum vision to which I will attend to below. It is a stumbling block and sometimes hugely difficult to fulfil, but it sets out a marker.

The fifth and final element is the student body (these are not ordered in hierarchal terms). Here, *Ex Corde* seems least sensitive to a diverse student body and for the most part assumes that students are Catholic. For those that are, the education is to form Christian minds, hearts and wills, so that students will become 'outstanding in learning, ready to shoulder society's heavier burdens and to witness the faith to the world' (9). This represents precisely what we started with: Christianity's voice in the public square.

For those who are not Catholic, it still offers a more holistic picture education rather than just outstanding academic excellence:

The education of students is to combine academic and professional development with formation in moral and religious principles and the social teachings of the Church; the programme of studies for each of the various professions is to include an appropriate ethical formation in that profession. Courses in Catholic doctrine are to be made available to all students. (Norms: 4.5)

Note, it refrains from making Catholic doctrines mandatory precisely because of the mixed body of students. Instead it relies heavily on an interesting and not uncontested view of 'natural law ethics', such that ethics might be taught to all, both in terms of life issues and also specific disciplinary and professional issues related to particular programmes. This is not the imposition of Catholicism upon students, but a deep appreciation of the moral character of all existence, both learning and that which is learnt about and its uses.

In conclusion, all these five require teasing out and testing and questioning. That is not possible for me to do here, but I will return to the intellectual curriculum in terms of identity and diversity.

**The curriculum: a Christic-transformation of education centred on love, awe, and wisdom?**

The main body of *Ex Corde* is devoted to a discussion of the intellectual curriculum and includes all sorts of deeply challenging suggestions that, if taken seriously, are deeply radical in their visionary transformation of the curriculum. The most fundamental concerns the curriculum.

There is a consistent refusal of the fragmentation of knowledge that is a result both of ever increasing specialisms, which is the hall mark of the successful research university, and the result of the growth of disciplines with the explosion of knowledge. The document lays out its vision with force and simplicity:

Integration of knowledge is a process, one which will always remain incomplete ... But a University, and especially a Catholic University, 'has to be a 'living union' of individual organisms dedicated to the search for truth ... It is necessary to work towards a higher synthesis of knowledge, in which alone lies the possibility of satisfying that thirst for truth which is profoundly inscribed on the heart of the human person' (19<sup>4</sup>). Aided by the specific contributions of philosophy and theology, university scholars will be engaged in a constant effort to determine the relative place and meaning of each of the various disciplines within the context of a vision of the human person and the world that is enlightened by the Gospel, and therefore by a faith in Christ, the Logos, as the centre of creation and of human history. (16)

This is quite breath-taking and possibly unintelligible on first reading as it contains so much. It requires at least three things to be in place, each requiring a serious number of sub-tasks, but all are in principle at least, achievable.

The first is that theology discovers something of its medieval role as 'queen of the sciences', a term not employed in the document for it could easily lead to misunderstanding.<sup>5</sup> Cardinal Newman observes that a University

professes to assign to each study which it receives, its proper place and its just boundaries; to define the rights, to establish the mutual relations and to effect the intercommunion of one and all.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Allocation to the International Congress on Catholic Universities, 25 April 1989, n. 4: AAS 81 (1989), p. 1219. Cf. also VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 61: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1081-1082.

<sup>5</sup> *ECE*, 19

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 457

*Theology* plays a particularly important role in the search for a synthesis of knowledge as well as in the dialogue between faith and reason. It serves all other disciplines in their search for meaning, not only by helping them to investigate how their discoveries will affect individuals and society but also by bringing a perspective and an orientation not contained within their own methodologies. In turn, interaction with these other disciplines and their discoveries enriches theology, offering it a better understanding of the world today, and making theological research more relevant to current needs. Because of its specific importance among the academic disciplines, every Catholic University should have a faculty, or at least a chair, of theology.

The role for theology is not to suggest some superior knowledge of each particular discipline by the theologian, which would be both foolish and implausible. Rather it is to suggest that theology (with philosophy) can begin to examine the overarching connection and relationship of the disciplines to overcome fragmentation; to see how all knowledge and disciplinary excellence can be employed to the glory of God, without ever contradicting the highest principles of excellence within those disciplines properly conceived. Precisely because theology's object of study, if you can permit me these Thomist terms, is God the infinite, loving and merciful creator, who is the meaning of all finite things, theology has the disciplinary ability to engage with this complex and perplexing question in helping to enquire about the 'fit', the 'relationship' between these finite disciplines. And also the fit that these disciplines have with the overarching fundamental theological vision that the world is created for love, awe, and wisdom. Theology in the university has a vocation, one might say, to restore holistic relational thinking. This is already a challenge as many theologians, including myself, were educated without this perspective. But the task will require well educated theologians who are familiar with at least one discipline other than their own. But it will also require well educated economists, lawyers, biologists and literary scholars who are familiar with theology, enough to engage in such a conversation.

Perhaps this is one reason why *EC* recognises that the critical mass of academic staff would need to be majority Catholics, for the type of project above would not be possible without committed believers who are also professional physicists, sociologists and literature specialists. But I have expressed the matter more ambitiously, as the document is

realistic and even stipulates a canonical bottom line: any Catholic university/college should at least have a chair in theology! *EC* says:

Because of its specific importance among the academic disciplines, every Catholic University should have a faculty, or at least a chair, of theology. (19)

The second thing to be in place to aid this monumental task is theology's handmaiden, philosophy. A fuller picture of philosophy is presented in John Paul II's landmark encyclical, *Faith and Reason* (1990) and it is decidedly thin in *EC*. Remember, this pope was a professional university philosopher himself, but he draws on an ancient conception of philosophy as the:

'love of wisdom'. Born and nurtured when the human being first asked questions about the reason for things and their purpose, philosophy shows in different modes and forms [thus implying the different sub-types within philosophy: analytical, feminist, etc] that the desire for truth is part of human nature itself. It is an innate property of human reason to ask why things are as they are, even though the answers which gradually emerge are set within a horizon which reveals how the different human cultures are complementary. (3)

Philosophy's role stems both from the power of reason, illuminated by grace, understood as a realist love of wisdom embedded in the human person; and philosophy's ability to conceptualise possible relationships in human modes of thinking be they in science, social sciences, or the humanities. Thus in every discipline one finds the 'philosophy of science with its different branches. There are of course philosophers of the social sciences (for example Talal Asad, Alasdair MacIntyre or John Milbank) and the humanities (for example George Steiner). This view of philosophy, which is of course contested, working along with theology, begins to offer the intellectual resources for envisaging a different curriculum within the university where students might reflect on the bigger picture other than their specialism alone. Awe, love and wisdom are the real framework for a proper education, not specialisms alone. Theology and philosophy serve this.



Students must be engaged in such an interdisciplinary curriculum if this restored view of the disciplines is ever going to be possible. Right now we are seriously encumbered by people like myself. A generation learnt that disciplinary specialism was the highest virtue for the academic, at least in many research institutions worldwide. In my generation, there was not a single interdisciplinary doctorate in the theology faculty at Cambridge. Now there are many, because this view of the disciplines also has a host of champions, a deep humanism undergirding both religious and non-religious approaches. Hence, the possibility of this new curriculum might seem like an eschatological dream, but in reality, it is also realised eschatology: it is happening in Catholic universities and in many other institutions all around the world. Calvinist philosophers are in the forefront.

For example, in Notre Dame University there is a course that is designed for scientists and theologians to explore the false rivalry between religion and science, which forms a key undergraduate component of both disciplines. In other Catholic universities such as Georgetown (and Notre Dame) there is a mandatory unit on philosophy, conceived in this wider sense, which allows students from every and all disciplines to reflect on their own disciplinary methods, ethics, and presuppositions. The evangelical Calvinist philosopher, Alvin Plantinga, working at the Catholic University of Notre Dame, was instrumental in developing this project precisely because he was at the forefront of outing questionable assumptions embedded in certain disciplines such as strict naturalism in the natural sciences. His argument is that

there is superficial conflict but deep concord between science and theistic religion, but superficial concord and deep conflict between science and naturalism.<sup>7</sup>

The concern is not defensive - to simply challenge the Dawkins of this world, but to positively advance a less antagonistic picture of disciplinary difference and to seek a greater harmony between disciplines to promote holistic education.

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<sup>7</sup> Plantinga, 2011, 23.

Finally, how might I relate all the above to the question of identity and plurality in my own discipline – theology? This opens up a huge debate that rages in ‘theology’ and ‘religious studies’ in the UK and the USA. My own position is as follows, which I should say is in total contrast to the viewpoint held in the department where I teach. That is as it should be as it is a secular university; and its great virtue is providing cover for those who disagree with its basic vision and methods, but to disagree in an academically acceptable fashion.

I would argue that the study of religions is a secular discipline and should be questioned. It delivers information which is very important but is hidden behind a façade of ‘neutrality’ regarding its subject matter. This was the position of the founder of the discipline in the UK, Ninian Smart, and also its methodological decision for *epoche* (suspending judgement). Feminists and Marxists were quick to call *epoche* into question – as modernity’s white male viewpoint or/and as the viewpoint of those in power in secular institutions. Gentler versions of a more theologically oriented engagement with the ‘other’ are to be found in the important new movements of ‘Scriptural Reasoning’ (that has initially focused on Jews and Christians and then Muslims and more recently Hindus) and ‘Comparative Theology’ which in contrast started with Christians and Hinduism and then Buddhism, and is now moving towards engagement with the Semitic traditions. In both these new movements, there is much to be celebrated and supported. But I have a reservation regarding the hesitancy towards missionary engagement with the other.

With the history of the holocaust in the West towards the Jewish people and the colonial movements that made the bible, sword and trade uncomfortably close companions, it is easy to understand the context of such hesitancy. None of this can be silenced. It should make all Christians deeply uncomfortable. However, there also has to be a time when one can question such hesitancy and creatively reaffirm mission, without violence and denigration, without superiority and close allegiance to imperial or European forms of Christianity, but with a profound and deep conviction that Jesus Christ came to set all humankind free. That Christ came to transform the intellects, hearts and wills so that awe, love and wisdom might guide us.

I have argued for a theological religious studies where the task is to understand the other in their own terms (which is an absolute necessity, if there is to be serious engagement) and to understand and interpret the other within the context of Christ, theologically, so to speak.<sup>8</sup> Only such an enterprise might mark the distinctive manner of theology and its interdisciplinarity within the field of religious studies and engagement with philosophy.

This is after all what a Christian university is about. In each of its disciplines, one should find the light of the gospel in some way – and to engage with plurality, intellectually and socially – and creatively. To articulate this ‘way’ is the task that we all face, one that requires long term strategic thinking, one that has deep conviction about the importance of a Christian voice and other religious and non-religious voices in the public square, and one that has a deep conviction that Jesus Christ transforms the world which means the academic disciplines and the university curriculum will also be baptised.

To cite *EC*:

Each Catholic University makes an important contribution to the Church's work of evangelization. It is a living *institutional* witness to Christ and his message, so vitally important in cultures marked by secularism, or where Christ and his message are still virtually unknown. (49)

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<sup>8</sup> See D’Costa, 2005, 145-77.

## Discovering Virtue: How to be good in Higher Education<sup>1</sup>

Mike Higton  
*Durham University*

### Jeremiad

It is a truth universally acknowledged that someone who looks like me, standing in a place like this, about to give a lecture with a title like this, must be about to indulge in a jeremiad.

*To whom shall I speak and give warning,  
that they may hear?  
See, their ears are closed,  
they cannot listen.  
But I am full of the wrath of the Lord;  
I am weary of holding it in.  
Pour it out on the students in the lecture halls,  
and on the gatherings of young faculty;  
both tenured and adjunct staff shall be taken,  
the emeritus professors and those long overdue for retirement.  
Their institutions shall be turned over to others,  
their teaching and their research together;  
for I will stretch out my hand  
against the inhabitants of the colleges and universities of the world,  
says the Lord.<sup>2</sup>*

It is enjoyable stuff, this jeremiad, once you get into the rhythm (and prophetic denunciation does have a very catchy rhythm). As for the substance—well, you can probably guess it all already. At some point, I am bound to bewail the reduction of the education that we offer to the status of consumer product—telling you that we have become unconvincing venture capitalists, investing resource into our students' personal brands—in the hope that they will position themselves competitively in the jobs market, win big, and pay us back in donations in years to come. I will probably say that we are reduced now to offering

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<sup>1</sup> This is a slightly edited version of the CUAC Annual Rowan Williams Lecture, delivered at Trinity College, University of Toronto, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Jeremiah 6: 10-12 (NRSV).

one of the stranger forms of gratification on the market: students come to us knowing what they need, or rather what they want, and we now scurry around to provide exactly that: the customer, after all, being always right. The learning outcomes are defined in advance, and most of the time the grades are too, as long as the students pull the right levers and pay the right fees. We have become one more low-rent service industry, somewhere between the print shop that will typeset your résumé for you, and the fraudsters promising to teach you how to make fifty dollars an hour working from home, no questions asked.

My jeremiad will not stop there, though. I will probably go on to bewail the way we have dismembered these same consumer-students. We have collaborated in a bizarre division of labour by which intellectual achievement is severed from socialising, which is severed from voluntary pursuits, which is severed from career advice. If it were not medically a little problematic, we would separate students into brains and hearts and livers on entry, tend to the brains in our lecture halls, deliver their hearts (or some other organ) to a speed-dating evening, and send their livers to the student bar. And 'holistic'? That is a word our students are likely to hear only if they are into alternative medicine.

Then (this bit of my jeremiad will have got louder in recent weeks), I will probably launch into something about our collective abandonment of truth or, if I am really riding the wave, our abandonment of truth, goodness, *and* beauty. I am afraid it is going to be pretty much impossible for me to resist the temptation to denounce our descent, step by alternatively factual step, into the post-truth quagmire. We are not teaching to transcendental standards any more: our institutions do not recognise that those standards exist, or, even if they do, that there could be any procedurally appropriate way of taking them into account. We are governed internally by the arbitrary standards of some quality assurance regime, and externally by, at best, the equally arbitrary dictates of a set of professional associations, and, at worst, by a calculation of which apparent achievements will have most currency in the jobs market when our students leave.

And so my jeremiad could go on, and on, and on.

Or, to save time, I could simply go for the short version, and say, 'We're doomed!' Now, if you were an English audience, of the right kind of age, and I said that again in the right accent, you would all immediately form a particular mental picture. Because all of you would have watched a sitcom called *Dad's Army*, back in the 60s and 70s, or in

endless re-runs. It was a long-running sitcom about the British Home Guard—that is, the groups of men who were not called up for active service during the Second World War (on grounds of age or health), but who were organised for local defence in case of invasion. And when I said ‘You’re doomed!’ you’d be picturing Private Frazer, the Scottish septuagenarian undertaker and professional pessimist portrayed by the actor John Laurie. ‘We’re doomed’ was his catchphrase.

So at this point in my jeremiad about the decline of Higher Education, hearing me say those words, you would suddenly have conjured up in front of you a very particular picture. A group of men (and they were all men) unfit for or exempt from the activity in which the other men of their generation were engaged, faintly ridiculous but also in their way rather admirable. Not uniformly respectable—the group certainly included the odd crook—but together about respectable business. They were a bastion of decency, an outpost of civil society. These men were the slightly tweedy last-ditch defenders of civilisation against all the forces of unreason.

Even if you have never had the pleasure of seeing this particular British sitcom, that still might not be a million miles from the kind of vision that my Higher Education jeremiad would have conjured up for you. Faintly ridiculous but also in our way rather admirable, slightly tweedy last-ditch defenders of civilisation against all the forces of unreason.

Of course, the parallel goes only so far. Obviously I am not including the bit where your role as educational defenders of civilisation suddenly seems much more serious because your nearest international neighbour has been taken over by the terrifying shock-troops of irrationality: I don’t imagine that element would have any resonance for you at all.

Now, as I say, I could start with some jeremiad like this, conjuring up a picture of our collective back-to-the-wall defence of civilisation, and I do not think any of you would be all that surprised. But you can hear that kind of thing from all quarters, so, with your permission, I’ll forgo the temptation, and skip the jeremiad entirely.

Why then am I here?

## **Sermon**

Maybe it is because I am a theologian. Maybe, instead of simply offering you the jeremiad, I can offer you something more positive instead: a

Christian theological account of what it is we are in danger of losing: what it is that this slightly ramshackle and unconvincing collection of the educational Home Guard are defending.

If I went in this more positive direction, my lecture might sound more like a sermon, more homily than jeremiad. I might say that in a Biblical vision, we cannot separate out intellectual development from the wider texture of life. Understanding, insight, the right ordering of the mind, is inseparable from the right order of desire, from the right ordering of action. The proper development of understanding is inseparable from repentance, from holiness, from worship.

I might delve, for instance, into St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, a text in which there is a contrast between darkened understanding and the renewal of the mind—that is, between disordered and reordered intelligence. But my darkened mind is not simply an ignorant mind; it is a corrupted mind. I am yoked to gratification, and so I understand the world, and my possibilities for action in it, only through the filter of selfish desire, thinned down to a blunt calculus of cost and benefit. I become insensitive to anything in my world that does not tip the balance of that calculation. I mentally colonise the world, in preparation for stripping its assets.

To live in this way is to live with a mind almost blind, because it has such a dim light by which to see. True understanding, on the other hand, involves a purification of vision. It demands that I be taken out of myself, enabled somehow to see from a perspective beyond my own gratification: to learn a different kind of love as the light by which to see the world. It demands the painful stripping away of my old habits of mind; it requires a form of decolonisation; it requires that I die to my old selfish self and rise to something new. This is learning that takes place on the way of the cross and of resurrection, on the way of Jesus Christ. It is under his tutelage, according to Ephesians, that Christians are taught to love differently, and so to understand differently.

Learning this kind of understanding—learning understanding beyond gratification, learning to see the world as something other than the arena for my profit and loss—also involves, in this Christian vision, becoming the body of Christ. It requires that multiple people learn to play distinctive roles within a single body. Each person has received a distinctive gift and *becomes* a distinctive gift to the whole; that includes a gift of understanding. I bring my understanding—what I see from where I am, from *who* I am—as a gift to the body, and I receive in turn the gift of each other member's understanding. I learn to understand

more and so to give more to the body, the more that I receive from others in the body. It is a virtuous cycle of mutually deepening understanding.

In the vision set out in Ephesians, the Christ who teaches us this comes to us from the God and Father of *all*. There are no boundaries to the community of those called into this body, into this life of growing understanding, of vision given and received. We are therefore called, as Paul puts it, to 'put away from ourselves all bitterness and wrangling and slander', and grow into renewed understanding as members of a family without limit: a truly universal community of all the children of God. Christian learning is therefore learning against a horizon of hope: hope for the inclusion in this learning community of the whole of God's family.

So, I have moved on from jeremiad to Christian sermon. I have moved, that is, from bewailing the present state of Higher Education, to presenting an idealised Christian vision that (let us be honest) does not sound like a description of any university you or I have ever encountered. If nothing else, the moment I said that it is a vision in which we have 'put away from [ourselves] all bitterness and wrangling and slander...' you must have been thinking, 'He's not talking about Higher Education any more, not even about the Colleges and Universities of the Anglican Communion; maybe not even about Trinity College in the University of Toronto'. Anyone who thinks differently has clearly never been in a faculty meeting.

Bear with me, however. I think this sermon does have some application to colleges and universities, and not just to those with an Anglican foundation. So this is where I turn from jeremiad and sermon to *apologia* – an *apologia* for Higher Education.

