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INTRODUCTION

As the title indicates, the focus of *Occasional Papers on Faith in Higher Education* is on the relationship between two fields of enquiry — religious faith and education — each of which has its own rich intellectual tradition, stretching back to classical times. Scholarship in each field has often been conducted independently, resulting in a *de facto* isolation of the one from the other; there are some, in either discipline, who have argued that they are separate in principle. There is also, however, a long history of scholarly endeavour exploring their interrelationships. The exploration continues today, even in so-called secular societies, and is in many respects as vigorous as ever.

Comprising faith-foundation higher education institutions in many different political and socio-cultural contexts, Colleges and Universities of the Anglican Communion is ideally suited to contributing to this intellectual endeavour. *Occasional Papers* is a forum for that contribution. Is faith enriched by education; is education enriched by faith? If so, how, and what are the consequences for educational strategy and pedagogy within our colleges and universities? This, our fourth, issue contains five articles addressing aspects of these questions. The topics the authors address are in many ways quite different, but they are thematically related insofar as they are all concerned, in one way or another, with the age-old conundrum, 'what is truth?'

In the first paper, Martyn Percy examines the true purpose of education, and draws on a number of eminent thinkers to substantiate the argument that 'a real education shapes us for virtue and wisdom'; it is 'a profoundly spiritual dynamic'. The three following papers were originally presented at a seminar on 'What is truth in the disciplines?' The 'truth' question is answered in the context of the disciplines of science (Richard Cheetham); literature (Margaret Masson); and linguistics (Mark Garner). The theme of the final paper is one which is rarely addressed: what does it mean for an institution to have a patron saint? Nicholas Sagovsky investigates the truth of the legend of St Ursula, the patron saint of Whitelands College, and its implications for our understanding of higher education in the contemporary world.

It is our hope that these contributions concerning faith and education will provide informative reading and will stimulate others to participate in the scholarly debate about the fundamental relationships between these two vitally important fields.

Mark Garner
Editor

Not joining the dots: education as love, life and liberty[1]

Martyn Percy
Christ Church
Oxford

Last year, 2016, the *Oxford English Dictionary* named 'post-truth' its word of the year. The term refers to statements that are manifestly untrue, but achieve a desired goal of persuading people to think or act differently. Marx might have referred to this as the 'end justifies the means'. In other words you can lie about Mexican paying for new walls; or in the UK, that leaving the EU will save the NHS 500 million USD per week. Because what matters is that people change, not whether they change on the basis of truth or falsehood.

Call me old fashioned, but I also think good education should be free and costly. If you think education is too expensive, let me introduce you to the cost of ignorance. It is a big bill. We face many challenges today in education: marketisation, consumerisation, commodification and atomisation. Our young people, burdened with debt, want to know, not what this intellectual journey will do their mind, but how fat it might make their wallets later in life. We face too, cultural anaemia. Lack of knowledge means that ignorance spreads. It means we run risks with how people are formed. I am old fashioned enough to believe that universities are not primarily places to process endless numbers of graduates as though were some kind of knowledge factory, with political investors backing us. Not at all: we are here to produce citizens of character and virtue.

This means being in touch with knowledge, or facts; not colluding with the watering down of religion in favour of a weaker idea of spirituality. Indeed, spirituality to religion, in the modern world, is like smoking without inhaling. If you are going to smoke, then smoke. If you have a religious foundation, have it; and don't apologise for it. It is part of your ethos and heritage.

Specifically, in Anglican terms, let us remind ourselves that Anglican polity is, first and foremost, a social vision that has ecclesial consequences. It is not an ecclesial polity with accidental social consequences. The Elizabethan Settlement was a social vision for breadth,

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inclusiveness, charity, generosity and diversity. It produced the *Prayer Book*; the *Prayer Book* did not produce that society. So Anglican educational institutions have deep and profound practical and intellectual DNA that produces a harvest of sagacity and acumen for the ordering of society, all posited in the formation of character and wisdom.

As Einstein said, education is the realisation that not everything that counts in life can be counted. Equally, not everything in life that can be counted counts. Nelson Mandela said education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Martin Luther King Jr said the function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character: that is the goal of true education. As Aristotle has it, the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it. As Sydney J. Harris comments, the whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows. Carl Rogers adds, the only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn and change. Benjamin Franklin; Allan Bloom that education is the movement from darkness to light. Daniel J. Boorstin thought that education is learning what you didn't even know you didn't know. Abraham Lincoln knew that the philosophy of the school room in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next. Tellingly, William Butler Yeats says that education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.

I want to consider the point of education; more specifically, I want to argue that it is not just about training and educating individuals for making useful contributions to economic outcomes. Education also *forms* individuals — and shapes their lives for and in society — making contributions to every spectrum of life. Education is about character, conduct and citizenship. A real education shapes us for virtue and wisdom. So our best education may not be about helping students to 'join-the-dots', so to speak. I am, of course, mindful that if you are building bridges: you do want precision and accuracy. Sometimes, 'ticking the box' is exactly right, because there is only one right answer. A lot of education, however, is also about forming minds and hearts. It is also about getting our students to think independently: not to tick the box, so much as to think outside the box.

This can be illustrated with a nice story concerning a question in a Physics degree examination at the University of Copenhagen: 'Describe how to determine the height of a skyscraper using a barometer.' One student replied,

You tie a long piece of string to the neck of the barometer, then lower the barometer from the roof of the skyscraper to the ground. The length of the string plus the length of the barometer will equal the height of the building.

This highly original answer so incensed the examiner that the student was summarily failed. He appealed on the grounds that his answer was indisputably correct, and the university appointed an independent examiner to deliberate. The examiner judged that the answer was indeed correct; but did not display any noticeable knowledge of physics.

To resolve the problem, it was decided to call the student in for a viva and allow him five minutes to provide a verbal answer, which showed at least a minimal familiarity with the basic principles of physics. For four minutes the student sat in silence. The examiner reminded him that time was running out, to which the student replied that he had several extremely relevant answers, but could not make up his mind which to use. On being advised to get a move on, the student replied as follows.

You could take the barometer up to the roof of the skyscraper, drop it over the edge, and measure the time it takes to reach the ground. The height of the building can then be worked out from a standard mathematical formula. (But bad luck on the barometer). Or, if the sun is shining you could measure the height of the barometer, then set it on end and measure its shadow. Then you measure the length of the skyscraper's shadow, and thereafter it is a simple matter of proportional arithmetic. But if you wanted to be highly scientific about it, you could tie a short piece of string to the barometer and swing it like a pendulum, first at ground level and then on the roof of the skyscraper. The height is worked out by the difference in the gravitational restoring force. Or, if the skyscraper has an outside emergency staircase, simply walk up it and mark off the height of the skyscraper in barometer lengths, then add them up. If you merely wanted to be boringly prosaic, you could use the barometer to measure the air pressure on the roof of the skyscraper and on the ground, convert the difference in millibars into feet to give the height of the building. But, since we are constantly being exhorted to exercise independence of mind and originality of thought, undoubtedly the best way would be to knock on the janitor's door

and say to him 'If you would like a nice new barometer, I will give you this one, if you tell me the height of this skyscraper'.

Although the story is almost certainly apocryphal, there is a rumour that the student later won the Nobel Prize.

'Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail', would seem to be the right maxim here. Even John Henry Newman knew the value of constructive dissent, and that was to be valued over destructive consent:

> [The] process of training by which the intellect, instead of being formed or sacrificed to some particular or accidental purpose . . . is disciplined for its own sake, for the perception of its own proper object, and for its own highest culture.[2]

So education is not all about acquiring knowledge. It cannot be, as Mr Gradgrind has it in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*, all 'facts, nothing else, and root our everything else ... stick to facts'! Education is not just about the acquisition of knowledge: it is also what we do with it, and, also, what we let it do with us. In that sense, it is a profoundly spiritual dynamic. It is not only what truth we possess, but what truth in the end possesses us. Further, this truth set us free to serve our neighbour, community and wider world?

One of the great educationalists of the twentieth century was Paulo Freire, a writer on learning, life and libery who was possibly surpassed only by John Dewey, whom I shall introduce later. Freire was Brazilian educator and philosopher who was a leading advocate of critical pedagogy. He is best known for his influential work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,[3] which is considered one of the foundational texts of the critical pedagogy movement. One of Freire's aims was to help people achieve 'deep literacy': to be aware of the far from innocent forces which can shape lives and institutions. He argued that deep literacy comes through dialogue. It is in conversation and reflection that we become aware of how we are *determined* by our cultural inheritance. Moving beyond that can be achieved if we are willing to critically question what we think we know.