## **Apologia**

The first thing to say is that this Christian vision of learning can extend – in fact, it has to extend – to cover all the subjects taught in our universities. The God about whom Ephesians speaks is the One 'above all and through all and in all', the creator of the heavens and the earth, and so Christians are called to live well with their fellow human beings, with the wider circle of non-human animals, as participants in the ecology of all living things, and as parts of God's material creation. The understanding that can be darkened or enlightened, therefore, has to include the understanding of any object whatsoever, if understanding



that object can affect how the learner lives in the world as God's creature.

Having said that, I note that university learning of all these subjects does indeed shape learners' ways of inhabiting the world, and their ways of living together, and that at least some of the forms of learning pursued in a university or a college allow for the present projects and expectations of learners to be interrupted, complicated, or derailed by what they learn. After all, the objects we study in our colleges and universities become the foci of on-going exploration in which new possibilities of response are constantly being proposed, tested, refined, abandoned, replaced, and supplemented. We go on examining the patterns of language and practice with which we have surrounded these objects, and we ask what forms of engagement they enable and what forms they obscure. And at least some of the time we do ask whose interests are involved in these patterns of language and practice.

Therefore, at least some of the time, the learning that takes place in Higher Education will be learning in which it is recognised that the possibilities we have of 'living with' and 'responding to' the objects of our learning do not reduce to consumption or exploitation, but can include wonder and perhaps even wisdom. In other words, there is at least a possibility that the learning that goes on in a university can undercut gratification, and so at least resemble the kind of Christian learning depicted in my sermon.

I think there is an interesting, complex, partial but real overlap, or proximity, between the Christian vision of learning that I sketched, and the kind of learning that happens in Higher Education. At its best, the learning that takes place in colleges and universities may therefore contribute, in however limited a way, to the task of learning to live together in the world as Christ's body, regardless of whether or not those involved in it understand their learning in these terms.

I say 'at its best', of course, because nothing I have said requires that university learning will automatically lead to holy and righteous possibilities of living. My claim is certainly not that university learning inherently or pervasively makes a positive contribution to dying and rising with Christ. Some of the forms of learning pursued in universities and colleges will promote deeply distorted ways of living with creation, or of relating to others, and there may well be little in the resources of the university itself to help us avoid that possibility. But as a matter of fact, even if not as a matter of necessary principle, I think it is possible

for eyes being formed by the Christian vision set out in my sermon to see quite a lot of real good in many of our colleges and universities, whether they have an Anglican foundation or not.

Let me draw your attention to one particular facet of this. In my sermon, I mentioned the line from Ephesians, 'Put away from you all bitterness and ... wrangling and slander'. I could have gone on to stress that, in the Christian vision, people learn well by becoming those who learn with humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, honesty—the fruit of the Spirit, necessary to life together in the body. Even if references to the fruit of the Spirit are predictably sparse in most secular discussions of Higher Education policy and practice, you will find plenty of references to 'virtue', which, though certainly not identical, covers at least some of the same territory.

At its most neutral, of course, the term 'virtue' is simply used to name the internalisation by students and staff of the standards of excellence appropriate to the practices pursued in university: learning, teaching, and research. Quite often, however, in discussions of Higher Education, the language of virtue is given a more decidedly ethical cast: it is used to talk about these internalised standards insofar as they are constituents of a good human life, or insofar as the practices they govern are contributions to the common good. It is not uncommon, then, to see university learning presented as a matter of virtue, and the university itself as a school of virtue, even if the accounts of virtue involved vary widely.

Learning in Higher Education demands *attentiveness* of us; it demands that we be *open to surprise*, with a readiness to notice facets of reality that do not fit our expectations. It involves the *patience* required to allow those facets to emerge. It requires the *honesty* to admit the challenges created by these surprises for our existing thinking, the *integrity* to trace their implications as far as necessary through the whole pattern of our thinking, and the *clarity* that makes the tracing of those connections possible. It involves the *humility* to admit that changes to our thinking are necessary and to communicate those changes. At times it requires the *courage* to admit that one has been wrong. Yet it also involves *confidence* in what one has learnt, and the *willingness to trust* the findings to which disciplined investigation has led, even when that means contradicting others.

One does not have to look far to find accounts of Higher Education that speak of it involving the formation of communities within which these virtues are formed and sustained. University

learning inherently involves patterns of relationship within which certain kinds of give and take, certain kinds of mutual affirmation and critique, are enabled and encouraged. Participation in such communities involves taking responsibility for one's contribution, responding to critiques of that contribution, and offering criticism in turn. It involves the maintenance of certain patterns of civility: the maintenance of conventions that permit and facilitate exchange.

So, just as there is something like the Christian focus on the fruit of the Spirit in accounts of Higher Education, there is also something like a Christian focus on the formation of the Body of Christ—the formation of a community of exchange, of gifts given and received, of learning together and from one another. There is an unsystematic proximity or resemblance there: enough, I think, to allow me as a Christian theologian who has worked in a variety of Higher Education settings to value much of what goes on in those settings, to see it as *good*.

No more than that. I do not want to overclaim. The extent to which what goes on in colleges and universities can contribute to the good fight against sin, the world, and the devil—against, that is, selfishness and colonisation, against the myopia of gratification—is limited. Newman, in his *Idea of a University*, knew this:

Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man.<sup>3</sup>

The good that is possible here is limited and partial. But it can be good, nonetheless.

## Appeal

So, where have we got to? I started with a jeremiad, bemoaning the descent of the Higher Education sector into instrumentalist, gratification-focussed fragments. I conjured up a vision in which I, as the deliverer of the jeremiad, and you, as its hearers, were the plucky defenders of civilisation, the Home Guard, faintly ridiculous but also in our way rather admirable, standing proud as the slightly tweedy last-ditch defenders of civilisation against the forces of unreason.

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<sup>3</sup> Newman 1976, p.111

Next, I turned from jeremiad to sermon, and set out a Christian vision of learning. I talked about the transformation of life by which we are weaned away from understanding mired in selfishness. I talked about that learning taking place in the body of Christ, in those who, on the journey of cross and resurrection with Christ, are learning with one another, becoming gifts to one another, and receiving gifts from one other. I talked about the kind of holiness that this life of learning sought and demanded.

I then turned from jeremiad and sermon to my apologia for the idea of Higher Education. I did not claim that colleges and universities *were* the Body of Christ, or that the learning that what went on in them simply *was* the learning that I had set out in my sermon, but I did claim that there are, in practice, interesting if partial resemblances, which are enough to encourage me to value Higher Education: to see it—at its best, as in some sense, in some ways, to some limited degree—good.

The question I want to pose now is where my sermon (setting out a Christian vision), and my apologia (for the idea of Higher Education), leave my jeremiad ('We're all doomed!') That leads me on, after a couple of steps, from apologia to *appeal*.

One reason for being dubious about my jeremiad is because of the attitude to the past that it can encourage. Of course, some things about our colleges and universities were indeed better in the past—or at least some things that we care about tended to be seen more clearly, valued more explicitly, and protected more carefully in the past. There is, however, a real danger of falling into a historically bizarre golden-ageism, a glowing vision of what colleges and universities used to be like, back in the day. The history of Higher Education is actually complex, fraught, and ambiguous, and we are not well served by a rhetorical strategy that presents it as the promised land from which we are in process of being exiled.

Alternatively, one could raise the problem of the present. There are, of course, numerous genuinely worrying pressures and tendencies in the present. One does not have to look far to find bowdlerised curricula, appallingly treated faculty, pernicious financial arrangements, dispiriting student behaviour, eviscerated libraries, deadening political impositions, obscene economic disparities, overwork, underpay, stress, lies, gloom, despair, and death. But the danger of indulging in the jeremiad is that it helps one to miss the good that abounds in the present—and to miss the ways in which so much about Higher Education has got better, and is getting better.

My real worry about the jeremiad, however, relates to the future. The jeremiad critiques the depressing present in the light of the golden past, and faces the future either with despair or with hope, presented only as a matter of preservation and defence. At best, we dream of keeping the flame alive, guarding the sacred deposit, holding fast to the academic faith once delivered to our forefathers.

Furthermore—here begins the appeal—such visions drastically underestimate the need still to invent, to create the good university. Even amongst the colleges and universities of the Anglican Communion, and despite what I have said and seriously meant about the good visible in the past and the present of our institutions, there is still a strong sense in which the good university, the virtuous university, *does not yet exist*. The good university does not yet exist, and we are charged with inventing it.

I want to unravel just one thread of that claim. At the end of my sermon, I said that there are no boundaries to the community of those called into the life of growing understanding, of vision given and received, and that Christian learning is therefore learning against a horizon of hope: hope for the inclusion in this learning community, of the whole of God's family.

To look at Higher Education in this light, to look at what it means to be good in Higher Education, therefore means to be made restless with the limitations and exclusions that still shape university life. We may have moved a long way from the university as finishing school for a vanishingly small white elite, but the task of inclusion, of opening the community of learning as wide as it can go, is still a very long way from complete. This is not simply about who is given access to learning. It is not simply about the wider sharing of a good that we, in the university system, already possess; it is not only a matter of distributive justice. That is vitally important, of course, but it is not the end: it is only the first step of the journey into wider inclusion that we need to take. The vision I sketched was not simply of a wider community of recipients, but of each person becoming a gift; of learning from each participant in the community of learning, not simply learning alongside them all. It is not simply a matter of whose presence we admit, but of whose voices we allow and encourage, whose voices we hear and learn from.

If, at its deepest, our learning together in Higher Education has to do with learning to live well together in the world, learning to live wisely together in the world, then, in its deepest and most characteristic forms, Higher Education relies for its integrity, for its power, for its

capacity to contribute to the good, on widening the circle of engaged voices. The penitence, the dying to the old self and rising to the new, the overcoming of gratification that we need as we pursue the good possible in our colleges and universities, involves, on an individual and on an institutional level, a deepening attentiveness to, and a rooting out of, the attitudes, behaviours, and structures that inhibit such learning, and the fostering of patterns of life that encourage it. We have mentally colonised the world, colonised the identities and imaginations of others, and to learn more deeply, see more truly, we must be called out of that myopia.

I admit that this is so far a gigantically abstract thing to say. But think of it as a vague term that can be concretely, repeatedly and diversely specified in particular proposals and counter-proposals for patterns of university and college life. We should think of that life not as a sacred deposit to be preserved, but as a site for ongoing negotiation, ongoing experimentation and invention in relation to inclusion, and therefore as a site for our own ongoing learning. Yes, we already know something of what it means to be open, and to be formed for openness, but we do not yet know *all* that inclusion can and should mean. We have virtue yet to discover.

If I look at the universities I know, however, I can see that they are often, today, locations where the openness or inclusivity of learning is a matter of intense and difficult negotiation. Universities are often depicted in the press and elsewhere as seedbeds of ‘political correctness’, but that normally means no more than that they are sites for the sometimes awkward, sometimes heated attempt to identify the forms of exclusion prevalent in our society and mirrored in our society’s universities, and to track down the roots of those forms of exclusion through all of our practices and all of our language. Such negotiation—genuinely difficult, genuinely contested, and inherently resistant to resolution by simple appeals to a supposed common sense—is not a distraction from the proper business of universities, but an inevitable and proper accompaniment to real learning. It is a symptom of the ongoing exploration of the nature of real learning.

One could look, therefore, at recent debates about, say, the ‘no platforming’ of controversial speakers, or debates about the removal from Oxford college facades of statues of infamous figures from Britain’s colonial past, or the furore in a Yale college about cultural appropriation in students’ Halloween costumes, or the rise of the practice of giving trigger warnings before lectures that include

disturbing content, or the recent publicity given to the Students' Union at SOAS in London and their campaign to 'decolonise the curriculum' (falsely reported as a campaign to kick Plato and Kant off the philosophy curriculum for being white). The existence and fierceness of all these debates are not signs of some fundamental breakdown in university life, still less of some easily dismissed immaturity on the part of snowflake students. They are not yet more evidence of the sorry decline lamented in my jeremiad. They are evidence of the on-going, complex negotiation of the openness of the university learning community. They are new forms of fundamental and perennial questions facing universities, about the kind of learning community that we generate: questions which go right to the heart of the vision of learning that I have been sketching.

The negotiations are, genuinely, difficult because any answer that sees inclusion merely as a matter of wide open doors leading to an interior decorated in colours of bland neutrality is simply inadequate to the task. Think, for a moment, of what is involved in bringing the voices of former colonisers and those whom they have colonised into the same space, and allowing all voices to be heard and mutual learning to take place. It is the kind of task that requires not simply the publication of a policy on free speech on campus, but the wisdom of a Desmond Tutu and the risky inventiveness of a truth and reconciliation commission. Now think about the ways in which the spaces that our universities and colleges occupy is not shaped by one simply specified gradient of power, but by an overwhelmingly complex intersection of such gradients. Radical inclusion demands fierce creativity, courageous and precarious institutional inventiveness. It demands a willingness to look again, and again, and again, at the supposedly settled patterns that we have taken for virtue and for community in the past and in the present.

### **Peroration**

Let me finish with one further thought. If we are asking about forms of exclusion and inclusion, about the ways in which our patterns of institutional life, of practice, of speech, make it more or less possible to gather and learn from a diverse community of living and dead voices; if we are asking about all that, we might want to ask some unsettling questions not just about my jeremiad, but about my sermon.

That sermon was spoken in a Christian voice; it set out a Christian vision. It spoke about inclusion, but the basis for that inclusion was a

vision of the Body of Christ, a hope for salvation for all in Christ. I turned to the university setting claiming only a partial overlap, a proximity, an echo of that Christian inclusion. I spoke instead more generically about inclusion in a learning community: letting the explicitly Christian language drop into the background. But if we are on the lookout for subtle and not-so-subtle forms of exclusion, is not this reliance upon an insistently Christian account something of a problem?

There is, of course, a deeper question behind that: about the 'Anglican' identity of the Colleges and Universities of the Anglican Communion. It is all very well to argue that the Christian identity of these places should underpin a vision of education which is committed to inclusion, to exploring creatively the difficult territory of what makes for genuine inclusion and exclusion; but might not one of the things that need to be *given up* in that negotiation be, precisely, that explicitly Christian identity?

Now, rhetorically, you can tell I am building up to the answer, 'No'. No, don't worry, it's all fine. This is how lectures like this go: you ramp up the difficulties, making it harder and harder to see how our hero is going to extricate himself, and then, at the last minute, you turn the narrative corner, and with one bound Jack is free. So in that vein I could say, 'No, no, really – it's fine.' The model I have been suggesting is not a hard secularist one, of (as I said) wide open doors leading to an interior decorated in colours of bland neutrality. We do not include everyone by creating a learning space in which everyone leaves behind particular histories, particular identities, particular commitments (including religious commitments) and searches for reasons that can be equally shared by all.

Rather, the model I am after is of what the first lecturer in this series, the one after whom the series is named, has called an 'interactive pluralism' (Williams, 2008). This is a vision in which multiple distinctive voices are included, multiple identities and histories, in intense, serious, difficult conversation with one another.

I could draw here on my experience of Scriptural Reasoning, an interfaith conversational practice gathered around the reading of texts, in order to sketch a picture of a conversational space in which participants are able to participate precisely as inhabitants of their own traditions, precisely as people who are passionately different, people who don't agree about the nature of the texts in front of them, about those text's authority, or even about the purpose of the conversation, but who nevertheless negotiate together an ongoing shared practice, and



who learn from one another in the space so negotiated. That is interactive pluralism in action, a space in which a sermon-spouting Christian theologian like me can sit down next to his Jewish and Muslim equivalents, and all of them can read together, and learn together.

I do not, however, want to leave my lecture with quite that neat an ending. The actual negotiations of inclusion and exclusion around the Scriptural Reasoning table are complex and difficult enough. They have, in ways not necessarily clear from the surrounding literature, involved a constant ongoing creativity in form and process, one that has produced as many failures as successes. The negotiations of exclusion and inclusion in a college or a university are a whole order of magnitude more complex.

Having given my jeremiad, my sermon, my apologia, and my appeal, here is my *peroration*. I do not want to leave you with the impression either that Higher Education is already good, and we simply need to preserve that good against the barbarians, or that being a Christian-foundation institution makes perfect sense in the multi-vocal marketplace of contemporary Higher Education, and gives you a head start on the task of inclusion.

I want you instead to have heard the message that we do not yet know how to be as inclusive as we should be; we do not yet know how to be Christian in this space without being exclusive; we do not yet know how to pursue a Christian vision of an expanding and deepening learning community without the very terms in which we do so tripping up the endeavour.

We do know all sorts of things about that; we do have all sorts of resources; there are all sorts of existing experiments, past and present, to examine and to learn from: we are not starting at square one. But what it means for us to live more fully and deeply into that vision something that we are still learning. We are still learning to shape our admissions policies, our hiring policies, our curricula, our bibliographies, our assessment regimes, our learning spaces, our built environment, our online presence, our habits of life, and speech, and thought. What does it mean to shape all that so as to make deeper mutual learning possible, and to extend the boundaries of whom we include in that mutual learning in ways that rightly challenge and disturb us? What does it mean to see the involvements and experience, the relationships and the histories, of all our students as fuel for the engine of learning, and to be passionately eager to find more such fuel? What does it mean to look with a cool eye on everything we do to ask where the blockages to that

endeavour are? These are what we need to go on learning – negotiating and experimenting and failing and trying again, dying to old habits and rising to new.

My hope – and, yes, my prayer – is that the Colleges and Universities of the Anglican Communion can be, if not always the first or the most visible explorers of that territory, then at least amongst the most determined.

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## The place of religion in a secular university

**Andrew Williams**

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### Silencing God on campus

Often, and in many ways, talk about God has been an embarrassment for the human spirit. Today, at the end of a long history of talk about God, this embarrassment appears to have become a dead-end street. Not only do we not know how one ought to talk about God, but beyond that, the question is raised whether one can talk about him at all... The word 'God'... is seldom made use of by anyone with any seriousness. Should it nevertheless be mentioned, painful embarrassment results immediately.<sup>1</sup>

With these startling words the contemporary Lutheran theologian, Eberhard Jüngel, highlights the problem we face in society today when it comes to discussing God. Religion is everywhere, it seems, but God is not to be seen and very rarely do we hear the G word uttered in public discourse on the place of faith in our world. Jüngel's assessment pertains to a general trend in western culture that has seen sharp falls in active Christian commitment over recent generations. However, more specifically, his analysis applies to the place of religious belief in our universities. And this is a phenomenon that is especially apparent in those institutions that have embraced an explicitly secular stance.

In the establishment that I worked at until recently, Kingston University, one of the post-1992 higher education institutions, it is certainly the case. Many colleagues mentioned to me how they felt ill-equipped to talk about religion and belief; views informed by religious faith did not feature much in the intellectual climate of the university; theological notions, such as God, faith, prayer and worship, were rarely discussed; and few of its students are engaged actively with a religious tradition. Indeed, for the first time last year 'no-religion' became the largest category of religious identity amongst Kingston University's

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<sup>1</sup> Jüngel, 2014, p.1.

students. Whilst the focus on equality and diversity was, quite rightly pursued with rigour and care, some students and staff within the organisation asserted that religious expression was not safeguarded to the same extent as other protected characteristics. A supposedly neutral stance on religious belief was meant to govern who we were and what we did. Thus, staff received a message at the end of the autumn term wishing them a happy Winter Festival; any references to Christmas were carefully expunged! There was, indeed, then, in this institution, at least, something of the embarrassment that Jüngel refers to in speaking about God.