Harvey Cox says that the first sin is not disobedience, but rather sloth and indifference: 'we have not defied [God] so courageously — we

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[2] John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 1899, Discourse VII.
[3] Freire, Paolo *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.

fritter away our destiny be letting some snake tell us what to do'.[4] Freire distinguishes between the types of questions or observations that are made in the church: (1) Naïve—that maintain the status quo; (2) Shrewd—that challenges (but also maintains) the status quo; and (3) Revolutionary—which alter the status quo.[5]

Clearly, and pedagogically, education is, properly speaking, 'revolutionary'; it should change the way we look at the world (or a topic). The art of this lies in problem-posing strategies; acknowledging that knowledge or history is not neutra'; and that education is part of the pursuit of freedom[6]. In other words, knowledge is not simply material to be banked; it is, rather, to be discovered: 'liberation education consists in acts of cognition, not (merely) transferrals of information'.[7] Freire, in his attack on the supposed neutrality of education, calls for a pedagogy of asking questions:

> Students [should be] engaged in a continuing process of education [that] should be adept at asking questions about themselves…when someone loses the capacity to be surprised, they sink into bureaucratisation…Bureaucratisation, however, means adaptation with the minimum of risk, with no surprises, without asking questions. And so we have a pedagogy of answers, which is a pedagogy of adaptation, not a pedagogy of creativity. It does not encourage people to take the risk of inventing or re-inventing.[8]

Freire continues:

> I would want to stress that education as it is consists generally in finding answers rather than asking questions. An education which consists in asking questions is, however, the only education which is creative and capable of stimulating people's capacity to experience surprise, to respond to their surprise and to solve their fundamental existential problems. It is knowledge itself…The easiest way is precisely the pedagogy of giving answers, but in that way absolutely nothing is put at risk … [intellectuals and people]

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[4] *Cox, Harvey, On Not leaving it to the Snake*, London: SCM, 1968, p. xiv.

[5] Freire, Paolo, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy and Civic Courage*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998, pp. 51ff.

[6] Freire, Paolo *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972.

[7] Freire, A.M., & Macedo, D., *The Paulo Freire Reader*, 2001, p. 73.

[8] Freire, Paolo, 2001, p. 337.

should dare to take risks, should expose themselves to risk, as one way of advancing in knowledge, of truly learning and teaching … if you do not engage in adventure, it is impossible to be creative. Any educational practice based on standardisation, on what is laid down in advance, on routine in which everything is predetermined, is bureaucratising and thus anti-democratic.[9]

The importance of the question in education—and most especially in research—is therefore paramount. Anything less than that risks what Freire calls 'the castration of curiosity'.[10] It is in pressing, probing and interrogating that the research project is born in the heat of the intellectual crucible. Moreover, research itself is vital to the overall educational task. The alternative, against which Freire sets his face, is a kind of joining the dots. This is the great danger of an overly heavy and centralised curriculum: it does not permit space to explore, think, challenge and even to revolt. It teaches people answers, but it does not teach them how to question. It teaches students what to say; but not how to reason for themselves. It protects vested interests, by not allowing sufficient scope for students to frame questions and create new ideas. In other words, it can castrate curiosity. It can lead to just joining the dots.

Unfortunately, with rare exceptions such programmes are seldom found. Commenting on the fragmentation and concentration of theological training programmes in the USA, Poling and Miller note how ordinands (or seminarians) are pulled deeply into isolated and disconnected wells of expertise, such as biblical studies, church history and various types of (competing) theologies. In contrast, they argue for a process of

community formation [establishing] critical awareness of the tradition, focused community planning … reinterpreting the interplay of covenant and tradition … stimulat[ing] the formation community … [standing] between the interpretive and political processes … as midwife to community formation.[11]

That is a curious phrase: 'midwife to community formation'; what can it mean? One thinks instantly of the Socratic idea of the educator as

[9] Frerie, Paolo, 2001, p. 228.
[10] Frerie, Paolo, 2001, p. 222.
[11] Poling, J., & Miller, D., *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1985, p. 147.

midwife, of the idea of education returning to its etymological roots, for it means to 'draw out' ('seminary', indeed, is rooted in the idea of 'seed'). Education is not merely cramming in and ramming home facts. It draws something out of the child or the student.

Socrates believed in what we now call *maieutics*: the belief that many important lessons and truths cannot be taught directly as a transmission of knowledge from an instructor to a learner, but instead the learner learns these truths by interacting with an instructor and through his or her own experience. In his *Symposium*, Socrates claims that a student is not an empty vessel to be filled with the wisdom of their teacher: 'if only wisdom were like water which always flows from a full cup into an empty one'. Instead, one must act as 'a midwife' to a student's learning. In the *Theaetetus* Socrates explains, 'my art of midwifery is in general like theirs, [but] my concern is not with the body but with the soul that is in travail of birth'. Additionally, and differently from real midwifery, Socrates says his role is simple: to test the strength and realness of the ideas his students give birth to, through questions and challenges.

All this talk of education-as-midwifery leads to a more personal reflection here. I was born in 1962 in what used to be called 'a home for naughty girls', in Blackburn, Lancashire, far away from the curtain-twitching neighbours of my birth mother's street in south Manchester. It was a bad birth and, for about a year, the doctors thought I might be physically damaged and with learning difficulties. The letter from Lancashire County Council says:

> You were 6lb 4oz when born, but it was a difficult delivery resulting in some concern for your wellbeing. For that reason, it was decided to place you with your family on a fostering basis whilst monitoring your progress … so you remained in the mother and baby home … when you appeared to be developing normally and meeting your milestones, an adoption application was eventually granted.

I was not a promising pupil when I eventually got school. I cried on my second day. Such a fuss had been made about my first day, which I survived and enjoyed; but no-one had warned me that there were years of this stretching ahead. Most of my time I struggled, and it was not really until I sat A-levels that I began really to enjoy learning. — and I mean really enjoy it.

Although my parents had both left school at 14, and none of my brothers has gone into higher education after their schooling, I still

contend that home is where we do a lot of our learning. I learnt a lot about openness by being adopted. Adoption is not one legal act: it is also a continual process of openness. Christian thinking orthodoxy teaches a kind of double adoption: in return for our adoption of Jesus, we are ourselves adopted into the life of God.

Moreover, the adoption is costly. Mary and Joseph both take a risk: 'Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not known a man?"[12] (Luke 1: 34). But, in accepting something alien, rejection is averted, and hospitality and love are shown instead. Hospitality, love and redemption are, in turn, bestowed on humanity through God in Christ. Then there is the education of Jesus. Where did he get his wisdom from? The kingdom that Jesus preached was more than just a creature of his adult imagination and inspirational prophetic vision. His childhood had probably taught him a thing or two about people, society and God. He grew up in occupied territories, so had seen the good and bad side of that coin: oppression traded off against organisation. His childhood had included a sojourn in Egypt. We know that, working in Joseph's trade—carpentry and building (Gk. *tekton*)—he had, by living in Nazareth, been exposed to the nearby Roman settlement of Sepphoris.

Sepphoris was a Hellenized community of almost 30,000 in Jesus' childhood, compared to the population of Nazareth, which boasted a mere 300. Nazareth was a dormitory village supplying labour to a much larger cosmopolitan community nearby. It would have been full of Gentiles of every kind. From an early age, Jesus would have been exposed to a world beyond his native parochial Judaism. The theatre at Sepphoris seated 5,000; it is almost certain that Joseph took Jesus, for Jesus, in his adult life, uses the Greek word 'hypocrite' quite a few times, which simply means 'actor'—one who is masked, and playing a part.

What is significant about this, I think, is this. Jesus' Kingdom of God project, was, from the outset, supra-tribal. It reached out beyond Judaism to the Gentiles. Indeed, he praised gentiles for their faith, and often scolded the apparently orthodox religion of his kith and kin for its insularity and purity. Jesus saw that God was for everyone; he lived, practised and preached this. The openness and Jesus witnessed as a child, and which educated him, came out in his ministry.

Why does all this matter? Well, God has many children. But God has no grandchildren. That is why our teaching and education matter so much. Our faith is not gained by descent, but by nurture; by teaching and

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[12] Luke 1: 34.

educating those who are not your own; cherishing those outside your family, not just those on the inside. Like many people with any kind of schooling, I look back now, and realise how remarkable our teachers were. They were patient, and they were faithful. They believed in teaching. They believed in their pupils. They planted seeds of new ideas. They expanded our minds and our horizons of possibility. Few were lazy, and even fewer were poor. They were committed to this midwifery. In a way, they adopted us.

One of the saddest things about our age is that we undervalue our teachers. When you think of how much time our children spend in school, with strangers forming them into citizens, and teaching them what they need to know, and how to think and act, and how to discuss, our neglect of the teaching profession, and our disregard for teachers, is scandalous, tragic and criminal. I was recently speaking in some schools in Singapore on behalf of Oxford University, and was struck by a range of gift-wrapped presents in one of the staff rooms. Innocently, I asked if there had been a birthday or some other celebration. I was told I had just missed National Teachers' Day—a day set aside by the government to affirm and celebrate teaching. Parents and pupils bring presents and tokens to the school, to express their appreciation of what the teachers do. The staff room was crammed with chocolates, bottles, gifts and tokens. I cannot imagine this in England. I wish I could.