Despite this context, however, Kingston University now has its largest numbers of student-led faith societies (19, with some 10 Christian groups) and student faith-based initiatives are more prominent than ever. These include fund-raising projects, social-justice campaigns, events and social activities. How, then, can we explain the paradox of silence about God amidst energetic religious activity? It is an intriguing question and one that takes us to the heart of the multifaceted arena of faith and belief within the world of higher education today.

### **Religion under the radar**

Religion in our universities is undoubtedly a complex phenomenon and it appears to have shifted somewhat in its focus and expression over recent years. This has not been a straightforward process and it takes some unpicking to work out what has gone on. There appear to be several dimensions to the transformation that has taken place in the sphere of faith and belief both within society and amongst those who study in higher education. In what follows, I seek to explore a number of strands within the place of religion within a self-consciously secular university environment.

#### *Conviction and engagement*

First, as has often been remarked by sociologists of religion, the relationship between believing and belong has undergone a profound alteration. These categories, first explored in a systematic way by Grace Davie in the 1990s, have become related in complex ways in modern

Britain.<sup>2</sup> The former correlation between religious belief and institutional belonging has broken down and been replaced by new configurations. As is the case in the population at large, there are a large numbers of students that might now be described as 'belonging *without believing*.' These are those students who are prepared to self-identify as a member of a religious tradition but who do not have an active faith commitment. Thus, they will acknowledge a religious affiliation, which may stem from their cultural inheritance or family background, but they may have distanced themselves from engagement with religious belief and practices.

There are many students, too, who fall into Davies' much referred to 'believing *without belonging*' category, those who are often termed 'spiritual but not religious.' These are students who do, in fact, maintain some kind of faith but who choose not to attend acts of worship routinely and who do not consider themselves to be members of any kind of religious organisation. When students in my former institution were asked about their spiritual identity or religious outlook, many of them put themselves into this category. As a form of identity, the term 'spiritual' is acceptable to them; 'religion' is less satisfactory. So, patterns of believing and belonging in higher education have diversified and present to chaplains ministering on campus today a rather different situation from the one that prevailed when most university chaplaincies were first established.

### *The object of faith*

Secondly, the *nature* of religious belief, when it is present, seems to have changed. Students today are, in the main, not especially religious or irreligious. There are those who are hostile to faith and, of course, all universities have significant numbers of committed believers who engage with the Student Union's faith societies and who regularly attend acts of worship. The majority, however, neither embrace a purely atheistic naturalism nor affiliate in a positive way with an established world faith. They navigate through the intermediate terrain between these poles.

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<sup>2</sup> Davie, 1994

So, amongst those sizeable number of students who have some belief but who do not belong to a faith community, the belief they hold may not, today, correspond closely to that of traditional religious confessions. It is often open to the notion of transcendence but sceptical about what are seen to be restrictive dogmas. Research by Theos and other organisation suggests that belief in God—at least God as conceived by the majority faith traditions—has been declining, particularly amongst the younger generations who make up most of the students in higher education.<sup>3</sup> Yet, this study shows that even amongst those who classify themselves as non-religious and who are generally not connected with any faith, belief in spiritual realities (such as angels, the immortality of the soul, heaven and hell) persists.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the diffuse belief structures of the students I encountered seemed to represent the perspectives of the early Enlightenment, when natural religion, grounded in universal reason and consciousness, could be affirmed but where there was deep scepticism about the individual confessional traditions, notably Christianity, that claimed a unique understanding of truth based on divine revelation. This trend has been especially significant in young, white males.<sup>5</sup>

Using a more recent marker, there are many in higher education who have commitments that correspond with the theistic non-realism of Don Cupitt. For Cupitt, Christian theism needs to be reinterpreted as a faith in God, not as an objective metaphysical truth, but as humanity's highest spiritual ideal and religious value. He sees no need to eradicate the spiritual, ethical and even doctrinal teachings of the church but suggests that the whole Christian vision should now be seen in non-literal and non-realist terms.<sup>6</sup> This paradoxical combination of philosophical atheism and religious theism seems alive and well amongst university students! Consequently, as Davie has put it, 'spiritualities which engage with the depths of personal experience are faring better than religions that demand conformity to higher truth.'<sup>7</sup>

What seems to be the case at Kingston and perhaps other universities is that large numbers of students have jettisoned

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<sup>3</sup> Spencer & Weldin, 2012, p. 6

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-26.

<sup>5</sup> Byrne, 1996, p.14

<sup>6</sup> Hyman, 2010, p.163

<sup>7</sup> Davie, 2015, p.168

involvement with organised religious groups, regular attendance at public acts of worship and affirmation of credal belief and replaced these things with an amorphous, vaguely conceived and often intensely personalised set of beliefs (and sometimes practices). So, the religious identity of students is often marked by a diffuse, privatised spirituality that is often quite unorthodox in its content. This is a phenomenon that chaplains have to recognise. Nonetheless, it does not mean that students are non-religious. Charles Taylor's capacious conception of religion as any worldview that remains open to transcendence as a dimension of human flourishing allows for non-theistic perspectives that are connected with what he calls *fullness*.<sup>8</sup> This notion of fullness concerns an approach to living in which 'life looks good, whole, proper, really being lived as it should.'<sup>9</sup> With Taylor's inclusive, perhaps permissive, idea of religion in mind, we might actually see our universities as more densely religious environments than the data collected at enrolment, the numbers involved faith societies or who attend chaplaincy events, or the prevalence of credal orthodoxy, might otherwise suggest.

### *Religion as an engaged social ethic*

Thirdly, universities seem today to reflect the pattern that has been observed in society more generally concerning the *social* orientation of religious life. So, although there are fewer members of faith communities they are doing more. At Kingston University, members of the faith societies were, in fact, remarkably energetic and active in undertaking projects that contributed to the well-being of the wider community. There were major charitable campaigns, fund-raising initiatives, lunches for homeless people, litter picking schemes, food-bank collection drives, programmes to promote healthy relationships and many other initiatives, which were conceived of and run by students.

These projects demonstrated the social conscience of Kingston University's students: those of all religious faiths—particularly Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs—getting involved in social action programmes. This seems to correspond to what Nick Spencer, in a

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<sup>8</sup> See Abbey, 2016, esp. pp. 221-26.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, 2007, p.600

recent Theos report, has called 'social liturgy,' that is the authentic practice of public commitment to the other, which is rooted in and shaped by the love of God.<sup>10</sup> 'Social liturgy' is an interesting, although unusual, phrase; it somehow captures the thrust of much religious life on campus with its contemporary tendency to translate faith into action and so to move from prayer to practice.

### **Anglican chaplaincy in the secular and multi-faith university**

How can Anglican chaplaincy best serve the modern secular University, characterised as it is by this complex pattern of religious diversity, personalised spirituality and indifference to institutional religious frameworks?

As a former chaplain, I should start by acknowledging that this task is not always easy. Many higher education institutions are nervous about expressions of religious belief and sometimes there is a sense that it is a problem that needs to be managed rather than a resource that can contribute to the human flourishing, intellectual enlargement and social enrichment of the organisation. The Prevent<sup>11</sup> agenda may have contributed to this. A lot of the concern within universities in connection with faith has been directed towards the vetting of external speakers, the management of prayer spaces and in tackling the occasional outbursts of discrimination against certain religious groups.

There is also the issue of where chaplaincy sits within the organisational structure and how the contribution it makes to institutional life is conceived of. Chaplaincy provision in many higher education institutions now sits within Student Services or a similar department. The fairly small resource at Kingston University, termed the Faith and Spirituality Service (rather than the Chaplaincy), sits within the Student Wellbeing Group, which is, in turn, positioned within the Directorate of Services for Students. This is quite a common model. But characterising chaplaincy in this way, logical though it may seem to be, is not always entirely helpful. By describing chaplaincy as a service, there is, perhaps, an assumption that it consists of a resource that is provided to make good a deficit or to deal with a problem. Perhaps in

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<sup>10</sup> Spencer, 2016, pp.48-52

<sup>11</sup> **Prevent** is one of four work strands which make up the United Kingdom government's counter-terrorism strategy.



mind here is the idea of needy individuals receiving assistance, information, advice or pastoral care. These are, of course, important functions of a chaplaincy, but there are managerial and therapeutic undertones to this idea of what chaplaincy is all about that rather narrow the understanding of such a ministry.

When the emphasis on service provision is to the fore, the work of chaplaincy in other arenas tends to get downplayed. Aspects of university ministry, such as spiritual formation, community building, social action, moral challenge, intellectual engagement, shared sacramental life, discernment of vocations and the cultivation of prayerful discipleship, do not sit so comfortably within a service model of chaplaincy. Yet, they are all part and parcel of priestly ministry within higher education. Furthermore, the positioning of chaplaincy within a student services umbrella fails to acknowledge the important component of the work of chaplains in relating both to staff within the university as well as to the wider community beyond its walls.

Furthermore, chaplaincy in many of our newer and avowedly secular universities is challenging because students are simply so busy and so stretched and live such complex lives. At Kingston, the majority of the students commute from homes across London and elsewhere in the south-east and so have little time to attend events and engage in activities beyond the demands of their courses. Many of them are studying at campuses other than the one where the Faith and Spirituality Service is based and they are typically juggling academic study with part-time employment or other commitments beyond the university. The possible introduction of fast-track, two year degrees will only exacerbate the challenges that chaplains face in engaging with students.

Having said all this, there is much that can still be done and chaplaincy remains an important element within the life of our busy, complex and religiously ambivalent universities. At Kingston, we developed a strategic vision for the development of the Faith and Spirituality Service, which identified a number of future priorities for activity moving forwards. The plans clustered into four areas of work:

1. Providing SUPPORT for students and staff.
2. Encouraging EXPLORATION of faith and spirituality.

3. Offering opportunities to ENGAGE with events and activities.
4. Building a cohesive COMMUNITY within and beyond the University.

These all seem to be important pursuits given the mix of interests, preoccupations and commitments of our students. Implementing them will involve work to highlight the enduring and pervasive presence of religious questioning within the university community and will seek to respond to the curiosity that continues to exist about spiritual matters. It will involve a focus on social action projects and community enhancing schemes, on providing assistance to the increasing number of students who are challenged by mental health issues, offering opportunities for the development of religious literacy and it will aim to make a serious-minded contribution to intellectual discourse within the university.

The cultivation of Christian spirituality, however, cannot be lost in all of this activity. Anglican chaplaincy, whatever its context, must be rooted in those traditions and practices that have served it over the centuries. These include mature, integrated and psychologically attuned patterns of prayer and worship; Christian living that rejoices in our embodiment; a sensitivity to the presence of God, that divine mystery, which is mediated through the ordinary experiences and materials of life; a keen awareness of the preciousness of the created environment; and initiatives that open the door to those who feel the pull of God, however that might be articulated, by imaginatively drawing on creative enterprises, the arts, and carefully devised liturgies.

Even if, as Jüngel thinks, talk about God has become an embarrassment for the human spirit, Anglican chaplaincy in the seemingly stony ground of the modern secular and multi-faith university is still a vital element of the mission of the church. Those who minister in our secular and multi-faith universities have a crucial role to play in keeping alive the rumour of God, in helping to point to the porous boundaries of church and in pursuing faithful Christian living that witnesses to the God that is in the midst of all our searching, questioning, confusion and perplexity. The call for chaplaincy is still, as it always has been, to flourish, grow and serve its community well.



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# The Elephant in the Room: Anglicanism's Response to Secularism<sup>1</sup>

**Frances Ward**

*Dean of St Edmundsbury*

What would the world be, once bereft  
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,  
O let them be left, wildness and wet;  
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.  
(Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Inversnaid*)

## Introduction

In 1814, Ivan Andreevich Krylov wrote a fable entitled 'The Inquisitive Man', which tells of a man who goes to a museum and notices all sorts of tiny things, but fails to notice an elephant. The phrase became proverbial. Dostoevsky in his novel *Demons* wrote, 'Belinsky was just like Krylov's Inquisitive Man, who didn't notice the elephant in the museum.'

The Elephant in the Room: Anglicanism's Response to Secularism: there is any number of approaches to this. Let us start with elephants. Elephants are large mammals of which two species are traditionally recognised: the African and the Asian. Elephants can live up to 70 years in the wild. They communicate by touch, sight, smell and sound; they use infrasound, and seismic communication over long distances. Elephant intelligence has been compared with that of primates. They appear to have self-awareness and show empathy for dying or dead individuals of their kind. African elephants are listed as vulnerable while the Asian elephant is classed as endangered. The biggest threats to elephant populations are the ivory trade, habitat destruction, and conflicts with local people.

What is the biggest elephant in the Anglican room? It is not sexuality, or decline; nor is it any number of issues to do with theological education or learning, but how the church is (or, more honestly, is not) entering debates about the future of the natural environment in the face of the challenge of anthropogenic impact. This

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was delivered at the CUAC UK/Europe Chapter conference, Lincoln, UK in June, 2016.

is, I believe, the key issue that faces us. If we were to take it much more seriously, what new natural theology might emerge? What difference would that make to theological education and learning?

### **Engagement with Secularism**

We, the Church, are not there as we should be, engaging from our rich resources of traditional wisdom and theology, contributing to rescuing and promoting the future flourishing of the planet. The Church is attending to all sorts of tiny things in the museum, but failing to notice the big things that concern the world. We are not listening and dialoguing as we should. In the secular world, those who are writing and thinking about such issues largely see Christianity as a significant part of the problem. They certainly do not consider that Christianity brings anything to the table. Consider the following excerpt<sup>2</sup> from a recently-published book on the importance of recovering a sense of joy in nature. It was written by Michael McCarthy, who was brought up Catholic, yet as he explores his central theme of joy he does not turn to the living traditions of Christianity.

I have got to the stage now where I look forward to the winter solstice more than Christmas, which so swamps and dominates our culture. Not that I have anything against Christmas itself: having been brought up in the Christian fold, I have reverence for its story and enjoy its customs and music and celebration ... even though they are so naffly commercialised ...

But the solstice ... I can only say that, as I move towards the last part of my life, its arrival fills me with joy ... in the way I tried at the outset to define joy in the natural world: a sudden intense love stemming from an apprehension that there is something extraordinary and exceptional about nature as a whole. I can think of nothing more extraordinary and exceptional than the annual birth of the world; and in fact, there are a number of specific markers of the rebirth, of the earth's reawakening after winter. ...

The first of them is the appearance of snowdrops. ... They are closely associated with a major feast of the Christian church which follows Christmas, although while the world and his wife cannot remain ignorant of 25 December, ... I doubt if one person in a thousand could tell you today what Candlemas is.

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<sup>2</sup> McCarthy, 2015 pp. 131 – 133.

Celebrated on 2 February, it marks the purification, under Jewish religious law, of the mother of Christ, forty days after his birth. (It also commemorates the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple). But Candlemas long meant something else as well, in practical terms, especially in the Middle Ages: it was the day when everyone in the parish brought their candles to church to be blessed by the priest. ... it must have been the brightest moment, quite literally, of the whole year.

But another source of brightness was also closely associated with Candlemas, and that was the snowdrops, for they were the flowers of the feast. It is easy to see how they were perfect for it, flawless symbols of purity that they are. ...

They were the unexpected but undeniable notice that the warm days would come again, and I realised what it was that made me smile: here against the dead tones of the winter woodland floor was Hope, suddenly and unmistakably manifest in white.

Snowdrops are singular. They alone are the flaunters of this optimism, which can seem gloriously defiant, in the heart of the time when the earth is anaesthetised and numb. But as the world starts to stir again, to wake, to warm and to open, there are an increasing number of signals of spring, for some of which my feeling is so intense that I would readily describe it as joy.

McCarthy talks movingly about joy and Hope (with a capital H) key Christian virtues. Here he is, reminding a secular world of Candlemas, the brightest moment of the pre-modern year, but which he firmly locates in the past as a festival that the majority of people have forgotten. He writes of his intense joy at the sight of snowdrops, the gloriously defiant signs of a spring that is on its way. But for him the Church's message today is empty. He does not turn to Christianity for its insights and wisdom about the natural world that he loves so much, which he laments as he sees around him the thinning of the abundant species that he knew as a boy. The moth snowstorm he remembers as a child is no more. Nor are sparrows on the streets of London, or fish in the sea. To his mind, Christianity is significantly to blame. I want to explore further how he portrays Christianity, for it is typical of many nature writers, and is a good illustration of what we need to hear.

In an article in the *Daily Telegraph*, Tim Stanley<sup>3</sup> wrote that it would be wrong to write the established Church off just yet. It has been

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Stanley: 'British Christianity isn't dying. It's sleeping. Evangelism can awaken it.' *Daily Telegraph*, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

in dire straits before: on Easter Day in 1800, just 6 people took communion in St Paul's Cathedral. The Church of England 'became fashionable again', but, more importantly, it regained ground by dedicated campaigns for causes such as workers' protections, the outlawing of child prostitution, and the welfare state. Stanley concludes: 'that's what's missing from 21<sup>st</sup> century British Christianity: evangelisation'. What marked evangelisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a real engagement with the pressing needs of the society of the day. McCarthy speaks of joy as the best defence against imminent environmental catastrophe. Like so many other new nature writers, he has taken up the role of prophet for today's world. They are stepping in where the Church is not.

This is a good place to engage: there is a great potential here for real dialogue with atheistic secularists. Their love and concern for the natural environment offers an open door for theologians, who should be as concerned about what we would call God's creation as they are. When such writers as McCarthy are commending the importance of joy, and Balmford<sup>4</sup> writes about hope, and Monbiot<sup>5</sup> talks of a long-term patience, and others write with such love and passion for the natural world, we have an open door for engagement. We need to be saying, much more positively, that Christianity is part of the solution, not part of the problem. Given the immensity of the challenges that lie ahead of us, the question for theological educators becomes: how do we develop a new natural theology?

### **A close reading of McCarthy's text**

McCarthy's text is revealing of that secularist prejudice against Christianity that is so prevalent in nature writing and the Green movement, and which he obviously assumes is held by his readership. The first basic assumption he makes is that Christianity has had its day. Once, Christianity offered a ready explanation: our joy in the beauty and life of the earth was our joy in the divine work of its creator. But as Christianity fades, the undeniable fact that the natural world can spark love in us becomes more of an enigma.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., Balmford, 2012

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Monbiot, 2014

<sup>6</sup> McCarthy, 2015, p. 6



His second assumption is that Christianity is significantly responsible for a human attitude towards the natural environment that has caused the state we are in. He writes:

We have spent most of the five hundred generation since the Holocene epoch, breaking the sod and hacking the forest down and proclaiming our God-given right to do so, God-given quite literally – the Old Testament spelt out bluntly the farmers’ ascendancy over nature, and their entitlement to do whatever they damn well liked with it, in the famous lines of Genesis, 1.28: ‘and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth’. Thus we long regarded wild places and wilderness, the bits we hadn’t managed to subdue or have dominion over, with near universal disapproval, indeed with a revulsion sometimes verging on horror. It was against wild places, after all, that the civilising struggle was being waged, to clear the forest and grow corn in its stead; the forest was the enemy, it held deadly wild beasts, and sometimes deadly wild men, as deserts did, or mountains. The civilised looked to cities. What was there in wilderness other than the absence of everything that made life worth living?<sup>7</sup>

One might read from this that he thinks it is largely obvious that Christianity is fading in its influence. He traces the authors like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and George Perkins Marsh, who have argued Christianity’s fault. It is a convincing argument; at least it has convinced many in our culture and significantly contributes to the lack of credibility that Christianity has today. If one is convinced, one is not going to stop and engage properly with any other trajectory that might nuance that narrative. There are a few theologians who provide this other trajectory, but McCarthy is not reading them. The belief is secure: Christianity is part of the problem, not part of the solution.

If we are to engage, and be heard, we need to address this. For some, Christianity is a toxic brand. Theological critique and insight are important, but they will not be enough. ‘That’s just theology’ will be the response, if it is not accompanied by arguments that capture the attention and imagination sufficiently to prompt a change of attitude

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<sup>7</sup> McCarthy, 2015, p. 43

and approach. This has a chance of succeeding if we ourselves are passionate about the natural environment, and can show proper knowledge and understanding of the issues. We need to offer good reasons why Christianity should be seen as part of the solution.

Another point of real engagement with McCarthy is offered by his interesting comments about anthropology and his critique of contemporary liberal secular humanism:

[T]he destruction of humanity's home by humanity's own actions is not something that can be coped with adequately—and that means, confronted—by our current belief system, ... liberal secular humanism. This creed ... has a single, honourable aim: to advance human welfare. It wants people everywhere, ... in so far as is possible, to be happy and to live fulfilled lives. It is principled and upright. It is admirable. But there is a gap at its core: the failure to acknowledge that humans are not necessarily good. Still less does it admit that, more, there may be something intrinsically troubling about humans as a species: that *Homo Sapiens* may be the earth's problem child.<sup>8</sup>

[I]t is time for a different, formal defence of nature. We should offer up not just the notion of being sensible and responsible about it, which is sustainable development, nor the notion of its mammoth utilitarian and financial value, which is ecosystem services, but a third way, something different entirely: we should offer up what it means to our spirits; the love of it. We should offer up its joy.<sup>9</sup>

This is a critique of contemporary humanism and its understanding of itself that Christianity can most definitely engage with. For 'the failure to acknowledge that humans are not necessarily good' is central to a Christian anthropology. I have written elsewhere<sup>10</sup> about how the Romantic Movement persuaded us that we come trailing clouds of glory, inherently innocent and good; then to be corrupted by and through adulthood: it was Rousseau's story of *Emile*. This is not what Christianity traditionally teaches. Christian anthropology should help humanity to understand that we are capable of good and evil, we are innocent and wise, both at the same time, and at whatever age; although often Christians can be seduced by that Romantic

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<sup>8</sup> McCarthy, 2015, p.19

<sup>9</sup> McCarthy, 2015, p.29

<sup>10</sup> Ward, 2013

anthropology.<sup>11</sup> We need to think through our anthropology and offer an alternative to some aspects of the ideology of liberal humanism, particularly that which holds the inherent goodness of humanity. That Christian anthropology recognises that we do wrong, again and again, and we need to say sorry again and again, and promise to do differently. With the promise of forgiveness, and with the grace of God, all things become possible.

McCarthy is also calling for a different defence of nature, apart from utilitarian arguments. We should offer up its joy. Just as Christians believe that the first and last purpose of humanity is to offer worship to God, for God's sake, so McCarthy is commending our love and joy in nature. There is much ground for fruitful dialogue and action here about what it means to be human and how we need to understand ourselves differently from the dominant liberal humanist ideology. For there is a world of difference if we argue that we should do things for their own sake, for the sake of a virtue like joy, rather than because it is a means to an end. McCarthy is commending joy in the same way we should commend worship: we do such things not because they are means to ends, but for their own sake, for God's sake.

We think of ourselves, especially since the decline of Christianity in the West and its replacement by our current creed, liberal secular humanism, as rational beings entirely. We pride ourselves that, faced with a Problem (with a capital P), we may employ Reason (with a capital R), and naturally find a Solution (with a capital S). We believe that this will deliver, every time. Rationality is ingrained in a million mindsets. Yet the world does not always work like that.

It is an open door, especially when McCarthy starts to talk about the paucity of the rationalist imagination:

It has been well said, that science gives us knowledge but takes away meaning. ... [I]t has subverted or done away with many parts of our imagination, and there are numerous non-rational ways of looking at the world, once widespread, once resonant traditional beliefs, which we have now ceased to engage with, such as alchemy, or magic, or the power of curses, or the story of Adam and Eve. All of these provided fertile ground for the imagination to flourish, and with their inevitable suppression I

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<sup>11</sup> See Dodd, 2016

think—as with the conquest of the moon, with Neil Armstrong and his great fat boot—that something has been lost.<sup>12</sup>

McCarthy denies Christianity, but uses a theological imagination again and again, almost despite himself.

Human existence is taken for granted virtually all the time, of course; it is the greatest of our complacencies, but experiences of wonder can jolt us into the realisation of how remarkable not only our own but all existence actually is: *Why anything? Why not nothing?* An arresting illustration of this was given by Ralph Waldo Emerson at the start of his essay, *Nature*,<sup>13</sup> with a flight of fancy as charming as it is vivid:

If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown!

One last, glorious passage:

For some years I have thought of spring birdsong as blossom in sound. This takes us I suppose into the realms of synaesthesia, the interpreting or experiencing of one sense via another ... listening to willow warblers singing on Skye, their silvery falling cadence softening the severity of the northern landscape as much as flowering trees might do ... In the orchard in France the birdsong was fulsome: we woke every morning to a chorus of blackbirds and song thrushes, robins, wrens, and chaffinches, and best of all a blackcap, with the most mellifluous, melodious song you can imagine, and I began to think of this as blossom, as much as the blossom was blossom; and then in the most extraordinary experience—at least, it was for me—they merged into one.

For one late April the blackcap was singing unseen, deep in a hedge, and it was joy-inspiring; and across the garden was the most gloriously flowering of the cherry trees, and that was joy-inspiring too. Then on a Sunday morning – I remember it precisely – the bird moved into the tree and began its song.

I was struck dumb in amazement.

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<sup>12</sup> McCarthy, 2015, p.134

<sup>13</sup> Emerson, 2015

Here was this God-given, blossoming snow-white tree, which was breathtaking in its beauty; and here was this God-given, breathtaking sound coming out of it. This tree, this tree of trees, was not just an astonishing apotheosis of floral beauty. It now appeared to be singing.

The rational part of me couldn't cope. ... [T]here was only one possible response: I burst out laughing. And there, in the exquisite fullness of the springtime, was the joy of it.<sup>14</sup>

What might be the Anglican response to this particular example of secularism?

### **What might a new natural theology look like?**

Four aspects of a new natural theology come to mind. First, it would take seriously a sense sublime that inspires joy, hope, love, patience—core Christian virtues—and explore the expression of that sense in nature writing today, and in some of the best Anglican literature, poetry, art, theology. I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns, ...  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.<sup>15</sup>

It is a very short step from being stirred by that sense sublime to an apprehension of God, a mystical experience of unity with a ground of being. Many people come to faith this way. I did. This needs to be a part of a new natural theology.

Secondly, such a theology also would need to offer a re-reading of the biblical sources, with a narrative of stewardship rather than exploitation. Thirdly, it would offer a different anthropology to challenge that of secular humanism, reminding the world and ourselves of an understanding of the need for repentance for the many

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<sup>14</sup> McCarthy, 2015, pp. 153-4

<sup>15</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey'

wrongs that we do, but that we can, on the basis of forgiveness and grace, be much wiser in our stewardship. Fourthly, it would offer a deep and credible knowledge of the natural environment, and a commitment to action.

Let us explore further, taking each of those four aspects into a little more depth.

### **The sense sublime**

Let us begin with contemporary Nature Writing. It is a popular genre, enjoying a renaissance. It is a phenomenon that, it could be argued, began in my home county of Suffolk, in Mellis. Roger Deakin wrote a book entitled *Waterlog* in 1999, which gave accounts of the various wild places he had swum throughout Britain, including his own moat in deepest Suffolk. The book initiated a wild swimming trend for enthusiasts. His *Wildwood* was published in 2007, posthumously. In 1982 he founded Common Ground, the arts and environmental charity and during his life he supported many environmental causes, working to preserve woodland, ancient rights of way and coppicing techniques of Suffolk hedgerow. He was one of the first writers to bring to our attention the importance of the 'wild'. Since then, it is a word you'll see in many places. English literature is providing a veritable feast of books that commend the wild places of the earth, capturing the imagination.

A new natural theology would not find it difficult to engage with this new revival in English nature writing. I recently led the Little Gidding pilgrimage, and used four 20<sup>th</sup> Century authors: Elizabeth Goudge, L M Boston, Rose Macaulay, L M Montgomery. It was a glorified nature walk, with literature thrown in. I was reminding them of the need to stir a sense of mystical apprehension in the children they know. That is not hard: from an early age, to find time to read aloud to them, to stir the imagination, to stir a love for the natural world around. To walk, and name the trees, the flowers, the birds, to pass on a knowledge of the environment. To listen to the wind, to hear the birdsong, to receive the beauty as gift. It is there, now, in television programmes encouraging us to get out into nature, to learn to be still.

I love David Attenborough—who does not—but I sometimes wonder if he has not done us a disservice. We have become used to the fruits of the patience of camera men and women, sitting for days for the sight of some rare and exotic creature, doing some rare and exotic activity. We have become so used to the fruits of the patience of others,

that no longer do we leave our screens and venture out ourselves, to sit quietly and in stillness to let nature reassemble itself around us, and reveal to us its secrets, which might well not be as interesting as the camera has captured. To learn to be still, to be attentive, to become immanent and sensitive to the world: that is a gift to pass on to the young people in our lives. There is literature and poetry galore to inspire us. John Clare wrote of the times when he remained hidden in nature, listening intently for the sound of the nightingale, or allowing himself simply to become unremarkable, unnoticed in the world, no longer the centre of attention, but apprehended by the otherness of the world. It is with such experience that God begins to be known.

A new natural theology would reengage the imagination with a love of nature through nature writing, from Wordsworth onwards. Poets and novelists have produced a rich vein of nature writing that is often mystical in expression, revealing a deep love of the countryside and sense of reverence and oneness with the fauna and flora around us. Such writers who celebrate wildness seek to reimmerge us in nature, to help us to reconnect with the ancient land and the patterns and rhythms of the seasons. What is our new natural theology? It must speak of joy, and love, of patience, of hope – of enchantment.

One of the latest in this genre of new nature writing is Monbiot. Like others, He is very keen that we keep hope alive: that we do not despair. Remember *Silent Spring*?<sup>16</sup> Monbiot believes we have moved away from the quiet desperation of this influential book, towards keeping hope alive and kicking.

Environmentalism in the twentieth century foresaw a silent spring, in which the further degradation of the biosphere seemed inevitable. Rewilding offers the hope of a raucous summer, in which, in some parts of the world at least, destructive processes are thrown into reverse.<sup>17</sup>

Monbiot is determined that we need a long-term view; that we challenge the short-termism of so much contemporary politics. He believes we need patience – patience that will outlast our lifetimes – if we are to make a difference to a world that is struggling to survive. He

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<sup>16</sup> Carson, 1962

<sup>17</sup> Monbiot, 2014, p. 9

talks of 'rewilding': a new word, first recognised in 2011, but it has captured the imagination. He writes:

Rewilding, to me, is about resisting the urge to control nature and allowing it to find its own way. It involves reintroducing absent plants and animals (and in a few cases culling exotic species which cannot be contained by native wildlife), pulling down the fences, blocking the drainage ditches, but otherwise stepping back. At sea, it means excluding commercial fishing and other forms of exploitation. The ecosystems that result are best described not as wilderness, but as self-willed: governed not by human management but by their own processes. Rewilding ... lets nature decide. The ecosystems that will emerge, in our changed climates, on our depleted soils, will not be the same as those which prevailed in the past. The way they evolve cannot be predicted ... while conservation often looks to the past, rewilding of this kind looks to the future.<sup>18</sup>

Monbiot's latest recommendation is that we rewild the child. He wrote in the *Guardian* newspaper:

Why shouldn't every child spend a week in the countryside every term? Why shouldn't everyone be allowed to develop the kind of skills the children I met were learning: rock climbing, gorge scrambling, caving, night walking, ropework and natural history? Getting wet and tired and filthy and cold, immersing yourself, metaphorically and literally, in the natural world: surely by these means you discover more about yourself and the world around you than you do during three months in a classroom. What kind of government would deprive children of this experience?<sup>19</sup>

There is a deep note of hope that runs through much nature writing, to counter the profound anxiety that is the realistic, gut response to the analysis of so many that the environment is under intense and growing pressure from anthropogenic impacts. This is a rich seam for new theological dialogue.

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<sup>18</sup> Monbiot, 2014, pp. 9-10

<sup>19</sup> October, 2103



## The New Natural Theology and the Bible

Often, in current green thinking and writing, you will hear criticism of Christianity for giving us a legacy of dominion over nature. The 'dominion text' of Genesis 1.28 is claimed to be at the root of the ecological crisis because it licensed humanity to regard the earth as their possession, to do with what they wanted, to exploit, and to turn to material advantage.

Gorringe & Beckham<sup>20</sup> have countered this argument: they explain that, in fact, Christianity from the start has affirmed the goodness of creation and understood it as a gift. St Benedict, for example, interpreted the 'dominion text' to understand human beings as gardeners, to serve and keep creation. There are many Christian poets and writers and activists who do not subscribe to the 'dominion' thesis, and they need to be heard, because these counter arguments have not dislodged the mindset of most ecologists. It needs to be said, for instance, that it was only with Descartes, and the Enlightenment, that human beings came to be described as 'masters and possessors' of nature –a view bound up with the rise of empirical science, and new views of the State and of the economy. We must convince contemporary secular writers to see the theological richness and sense of wonder that a different theological and biblical narrative can bring: that Christianity is part of the solution, not the problem. Of course, Christians, along with the rest of humanity, have been guilty of poor stewardship. Much more important is that Christianity encourages a reverence for nature, a working with rather than subjection of the natural world around.

The concept of stewardship is the first idea to explore. Christians believe that all we have is gift, not possession; we are stewards, not owners, of the world around. There is much in the rich resources of the ancient Judaeo-Christian tradition that indicates that humanity should be much, much more responsible for our actions, and much better stewards of what we have received. Our principle should be that what we have received should be handed on to future generations in a better state than it came to us. There is plenty of evidence, especially in the Wisdom literature in the Bible, which understands the creation in the context of God's creating agency:

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<sup>20</sup> Gorringe & Beckham, 2013

The biblical wisdom literature is of great value to Christians as we seek to deepen our theological understanding of creation and thus respond out of our faith to the ecological crisis that currently threatens its well-being. One of the pronounced features of this literature is its focus on creation as the realm where God's will and action is to be discerned. 'The Lord by wisdom founded the earth': This brief statement sets forth the central truth underlying all biblical statements about God as creator. ... It follows, then, that human wisdom necessarily has an 'ecological' dimension, that is, it involves directing our own careful attention to learning about and preserving the world that God has made.<sup>21</sup>

Humanity is called upon by God to be wise: to act responsibly in creation, as stewards of the beautiful world God has made, which is everywhere described in the Bible. Psalm 104, for instance, is a song of praise to God the creator. God can be seen in the light, and wind; wrapped in light as in a garment; riding on the wings of the wind. The myriad diversity of the created world is there: the leviathan, playing in the deep; the coneys; the animals of the forest; the birds of the air. From the rich gifts of creation, humanity is satisfied. Meat, vegetables, wine, oil, bread: what more could humanity need? This is a God whose love reaches beyond the farthest star; is deeper than the deepest ocean; whose glory fills the earth.

In contrast to this vision, let us remind ourselves of just how dire things are. Jeremiah (9: 10-14) makes lamentation for 'the pastures of the wilderness, because they are laid waste so that no one passes through, ... the birds of the air and the animals have fled and gone'. It is not, he says, that God told humanity to subdue and dominate, but rather the fall comes again and again when God's law and gifts are violated: 'they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, or walked in accord with it, but have stubbornly followed their own hearts'. The breaking of the covenant between God and humanity caused the land to turn to desert, the rivers to run dry, the crops and vineyards to fail, the animals to stop reproducing.

When we read such passages in the light of the reality of global warming, we hear a judgement upon us. It is a judgement that should lead us to repent, and to listen again to the wild patience of God, who creates and sustains the universe.

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<sup>21</sup> Davis, 2000, p. 45

At the heart of the pathology of ecological crisis is the refusal of modern humans to see themselves as creatures, contingently embedded in networks of relationships with other creatures, and with the Creator. This refusal is the quintessential root of what theologians call sin. And like the sin of Adam, it has moral and spiritual as well as ecological consequences. Resituating the human economy in the enfolding and relational ecology of the earth is therefore not a dispiriting task of merely constraining or limiting human making and creativity. On the contrary, it is joyous and spiritual work ... a renewed appreciation of the abundance of diversity that the relational networks of the earth ... have sustained through the evolving history of life and of the rich history of more beneficent forms of human interaction with life in all its diversity.<sup>22</sup>

### **Repentance and hope**

As Christians, we bring to the table some deep thinking drawing on long traditions of writing and of practice that commend the hope and faith in the God who creates with a wild patience, despite human sin, who makes the rainbow shine through the rain. We need to keep hold of that central Christian core virtue of hope, which can inspire people to change. We need to say, clearly and with good theological backing, that Christianity is part of the solution, not part of the problem.

We need to position ourselves, too, over against other interpretations of divine activity. When there was extensive flooding in this country in early 2014, questions were asked in the press about whether we should see it as divine retribution. This can be a dangerous direction to go, depending on how human sinfulness is understood. Weather is not changing because the Church of England is discussing gay marriage. There is a deeper cause and effect that I would want to read - theologically - as Northcott does.

Scientists such as the palaeontologist, Simon Conway Morris,<sup>23</sup> argue that the way the world is cannot be by chance. He talks of convergence in the natural world; that the emergence of sentient human beings was effectively inevitable: that the Universe does

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<sup>22</sup> Northcott, 2007, p. 16

<sup>23</sup> Morris, 2005

function with an underlying pattern that makes certain outcomes predictable. This does not, in any way, contradict evolution, for evolution relies itself on a predictability, a pattern. Linked to that pattern, Morris maintains, is a moral pattern. He refers to G. K. Chesterton:

Reason and justice grip the remotest and the loneliest star. Look at those stars. Don't they look as if they were single diamonds and sapphires? ... Think of forests of adamant with leaves of brilliants. Think the moon is a blue moon, a single elephantine sapphire. But don't fancy that all that frantic astronomy would make the smallest difference to the reason and justice of conduct. On plains of opal, under cliffs cut out of pearl, you would still find a notice-board, 'Thou shalt not steal'.

That moral patterning lies, it could be argued, at the heart of the relationship between God and humanity concerning the creation. Christianity offers us a framework to take seriously our accountability to God for our stewardship of the rich resources at our disposal. We should not steal and exploit that which is not ours. In the Psalms, that accountability is clear, most particularly when things go wrong, when humanity is not wise in its relationship with creation. In Psalm 18, for instance, so we hear the Psalmist expressing God's lament at a sinful humanity that is so careless, so unwise, in its treatment of the world. Here we are told that God is faithful, true, and pure with those who are the same, but when people are crooked, God becomes angry, and the physical manifestations of this can be read from the natural world: the foundations of the mountains shake at the blast of the breath of God's displeasure.

I do not want to make too close a connection between God's wrath and natural disaster; that each time there is a tsunami, or hurricane, God is visiting vengeance on the people who suffer. Rather, when the deep order and pattern of the natural world are thrown out of kilter, the consequences become apparent. We can, in a sophisticated way, seek to understand God's engagement with creation as characterised by sustaining love, where the natural world will be ordered and patterned as a direct expression of that love. When humanity disrupts that divine order, then the Psalmist is clear: God's wrath, disappointment and anger are expressed.