Teachers, you see, are *characters* that inspire us with their love. Here is what one writer has to say about algebra—not my favourite subject, I hasten to add:

> I had a teacher who *loved* algebra, and made me feel it meant the world to him that I could love it too. When I do algebra, I think of him. I see his face, I hear his voice, and when I get stuck on a problem in mathematics, or maybe even a problem, you know, in life, I think of how it was he talked with me. I hear his voice as I think the problem through, it's like I talk with him about it. To me, algebra is what it felt like to learn it with Mr Norton.[13]

Education should be an interaction of love, says Nicholas Wolterstorff.[14] And St Bernard of Clairvaux, no less, has this to say:

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[13] Interview with James Day, in James Conroy (ed.), *Catholic Education: Inside-Out/Outside-In*, Dublin: Lindisfarne, 1999, p. 277

[14] Wolterstorff, Nicholas, *Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2002, p. 105.

There are many who seek knowledge for the sake of knowledge: that is curiosity. There are others who desire to know in order that they may themselves be known: that is vanity. Others seek knowledge in order to sell it: that is dishonourable. But there are some who seek knowledge in order to edify others: that is love.[15]

Why does love matter? Love is what we are born with, as Marianne Williamson reminds us. Fear is what we learn, if we are not careful. The spiritual pilgrimage, and the journey of education, is the unlearning of fear and prejudices and the acceptance of love back in our hearts. Love is the essential reality and our purpose on earth. To be consciously aware of it, to experience love in ourselves and others, is the meaning of life. Meaning does not lie in things; not ultimately. True meaning lies in us, which is why teaching is so vital. This is costly; so costly. As the old adage goes, if you think education is expensive, try ignorance. We cannot afford to be uneducated.

As I reflect upon the value of education today, I see it as a matter of love, life and liberty, and connected to the ideas of adoption and midwifery I have briefly touched upon. It is, in other words, personal, human, social and moral. It is a matter of the heart as much as the head; it is about preparing pupils and students to be good citizens, not merely useful units in the economic system. This is important, because:

> students who have been well served by good teachers may walk away angry — angry that their prejudices have been challenged and their sense of self shaken. That sort of dissatisfaction may be a sign that real education has happened. It can take many years for a student to feel grateful to a teacher who introduces a dissatisfying truth. A market model of [education], however apt its ethic of accountability, serves the cause poorly when it assumes that the customer is always right.[16]

Education, in other words, also has to risk offence and difficult probing if it is to be the handmaiden of life, love and liberty. Just as you cannot raise children without some sense of right and wrong, so it is with education.

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[15] Quoted in Schwehn, Mark R., *Exiles from Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America*, New York : Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 60.

[16] Palmer, Parker J., *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1998, p. 94.

It cannot all be neutral and nice. I was at a school recently, sitting in the reception area, and was struck by the Table of Values that towered over the welcome desk, like a kind of secular list of the Ten Commandments. The values were, apparently: no bullying; respect for all; care for the environment; and make sure you recycle what you can. There might have been others, but they did not register. I was struck by how these might not be the strongest foundations upon which to continue building Western civilisation.

The risk here is that, by trying to be vapidly inclusive, we fail to teach, love and lead with passion. Not all political opinions are equal; some don't command respect. This is true of religion, too. The danger of a heavy culture of relativistic respect is that we run the risk of promoting spirituality at the expense of faith. But an emphasis on spirituality at the expense of religion is like smoking without inhaling. You may need to discover the substance behind it all, even if you don't agree with it.

> Passion for the subject propels that subject, not the teacher, into the center of the learning circle …The passion with which [my mentor] lectured was not only for his subject but also for us to know his subject. He wanted us to meet and learn from the constant companions of his intellect and imagination, and he made those introductions in a way that was deeply integral to his own nature. Through this teacher and his lectures, some of us joined a powerful form of community marked by the ability to talk with the dead.[17]

Education is expensive, but, at its best, it is also expansive. It is 'womb to tomb', in the immortal words of Riff in *Westside Story*. The best educations are life- and world-transforming, for all, not just those lucky enough to receive such an education. If I might be permitted a brief reference to Christ Church here, I could say something about our Nobel Prize winners, or that Christ Church has produced thirteen British Prime Ministers, which is equal to the number produced by all other forty-five Oxford colleges put together, and more than any Cambridge college (indeed, two short of the total number for the University of Cambridge). But I prefer to talk about the founding of Oxfam, which was started in Oxford, with half the founders from Christ Church. Oxfam now works in eighty-six countries; or of the young student I met on my first day as Dean, working on a cure for Ebola; or that, through its charitable work, it supports a

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[17] Palmer, Parker J., 1998, pp. 120 & 137.

range of activities in the arts, public life, and social welfare, including, *Ovalhouse* (youth drama in Brixton), *IntoUniversity* (a project helping hundreds of very young children from deprived backgrounds in Blackbird Leys towards the opportunity of higher education) and the *Tower Poetry Prize* (which encourages young people to write publishable poetry).

Education, said Einstein (who by the way, also spent five years at Christ Church), is what is left when we have forgotten everything else. It is a telling phrase. It is not, I think, in the same league as Mark Twain saying that he never let schooling get in the way of his education; or Winston Churchill, for that matter, telling us the only time his education was interrupted was when he was at school. So what is Einstein saying? He is saying that what education produces, inspires, instils and forms is sedimentary and elementary, and that these are such valuable life-lessons that they cannot be forgotten.

John Dewey began his Laboratory School in 1896. Few have heard of Dewey—or, in fact, of any of our great educationalists in the twentieth century—few will remember the Hadow or Plowden Reports that argued for progressive education. But, invariably, they owe some debt to Dewey's work and insights. Dewey started with sixteen pupils in the Hyde Park area of Chicago. His aim was to create a cooperative school community in which mechanical and drilling methods of schooling were replaced by conversation, and through real-life projects. He wrote up his project in *Experience and Education*.[18]

Dewey was a bit of a polymath; a Professor of Philosophy at Michigan and Columbia, he did not confine his academic thinking to one field, but ranged freely through psychology, education, politics and other subjects. He believed that there was an integral relationship between education and democracy; how we live is through how we learn. In *How We Think*,[19] he draws a distinction between belief and reflective thought, and argued the latter was crucial to education. In other words, he did not believe that good education consisted of filling an empty pail, but rather lighting a fire. Just as Freire would later argue, Dewey saw education as something that was critical for social development, a mode of associated living; a conjoint communicated experience. Education was political, and critical. For Dewey, there was difference between knowledge and information. Pupils needed information, which was merely imparted, but

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[18] Dewey, John, *Experience and Education,* New York: Touchstone, (1938) 1997.
[19] Dewey, John, *How We Think*, London: DC Heath & Co., 1910.

knowledge was discovered, and so went much deeper. Dewey wanted his pupils to grown into critically-aware adults, who would develop habits of curiosity, testing, and challenging—all leading to a deepening of reflective thought. For Dewey, education built in a capacity to resist simply colluding with the status quo. Education was inherently progressive, questing and restless. It took risks.

I mention this at the end, because are sometimes surprised by how we learn. And sometimes to learn, we have to deliberately unlearn. A friend of mine recently described the experience of being taught to touch-type after more than thirty years as an academic. He said that, for three weeks after the course, his typing speed halved, and he almost ground to a halt. But he persisted, and a month later, could type twice as fast as before. His colleague, on the same course, did no persist, and still types in the same old way. The lesson of letting go, of unlearning and starting from scratch, was something he could not manage.

Over the past few years, I have benefitted enormously from another kind of unlearning, which is generally dubbed 'mindfulness', and have had the good fortune to be tutored by one of the country's leading experts. Mindfulness is hard to describe: attention to the breath, and letting go would be a partial description. But its great strength is the perspective it brings. It does not directly impute new knowledge. What it does is search out what is already there; it finds the things we often miss in peripheral vision. It connects the heart, head and body to our breath. It is able to remove most of the noise and clutter that distract us all the time from noticing, and learning, and to recentre individuals with a sense of numinous poise and peace. It is an education, and one that is increasingly helping us in our schools.

Now, lest this sound slightly New-Age, let me remind you of Robert Bellah's famous essay, 'To Kill and Survive or To Die and Become: The Active Life and Contemplative Life as Ways of Being Adult.[20] In this, Bellah draws on ancient Greek philosophy to show how the higher life—intellectual and spiritual—is fed by the contemplative. Bellah, like Erikson, does not favour one over the other, but following Aristotle, Plato and Socrates, he says that both are needed for the deep work of true, transformative and liberating education. Moreover, it is charity and wisdom that come through the contemplative, and lead to action. So the love of wisdom (*theoria*), which comes only through the contemplative life, is, for example, in Aristotle, contrasted with the active political life

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[20] In Erikson, Erik (ed.), *Adulthood*, 1978.