We move now to the third area of potential engagement, suggested by McCarthy's comments on the liberal humanist anthropology.

### **The new natural theology: a different anthropology**

Secularism has a different anthropology from that of Christianity. It can be characterised, first, as individualistic, with free choice, rights, and autonomy; secondly, as a number of identities, some of which sometimes conflict. Thirdly, it is utilitarian and instrumental: what is valued is that which brings in gain, rather for its own sake. Lastly, secular anthropology believes that humanity is inherently good. Anthropology is a key area that requires much more attention, not least because of its ideological power.

Instead of seeing ourselves as individuals, there is a long Christian tradition of seeing humanity as belonging to the corporate, to the Body of Christ. We belong to one another, to the world, to the natural environment. We are called, not to dominate and subdue, but to be stewards of something that does not belong to us, but to which we belong. Theological insight here can help us counter the excessive individualism, the propensity to become tribal, and to fragment, with a strong trajectory of the Body of Christ to which we belong. The sum is greater than the parts.

In *The Mass on the World*, Teilhard de Chardin argued that there is an underlying unity to all things, offered by the love of God which spends itself again and again for the creation. As with many Christians, he puts God's sacrificial love at the heart of things. In the mass on the world, it is the outpouring of the cup, the breaking of the bread; the patient suffering, the redemptive love that counts. What Teilhard gives us is a theological framework for our reverence of the created order, but also a way of identifying with the forces of generation, degeneration and regeneration that we see around us. Here is a way of understanding the sacramental processes of self-sacrificial love that lives, dies, and lives again as a process that overflows in abundant life, renewing the face of the earth.

Christianity and other major religions give us resources to control our behaviour: to develop self-control, to challenge the obsession with growth. This is a different anthropology, which recognises not inherent goodness, but capability of great evil, and processes and practices that form us into more virtuous ways of life. If we think of the fruits of the

Spirit that Paul offers in Galatians in the light of the crises that face the natural environment, a different anthropology would be recovered, one that can shape us differently as people. The Church can knowingly shape us as better stewards, to be hopeful, joyful, lovingly responsible for God's creation all around us.

We need also, I believe, to take seriously the deep anxious fears, and how easy it is to fall into a state of helplessness, fuelled by despair. There is an elephant in the room, and we run around attending to the tiny things. We are profoundly anxious. We see the signs of disaster in flood and famine, in disrupted weather patterns, in the depletion of the oceans. Our faith should see despair of this sort as sinful: we should not give up hope. We should repent of our despair and our actions, and change our ways, and seek to live our lives in a way that accords with God's desire for us, to live in harmony with the world around. Teilhard reminds us of the imperative of self-sacrifice that lies at the heart of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

So what is the call upon us, in response? Instead of the hedonism, the greed, the exploitation we see all around us, we should be discovering a new asceticism for today. The ascetic tradition stresses self-discipline, a training of the appetites. It is a training of our human nature towards other ends rather than self-gratification, with the desire for fulfilment in some larger goal, some greater story. Christians, particularly in the religious orders, are called to be ascetical, to be careful of what they consume.

What might it mean to commend asceticism in today's world? Our grandparents' generation, the war generation, knew better than we do what it is to do without, not to expect too much, to make and to mend and give from your little to others who had less. Many people who do not go to church are there ahead of us, changing their lifestyles, treading lightly on the planet. They look at the churches and wonder why on earth we are preoccupied by the petty, tiny things of the museum, failing to notice the elephant in the room.

We should learn to be ascetic: the Christian faith and particularly the religious orders give us the resources to do so. It is difficult to change the habits of a lifetime; the habits of hedonism and consumerism. Instead of asking, 'What's in it for me?' we can use traditional religious practices to help us to change, turn abstinence into a virtue, and not to give in to the temptations of the world and the devil. We need to develop the habits of a different way of life, in which

having less is a virtue, something we want and crave. If we do so, we will understand much more about abundant life.

### **The new natural theology: deep knowledge of God's creation**

The fourth aspect of a new natural theology is that we learn much more about the planet. Theology needs to reintegrate science and theology; theologians need to know about the catastrophic impact humanity is having upon global ecology in at least these four major areas:

1. Major extinction of species;
2. Radical changes in climatic patterns;
3. Pollution in the oceans, rivers, air and land;
4. Soil erosion and desertification.

We need to read and be knowledgeable, because, as all the evidence shows us, we do not have much time left. We are now aware as never before of the costs of our exploitative behaviour. No longer can we use the excuse of ignorance.

### **Conclusion**

I commend a new natural theology that engages with the sense sublime of nature and enters into an exciting dialogue with secular nature writers, drawing forward our long, Anglican tradition of love of and writing about the natural environment. It is a theology that offers a biblically-based doctrine of stewardship to counter the widespread perception that Christianity is part of the problem, not the solution. It offers a different anthropology that is corporate, belonging to the whole of creation and knows about ascetical training. Finally, it is deeply knowledgeable about the natural environment and the current pressures upon it. Anglican theological learning would gain a new, indeed crucial, lease of life if such a natural theology were to capture the imagination.

As theological educators we should be taking Iain McGilchrist's advice and not allowing ourselves to become left-hemisphere-dominated in our teaching and learning,<sup>24</sup> and in what we impart to students, ordinands, and disciples. We become too preoccupied with

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<sup>24</sup> McGilchrist, 2011

the methodology, with analysing current trends, with processes and systems, to our peril. We attend to the tiny things in the museum and fail to bring our right hemisphere theological imagination to what really matters to the world and to God. God's creation is the elephant in the room who is now no longer just standing there, but racing against time for her survival.



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**Monodeep Daniel**

*Delhi Brotherhood Society*

## **Introduction**

The undisputed role of higher education in cultivating citizenship must at once be stated at the beginning of this paper. The question, therefore, before us is this: what is education? Can a Christian understanding of education help to steer our young generation away from the values of the market-society which reduces human beings to self-centred personalities? What lends identity to a person?

In the Indian context the identity comes primarily with caste and *jati*. Everything else follows after that. This is unique but also oppressive. Caste identities involve exclusion or subjugation or both of those who are not in that particular orbit. This needs to be changed. Therefore the question is this, what can replace caste as the source of identity? To answer this most difficult question in the Indian context, I propose that we turn to Western education. The aim to cultivate educated personalities is to bring about both personal and social transformation. For this reason I propose the term 'transformative education'.

Personal transformation entails a change in what one values. In a casteist society it is the honour of caste by trampling on the dignity of one below. Similarly, in consumerist society it is power of money to procure and consume from the market. The pursuit of wealth makes people exploitative and callous towards the weak and marginalised. Needless to say, Western society has emerged as a 'market society'. Against all this the aim of education should be to wean a person away from a self-centred life seeking honour and power. This change of thinking is the key for cultural transformation i.e., to create a culture of compassion and justice. As Manyawar Kanshiram-ji had said,

We don't want social justice, we want social transformation. Social justice depends on the person in power. Suppose at one time, some good leader comes to power and people get social justice and are

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was delivered at the CUAC triennial conference in Chennai, India, January, 2017.

happy but when bad leader comes to power it turns into injustice again. So we want whole social transformation.

Transformative education should derive models and inspiration from monastery rather than market. The former is focussed on building community but the latter on competition. An excessive spirit of competition isolates individuals from their communities as they seek jobs, comfort and success, material things for their own sake with no objective to share them with others.

In this connection it must be stressed that 'to teach' has no intrinsic value unless it aims at the higher goal 'to educate'. To be educated means to develop the capability of becoming the master-narrator, and thereby to make the gospel the master-narrative of the society. I contend that it is the gospel that makes education transform society. Without the gospel education serves only to reinforce caste-system, which increases inequality in society by practices of discrimination, segregation and untouchability.

Human beings educate themselves all the time from their birth to death so that if not in life then in death their favourite story might become the master-narrative. There are various reasons for this. One is that their human nature of curiosity compels them to seek and understand; two that it is in their nature to be sensitive to what is moral and just; and three that their instinct to survive inclines them to dominate over others. This process continues beyond the formal systems of education. One way in which people are informally educated is culture. Here knowledge is retained and transmitted continuously from one generation to the other. At this point of our discussion we must come to terms with the Indian culture.

Cultures are fluid. They are born, they flourish and then they cease; nonetheless they leave something of enduring consequence which is retained over a longer span of time. One enduring feature in the flux of Indian culture has been the caste-system. According to this system, education was permitted only for the so called upper castes—particularly the priestly castes who were engaged in liturgical activities. Others in the socially privileged category were the philosophers and those keeping accounts. We all know that on the basis of religious injunction the society has been organized into four castes in a descending order of purity. All *jatis* have been accordingly accommodated in these four castes, namely, *brahmin*, *kshatriya*, *vaishya* and *shudra*. With the passage of time some *jatis* became casteist; others

followed caste-like practices and others uncaste-like manners. Priestly castes assumed the privilege to legitimise social practices and others sought legitimacy from them, especially the princely families. Such *jatis* became rigid observers of the caste system.

The remaining population that could not be accommodated in any of the four castes and those who flouted the caste norms, either by disregarding the regulation of diet or by marriage, have been relegated outside the caste system as untouchables. However, Dr Ambedkar, who gave India its Constitution, described the features of the caste system: graded inequality, fixation of occupation and fixity of birth. The resultant social inequality perpetuated by the caste system is gross injustice, which can only be abolished by social change and by changing the thinking of the people. This exercise to change the thinking of people is education that leads to social change.

The point of this discussion is to draw attention to the practice of education in Indian society since antiquity. The fact is that, except for the privileged castes, education was not permitted to the populace. The practice to educate the privileged castes resulted in reinforcing their domination over the rest. The aim of education was to ensure domination of the privileged castes, with none to challenge. Hence it is understandable why the masses on the subcontinent have remained unlettered till now.

This has seriously affected the identities of individuals and communities in the socially diverse canvas of India. How others regard and treat an individual and a community in the larger arena of society are critical for creating identity. Always it is the dominant social groups that set the standard for creating an identity for others. In a socially and culturally diverse society, identities reflect positions of power or powerlessness. The dominant social groups take control of education because education is the key to power. Therefore, they determine who are to be educated and how they are to be educated.

We now turn our attention to education today. I began with the premise that the aim of education is to cultivate human personality for social transformation by changing the thinking of the people. Paulo Freire's insight into education as critical pedagogy<sup>2</sup> is most useful: cultivating personalities through education is useless unless they became a part of initiating social change. In the Indian context this has to be done by liberating education. The question is, how can we liberate

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<sup>2</sup> Freire, 1968

individuals and communities to decide how they are to educate themselves? In what are they to educate themselves? In other words, the minorities—tribes, Dalits and women—must decide the method and priorities in the field of education.

How could this be done? According to Freire we have to help those under education to develop critical thinking. In other words they must raise questions of why, what, and how pertaining to social realities so that they challenge and critique the master-narrative of the dominant castes and offer an alternative narrative which is suitable for their emancipation from the grip of caste.

### **Identity and Diversity**

In the Indian context, education is deeply linked with identity. So we have to understand how identities are created. Identities in India are created within the discourse of a caste system from which none can escape. The conception of caste which creates a field for people to think, feel and act is transmitted through repetition of the practice of untouchability and touchability; in other words the repeated exercise of social inclusion and exclusion, particularly in matters of social intermingling i.e., intercaste dining and intercaste marriages.

Like the master-signifiers which Jacques Lacan propounded as the identity-bearing words in the world of symbols, the caste discourse in this context propounds master-narratives that mark identities.<sup>3</sup> One such master-narrative is the story of cosmic sacrifice enumerated in the Rig Veda, which is the foremost *shruti* scripture. Here we hear about the division of society into four castes or *varnas* for the first time. The Rig Veda tells of the origin of castes from the body of God who is the creator of all, or *purusha*:

The *brahman* was his mouth; of both his arms was the *rajanya* made. His thighs became the *vaisya*; from his feet the *sudra* was produced.<sup>4</sup>

This text of creation signifies all the people. James Massey, a foremost Dalit theologian in north, wrote,

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<sup>3</sup> Ginwalla & Ramanathan, 1996, pp. 42-3

<sup>4</sup> Rig Veda 10:90:12.

The description of the traits and the profession that is assigned to each of the caste or *varna* follows this. Thus a *brahman* was the priest with white complexion; a *kshatriya* was the warrior with red complexion; a *vaisya* was a trader with yellow complexion; and a *sudra* was a serving caste with dark complexion. Having described this much the Rig Veda does not go any further.<sup>5</sup>

In this connection those people who did not belong to the four castes were named as *malecehas* or *chandalas*. *Manusmriti*, which is a major *dharma-shastra*, describes them as those who came through mixed marriages. Among the scores of injunctions against them one will suffice for an example:

The dwellings of *chandalas* should be outside the village; they should be deprived of dishes; their property consists of dogs and asses. Their clothes the garments of the dead, and their ornaments of iron, and their food should be in broken dishes and they must constantly wander about.<sup>6</sup>

The repetition of such identity-bearing stories by the learners makes it appear to be true imparting security and well-being. In this way it makes the master-narrative the signifier. As Persis and Saguna explain:

There are two operations here on the part of the signifier: (i) it confers identity on the subject by saying: 'You are this' or 'You are that', (ii) it induces a behaviour in conformity with itself: 'You will be loved and recognized if you are like/do this or that.' In short, the signifiers of discourse have immense power over the subject; they make the subject that which they enunciate.<sup>7</sup>

But what causes such subservience of the subjects to the master-narrators or master-signifiers? The answer lies in the human desire for the Other. Now, if desire is always the desire-of-the-Other, then every individual seeks recognition and approval from the Other. For this reason the subservient people also seek recognition and approval from the Other i.e., the dominant castes whom they acknowledge as superior. They think, feel and behave in ways that would be approved by the

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<sup>5</sup> Massey, 2015, p.56.

<sup>6</sup> Manusmriti 10.51,52.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in Ginwalla & Ramanathan, 1996, p. 44.

dominant castes. This affects the way they respond to education, particularly resisting change in the way of thinking.

Having said this, we know that there is diversity of identities in Indian society. Even, supposedly, if there were to be one religion and one language, it would fail to produce uniformity. The reason is that identity is not created by religion or language but by caste. Caste which is constituted by diverse *jatis* will continue to create diverse identities. In such diversity the importance of identity of individuals and communities is crucial. That the castes provide identities is not objectionable, but that they impose inequalities in identities in a descending order of purity is unacceptable. As pointed out above, caste identities are not based only on graded inequality, but they propagate feelings of revulsion against Dalits and heighten untouchability.

As a counter to the master-narrative of caste, postmodernity may offer some respite by its emphasis on deconstruction and the equal validity of all narratives. Unfortunately progressive thinking like these has failed to appeal the Indian intelligentsia, where the ideology of *Hindutva* has strengthened the casteists' master-narrative, which is profoundly based on exclusion of the adherents of Semitic religions from the communities of Indic religions.

The challenge for Christian educators, therefore, is this: how to make people change their way of thinking in a two-edged way (i.e., on the one hand to respect diverse identities equally and on the other to be inclusive? In other words, how do we celebrate diversity of identities yet welcome everyone everywhere? Where do we draw the line of social distinction, and when do we erase it? This takes us to the next section of our paper, namely, citizenship.

### **Cultivating citizens not consumers**

First of all, what is the meaning of citizenship? A citizen is a person who belongs to the free order of Indian society. S/he enjoys rights and shares duties as enumerated in the Constitution of India. But this does not come automatically. The sense of rights and duties has to be cultivated. This cultivation comes with education. The question is this: in the diversity of thinking what approach to education should we take? To answer this query help comes from Dr B.R. Ambedkar (1881-1956) who was a great thinker, a reformer and pioneer into modernity. In his line of thinking education was not merely literacy and training for livelihood,

but learning the associated way of living in a democratic society. I describe this as democratic social morality. In short it means two things. First, to be citizens of democratic India involves social equality, inclusion and dignity; secondly, it involves striving to create a democratic society in which all citizens may be equal and free. It means 'to be' and 'to strive'. Indeed we strive to be free because we were born free. Similarly, we strive for kinship and community because we were born social. There are no lines of social exclusion. Clearly to be equal and to be social annihilates caste, which enforces social inequality and isolation. To reiterate, citizenship is all about democratic social morality, which has to be inculcated through education.

The best example in the gospel which involves all these ideas is the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is a parable which brings to fore the practical aspects of democratic social morality in which class and caste and indigenous and non-indigenous divisions are erased by a human touch of care and concern, responsibility and duty. It is also a parable for good citizenship in which every individual citizen goes beyond his/her limits of duty to attend to the real needs of others. A good city is one in which the citizens care for others. In the parable of the Good Samaritan the individual identities of the Samaritan and the stranger are subsumed in a greater identity which constitute our citizenship.

Citizenship is an identity which includes within itself all diverse identities. Citizenship offers an alternative narrative of an India which is secular and inclusive. It is the story that begins with the people of Indus civilisation; it tells us of the coming of various groups of people; invasion of powerful empires; progress and fusion of ideas; blending and dissemination of religions; evolution and change of culture; rise and fall of empires. In this story the people of India from all backgrounds have a role and a contribution. For clarity let us see three cultural streams blended in the mosaic of rich multi-cultural heritage of India. These are the Indigenous, the Indic and the Semitic. The fact of the matter is that we intentionally use words like 'blend' or 'mosaic' or the phrase 'multicultural heritage' to conceal the horrendous nature of conflict between the three cultural streams which coexist like separate nationalities. The basic cause of conflict lies not so much in the existence of these three streams but in the challenge that the Semitic and Indigenous worldviews pose for the Indic. Sadly, within the Indic culture the counter argumentative streams of *charvaka* and *sramana* have been eliminated, leaving the casteist discourse to dominate as the



master-narrative. With the inner threat eradicated, the danger is from the outside, namely from the Indigenous and the Semitic.

The desire of the casteist Indic stream to dominate and control the national and natural assets leads them certain strategies. One is to exclude the non-Indic from sharing the main stream. The strategy of exclusion is to make them powerless by depriving them of education. This is certainly not a good approach to citizenship of a nation that wants a place in the present global world as an upholder of human rights.

Let us turn to another impediment to citizenship: the rise of materialism. It takes fifteen long years to educate and prepare children in Indian schools to serve the larger society as productive citizens. Their capability is assessed by what they are paid for what they offer as their service. Through years as students they were mentored and monitored mainly by tutors and parents. What these people inculcated in them is evident from what they had appreciated as their own success. A teacher feels successful when he/she meets their students who have developed the capability to buy and consume things from the market. They should be able to afford gizmos and gadgets, holiday packages, fully furnished flats or villas, cars, labelled goods and clothes – and the list goes on.

Obviously not all, but those who have had the advantage of belonging to economically privileged families would be able to afford all this. The teachers, deliberately or unwittingly, had mentored their students to believe that their advantage was due to their own deserving abilities; those who suffered disadvantages were regarded to be their own worst enemies. Those who have the capability to procure goods in order to consume are the ones who also dominate in the sphere of culture, business and governance.

The above is a type of value-system of a market society and a consumerist outlook on life. It is clearly self-centred, with no concern of the progress of society: in other words, attending to the felt, rather than the real, needs. This is the result of the master-narrative of materialism. This attitude is favourable for the economically strong individuals who belong to the socially dominant castes, but it becomes detrimental for those who are persevering to progress and are striving to be free. It creates a society of dominant and subservient classes. Social classes have no sense of community. The situation becomes complex in a society designed on a caste system in which the privileged castes have also become the dominant classes. This is bound to be so, owing to the historical advantages of culture and finance which the privileged castes

have enjoyed. The cause of this advantage is explained through the stories which we can call the master-narratives.

Let us look at it like this. There are two master-narratives in India, the first is the *Mahabharata* and the second is *Hindutva*. These are master-narratives because they are the signifiers: they signify what each community is and who the individual is. The *Mahabharata*, in the narration of ethical dilemmas, brings out the significance of duty in the midst of crisis. The imperative of duty lies in the caste into which one is born. Hence caste signifies an individual by locating position and work in society i.e., whether a person is included in the four tier caste-system or is excluded as an outcaste. In contrast, *Hindutva* signifies communities in India as patriotic or otherwise, on the basis of whether they have embraced an Indic or a Semitic religion. Therefore this system of value and the outlook on life must be countered by an alternative value system.

The alternative is provided by the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a narrative of the Son-of-God who became a human being and explored and experienced what it was to be a man-of-sorrow by being refuted, rejected and killed. God, in his incarnated Son, experiences the world of creatures for the first time. Metaphorically it is like exploring and experiencing by becoming blind, which is how they negotiate through darkness. This was God's discovery i.e., what it was to be refuted and rejected. In the Indian context, Dalits are discarded as polluting people. But for God no one is discarded or rejected. All human beings, and the whole creation, are being saved and perfected. The way God brought this transformation was by giving himself to us as a weak and vulnerable man, thereby on his body on the cross exposing what evil does. From this we can derive the philosophy of Christian revelation in a nutshell:

It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Now 'giving' can be possible only by being just (Luke 16.19-31), being compassionate (Luke 10.29-37), being non-violent (Luke 9.52-56) and being wise (Matt 25.1-13). These qualities make us good human beings.<sup>8</sup> Three more values come out in the gospels which are particularly important for oppressed people: first, the value of knowledge and

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<sup>8</sup> These are the parables: Luke 16.19-31 is a parable of rich-man and Lazarus; Luke 10.29-37 is the parable of the Good Samaritan; Luke 9.52-56 is Jesus' refusal to destroy the Samaritan towns; Matt 25.1-13 is the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins.

practice or orthopraxis (Matt 7.24-27); secondly, the value of organisation (John 15.1-5); and thirdly the value of struggle (Matt 10.16-31).<sup>9</sup> Added to this is our obligation to be a community of equals by being united (Gal 3.28), to enjoy fellowship by intermingling (Eph 2.14-19) and to be free (Gal 5.1).

### **Discerning vocation, not career**

Another query for the educational institution is this: what is the purpose of educating our generation? The predominant opinion is as simple as to affirm that it is to build a career. In other words, it is all about money for professional services. To meet this need there is a clear expectation from institutions imparting education. They must produce capable men and women with the aptitude to be trained as professionals to deliver specific services. The result of this is that the institutions of education operate on a factory model. Accordingly they admit children as raw material. They work on them for more than a decade. After this processing those who get moulded for the utility of the consumerist society are honoured but the rest are eliminated through the examination system as waste material. These are then the product which the educational institutions offer in the market. From among these best-suited students the companies can select according to their choice those who will render services and for which they will be well paid. In other words, the institutions of education are focussed on enabling the students to improve their skills for the prospect of a career.

The attraction to a lucrative career is humans' selfish instinct, which takes over their social instincts. With surplus capital the individual caters to his/her 'felt' needs at the expense of 'real' needs. As real needs are social and require collective effort, they demand of individuals that they sacrifice their instincts to cater to their felt needs. For example, given that a real need is the conservation of the environment, then the individual must sacrifice the felt need of automobiles, but the factory approach to education does not view education in this light. Rather, owing to this factory-like approach to produce serviceable products – in this case human resources – we have

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<sup>9</sup> These are the metaphors: Matt 7.24-27 to hear and to act is like constructing a house on a rock with quality to endure; John 15.1-5 to be organized to be ordered like branches attached to vine; and Matt 10. 16-31 to struggle non-violently is to be like sheep among wolves and to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

had no impetus to raise our universities to be counted among the world-class institutions. Therefore, the Christian vision for education has to be larger than merely building a career; instead it is to do with discerning vocation. Vocation involves excelling in the field which a person discerns as a call. Call is one's internal compulsion inspired by divine sources, which is beyond human rationality. The aim is to obey this call despite the economic and social losses one would suffer as a result.

In this line of reasoning, we affirm that educating-to-discern-vocation not only involves cultivating capacities with which a person is naturally endowed, but also to enable him/her to acquire expertise for which he/she may not have the aptitude. Such considerations in education have to be for higher goals which are beyond merely career building.

In all this prayer also has a place. The aim of prayer is to help the person to discover the sources of living waters springing internally from transcendental sources. It is in the directive presence of the transcendent that a person discerns his/her immanent purpose. Despite the intention to develop one's naturally endowed capacities or to acquire capabilities, the aim of education should be to enable a person not only to discover the call but also to prepare him/herself to obey it. If this is the case, then education becomes a spiritual exercise. In other words, it develops a person to accomplish what this call demands. Finally, it is in obedience to this discernment that a person leads a purpose-filled life. The key to discern the call is to share life, faith and joy with the weak and the vulnerable.

Having considered the unsatisfactory functioning of the factory-model of education, let us explore another model.

### **Serving the common good, not the private good of individuals**

A better illustration for educating our people is of planting a sapling. The idea is to respect each individual as full of potential to flourish into a tree. For this, the sapling has to be provided the right kind of atmosphere and soil with proper nourishment of water, manure, sunlight and air.

Similarly, every student is like a sapling full of potentials for flourishing, provided he/she is given the right kind of social and intellectual atmosphere. One of the ingredients for human life to flourish is moral education, which is fundamental to educate a person's mind for making choices and developing values in life. The moral life of a person begins

with the way he/she thinks. Now thinking is all about view and value of what is common, i.e., shared space of time and commodities.

From the metaphor of the flourishing tree we can infer the idea of a shared space in which the trees have to grow and spread. This is the ground, the space, the resources, and the environment that is common and in which they exist with all other forms of life. The insight of this metaphor is that, if all share the common resource, then the view of majority is not to be exercised at the expense and interest of the views of minorities. It is the restraint of the majority in a democracy that the minority are included and individual citizens feel that they also belong to the larger community of citizens. This idea is not new. Rousseau expressed it in the belief that government should be based on the 'general will' or common good, rather than upon the private or selfish will of each citizen. Education should, therefore, prepare the young generation to understand that the common good is not merely being eco-friendly, but also involves political participation, which is possible in democracy in which the feeling is strengthened amongst individual that they belong to the larger community of citizens. This collective feeling and belonging reinforce the social equality that is an essential aspect of social justice.

In seeking common good over and against private good, education must help students to develop critical thinking and the power of analysis. In this line of thinking, the power to distinguish the real interest from the felt interest must also be emphasised. The felt interests can be selfish, ending in conflict, but the real interests may require collective effort. For instance, the need and interest to conserve the environment is a 'real' interest, which demands collective efforts.

*In the Indian context, education must aim to bring social transformation.* This means that we together – teachers and students – create a society in which people understand that interdependence need not make them dependent; that they can still be independent. This leads us to view democracy as social, not majority mob rule. The aim is to generate faith in the goodness of humanity and to hold that human beings are not entirely selfish but seek companionship. They are bound to one another by the existence of common humanity and common good.

Furthermore, education in India must strike new grounds in three more aspects. First, it must bring more advancement; secondly, it must bring more justice and, thirdly, it must make us more eco-sensitive. As far as advancement is concerned, we can explain it by another word: progress. It must be said that progress is primarily to do with our

thinking. It entails the inculcation of courage in our people to leave old things behind, the foremost being the caste-system, and move ahead in forging social associations where all people can intermingle, interdine and intermarry. Similarly, justice entails guarding one another's dignity. Power and energy in a person are released when his/her dignity is preserved. For this there is a great scope for restructuring our bureaucracy, augmenting the judiciary, innovating new ways of dealing with community and family conflicts, and providing social and personal security. The aim is to make every individual secure, equal and free to practise, profess and propagate his/her ideas. Lastly, eco-sensitivity means that we not only realise our bonds with all other forms of life on this planet, but also do our best to preserve the environment, with all its diversity, food-chain, vegetation and wildlife.

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## **Contributing to citizenship, vocation and the common good: one academic librarian's perspective**

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### **Introduction**

This essay highlights ways in which the academic library can contribute to citizenship, vocation and the common good within higher education and beyond. Its purpose is two-fold: (1) to argue that academic libraries are still central to the mission of our respective institutions; and (2) that they can play a surprisingly active role in the development of citizenship, vocation and the common good.

I would imagine that all of us would agree that academic libraries can be wonderful places to explore ideas learned in class, discussed with faculty or fellow students, and read in-course readings. Libraries help one satisfy curiosity and engage in the creative pursuit of knowledge, truth, and the love of God through the many diverse voices—both ancient and new—found in the materials housed in, or accessible electronically through, libraries. That said, academic libraries, once considered to be at the heart of every institution, are increasingly sidelined, underfunded, and underutilised (in a traditional sense). They are devalued in this age of the digital, where Wikipedia reigns.

### **Case study: Laurentian University, Sudbury, ON**

What follows is a limited case study of my own institution, Laurentian University in northern Ontario, Canada, which partners with one of its federated members, Thorneloe University, a member institution of CUAC. Laurentian University is currently involved in a costly campus modernisation project. Recently, it has also had to unexpectedly absorb twenty-three full-time faculty from another campus. At the same time, the institution is working towards developing a more robust graduate studies programme and increasing its research stature.



While the main library has continued to receive steady budget support for acquisitions from the administration, this support has not kept pace with the cost of ever-increasing electronic journal subscriptions or with fluctuations between the Canadian and US currencies. Furthermore, non-acquisition expenditures have been significantly reduced. Consequently, the university library has sustained financial casualties over the last two years. Many electronic databases have been cut across the disciplines and book purchases and sabbatical and health leave replacements have been curtailed. In terms of current staffing, four full-time academic librarians on Laurentian's main campus are serving a population of approximately 10,000 students.

In spite of the library's beleaguered state and the staff's unified effort to communicate the impact of these cuts to the Laurentian community, surprisingly few faculty members raised objections at the University Senate during campus-wide budget deliberations. Furthermore, on a professional level, I have found it increasingly concerning that while our main campus library is considered a popular and congenial work-space with recently increased computer outlets and strong Wi-Fi signals, our print collections (some 600,000 volumes)—developed and refined over the years—are underutilised. In fact, it is a virtual ghost-town in the stacks. As a mid-sized university, we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on database suites, providing access to online journal literature and e-books through subscription, but generally not ownership of these materials. Whilst such subscriptions help with physical space constraints, when there are substantial subscription cuts such as we are experiencing, there are no print back-run alternatives to which to turn. This means that students and faculty have to rely on interlibrary loan services, assuming they persist and take the time to initiate such requests.

### **Laurentian's new McEwen School of Architecture Library**

As the embedded Architecture Librarian at the University's signature McEwen School of Architecture located ten minutes from the main campus in downtown Sudbury, Ontario, I have been somewhat sheltered from these fiscal shortfalls. The mandate for the School of Architecture is to be bi-lingual and tri-cultural. The architecture library,

a branch library of the main university library, supports this mandate by purchasing English, French and indigenous materials relevant to the School's curriculum.

This fall, I moved into a new library space. There, I manage a nascent collection for which there is stable funding for growth, at least in the short term. The subject-specific nature of the library and my willingness to serve as a 'roving librarian': walking throughout the various studios interacting with students and faculty, showcasing relevant library materials, and connecting with students over the lunch hour providing a 'library lunch & learn' series, all enables a better-used collection. In fact, students and faculty make a beeline for the 'new books' shelf.

Even a selectively stocked, highly-promoted library, however, does not ensure a *well-used* collection. There is a general lack of sustained reading among undergraduates, who prefer to find their information on the Internet, usually reading only several pages deep on a particular website. The students' level of engagement with a text is tenuous: the written word that once captured the imagination through story, for example, appears diminished. To counter this trend, I have initiated several events.

First, shortly after my return from the Triennial Conference, I hosted a literary activity in the library called 'Story Weaving,' led by an indigenous Knowledge Holder. This was an activity in which participants were integrated into a living story, and wove a large dream catcher at its conclusion. Secondly, I borrowed the One City One Book concept (in which a whole city attempts to read a particular book and then discuss it) and tweaked it to become 'One School One Book' to encourage the McEwen School to read an architecture-related novel and to join in a community discussion about it. This year, the chosen title was Ken Follet's *The Pillars of the Earth*, also translated into French. This highly rated historical novel is an epic tale of the building of a cathedral in 12<sup>th</sup> century England.

Generally speaking, librarians bemoan students' lack of information literacy, academics complain about the lack of writing coherence found in research papers and the rise in plagiarism, and many academic institutions have resorted to developing so-called Centers for Academic Excellence, in order to support and to develop the reading, writing, notetaking and test-taking skills of our student populations.

Clearly, academic libraries, and specifically librarians, can play an active role within academic communities in helping to address these problems. In terms of architectural research methods, for example, I encourage students to use the specialised databases acquired for Art and Architecture and to perform searches using Google Scholar rather than Google. I consistently try to demonstrate techniques for extracting information that yield effective results.

In addition, along with my main campus library colleagues, I provide in-class and library instruction on the use of the library and its particular resources, as well as direct students and faculty to freely available external resources relevant to research. In recent years we have developed an online research skills tutorial that most first-year students are required to take. In this way, the academic library supports and is central to the educational mission of the institution. In my estimation, the academic library can take a leading role in relation to citizenship, vocation and the common good.

### **The academic library: contributing to citizenship**

Let us consider some ways in which the academic library nurtures good citizens. As one might expect, the library contributes to the academic community, and indirectly to the public square, by its generally inclusive stance towards library users and its tolerance for different ideas and support of academic freedom and copyright compliance.

Whilst librarians have a hard time shaking off their 'shushing' stereotype and often seem intent on following library policies to a fault, they may often be seen as exemplary models for following an institution's code of conduct. Conduct policies are increasingly utilised on college and university campuses as society becomes less civil. Recently, many college and university campus groups, particularly in the United States, have called for renewed dialogue and for civil discourse on their campuses. The academic library is positioned to play host to these discussions.

Likewise, the library can be perceived as a leader on campus by adopting green practices, including recycling and composting, encouraging the use of reusable and spill-proof coffee mugs, installing

and maintaining a living wall, or simply creating a terrarium to bring the outside, natural world in. At the McEwen School of Architecture Library we are in the initial stages of creating such a wall. We are also considering applying for a grant to manage a bee hive on the greened roof of our library. Additionally, the library can offer limited amnesty programs that promote healthy living and create incentives to get users back to the shelves. For example, overdue fines can be worked off with proof of having walked a certain number of steps or having cycled a particular distance to the institution on amnesty day.

The library can also engage the external community through mutually beneficial partnerships. For example, the McEwen School of Architecture Library has partnered with the main branch of the public library, the city's art gallery, the Department of City Planning, architectural firms, and beyond. All of these relationships enable the library to extend services and to increase opportunities for teaching, learning and research for our students and faculty, and to build community. The discipline of architecture intersects naturally with the city with a shared interest in the built environment, but other disciplines, such as economics or commerce, can also benefit through local external partnerships.

Furthermore, although I have not measured the potential positive and valuable impact on an individual's citizenship due to the effective seeking and processing of information and support obtained through the library,<sup>1</sup> I surmise there is a connection. Common sense would suggest that the more informed or self-educated an individual is, the more she is likely to think beyond herself and to seek the common good.

### **The academic library: contributing to the common good**

Academic library staff contribute to the common good—that which benefits us all—in measurable ways. One of these ways worth noting is that most academic librarians liaise with academic departments, selecting book and journal titles and databases in support of the curriculum and exposing students and faculty to the breadth of knowledge within a particular discipline and beyond it. The work of collection development is somewhat painstaking, but the long-term

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<sup>1</sup> Appleton 2014, abstract

results of thoughtful selection have the potential to impact the lives of our library users. The implication is that

what we read matters, especially in relation to the life of the mind. The ideas and impressions that are aroused by reading influence our beliefs and actions.<sup>2</sup>

Coleman expands on these sentiments:

Reading is not solely an exercise to feed one's inner life. Rather, eating the book—not just nibbling at it or having a little taste here and there, but eating it wholesale—produces a changed person, an empowered person, a different kind of person, and changed people means social and political change, not just personal change.<sup>3</sup>

Coleman claims 'We live in the midst of a transition from print culture to screen culture'.<sup>4</sup> In the midst of this cultural shift, he asserts that the antidote is to

read texts that engage with the complex moral and ethical situations we often feel overwhelmed by, ones that open up aspects of human and natural life in the world that we could not possibly understand or perceive without guidance or, at least wise company. We need to read works that draw out our surprise, call up our admiration, devastate our current assumptions, and call us to a wider experience than we currently have.<sup>5</sup>

And so the very act of careful selection of titles for an academic library collection that is freely accessible to its members, while seemingly a mundane task, can be a holy or transformative experience for readers, ultimately benefitting society as a whole.

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<sup>2</sup> Derrenbacker 2017

<sup>3</sup> Coleman 2009, verso

<sup>4</sup> Coleman 2009, p. 18

<sup>5</sup> Coleman 2009, p. 38

## **The academic library: contributing to vocation**

If ideas and impressions that are aroused by reading influence our beliefs and actions, they also have the potential for influencing vocation. Whilst it is more likely that a student will seek vocational counselling from the career centre on campus or from an individual faculty member or a professional, the library can also play a role in vocational development. Certainly there is a relationship between knowledge and vocation. The question arises, 'Knowing what I know, having heard what I have heard, having read what I have read, what am I going to do?'<sup>6</sup>

At the McEwen School of Architecture, one is, of course, training for a specific profession. And yet inherent in that profession, there are moral and ethical choices that must be made. Our students cannot help but be challenged *vocationally* when taking the course, Design for Climate Change. Likewise, few remain unmoved when watching Edward Burtynsky's film *Manufactured Landscapes* or when reading Sinclair and Stohr's *Design Like You Give a Damn: Architectural Responses to Humanitarian Crises*. Hopefully the resources in the architecture library draw students towards designing and creating for the common good, motivated more by our common bonds as humans and the need to build in sustainable ways and less by consumerism and individualism.

## **Conclusion**

To sum up, as culture becomes increasingly reliant on electronic media, Coleman proposes that

[r]eading is counter-cultural mainly because it requires quiet time, being slow and meditative, and it is active rather than passive, being imaginative and dialogical. These qualities run in the opposite direction from the one in which Western commodity culture is heading.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Garber 2014, p. 82

<sup>7</sup> Coleman 2009, p. 26

Our attachment to the computer screen and hyperlinks runs counter to the time-honoured Anglican tradition of *lectio divina*, where words are savoured and from which we draw deep meaning.

In critiquing the information age Garber references the Librarian of the United States Congress, James Billington, who is known to have described the contemporary world as ‘an info-glut culture’ and who asked the question, ‘But have we become any wiser?’<sup>8</sup> Likewise Garber references Neil Postman’s book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, writing of the ‘challenge of holding onto one’s humanity in an information-saturated culture.’<sup>9</sup>

While the main campus library at my home institution has sustained significant collection cuts (cuts based primarily on usage statistics), it could be that faculty have not rallied on behalf of the academic library, in part, because they themselves have become oversaturated with information and various information outlets and are less reliant on a central library rich in material resources. Arguably, however, librarians can help faculty and students navigate the complex array of library resources and typically there is a depth of resources more than meets the eye.