(*bios politikos*) and the practical life. But the polis — from which we get both the word 'people' and 'politics', or in other words, 'society' — according to Aristotle and Plato, must be rooted in the teaching and practice of contemplation. So, stopping, being still, contemplating: these things lead to love, charity, wisdom; these ideas were taken up by Augustine in his *City of God* many centuries later. As Bellah argues,[21] becoming educated, and becoming an adult, is about an active and contemplative life in which we take our place as citizens. To contemplate is to be have regard for the polis: those around us. As Jesus says, love of God and love of self or wisdom (contemplation) leads to love of neighbour (action). Contemplation deepens our education, and so, as Dewey argues, our life together as a people. Contemplation takes us into, then out of, ourselves. Just imagine what our schools and universities would be like, as liberated communities of love and learning, if we could learn to simply … breathe. As R.S. Thomas says, sometimes you just have to let go of what you know, and trust, and be still. Here, you can learn. His poem, *Apostrophe,* catches this:

> Improvisers, he thinks, making do with the gaps
> in their knowledge; thousands of years
> on the wrong track, consoling
> themselves with the view by the way.
> Their lives are an experiment in deception; they increase their
> lenses to keep a receding future in sight. In arid
> museums they deplore the sluggishness of their ascent by a bone
> ladder to where they took off
> into space-time. They are orbited
> about an unstable centre,
> punishing their resources to remain in flight.
> There are no journeys,
> I tell them. Love turns
> on its own axis, as do beauty and truth,
> and wise are they
>
> **who in every generation**
>
> remain still to assess their nearness
> to it by the magnitude of their shadow.

A vast amount goes on in our schools and universities. By far the most important is the daily matter of teaching, learning and research;

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[21] Bellah, Robert, *op cit.,* p. 64.

educating our future leaders; forming citizens of character and virtue; shaping lives that will reshape this world of ours: simple things. Joining the dots can be important in teaching and development, but it is only one task of education. The moral question of our age is not 'how much can we know', but 'what can we *do* with what we know?' For others; together; for the world. I know our resources are spread thinly and unevenly, and I have not even been able to touch upon how demanding teaching can be, and how, as Stefan Collini warns,[22] education is currently eroded and corroded by turning it into processes that form people into 'useful' economic units. It binds us, when it should free us.

So the vision is simple. Truth sets us free. Education enables us to become more fully human; it is a labour of love, and a vocation, in the service of love: love of knowledge; love of its power to transform lives and change communities; love of the liberty it brings, because truth sets us free. Education is a craft, a craft that brings us not only the love of a subject, with progression and advancement. But love is the lesson. As William Langland puts it in *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, (c. 1370):

> 'Counseilleth me, Kynde', quod I, 'what craft be beste to lerne?'
> 'Lerne to love,' quod Kynde, 'and leef alle othere.'

[22] Collini, Stefan, *What are Universities For?* London & New York: Penguin, 2012.

Truth in the natural sciences

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'What is truth?' has been a vital question throughout human history, at least from Plato to the present day. In the fourth century, Augustine of Hippo described humanity as 'the community of truth'.[23] Much later, Francis Bacon, the philosopher-politician who lived in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, and is regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern science, wrote,

> The enquiry of truth, which is the lovemaking or wooing of it; the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it; and the belief in truth, which is the enjoying of it – is the sovereign good of human nature.[24]

Such ideas are even more vital now in our era of post-truth and fake news.

The former master of the Dominican order, Timothy Radcliffe, has said that if humanity gives up on the idea of truth it begins to disintegrate; and perhaps we are seeing something of that happening now in our so-called 'post truth' era.[25] So it is very good and timely to be looking at the concept of truth in different disciplines and to see how they interact. My brief in this article is to focus on truth in science and also to reflect on how that relates to other disciplines, especially theology and philosophy.

My interest in these ideas goes right back to my teenage years when, as a student of A-level maths and physics, I was increasingly impressed by the power of science to unlock the mysteries of the universe. At the same time I was increasingly involved with my local church and its youth club and was reflecting on the Christian understanding of life and the universe and the claims it made about the nature of God and reality. One of the songs we used to sing in the youth club was entitled, 'Can it be true, the things they say of you?' referring to Christian claims about Jesus—his

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[23] Augustine of Hippo; quoted in Radcliffe, Timothy, *What is the point of being a Christian?* London; New York: Burns and Oates, 2006, p.6.
[24] Bacon, Francis, *Essays: Of Truth*, 1625.
[25] Radcliffe, Timothy, *loc. Cit.*

humanity and divinity. The question for me was how a scientific lens on reality related to a Christian theological one. It seemed clear that the question of truth was at the heart of this. Partly as a result of these musings, I ended up studying Physics and Philosophy at the University of Oxford, followed by a number of years teaching Physics in secondary schools. Many years later, in the 1990s, when I was a vicar in Luton, I completed a PhD which explored, through the lens of collective worship in schools, the question of how the truth of religious belief is understood in a public context, especially given the powerful prevailing view that religious faith is a private matter of opinion while scientific knowledge offers public truth which all can agree on.[26] My inaugural lecture as a Professorial Fellow at the University of Roehampton[27] was entitled 'Whatever happened to truth? Reflections on the concept truth in post post-modernity'.

My focus here is on the question of truth in the natural sciences. In 2012 I had a three-month sabbatical which I spent in Berkeley, California, studying at the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences and the Church Divinity School of the Pacific. My initial intention was simply to get up to date with the science and religion academic literature. What I came back with was somewhat different. It became increasingly obvious to me that there is a very powerful prevailing caricature of conflict between science and religion, despite a mountain of academic literature which tells a very different story. The vital task was to get this more informed and nuanced approach into the bloodstream of our churches, the education system and wider society. Since that time I have been privileged to help in leading, alongside Professors David Wilkinson and Tom McLeish, a major national project, 'Equipping Christian leadership in an age of science', which is based at Durham University and ably directed by the Revd Dr Kathryn Prichard.[28] I want to share with you some of the thinking behind the project, as this explains why the conflict caricature of the relationship between science and religion is less interesting, fruitful and truthful than an alternative approach.

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[26] Cheetham, Richard, *The nature and status of religious belief in contemporary Britain (with particular reference to the concept of truth) as reflected by acts of collective worship in a sample of Luton Schools since the 1988 Education Reform Act.* PhD thesis, King's College London, 1999.

[27] 4th November, 2015.

[28] *http://community.dur.ac.uk/christianleadership.science*

There is plenty of evidence to show how widespread the conflict narrative is. Jim Al-Khalili, Professor of Physics at the University of Surrey and President of the British Humanist Association has said, 'The difference between my beliefs and having a religious faith is that I am prepared to change my views in the light of new evidence'.[29] The author Dan Brown first introduced his fictional hero, the Harvard professor Robert Langdon, in the hugely popular book, *The Da Vinci Code*; in *Origin*, the latest book in the series, Langdon says,

> Countless gods filled countless gaps. And yet, over the centuries scientific knowledge increased. As the gaps in our understanding of the natural world gradually disappeared, our pantheon of gods began to shrink.[30]

Many people, when asked what comes to mind in terms of the relationship between science and religion, will come up with examples portrayed as straight conflicts such as the Galileo engagement with the Inquisition, and Thomas Huxley's debate in 1860 with the Bishop of Oxford over evolution, or more recently the new atheist writings of authors such as Richard Dawkins.[31] This is despite considerable scholarly work which portrays these episodes in a far more nuanced manner.

In our modern 21st-century context, it is often assumed that scientific method is the only way of discovering true and reliable knowledge about reality. In his book, *Science as Truth*, Professor Peter Atkins wrote,

> There can be no denying the proposition that science is the best procedure yet discovered for exposing fundamental truths about the world … it has shown itself to be of enormous power for the elucidation and control of nature. There would appear to be no bounds for its competence: it can comment on the origin of the end of the world, on the emergence, evolution and activities of life, and it can even presumably account of the activities and beliefs of

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[29] Al-Khalili, Jim; quoted in Peck, Tom, 'Jim Al-Khalili: I'm a cuddly atheist. I don't need to tell my mum her faith is stupid', *The Independent*, 23rd December 2012.

[30] Brown, Dan, *Origin.* London: Penguin, 2017, p.83.

[31] Dawkins, Richard, *The God Delusion.* London: Bantam Press, 2006.

sociologists. This claim of universal competence may seem arrogant, but it appears to be justified. No other mode of discovery has proved to be so effective, or to contribute so much towards the achievement of the aspirations of humanity.[32]

Recent research by Professor Berry Billingsley of Canterbury Christchurch University has suggested that students often emerge from their school science education with an uncritical approach to the conflict narrative between science and religion, and also with an attitude of "scientism": i.e., believing that science answers all the real questions and gives proper knowledge and everything else is private opinion.[33] As the caricature model of conflict between science and religion is alive, well and pervasive, we really do need to take a closer look at the nature of truth in science, and how this might relate to theological discourse. To do this we need to begin by asking two questions:

- How does science work?
- Why does science work?

Modern scientific method places great emphasis on empiricism and reason. Empiricism is what we learn via our senses and experience; reason is what we then logically deduce from such learning about the nature of 'what is'. This involves a constant cycle of observation, research, hypothesis- forming, experimental testing of the hypothesis, and a concluding theory, which is always only provisional until it has to be refined in the light of the next piece of evidence. So it is a virtuous circle, constantly sharpening our knowledge and deepening our understanding of the true nature of reality.

Famously, in the scientific method there is very little room for teleology, the explanation of something in terms of the purpose it serves. If we are to ask a simple question, 'Why is the kettle boiling?' a scientific answer will focus on the temperature of the water, the energy transfers, and the atmospheric pressure, rather than on any individual person's desire to have a cup of tea. To put crudely, science focusses on *how*

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[32] Atkins, Peter. (1995) *Science as Truth.* Durham: Sage, 1995.

[33] Billingsley, Berry, "Teaching and learning about epistemic insight", *School Science Review*, 2017, no.365, pp. 59-64.

questions rather than *why* questions. But does it really tell us all that we can know and give us every truth there is to be had? Is it really that simple?

Most scientists would describe themselves as critical realists. There is a real world beyond us; science is giving us an increasingly good understanding of the nature of that objective world. However, all we have direct access to is our own sense experiences and sense data. We then start building theories and making assumptions. The ontological status of theoretical entities such as electrons, other fundamental particles, dark energy, the multiverse, etc., is, at best, provisional, given the fact that scientific theories change over time. Some philosophers of science go so far as to claim that scientific theories are simply giant calculating and predicting devices relating to our sense data: a position known as instrumentalism. Others take a reductionist approach which argues that ultimately there is nothing but the material world and, for example, music is essentially composed of sound waves and our associated experience when those soundwaves are translated into electrical signals in our brains. In this reductionist view the human experience of love is ultimately accountable via evolutionary psychology and neuroscience. Any further meaning which we give to it is simply a construct of the human mind.

I suggest that we need a much richer narrative and understanding of reality. The subtitle of *Beyond Matter,* by the philosopher Roger Trigg, is, *Why Science needs Metaphysics*.[34] Scientific naturalism defines reality as that which is within the grasp of scientific method, thereby proscribing both metaphysics and theology. It collapses ontology—the nature of being—into a particular epistemology: an approach which is in itself a metaphysical position beyond the remit of science. Science is an extraordinarily powerful and effective way of exploring the universe, but its very method means that it can only tell us certain things about the nature of reality.

Peter Medawar asks what science can and, crucially, cannot tell us about reality.[35] There are some fundamental questions that we ask as human beings. First, the ontological question, why is there anything at all:

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[34] Trigg, Roger, *Beyond Matter – Why Science needs Metaphysics*. West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2017.

[35] Medawar, Peter, *The Limits of Science*. Oxford: OUP, 1985.

the mystery of being. Secondly, the epistemological question of what and how we can know: the mystery of knowing; and, thirdly, the ethical question of how we should live and what makes a good life: the mystery of living. For a full account of reality we need multiple perspectives which include but also take us beyond the purely scientific approach. So, for example, if we wish to know what it means to be human then, of course, we need the knowledge that comes from evolutionary psychology, neuroscience, biology, chemistry, physics, sociology, anthropology and all scientific disciplines. But I suggest we also need the insights which come from art, music and literature, together with those from philosophy and theology.

Such an approach was mooted in the 1950s by the mathematical physicist Charles Coulson.[36] The challenge, then, is to give an account of how these multiple perspectives engage with one another. The project I help to lead, 'Equipping Christian leaders in an age of science', seeks to provide a context in which such conversations between different disciplines can occur in a creative way. Our experience has been that these are richly productive all round.

In the end, the question of truth and the nature of the ultimate reality is central to these conversations. Theology and science are both truth-seeking modes of discourse. In my teenage years, as I wrestled with questions of science and religion, I came to the conclusion that, in the end, you have to be either a thoroughgoing materialist or a theist of some kind. The former view argues that ultimately there is only matter, stuff—elementary particles and energy—and human beings are rather complicated arrangements of this stuff. Any meaning that we choose adopt is essentially a creation of the human imagination, so we really are whistling in the dark in a cold and meaningless universe. A theistic approach suggests that such things as love, goodness, beauty, 'being' itself, inhere in God, who is not simply an overlarge entity hanging around in some corner of the universe, but rather the source of all being and truth.

In summary, science undoubtedly gives us vital knowledge about the nature of reality. It leads us closer and closer to a true understanding of the cosmos. But its very method means it does not answer every

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[36] Coulson, Charles, *Science and Christian Belief.* Oxford: OUP, 1955.

meaningful question about reality. For a richer conversation we need dialogue with other disciplines: the very thing that should be happening in a university. Harvard has as its motto the single word, *Veritas* (truth). The vision statement of the University of Roehampton says,

> We are engaged in the pursuit of truth through reason, research and debate, based on freedom of thought and expression.

This pursuit of truth is vital not only in science, but in every sphere.

Truth in the disciplines: understandings of truth through literature

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It is an old question, this conundrum 'What is Truth?' and, amidst the cacophony of voices in our postmodern, fractured, global world, an increasingly complex one. An interdisciplinary conversation like this is structured on the assumption that there are many ways to answer it. Different disciplines approach truth in diverse ways: science, linguistics, philosophy, theology, literature—each has its own approach, its particular perspective, a distinctive angle. The shared assumption, then, is that truth is a question of genre.

Recently, a colleague sent me a lovely essay by poet-priest, Mark Oakley, in honour of the poet David Scott (an alumnus of St Chad's College, Durham, where I am Principal). In exploring the way in which poetry, and literature in general, is true, Oakley says this:

> If I said to you now 'Here is the News' you would probably sit up and expect to hear the facts of the day, events that have occurred and some commentary on them. But if instead I said 'Once upon a time' you would probably be equally expectant for truth but you'd tune in differently and be ready to receive it in a different form, story, where meaning is communicated without summarising it.

In other words, when we are asking questions about what truth is, it all depends on what kind of truth we are looking for. Is it the evidenced-based truth of science, the strict kind of logical truth of certain branches of philosophy, the truth of a good story? How we find what we are looking for is determined by what lies behind our question, how we are listening, what we are searching for: are we looking for meaning, or coherence, or some a kind of resonance—or possibly even God? The truth we find depends, as Oakley says, on how we are tuning in.

Not only do we live in an age in which it is taken for granted that truth is plural and multifaceted, we live with an anxious scepticism about

the very possibility of truth. Postmodernism has challenged our innocence; fake news, our trust. This, however, does not mean we have stopped looking. Amidst all the lies, cynicism, and relativism, there is still, I think, a sharp longing for what is true, what can be trusted, and truth is now often framed as a kind of integrity. Does this statement, this person ring true? Does this story add up, does it cohere and can we trust ourselves to it?

This involves much more than the narcissistic 'does this feel right to me?' and calls for the hard work of learning to read, being trained to listen for truth so that we recognise this sense of 'ringing true'. It calls for the archaic-sounding, but ever vital, discipline of discernment.

There is an old story about a young man who wanted to learn to learn more about jade. His friend recommended a jade master, so the man signed up for a series of ten lessons. In his first lesson, the master gave him a piece of jade and then left him alone in the room. The young man sat there holding the green stone, wondering when his teacher would come back and the lesson would start. Half an hour later, the expert returned and announced the end of the lesson, and that he would see him at the same time the following week. A little perplexed, the young man nevertheless returned the following week, only for the same thing to happen. This went on for the next few weeks and just as he was beginning to feel cheated, he bumped into the friend who had recommended the jade master, and complained about his lack of instruction: 'All he does is give me a piece of jade to hold for half an hour and he leaves the room. And the worst of it is that last week he gave me some green stone that wasn't even jade!'

My discipline is not jade, but Literature, but literary critics[37] have been making a similar point—a familiar argument framed in a new context—that the kind of slow reading and careful paying attention to language, the 'serious noticing' demanded by the study of literature (and as taught by the jade master) is more important than ever in our post-truth age.

I have been invited to discuss how we might approach truth in the discipline of Literature and, for the purposes of this conversation, I would

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[37] See, for example, Christopher Schaberg, *The Work of Literature in an Age of Post-Truth* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), or James Wood's argument for 'serious reading' in *The Nearest Thing to Life*, Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2015.

like to draw on two very different writers who explore and exemplify ways in which literature helps us to approach truth through this kind of invitation to serious noticing and attentiveness.

The first is the poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose striking, original poetry was stylistically far ahead of its time. He was a writer in the Victorian era, published between 1876 and 1889, but his idiom is much more modern than his dates suggest. Hopkins was not a prolific writer but, unlike some who wrote volumes, there is no dross. There is a purity, a density about Hopkins' poetry, a tautness, economy and compressedness that is the hallmark of his startlingly vivid language.

Hopkins grew up an Anglican, became a Catholic and then served for much of his adult life as a Jesuit priest. Always conflicted as a poet-priest, he was not really sure he should be writing poetry at all. This reticence was, I believe, one of reasons for the quality and intensity of his work: he wrote only if he could not help it and, when he did write, it was because he felt this was the best way he could express his priesthood: his vocation of bringing people to God. For Hopkins, then, poetry was very clearly and very directly about truth. It had the capacity to reveal an aspect of the Truth of God and God's creation, and Hopkins came to see his poetry as integral to his priestly vocation.