I have given you a glimpse into ways that I and some of my library colleagues have tried to foster citizenship, vocation and the common good within the broader framework of higher education. I do not doubt that there are many other ways, and perhaps even more effective ways, for academic libraries and librarians to foster these ideals. It is my hope that readers of this essay will come away more conscious of the sometimes subtle but considerable contributions academic librarians and libraries make as partners in educating students and in support of institutional mission.

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## Chaplains as momentous meaning makers

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'Rough winds do shake the darling bud of May' wrote Shakespeare about youth and beauty that fade away with time. But today's youth living in turbulent and strife-torn times need not wait for their 'time' to be blown away. Right in their youthful days there are many 'rough winds' howling around them, threatening to shake their faith and trust. How should a chaplain respond to their agony?

As a pastor working in villages around Madurai, focussing mainly on the youth group, and as a professor working among young ladies from different castes, I have found the plight of the youths – both men and women, especially from a rural background – very agonising, tossed around by numerous rattling 'rough winds'. These are the people 'who fall outside the mainstream of the social or developmental spectrum' and who are 'consumed by the need to discover who they are.'<sup>1</sup> They are forever on the periphery, longing to find meaning in life, to be drawn into the circle, struggling to find their identity, autonomy and belonging. I am reminded of Dudley Randall's poem 'The Melting Pot'. This poem summarises the condition of the Blacks in America, which is similar to that of the Dalits in India. The metaphor of the melting pot is ironic because, as a melting pot, America accepts anybody and everybody but when the African tries to get in, it says:

Keep out. This is our private pot  
We don't want your black stain

This poem strikes a similar note with the song 'I am Not My Hair':

I am not my hair,  
I am not this skin,  
I am not your expectations; ...  
I am the soul that lives within.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clark, 2011, p. 168

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Johnson, 2016, p. 56

They are the 'vulnerable' whom Clark talks about in 'Kids at the margins'. These are the people 'who grow up under extreme systematic or societal oppression [and] ... beaten down by the impersonal vagaries of life circumstances'.<sup>3</sup> The focus of this paper is the role of Christian institutions and churches in helping the vulnerable to be just what they are and to 'give a damn' to the caste system that marginalises them in the world of the privileged, helping them find meaning in this seemingly meaningless world.

Growing up under extreme social oppression and beaten down by severe cultural constraints, the downtrodden people wonder if there is a God who truly cares for them. Ellison's description of young African American men aptly describes the plight of the poor people with whom we work in the villages –

Without a sense of control, such young people may wonder, 'What if I didn't exist?' Being cut dead, deliberately ignored, and completely snubbed evokes this deeply visceral, emotionally wrenching, existential question.<sup>4</sup>

My role as a pastor and chaplain is to inculcate in them self-worth, helping them to see that they are made in the image of God. Through caring words and deeds I assure them I do care and so do many who have surrendered to care for the 'cared-less'.

Then we have women, Christian Dalit women, who are triply marginalised: brutalised by their masters outside and bruised by their husbands at home. The second half of my paper will focus on women as careseekers and caregivers. Having been enriched by my readings of Richardson, I plan to draw extensively on his books,<sup>5</sup> and so also on the wisdom of Johnson<sup>6</sup> and on various other readings on caring for young adults, men and women.

The students who seek my help are mostly the vulnerable who grow up under extreme systematic or societal oppression, beaten down by the impersonal vagaries of life's circumstances. My responsibility as a chaplain is to help these precious young people to reframe and reshape their history of suffering. The 'repair scenes' that Johnson portrays in the chapter 'A Healing Journey' abounds with 'transpersonal symbols', like

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<sup>3</sup> Clark, 2011, p. 168

<sup>4</sup> Ellison, 2013, p.24

<sup>5</sup> Richardson, 1996; 2005

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, 2016

long stripes of red cloth to symbolise the shed blood of Jesus, the Cross and the lynching tree and their ability to see Jesus' crucifixion as a first-century lynching. These symbols enable the African Americans to reframe black America's history of suffering and reshape their past. Dalit theology also conveys the same message. Apart from the healing effect the Maafa Commemoration produces, it also helps reshape individual and collective identities. People stopped wondering 'why I'm not white' and started to see black as beautiful. This is the kind of question that torments many Dalits in India, but now they are slowly coming to terms with reality and getting to see the image of God in themselves. The role of our church is to help the Dalit youth to assert 'I am the soul that lives within'.

These young people, in Johnson's words, are held hostage by the repetitive intrusion of flashbacks and nightmares whose trauma has arrested the course of their development. Johnson rightly observes,

[I]f a trauma has not been sufficiently spoken of and acknowledged at the time of its occurrence, traces of it can remain and surface in the family of 50 or 100 years later.<sup>7</sup>

My ministry is to help these people, who are still affected by the trauma their parents and grandparents underwent, to come to terms with their trauma and to transform the traumatic effects of poverty and casteism into positive energy.

When our church started to work among these young people nearly two decades ago, we based our ministry on 1 Corinthians 1:26-29;

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world ... to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

If God himself in his sovereignty chose to begin his work with the poor and the marginalised, we should, too. The people whom we serve are

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<sup>7</sup> Johnson, 2016, p.101

the most hopeless and, as Capps says, I was intuitively aware that I am an agent of hope.

As the infant grows into a child, hope becomes associated with the *will* and with the capacity to take initiative, so that the child becomes actively involved in realising hopes.<sup>8</sup>

My hope was then fuelled by my desire to bring hope to these people through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and a ministry of good deeds. I was such a novice that I did not realise that not all goals are achievable. Neither was I aware of the risk involved both in realised and unrealised hopes: even fulfilled hopes may lead to depression, apathy and boredom. But from experience I can say that even depression, apathy and boredom have only forced me to set higher goals for the Dalit youths and to be constantly engaged in the imaginative act of 'future visioning': widening previous horizons of pastoral care, caring for the cared-less.

Yet another challenge that I had to face was the mismatch between many outsiders' perceptions of poverty and the perceptions of poor people themselves, which started to have devastating consequences. Defining poverty is essential in determining solutions. As with the doctor who makes the mistake of treating the symptoms instead of the illness or misdiagnosing the illness and prescribing wrong medicine, a wrong definition of poverty will worsen their situation. For example, if a person's problem is a lack of self-discipline, and as a result he was not able to keep to a job and earn money, any amount of monetary help will not benefit that person. We will treat the symptom rather than the underlying disease.

The relationship problem is one of the biggest problems they wrestle with. Corbett & Fikkert<sup>9</sup> give us a Biblical framework of poverty and poverty alleviation. They help us set eyes on the Triune God, the inherently relational being, and human beings made in the image of God as also inherently relational. Myers<sup>10</sup> explicates the four foundational relationships established by God: relationship with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation. These are the building blocks for all of life, and when they function properly, human beings will experience the fullness of life that God intended for us. These four key relationships

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<sup>8</sup>Capps, 2005, p.189.

<sup>9</sup> Corbett & Fikkert, 2009

<sup>10</sup> Myers, 2017

highlight the fact that human beings are multifaceted. With the fall of man all the four relationships are marred and its effects are manifested in the economic, social, religious, and political systems that humans have created throughout history. As a result, every one of us suffers 'from a poverty of spiritual intimacy, a poverty of being, a poverty of community, and a poverty of stewardship'.<sup>11</sup> Yet I did not lose hope, because I believe Christ continues to hold all things together and to sustain all things by his powerful word. All that I did, and continue doing, is to embrace our mutual brokenness in order to help and not hurt the poor with whom we work.

After a time of prayerful investigation we as a church came to the conclusion that education of the children should be given importance. Education is one of the powerful tools of empowering people and so we spend a large amount of money on the education of the underprivileged children. As a first step, we wanted them, both parents and children, to be dressed neatly. This may seem silly to a reader who is not aware of the bleak realities of Indian villages. Yes, these villagers had to be given decent clothes and taught to dress well, but it was not easy because there was opposition from the dominant castes. Deliege pictures the painful reality thus:

The Harijans [Dalits] could not dress as they liked. A man could not wear a turban nor cover his chest. ... He was forbidden, in addition, to wear shoes or sunglasses, to carry a parasol or an umbrella. ... Women were forbidden the same accessories and could not wear a blouse under their sari and their breasts had to be visible. ... Traditionally, the untouchables received their clothes from their employers and only when their old garments were in rags.<sup>12</sup>

This brings to my mind a powerful story titled, 'Subcontinent' by a Dalit author, Ajay Navaria. The narrator of the story tells how once, when they were returning from a wedding, the high caste villagers beat him, his father and his great-aunt brutally and dehumanised them in public, all because they were well dressed. The villagers turned brutes because they did not want their pernicious practices, the long kept custom of the village, to be broken by the untouchables. One of the villagers screams,

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<sup>11</sup> Corbett & Fikkert, 2009, p.63

<sup>12</sup> Deliege, 1997, p.29.

Punish him so that all the other lowborns think a thousand times before breaking the rules of the village again. Our ancestors worked hard to build all this. Make him lick up his own spittle.<sup>13</sup>

Thanks to education and empowerment, however, this kind of occurrence is long bygone, and things have improved beyond imagination.

From the initial step of providing education we moved to the next. As our children grew up we started spending for their marriages, and so on. Word spread among people that we care for them. The congregation started to grow. With the increase in number of people, demands increased and also problems that are not surmountable. My anxiety was that people would leave the church discontented. As Richardson states:

Just as some physical diseases are communicable and make their rounds through a social group, so too can emotional distress be circulated within a group such as a congregation.<sup>14</sup>

Anxiety is a powerful force in emotional relationships. If we are anxious because we fear an important person will 'abandon' us, we may do whatever it takes to prevent that.<sup>15</sup>

I tried to be a likeable and friendly chaplain and pastor. In caring for the cared-less I started to feel that I was the less cared for. Ironic! I was so emotionally intertwined with the problems of people and their concerns that I did not pay enough attention to my own personal life and well-being. As a result I suffered a severe nervous breakdown and had to be hospitalised and was in bed for nearly three months. The family had to pay heavily, literally and metaphorically, for the 'god-complex' I developed. But, above all, the people whom I served started to look down upon me as a failure. When we could not meet the material needs of the people, they started to leave the church. I learnt a valuable lesson: if any pastor tries to be the primary care giver, doing *everything* in his or her effort to becoming a meaningful meaning maker, he/she will just burn out. My behaviour created false expectations in people and many others were hurt in the process. Though my husband

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<sup>13</sup> Navaria, 2013, p.89.

<sup>14</sup> Richardson, 2005, p.4

<sup>15</sup> Richardson, 1996, p.49

and I were clear on our mission and vision we lacked a widely shared, clear cut strategy. It took a long time to realise that just because we were busy did not mean we were being effective.

The metaphor of Good Samaritan is beautifully explained by Gill-Austern. The Good Samaritan did not cancel his journey in order to care for the wounded man. He did not give up his plans or sacrifice all his needs. He used the communal resources by taking help from the innkeeper at the inn and thus effectively cared for the wounded man as well as carried out his own personal work. Caring requires effective action, and effectiveness demands the sharing of burdens and allowing others also to assume responsibility. 'To be human is to care and to be cared for, to love and to be loved.'<sup>16</sup>

Neuger uses the experiences of individuals and communities to critique pastoral theology and generates effective and relevant practices in pastoral counselling that emphasise interdependence and mutual care. She points her finger at the loopholes in Personality Theory. Women's experience has been neglected in culture's stories. They are blamed for being over involved with their families. The theory does not have adequate definition of mental health for women and according to therapists a healthy woman is one who is 'submissive less independent, less adventurous, less aggressive, less competitive, more easily influenced and so on'.<sup>17</sup> The theory tells a woman to adjust to her environment; it will not help her in any way: it is primarily pathology-oriented, and categorises women as 'borderline personality' and 'co-dependent'. Neuger redefines personality as

the means by which one takes in information about the self, others, and the world, assesses that information so that it has meaning, and then makes decision, build relationships, predicts future possibilities, and takes action out of it.<sup>18</sup>

We trained women in our church to gather information about the women in the villages and encouraged them to build relationships. This exercise helped us have an idea of future possibilities. We worked on the strategy with the team and took action. It worked.

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<sup>16</sup> Gill-Austern, 1996, p. 319.

<sup>17</sup> Neuger, 2001, p.36

<sup>18</sup> Neuger, 2001, p.41

The five-stage paradigm of Ballou & Gabalac<sup>19</sup> is prevalent in Indian society, especially among rural women. They are: the chronic *humiliation* that women are often subjected to; the *inculcation* which means women are indoctrinated with rules about being female; *retribution* which is the punishment for breaking the rules; *conversion*—when women believe that they are made to be unselfishly serving others; and *conscriptio*n, which takes place when the converted women try to suppress women who rebel against rules. Bama, a Christian woman Dalit writer, highlights the theme of women as victims and as victimisers in her autobiographical novel.<sup>20</sup> Bama's experience is similar to what our women in the village experience. She suffered discrimination everywhere—in the classroom, on the bus and on the streets. It is like rubbing salt on the sore when she also finds caste and social discrimination in the Catholic convents. She is frustrated at not being able to deconstruct caste as a paradigm from within Christianity. The religious indoctrination numbed her to the ill-treatment she faced as a Dalit nun. But Bama refuses to remain a submissive, marginalised woman. This is the foundation of the new culture of resistance that we lay in the hearts and minds of the young students and rural women among whom we work. The conditions for positive change include warmth, acceptance, positive regard, creating a safe counselling context that allows self-disclosure on the part of the counsellor and careful listening to the other's internalised problem so that it can be externalised and deconstructed. This has enabled our women to reshape theological reflections in radical ways.

Abandonment in love relationships is another major issue for the Dalit girls. The society treats them like trash and the family does not want them. When they accept Christianity, once again they are in a minority. So they are triply marginalised. Men make good of it. These innocent young adolescent girls are trafficked, brainwashed, tortured and traumatised.

As the culture virtually dismantled previously rigid guidelines for family life, a new family imbalance occurred as men and women attempted to redefine their roles and relationships within the family system. The consequences of this imbalance began to fall to

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<sup>19</sup> Ballou & Gabalac, 1985

<sup>20</sup> Bama, 2012



the child/adolescent, who was left to fend for himself or herself as parents sought to find their own way in life.<sup>21</sup>

Clark's description is globally applicable: the causes of the imbalance may differ but the consequences are everywhere the same. Imbalance and abandonment lead young adults to form social bonds:

The social bonds that are developed during adolescence are essential for two reasons. They address the need to belong, and they provide a cohesive unit that serves as a glue for society.<sup>22</sup>

It is this longing for social bonding that allows the rejected young girls to sell themselves for sex in spite of the risks involved. Nepali children are often seen in Indian circuses; Indian women and girls are taken to the Middle East and Europe as domestic servants and end up in the human-trafficking industry; the Philippines is one of the largest source countries for sex trafficking. Most of these girls are between the age of 12 and 16.

How are we as Christians to respond? It is challenging but not impossible. While working with young students I have often witnessed them wearing a mask of defensive joking and flippancy to hide their genuine sadness. Unless as a pastor and as a professor I am sensitive to their pains, I will become judgemental and start to behave like a strict, self-righteous moralist, which will drive young people away from their churches and ultimately from God.

As a first step to helping we need some understanding of the young people's spirituality. Schweitzer<sup>23</sup> states that contemporary adults show a great deal of distance from the traditional church and that many Christian churches fail to realise that Christianity should have a boundary-crossing, outward-reaching, other-oriented impulse modelled by Jesus himself. When we understand that we are called to being conformed to his person, we understand the value of human life. Every individual is made in the image of God and, irrespective of caste, culture or creed, is precious in his sight.

In India there is a generalisation that young adults are becoming more and more secular because they are exposed to religious pluralism. People assume that the childhood faith fades away when they grow to

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<sup>21</sup> Clark, 2004, p.16

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Clark, 2004, p.64

<sup>23</sup> Schweitzer, 2004

be adults. But working among young people in college and in the villages has convinced me this is a wrong notion. Exposure to many religions has not made them irreligious; it has reshaped their religious outlook to 'Moralistic Therapeutic Deism', which is supplanting Christianity in India.<sup>24</sup> They believe that God exists, he is good to all, there should be a goal in life, God is interested in our well-being, that finally they should go to heaven. There was a Dalit boy in the group; despite his condition in life he was not cynical about God: he was the most affirming. He said what he cannot find in the family, at college and even at church, he finds in God, and so God is dearest to him. The 'privileged' ones, though not irreligious, showed a disillusionment, pointing to the corruption that prevails in all religions. All the young people resented the religious violence that costs innocent lives in India and around the world. What I realised talking to them was that they are not to be blamed: it is the religious and political systems which condemn and ignore them that are to be blamed. At the same time I did not fail to notice that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is just an assortment of many religions without much resemblance to the historic teachings of Christianity.

Who is to be blamed for this watered-down theology? Not the young people, but the consumerist and casteist churches in India. The various authors I have mentioned in my paper opened my eyes and ears to the tremors of loveless faith that rumbles through Christianity everywhere. Pastors and chaplains have to take on the responsibility of connecting young people to the historical Christian tradition. First of all, they should provide Christian role models. That is why Moses exhorts the parents to learn the law and then to teach their children (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Unless we learn, how can we teach? Unless we practise how can they perceive? So we conduct Bible Study for leaders and deacons, training them to train the young adults in the church and villages.

Since emancipation of young women is our focus, we encourage the congregation to contextualise the scriptures, interpreting them in the present context, so that they become meaningful for people today. One of the big challenges we face is to open their eyes to the follies of literal interpretation of scriptures. For example, we have to help those who go into ministry, and the women at college, to unlearn the assumptions engendered by 'silencing verses' (such as I Corinthians 14:34, Ephesians

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<sup>24</sup> Dean, 2010

5:22, I Timothy 2:11-12, I Peter 3:1). It is not easy to make them understand that considering these apostles' words as the infallible Word of God can be counterproductive. The reality is that women so far have been oppressed and victimised by the oppressive misuse of scriptures by Christians. As a meaning-maker I need to be convinced, and to convince others, that Christ sends us into the world as he was sent: to embody God's good news, to enact the divine plan of salvation in word and deed.