Hopkins developed three principles which undergirded his quest to express truth in poetry. They help us to see what he was trying to do in his poems and offer an illuminating perspective on our theme. The first principle Hopkins wrote by he called Vital Beauty. If God is Prime Mover, God is expressed in energy—sacramental energy—seen in the irrepressible movement of what is dynamic and changing and constantly shifting. This vitality applied to colour, too, so Hopkins delighted in abrupt mixtures of light and shade, gradations of colour, contrast, movement that expressed the truth of God expressed as Prime Mover. This is probably best exemplified in his well-known poem, *Pied Beauty*:

> Glory be to God for dappled things—
> For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
> For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
> Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
> Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;

And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
      Praise him

If you can help people see this sacramental energy in nature, Hopkins believed—the dappling, the stippling, the couple-colouring brindling; or, as in another much-loved poem, if you can capture the movement of a windhover in flight and then diving to catch its prey, or the dancing of the light in its wings—then you give people a glimpse of, maybe even an experience of, God, the God from whom all this Vital Beauty is refracted. This is what Hopkins saw himself doing as priestly poet.

Secondly, Hopkins wanted to convey a fresh, unmediated vision, to challenge and stimulate our capacity to see what is actually there, not merely our jaded perception of it. He was deeply influenced by the art critic John Ruskin's notion of the 'innocent eye'. This refers to that purity and innocence of perception that involves us looking, as a very young child looks, seeing as if for the very first time, attentively open to what is actually there, unencumbered by what it will soon learn to *expect* might be there.

I have never forgotten an art class at school in which we were asked to draw, from memory, a lamp-post. We were surprised just how difficult that proved to be. After all, we had all seen countless lamp-posts. But had we ever really looked at one? Did we really know what a lamp-post looked like? As we grow up and get used to how the world looks, we accumulate a kind of accretion of perception that means we don't really look at things any more: we rely on a kind of cliché of what we expect is there. For Hopkins, this clouded seeing is a kind of sin, a failure of true, clear perception. Poetry's job is to re-clarify and refocus our vision, so that we can look again and see as if for the first time: to look again at the world around us with the freshness of Eden. Hopkins is showing us the way literary imagination gives us access to truth, how it allows us to see the world as it was meant to be, and through this, to see God. His notion of

sin contained the sense that sin was a kind of untruth, what he called 'wrong particularity': things were spoiled, soiled by being muddied, losing the clarity, of who or what they were, blurred, slurred, stained. If only they could be brought back into sharp focus, to right seeing, their relationship to God would be restored.

Connected to this is a third kind of truth that Hopkins was at pains to help people see. Influenced by the medieval philosopher, Duns Scotus, Hopkins developed his conception of *haecceitas*, the 'thisness' of things: the individual particularity intrinsic to seeing each thing as absolutely itself. Unlike Aquinas, who believed that the nature of things was best understood if you understood the type, the category, the universal pattern, Duns Scotus argued that it was by perceiving the particular, individual, intrinsic nature of something—its specificity—that that one could come to an understanding of truth. Scotus believed that this was immediately, intuitively knowable. From this, Hopkins developed his notion of 'inscape': the *thisness* that makes something or someone what it/she/he is, its quintessential, original God-given self.

Hopkins tried to convey through his poetry a sense of the 'overflow of presence': the abundance of being and expression when something is so utterly itself in all its non-negotiable immediacy, that one cannot help seeing it as it really is, rather than through the smudged, distorting lens of sin. This, for Hopkins, is Truth—potentially saving, redemptive truth—and, for him, poetry was its messenger, a kind of priest carrying people to the Truth of God, restoring their lost innocence from before the Fall.

This cluster of ideas is probably best embodied in his delightful poem *Spring*, in which he captures the thisness, the vital beauty, the freshness of the season, both expressing and enacting the purifying "rinse and wring" of a bracing, almost painful sense of clarity. What we see and what we hear through this tumbling freshness of words and sounds and rhythms and images clears the jaded palate of the imagination and gives us a taste of Eden.

> Nothing is so beautiful as spring—
> When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;
> Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
> Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
> The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;

The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.

What is all this juice and all this joy?
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning

In Eden garden.—Have, get, before it cloy,
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.

The lament of the final stanza is poignant in its almost *carpe diem* desperation. The loss of innocence is all but inevitable; the cloying, clouding, souring that come with the distortions of worldliness are here resisted by a priest, a poem, doing their utmost to preserve the innocent eye from being clouded and distanced from the truth and sinking into a life without vitality, a pale distortion of God's Truth, a kind of death—the ultimate untruth.

Also desperate to save people from a distorted understanding of truth, our second writer could not, in many ways, be more different from Hopkins. D. H. Lawrence certainly had a much more complicated relationship to Christian truth, and unlike Hopkins, was a prolific writer, who did not publish only finely-crafted works of economic intensity (although the best of Lawrence's work is brilliant).

Lawrence was brought up a Congregationalist and was deeply shaped by this: you can see it in the rhythms of his language as well as the preoccupation of his themes. Although a very different writer in terms of style and belief from Hopkins, Lawrence saw his writing, with just as much intensity, as a way of connecting people with a life-giving truth. There is a much less coherent, easily distillable sense through the body of his work of what precisely that truth is—and in any case, Lawrence's own views changed throughout his relatively short life—but it is not hard to detect his understanding of what truth was *not*.

Lawrence felt deeply that the Enlightenment privileging of Consciousness over Being ('I think therefore I am') was very destructive.

One of the big preoccupations of all his work was how to heal the wound that this had opened up in the human psyche and in our culture. Lawrence laid some of the blame for this on an over-spiritualised, intellectualised Christianity that inculcated a dualism that was suspicious of the flesh and fundamentally disconnected from nature. This led to alienation from the natural world, from the self, and a catastrophic breakdown of the relationship between the sexes. Lawrence believed that, through his writing, he could reconnect people with a kind of preconscious sensibility and way of knowing, and could restore people to a kind of original, instinctive truth—a recovery of the *thisness* of being or inscape, if you like. He believed he had an answer to the longing, the 'want' of today. He wrote in 1913 in a letter to Edward Garnett, his publisher:

> I think, do you know, I have inside me a sort of answer to the *want* of today: to the real, deep want of the English people, not to just what they fancy they want.[38]

Like Hopkins, but in a very different way, Lawrence saw his writing as a way of bringing people back into touch with the deep truth of existence and meaning.

Lawrence's writing can be difficult, deliberately so. In his greatest work, he is trying to articulate and allow us to experience a preconscious, pre-articulate state of being which is of course, by very definition, impossible. How do you express, capture, articulate, the experience of pre-rational ontology? The literary critic Michael Bell, in his brilliant book on Lawrence,[39] describes how Lawrence uses language as an impressionistic painter uses paint, and, like Cezanne, in trying to dissolve analytical order in his style, attempts to create for us a pre-dualist world through language. Lawrence's aim is to evoke primitive experience, to recapture something of that primal capacity, largely lost to modernity, to be, in Ernst Cassirer's famous phrase, 'constantly aflame with divinity'. In this way, Lawrence explores the possibility of epiphany, revelation, gift and innocence, waking his readers out of the reductive, materialist, scientific, mechanistic distortion of truth that he believed was choking the

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[38] *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, vol. 1, 1901-13* (ed. James T. Boulton), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 511.

[39] Michael Bell, *Language and Being,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

vitality out of the English psyche. As a miner's son, Lawrence had first-hand experience of the impact of technology and mechanisation on communities and on the natural world around them. He saw the dominant ideology of scientific rationalism as facilitating imaginative as well as political and economic mastery and control, intent on vanquishing the mystery of the unknown. Lawrence, vehemently opposed to this, believed that the deepest truth lay in the mystery beyond the light of what we can know merely rationally. It was a kind of reductive rationalism that Lawrence so brilliantly challenged in the best of his fiction.

Michael Bell offers us an illuminating exposition of how Lawrence, in his two great novels, *The Rainbow (1915)* and *Women in Love* (1920), is deliberately dislocating the all too familiar forms of a sophisticated modern syntax, systematically refusing the causal and Cartesian premises built in to the very convention of language, and in so doing, exploring a different, alternative and pre-conscious way of being. He is trying to offer us a glimpse into a pre-self-conscious sensibility. This is the heart of what is going on in the huge, inarticulate cosmic battles between Tom and Anna in *The Rainbow*, or, more calmly, as Lawrence describes someone ironing, or comforting a small child in the half-light of the hay barn when her mother is giving birth.

Lawrence, then, is exploring through his writing a (rather grand) metaphysical vision grounded in the everyday quality of experience, stories of men and women, parents and children, in love and communities and families. He is using and subverting modern language to disrupt what he sees as our fatal tendency to overanalyse rather than just experience instinctively, and he tries, as perhaps few other writers have tried, to capture that which is pre-individual, 'not the old stable ego of character'.[40]

D. H. Lawrence is not really much in fashion these days. He is certainly a flawed writer, but he is also an important one and, given the scale of what he was trying to achieve, a certain failure was inevitable. But his best works are rather great, even heroic kinds of failures. In many ways, they are part of a theological quest. Certainly, they have at their centre questions of truth and ultimate meaning and a belief that literature

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[40] *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, vol. 2, 1913-16,*(ed. James T. Boulton), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 732.

can help us grasp and be grasped by a lived, ontological kind of truth that Lawrence believed was desperately needed in his time.

By way of a post-script, I would like to introduce a third writer, the philosopher theologian David Bentley Hart, not a literary figure at all, but a writer whose fiercely-argued philosophical treatise[41] makes not only a compelling case for God, but also for how a (literary) imagination gives us access to the truth of God. Much of what he says echoes the kind of quest for truth we have seen in the work of G. M. Hopkins and D. H. Lawrence.

Like Hopkins and Lawrence, Bentley Hart argues for recovery of our primal vision: 'wisdom is the recovery of innocence at the far end of experience; it is the ability to see again what most of us have forgotten how to see'.[42] He talks of the way small children experience wonder in a "constant, innocent and luminous way … still trustingly open to the sheer inexplicable givenness of the world … its perfect immediacy ... [without the] inclination to translate into any objective concept', and laments, as do Hopkins and Lawrence, the way 'we've lost our sense of the intimate otherness of things; we've learned to banish delight.[43]

Like Lawrence (and of course many writers, artists and mystics), Bentley Hart wants to remind us that

> what is most mysterious and most exalted is also that which, strangely enough, turns out to be most ordinary and nearest to hand, and that what is most glorious in its transcendence is also that which is humblest in its wonderful immediacy[44]

He argues that the beginning of truth lies in the experience of wonder.[45] This is a very different kind of truth from scientific, evidence-based truth: it accepts that there is wisdom, truth, beyond the rational, 'in the experience of wonder', in that 'abiding amazement that lies just below the surface of conscious thought and that only in very rare instances breaks through into ordinary awareness'.[46]

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[41] David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness and Bliss*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

[42] *Op cit.*, p. 10.

[43] *Op. cit*, p. 90.

[44] *Op. cit.*, p. 84.

[45] *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

[46] *Loc. cit.*

In trying to get people to see truly, both Hopkins and Lawrence experimented with disrupting the language: Hopkins in strange new rhythms, striking juxtapositions, images and metaphors that sometimes bordered on the bizarre; Lawrence with the kind of dismantling of syntax in his Cezanne-like quest to express the inscape (or, as he put it, the 'appleyness') of an apple,[47] a person, an experience. Bentley Hart seems to be pointing to something similar in his suggestion of the way defamiliarisation, 'this rare and fleeting experience of being's strangeness within its very familiarity', can be 'a genuine, if tantalisingly brief, glimpse into an inexhaustibly profound truth about reality'.[48] It is recognition of the world's absolute contingency.[49]

It is through this kind of understanding—the deepening of insight that resists lazy cliché and the distortions of fake truth, an understanding of truth honed in the practice of attentiveness and serious noticing—that literature clarifies our capacity to see truly, and to glimpse what is true.

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[47] D. H. Lawrence, 'Introduction to These Paintings' in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence, 1936*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978, p. 579.

[48] *Op. cit.*, p. 90

[49] *Loc. Cit.*

What is truth in linguistics?

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Introduction

Before I attempt to answer the question in the title, let me clarify what I mean by the two key terms, *truth* and *linguistics*. I begin with the latter, because it is in the context of the discipline that we need to understand the former.

There are some common misconceptions about linguistics. For example, the discipline is variously assumed to be the study of foreign languages; etymology; the history of English; translation; or grammar.[50] There is an element of truth in each of these: multilingualism, grammatical analysis, language learning, and the like, all come within the scope of the discipline, but none is its defining object of study. Virtually all definitions given by those within the discipline are much less specific. A widely-quoted definition of linguistics is 'the scientific study of language', by which is meant 'its investigation by means of controlled and empirically verifiable observations and with reference to some general theory of language-structure.[51] (Although some would omit 'structure'.)

Notwithstanding this simple definition, linguistics has blurred boundaries. Within a number of other disciplines, too, although language is not the primary focus, it is an object of study, for example: anthropology, sociology, philosophy, literature, jurisprudence, psychology, education, communication studies, media studies, and more. Furthermore, there are numerous sub-disciplines of linguistics, such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and applied, anthropological, historical, and comparative linguistics, and the distinction between them is often contested by linguists themselves. For the purposes of this paper, however, it is enough to understand linguistics in its widest sense, as the scientific study of human interaction by means of language.

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[50] This itself is a term which is sometimes wrongly understood, as 'correct usage' and/or 'good style'.
[51] Lyons, J., *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 1.

If this is the field of study, then, what constitutes truth within it? Lyons' definition, quoted above, is a useful starting-point. What is accepted as 'true' in linguistics must arise from systematic observation; i.e., empirical data are collected and analysed in the light of, and where relevant to modify, a particular theory about language. Furthermore, such data must be, to all intents and purposes, sufficiently comprehensive to allow us to assume that further data will not controvert them. This, however, is only part of the answer. The clear implication in the title question is that any 'truth' must not only be empirically substantiated: it must also provide insight into a significant aspect of human interaction by means of language. It must, in other words, be both *valid* and *important*. This is the basis of the discussion that follows. We need not concern ourselves here with empirical facts that are trivial, nor with theoretical answers to a significant question that are empirically unverifiable.

On this basis, we can rephrase 'What is truth in linguistics?' as two related but distinct questions. The first concerns the empirical question of validity:

> Does the discipline of linguistics reveal empirically incontrovertible truths?

The second addresses the issue of importance, because the aim of this seminar is to consider disciplinary perspectives on faith (specifically, but not necessarily only, Christian faith):

> Can linguistic truths contribute to a theological understanding of human beings and their world?

These two questions are addressed in turn below.

Does linguistics reveal empirically incontrovertible truths?

My simple answer to this question is no, on two major grounds. One is that no facts about language are, in the present state of linguistic scholarship and at least for the foreseeable future, incontrovertible. Human language in general can be studied only in the forms in which it actually occurs. Any postulated truth about the human capacity to

interact can be drawn only from very many observed instances of people using a given language for that purpose. To give a simple instance, it has been claimed by some scholars that it is fundamental to (all) human language to distinguish between objects and processes (as expressed in English, for example, in nouns and verbs, respectively). This claim can be verified only on the basis of data from a large number of very different languages: English, Chinese, Arabic, Tibetan, Malay, and so on. There are, however, hundreds (perhaps thousands) of languages that have not been empirically described and analysed. There is always the possibility that further observed usages may invalidate that 'truth'. (The same may be said of all disciplines, but that is beyond the scope of this paper and, indeed, of my expertise.) Nonetheless, is it not at least conceivable that, at some point in the distant future, every usage in every language on earth may have been systematically observed and analysed? Many, many more years of research may eventually reach the universal data-saturation point. On these grounds, the first answer to the title question is perhaps better stated as, 'not yet'.

There is, however, a more fundamental epistemological problem. Like all disciplines in the human sciences and humanities, linguistics is an attempt by us humans to understand ourselves and to communicate that understanding to others. There is no standpoint outside the object of study (i.e., human beings and their behaviour) from which any potential truth can be verified as universally valid and therefore incontrovertible. Specifically, linguists have no alternative to using a particular language (English, Russian, Navajo, etc.) for the purposes of describing and analysing language. There is no language-independent medium in which we can represent the truths we discover. It has been argued that the language we use determines how we think, or, in a less absolute sense, predisposes us to think in certain ways.[52] To oversimplify somewhat, two linguists with different native languages will almost inevitably interpret the same linguistic data differently.

I offer one example, of many I have met, of the effect of this 'linguistic determinism' (as it is called). Some years ago, a colleague and

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[52] This is the so-called 'Sapir-Whorf hypothesis': for a recent discussion, see Hussein, B., 'The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis Today', *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 2/3, 2012, pp. 642-646.

I conducted research into Burarra, an Australian Aboriginal language.[53] One of many intriguing features of this language is its expression of time through the tenses of the verb. Along with the present (roughly, 'what is now happening'), we identified two tenses which treat past time in a discontinuous way (e.g., one apparently expresses simultaneously 'what happened a moment and/or some time ago'; the other, 'what is happening now' and/or 'happened fairly recently'). To us English-speaking researchers, with our strongly linear view of time (present → fairly recent past→immediate-past→distant past), it was almost impossible to grasp the Burarra approach, which seemed to us to leapfrog over adjacent times. The future tense was equally problematic. The English future tense is usually deterministic or predictive ('this will definitely, or is likely to, happen'); in Burarra it seems to be merely a means of expressing what has not yet happened, with no presumption that it will happen. It seemed to be used to refer indifferently to both what the speaker intends or hopes to do, and what could be hypothetically conceived of. Such widely different perspectives on time and tense caused practical communication difficulties, for example, in making an appointment to meet a language informant the following morning. But even if we make the enormous assumption that we had more or less accurately interpreted the Burarra tense system, describing it in English inevitably distorts it, as my poor attempts above demonstrate. It would be instructive to read a Chinese linguist's description of Burarra tenses: Mandarin has a very different tense system from those of both English and Burarra.