Yet another challenge is the problem of girls' being rejected and neglected by their own parents in some homes. The best way to get youth more involved in and serious about their faith communities is to get their parents more involved. So we seek to raise the parents' awareness about gender equality and the blessing of having daughters. For women who have for years been treated as second-class citizens, objects of scorn, sex and service, it is not easy to accept us, but after years of continuous teaching our efforts have started to bear fruit. Now there are hundreds of girls from villages who attend schools; many of them go into higher education. The Gospel of Jesus has brought them deliverance from the bondage tradition and now parents are very supportive of their daughters. As a result, these timid village girls are coming out of their shells. How true are Chap Clarks' words:

The kind of environment in which a child, especially during midadolescence, may ultimately be strengthened as he or she moves through the adolescent process is provided by a family with a relationally committed father and mother and home that is a place of safety and security and where, even during conflict and rocky circumstances, an adolescent knows he or she is unconditionally accepted and love.<sup>25</sup>

The influence of an adult, an outsider, apart from family members in the life of young people, is also important. Once our service as pastors and as a church is done with the parents we prayerfully follow up with their children. They need not only belief, but trust. Even though their parents have accepted Jesus as their God and saviour, and are able enough to teach their children, the youth still want us to visit them now and then. It is not dependence but (in their words) it is succour. They want to know more about Jesus from us. They trust us. Shifting the

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<sup>25</sup> Clark, 2004, p.93

emphasis in Christian formation from religious information to a trust born out of love makes a profound difference in mobilising faith. In II Timothy 1:5&6, the Apostle Paul commends the faith of Timothy's mother and grandmother and acknowledges the presence of the same faith in Timothy. Parents and grandparents play a major role in children's faith formation, as do other trusted adults. For Timothy, it was Paul who motivated him: 'fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands'. It was because of Paul that the faith inculcated by Timothy's mother and grandmother developed into trust, which awakened Timothy's desire to know Christ. Though young people's early lives may have been thwarted by a lack of 'affirmative mirroring', 'dormant hopes can be resurrected through communities of good-enough reliable others who nurture newly planted social neophytes.<sup>26</sup>

As momentous meaning-makers, we must cater to the needs of people irrespective of their religion or caste. There are many non-Christian youth who attend our church and become part of our ministry. We make space for their creativity; we guide and help them in their education and in finding jobs, using our influence wherever possible. We are heavily criticised by some for this kind of ministry, but also much appreciated and welcomed by the society in which we work. Our church violation of human rights or women's rights. If the church is to become more attractive to people, we have to distinguish between what is theologically necessary and what is merely customary. As a result, we see rural youths growing, moving from self-loathing, self-abjection, 'kids on the margins' to the confident assumption of their rights and privileges in the caste-dominated Indian society.

As practitioners of prophetic soul care will continue to engage critically with the structures of oppressive power and to employ practices of care that facilitate healing and hope<sup>27</sup> until our people find meaning in their existence, face their oppressors and the perpetrators of castes and tell them:

You may shoot me with your words,  
You may cut me with your eyes,  
You may kill me with your hatefulness,  
But still, like air, I'll rise. (Maya Angelou, 'Still I Rise')

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<sup>26</sup> Ellison, 2013, p.150.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, 2016, p.153



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## Visuality, spectacle, and 'the common good' in India today

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A curious paradox in the discipline of visual studies concerns the lines along which it constructs a subject. On the one hand, to render an issue visible helps make it easier to analyse. We might even argue that to visibilise a difficulty is essential for its resolution. To bring a subject into the domain of the visible is to empower the person who explores it to challenge and to dispel, perhaps, the willed obscurity that has hitherto enveloped it. To look at an image (or a sequence of images) does not merely counter authority through a replacement of one hierarchy of values by another. At its most sensitive, it can enable the establishment of multiple points of view from which readers/viewers can query and re-configure the subject. Visualisation can thus enable change, because it facilitates the study not just of a single text but of the multiple contexts -- visual, literary and historical -- that continually frame it anew.

On the other hand, however, it is also possible to argue that the need to visualise a theme or an issue generates the impulse to create a spectacle, or to choreograph a performance. In the process, already-fragile sub-groups might be endangered even further. Is it possible that to render a subject visible is also to make it vulnerable? Visualisation might then become just another tool of oppression in the hands of the state or indeed, in the hands of the populace. Representations along lines of gender and religion for instance -- two obviously volatile categories especially in a relatively young nation-state-- might well acquire increased potential for damage.

The best-known statement of this paradox continues to be magisterially perceptive in the way it balances one set of possibilities against the other. 'The autonomy claimed by the right to look is opposed by the authority of visuality. But the right to look came first, and we should not forget it' (Mirzoeff, 2) <sup>1</sup> Critical change however, comes not from stating a paradox, but from living through its complexities so as to re-work it for better times to come. To counterbalance 'the right to look,' therefore, this essay seeks to develop another concept, namely, the duty

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 2

to see. It will examine the cinematic representation of Christian women in India today, with specific reference to Paromita Vohra's 2006 nineteen-minute documentary *Where's Sandra?*<sup>2</sup>

### **The difficulties of visual appeal**

Before turning to the evidence, though, it is possibly a good idea to step back for a while and think about a larger question. This concerns both the need for women to remain in the picture (in more ways than one) and the difficulties that attend this situation. As the viewer walks the line between the sensitive and the acceptable, the terms along which visualisation moves emerge in all their complexity.

A helpful point of entry into this debate is provided by an internationally-covered vignette during the enthronement of Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury in March 2013.<sup>3</sup> Those who watched it will probably remember that the telegenic appeal of this quintessential Anglican moment was heightened by the choice of Evangeline Kanagasooriam, a student of Sri Lankan origin at The King's School, Canterbury, to welcome the Archbishop. When the latter sought entry through the ritualistic triple knock on the west door of the cathedral she asked, 'Who are you, and why do you request entry?' to enable the Archbishop to introduce himself and his mission. The selection of a young woman of South Asian origin to serve as interlocutor carried a deservedly-strong symbolic message. It sought to underscore the inclusivity and diversity of the Anglican Communion, with which all its members will probably remain in principled agreement. It also helped signal the way in which diverse national and diasporic aspirations could be articulated in a celebratory manner. A widely-read Sri Lankan newspaper asked: 'Who was the seventeen-year old dressed in an emerald green sari who played a vital role in the inauguration of the ministry of the 105<sup>th</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury?'<sup>4</sup> When beamed across the world by the BBC, a public broadcasting service, the moment also carried a strong nationalistic charge, drawing attention to multiple ways of 'being British.' Again, this is a message with which one might have no necessary wish to quarrel.

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<sup>2</sup> Vohra, 2006

<sup>3</sup> 'Archbishop of Canterbury enthronement video highlights, [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com) 21 March 2013/ accessed 14 July 2017

<sup>4</sup> deZylva, 2017



Simultaneously, however, the very success of the emotive symbolism at work here requires some application of thought. The terms on which the visual appeal works in this incident are not easy to distinguish from those that mark successful advertising. It is quite true that the credentials of those in the frame (for the enthronement of the Archbishop) are wholly verifiable and admirable. Nonetheless, to a casual viewer, it may well appear that a message is being marketed through spectacle that relies on the grouping and presentation of personable individuals. This may not in itself constitute a moral problem, but it certainly gives rise to some hard questions. On what terms may the visual representation of identity -- under considerations of religion and gender -- be taken forward? More importantly, the relationship between lived reality and attractive symbolism then demands careful attention. Does the deployment of visual politics— however thoughtfully this might be done—facilitate or inhibit an examination of the construction of identity under stress?

### **Indian Christian women in cinema**

The visual representation of Indian Christian women takes on a new dimension against the difficulties of process, such as those outlined above. Alongside, there are the complications that arise out of historical context. During the long imperial twilight the popularity of Indian Christian institutions (especially in the fields of health and education) increased, while the acceptability of the Indian Christian community decreased. This was due in part to the emergence of separate electorates along lines of religion and caste, signalled by the Morley-Minto legislative reforms of 1909, and intensified by the Montague-Chelmsford recommendations of 1919. Another suspicion that disturbed religious and social harmony concerned the alleged benefits in terms of land grants and employment given by the British government to Indian Christians. 'As a small minority, in an atmosphere of mounting communalism, and with their inability to free themselves from the charges of denationalization and association with imperialism, the community began to experience various forms of discrimination.'<sup>5</sup> This strain gained intensity during the early phase of Indian independence. The project of nation-building concerned mainstream Hindi cinema of the time sufficiently for it to re-inscribe family and religious ideals of

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<sup>5</sup> Beaglehole, 1967, p. 69

middle class Hindu patriarchy. It tended to stand aside from issues concerning the representation of minority communities, except to associate Christianity with the dubious populist tokens of debased westernisation such as permissiveness, alcoholism, and cheap entertainment. Documentary film-making however appears to have chosen to go down a different road. 'It has stood in opposition to everything the commercial cinema represents. It remains primarily a cinema of social conscience.'<sup>6</sup>

*Where's Sandra?* belongs to this performance space. It deconstructs stereotypes that cluster around the representation of women, particularly Indian Christian women, both in the cinematic and in the popular imagination. The opening is magical. The narrator begins: 'I always liked the girl on the side of the frame, the one in the dress, the one whose love story it wasn't. Unlike the girl who got the guy, her eyes were always shining, but not with tears. She was always ready for a laugh, for a song, for a good time. They told me her name was Sandra.' Notice the first principles of the cultural stereotype that the film seeks to rewrite. Sandra, the stereotypical Roman Catholic secretary from the Bombay suburb Bandra, remains on the periphery of her own story. Mainstream cinema will not follow her through a predictable if fatuous love story. A happy-go-lucky soul, she will know neither the heights nor the depths of melodrama. As a Roman Catholic—and this is the next valuable point made by the documentary—Sandra belongs to a community established on the west coast of India in the late sixteenth century.



*Figure 1 Front facade of sixteenth-century church in Bombay<sup>7</sup>*

This clearly predates British rule, and is a detail that helps remind viewers that Christianity does not need to be linked to the Raj.

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<sup>6</sup> Das Gupta, 1980, p. 37

<sup>7</sup> *Where's Sandra?* stills reprinted with the permission of the director Paromita Vohra/Parodevi Pictures

As the Rev Larry Pereira, an interviewee, amiably stumbles over the name of the suburb (he calls it Sandra instead of Bandra), distinctions between name and place begins to blur. The region reconfigures itself as streets begin to carry the names of Christian saints. Religion and regional affiliations cross over. This is interesting, because it shows how a certain kind of identity-formation gathers momentum. Such names become commonplace on street-signs and begin to serve as landmarks. A new cartography that suggests a partial assimilation of religious to regional identity begins to emerge. Indeed, identity becomes sufficiently fluid for names to slip their moorings and start to take on a life and purpose of their own. As a Muslim girl who runs 'Jeff's Caterers' cheerfully explains, the shop belonged to her father, Sheikh Zakiruddin. The name 'Jeff,' however, was 'gifted' to him by a Roman Catholic friend. It is an interesting sidelight on the issue of minority status to think about the ease with which names sometimes seem to travel, with no residue of communal ill-will. It is commonplace to construe identity as contingent upon a given point of origin or destination, but to think of it as either a journey or a gift is unusual.

This however, is to digress. The kaleidoscopic nature of the cultural stereotype 'Sandra from Bandra' is patent. Every time we pick this up and give it a shake, new colours and patterns emerge. Take for instance, the mock-up of the Bollywood item number that plays a pivotal role in the documentary. Three young stenographers, seated at manual typewriters, act out a little charade that spoofs Hindi cinema of newly-independent India. Their wardrobe, coiffure and make-up are immaculate for upwardly-mobile secretaries with plans for the evening. One reads a book with a dust-jacket that proclaims itself to be *Pitman's Shorthand*. This in turn soon slips down to reveal Helen Gurley Brown's 1962 *Sex and the Single Girl*, a manual for single career women who seek a relationship, usually in the workplace. Another triumphantly slings her typewriter carriage along to the beat of the song they lip-sync. The song is 'Dekh ke teri nazar,' from *Howrah Bridge* (1958). *Howrah Bridge* is an unremarkable thriller, but the song is significant because it constructs the prototype to which (among other things) *Where's Sandra?* responds. The film features an upright hero seeking the assistance of a Roman Catholic club dancer as he tries to uncover a criminal plot. The woman's name, Edna, is a marker of religious and cultural identity. As a Christian, she can be reasonably expected to be a good-time girl.

Were Edna not a Catholic it would have needed a tortuous explanation to allow her to dance to these songs ... Had Madhubala been playing Geeta or Sita or Meena, [typical names of Hindu film heroines] it would have been very difficult to pass her off as a dancer herself or as someone who helps—however unwillingly—with the smuggling of drugs, for Hindi cinema had no simple equation with the religious communities of India.<sup>8</sup>

The third character in this charade sashays provocatively in pencil skirt and stiletto heels to pick up a key-ring. As she spins it around on her forefinger, it jiggles to a halt to reveal a kitschy red heart, on which the words 'I love Sandra,' are inscribed. Availability, mobility and seductiveness—in a certain phase of cinematic imagination—signal Sandra, the Indian Christian woman.



*Figure 2 The stenographer's key-ring*

Had *Where's Sandra?* merely unpacked the principles of such typecasting, it might well have fallen victim to its own project of cultural analysis. It goes the extra mile, however, by revealing the lines along which subsequent evolution develops. As the film moves toward its resolution, one of the interviewees says, '*Dil se*, I'm a real Sandra from Bandra with a Punjabi touch ... I think it's more of a feeling than belonging to a community'. The speaker, Ritu Dewan, makes it clear that she is a Punjabi Hindu, not a Goan Roman Catholic, but is as thoroughly at home in the neighbourhood as any Sandra from Bandra might be. As she goes on to explain, regional origin is now irrelevant. One need not be an East Indian or Goan to claim the right to belong to Bandra. Religion is also increasingly unimportant. Sandra is herself, so to speak, even if she is not baptised into this role. Emotion is the new

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<sup>8</sup> Pinto, 2005, p. 48

determinant of identity. In this modern-day cultural parable, Bandra is open to everyone.



*Figure 3 'Sandra from Bandra'*

### **The common good**

This concludes the outline of the cinematic representation of Indian Christian women from prototype to stereotype and beyond. We may now turn our attention to the ways to map this set of concerns onto 'the common good.' To the popular imagination in India today, the phrase recalls the utilitarian calculus rather than Chrysostom's legacy and is viewed with concern. This intensified after Arundhati Roy reminded the reading public that the idea of 'the greater common good' was one used by government to secure legitimacy for its anti-democratic approach to development.<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this essay, however, the phrase will be used in its largest sense, to signal the public sphere and its possible (re)constitution so as to maximise the welfare of those within it. Specifically, I will use it to indicate the space that visual media helps to shape and define. Less obviously, it will also refer to the space that, in its turn, shapes and defines visual media. To put it in another way, film helps constitute the national imaginary that serves as a critical method that helps 'to induce an audience to imagine ... some form of collective entity or identity'.<sup>10</sup>

This is complicated. It is now a critical commonplace in visual studies to recognise 'the enormous power of images to transform and mobilise self and community for ... the power to see and the power to make visible is the power to control'.<sup>11</sup> This makes it sound practice to

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<sup>9</sup> Roy, 1999

<sup>10</sup> Walsh, 1996, p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ramaswamy, 2009, p. xiv

understand the evolution of social and cultural formations, such as the representation of Indian Christian women, through the medium of cinema. At the same time, we need to acknowledge a difficulty that is culture-specific. The majority of those who watch commercial cinema in India are neo-literate, particularly in the rural hinterland. This makes the audience very much more likely to unthinkingly accept cultural stereotypes, and to interiorise them. This is because their personal experience is likely to be limited by poverty. So will their access to reading and discussion. Consequently, they are more likely to be taken in by formulaic films than to question them.

Religious minorities and other marginal groups have appeared in [commercial cinema as subordinate stereotypes or have been excluded from it... Hindi cinema has apportioned shares of nationality among India's diverse communities while continuing a long-term relationship with Hindu nationalism.<sup>12</sup>

In sharp contrast, alternative cinema, of which *Where's Sandra?* is a notable example, sets out to disturb inherited wisdom, and to disrupt false cultural assumptions. Such films are densely intertextual, possibly because they need to both set up positions of orthodoxy and then systematically take them apart.

These films demand a level of engagement and self-reflection on the part of the viewer that destabilize the dominant relations of power between tradition and modernity and in fact put to question these very polarities.<sup>13</sup>

Nor can we rest secure in the belief that alternative cinema will automatically put things right in the matter of identity-construction and minority groups. For one thing, the two kinds of audience rarely overlap. Aficionados of alternative cinema might occasionally watch its commercial cousin for purposes of study or criticism. The majority of those who watch commercial cinema however are unlikely to ever encounter documentary films. For another, those who watch alternative cinema are likely to address those comfortable with a range of screen studies options as well as 'a postliterate world (in which people can

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<sup>12</sup> Deshpande, 2007, p. 103

<sup>13</sup> Monteiro & Jayasankar 2015, p. 253

read, but won't'.<sup>14</sup> The two audiences – neoliterate and postliterate – are unlikely to meet, far less exchange a single idea. In the absence of any common ground, the common good seems strangely dim and distant. In that case, how can possibilities for conversation develop?

A possible space for meeting and for debate is the secular university. It remains the most accessible site for intellectual play, 'where we may still search for the sake of searching and try for the sake of trying'.<sup>15</sup> I say 'secular,' for two very different reasons. The first is anecdotal, and the second is political. As far as the first reason goes, I recall that our university first screened *Where's Sandra?* at an international conference in 2011 on 'Gender and Modernities.' Young people who might not otherwise have had a chance to watch parallel cinema were able to contextualise the documentary with great clarity. They could see it as part of an ongoing debate on reformulating gender-relations within a world that was coming to terms with performance and cultural conflict. The second reason is considerably more fraught. The term 'secular' continues to be valuable in contemporary India. Despite its alarming porosity and its propensity to be appropriated by fundamentalism, secularism continues to be an exasperating but valuable ideal. India is still a multi-faith nation that seeks to come to terms with religious and cultural pluralism. Anchorage in any one religion -- in response to the challenge of a post-secular world -- is therefore hard to recommend in the field of higher education. This is particularly so in a university that needs to be intellectually hospitable and acceptable to people of all faiths, or even, no faith at all. The secular university, not a single-faith institution, in present-day India is a site of argument and debate where one can be reasonably sure of meeting a range of views and experiences that make discussion valuable. Otherwise, in a nation of multiple faiths and belief-systems one may end by preaching only to the converted. Only in the context of a secular university can the notion of intellectual play or the spirit of free inquiry become possible. It is this spirit of inquiry that is responsible for opening a much-needed space, particularly in the developing world, for friendly combat and dissent. Otherwise, protest either silences itself in an agony of self-censorship, or goes underground. Both possibilities are undesirable.

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<sup>14</sup> Rosenstone, 1995, p. 5

<sup>15</sup> Derrida & Saluszky, 1987, p. 17

## **The Anglican Communion and India today**

This sombre concern opens the door to the concluding segment of the argument: namely, the role of the Anglican Communion in contemporary India. As a united and uniting organisation, the Church of North India positions itself a province of the Anglican Communion and along with the Church of South India and the Church of Pakistan is the successor to the Church of England in India. Is there a distinctive role that it might play in the larger context of the representation of Christian women in India, and if so, what might that role be?

Possibly the first necessary step is to recognise the nature of the difficulty. No one quotation or extrapolated text can gloss over the situation. 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus,' (Gal 3.28) is a valuable statement of intention with regard to equal access to justification through faith before God of all peoples. It cannot erase specificities of personal or gender-based identity any more than it can function as a talisman to remove social and cultural crisis. That would be conjuring, not faith. It would also be cruel, and comparable to the late Victorian misinterpretation of 'the poor always ye have with you,' (John 12.8) as Jesus' maintenance of the status quo. Next, the church must begin to grapple with its internalised patriarchy, and recognise difficulties, where these exist, and not seek to erase these. Otherwise, the church will become as majoritarian as any other social and cultural formation, when in fact it needs to articulate the response of a counter-culture.

In one sense, this seems to return the argument to its point of origin. Is it helpful to visualise a difficulty, or does visualisation only intensify vulnerability? To answer this concluding question, I would say, it is our duty not merely to claim the right to look, but more importantly, the duty to see. It is responsibility integral to the concept of good citizenship that arises naturally out of a quest for the common good. The duty to see is a critical act of witness, in the university, in the church and out in the street. To refuse this engagement is, in every sense, to pass by on the other side.

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