In linguistics, therefore, *validity* of any 'truth' is always and inevitably provisional. Equally contingent is the *importance* of a 'truth'. In linguistics (as, indeed, in any discipline) what is considered important depends on the particular historical, social, political (etc.) context. What is a significant question in one time and place may later, or in another place, not even be considered worth raising. Even if the question remains important, changed circumstances may demand different answers to it.

Let me examine in a little detail one specific illustration from the history of linguistics. It was in early nineteenth-century Europe that the empirical, systematic study of language really began to establish itself as

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[53] Garner, M., and Glasgow, K., 'Clause-level tagmemes of Burarra', *Papers in Australian Linguistics*, 12 (1980), pp. 37-82.

an independent discipline. Throughout the preceding couple of centuries the ever-widening movement of European explorers, traders, and missionaries had made scholars aware of the existence of a formerly unimaginable variety of exotic cultures and languages. They wondered where this enormous diversity came from, and what it contributed to understanding humanity. Why is there such linguistic diversity in the world?[54] Is there any relationship between different languages?

There was a political edge to these questions, too. The prevailing intellectual-aesthetic ethos of the age was Romanticism, which, in reaction to the orderliness and regularity of the Enlightenment, explored the powerful, mystical depths of human experience, imagination, and emotion that cannot be systematised, measured, or controlled. Romanticism delighted in and sought meaning in the marginal, the quaint, and the poetic. Today, Romanticism is typically associated with the arts, but it was also influential in other fields of endeavour, not least political philosophy. Sub-communities that had previously been ignored or seen as aberrant were apotheosised on account of their 'originality' (in both senses); their cultures and non-standard language varieties were collected and eagerly studied. At the same time, scholars and artists became fascinated by deep, spiritual-cultural affinities that they sensed underlying the observable differences and uniting disparate communities into 'a people'. What are the links between culture and identity? The answer to this question gave considerable impetus to movements towards national identity, with tumultuous political outcomes, such as the unification of a plethora of city-states into the nation-states of Germany and Italy. Linguists, too, played their part, by formulating standard forms of the 'national languages', transcending regional varieties to create a currency of national communication and hence identity.[55]

The motivation for the contemporary linguistic questions, and the shape of the answers to them, arose also within an intellectual context in which Romanticism fused with concurrent developments in the natural

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[54] This was not a new intellectual concern, however, as the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 attests.

[55] See Milroy, J., & Milroy, L. (rev. edn.) *Authority in Language: Investigating Language Prescription and Standardisation*. Routledge, London, 1992; Garner, M, 'Language rules and language ecology' *Language Sciences,* 41 (2014), pp 111-121.

sciences. If the search for identity was impelled by the former, the philosophical model that language scholars adopted was shaped by enormous advances in contemporary evolutionary biology. The languages of the Old World had long been studied and assumed to have a fixed form, as described in magisterial grammars, from which any deviation was an error. Now, they were reconceived of as organic and evolving. Data were gathered from historical manuscripts and rural dialects, which were supposedly older and more original forms of the language,[56] mirroring the biologists' search for primitive life-forms. Such empirical data enabled scholars to formulate language change as an orderly, rule-governed process.[57] This historical framework provided an explanation for the puzzle of the multiplicity of languages, which mirrored that provided by evolutionary biology for the existence of distinct species.[58] Initially, the speakers of a proto-language had existed as a single tribal group. Over time, environmental and/or social changes drove them to spread out from their homeland and settle in separate, often isolated, regions. Socio-cultural practices developed variously in each region, and the means by which the community interacted changed accordingly. Over time, it was hypothesised, these different tribal versions became mutually unintelligible; in other words, different languages. The language, in its contemporary form, was said (following the biological metaphor) to have to have 'descended' from the earlier (or proto-) language.[59] Such conclusions were interpreted as evidence of 'genetic' relationships between groups of languages. Language 'families' were constructed, and the relationships within each family depicted in 'family trees'. For example, the Germanic family comprises English, German, Swedish, etc., which are all seen as descendants of Proto-Germanic. Furthermore, by working backwards from the contemporary forms of a language, linguists were even able to describe what must have been its earlier forms, even though they had not been written down.

Had language scholars, therefore, established truths about language? They had, in the sense that what were regarded at the time as

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[56] This was the impetus for the collection and publication of Germanic fairy-tales by the brothers Grimm.

[57] Although the claim that language is rule-governed is contestable (see below,)

[58] See, for example, Morris, D. *The Naked Ape*, London: Grafton, 1977.

[59] An example was Verner's Law (1875), which showed how voiced fricatives in modern German had systematically evolved from their voiceless equivalents in Proto-Germanic.

important linguistic questions had been empirically answered. But these truths were contingent and therefore not incontrovertible. Evolutionary biology had provided a useful tool, but (although this was largely overlooked), it was only an explanatory metaphor. To say that a language has descended from a proto-language is to use 'descend' metaphorically: it is demonstrably very different from saying that a living organism has descended from its forebears. A different conceptual framework for explaining historical variation—for example, that of human learning, rather than genetics—would give rise to a rather different form of these truths. For example, an alternative view is that children learn (rather than inherit) their language from the previous generation. Learning involves adaptation, and not simply faithful repetition; change is inevitable. Change, however, is now seen as a social and social-psychological phenomenon: the newer form of the language is not, in this view, descended from, but modelled on, the earlier form, and influenced by contextual factors. In summary, those nineteenth-century linguists set out to answer what were then important questions, and the truths they propagated were determined by contemporary intellectual frameworks.

In the course of the twentieth century, questions about the history and evolution of languages moved into the background as different questions assumed centre stage. It was not simply that the earlier questions were seen as having been answered: they were no longer seen as central to understanding language itself. 'How do languages change over time?' was superseded by '*Why* do languages change?' Once this question was posed, linguists began to focus on change itself, and variability was found to be more than merely historical. For example, English has numerous regional variations, such as dialects and accents. It also displays variation according to the socio-economic status, gender, and age of the users; the nature of the immediate setting (such as formal and informal); the purpose of the communication (such as persuading *versus* enquiring); the medium (speech *versus* writing), and so on. The 'why' question initiated a vast research endeavour into variability, and from that a number of linguistic sub-disciplines, such as sociolinguistics, pragmatics, dialectology—and, indeed, historical linguistics.

This is a brief illustration of why I regard truth in linguistics as not universal and incontrovertible, but inevitably temporal and contingent. What is accepted as a truth at any point in time may be well validated by

empirical research, but research is both motivated and limited by the theoretical framework. With this reservation in mind, let us turn to the second question.

Can linguistic truths contribute to a theological understanding of human beings and their world?

My answer is an unequivocal yes, provided we accept that what is regarded as important to an understanding of faith is itself contextually dependent. I shall attempt to illustrate and justify that answer with one example, derived from a relatively new theoretical perspective. It is a perspective that is by no means accepted across the discipline, as it challenges a view of language that has been long accepted as fundamental both within and outside the discipline. Nonetheless, it seems to a number of linguists, of whom I am one, to answer important questions about language and interpersonal communication, and has provided the impetus to promising new areas of empirical research. It is a theory of the essential nature of language, but, since communication is a highly complex process, it draws on and can contribute to a number of other disciplines. My focus here is on its implications for Christian faith.

It has long been assumed by scholars to be axiomatic that human language is governed by rules. Work in the discipline, particularly in its theoretical and descriptive aspects, has focussed on discovering the nature and form of these rules: in general terms, the 'grammar'. Rules are usually described in relation to particular languages (Russian, English, French, etc.), although some scholars seek to find a grammar that underlies all languages.[60] If we assume that language is rule-governed, we must also assume that the speakers of any given language must know the rules. What 'know' means here is a subject of fertile debate. It does not, of course, imply that even very well-educated speakers can articulate the rules of their native languages. (By contrast, many people who have learned a foreign language *can* state its rules explicitly, since language courses typically focus on teaching the grammar.)

A major aim of linguistics is seen as formulating the rules of language(s), and to explore a range of questions arising from them, often

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[60] See, for example, Mairal, R., & Gil, J (eds.) *Linguistic Universals*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

in collaboration with other disciplines. To give two of many possible examples,

> How does a child acquire the rules of its native language?
> What are the processes by which internal knowledge of rules is translated into actual speech?

Arising from contemporary interest in variation within a language, the notion of rules has been extended. In any given context, a range of equally grammatical utterances is possible, but only some are appropriate in that context. What are the sociolinguistic 'rules' that govern speakers' choices between grammatical alternatives?

The notion that rules are fundamental to language has led to a strong focus on the individual language-user: on what goes on in my head and in yours. A few in the discipline, however, are beginning to challenge this assumption, on the grounds that the concept of language as fundamentally rule-governed raises considerable difficulties. A different, and much less problematic, view is that language is socially learned behaviour, in other words, language is a complex of communicative habits. In this view, a child acquiring its home language is not unconsciously learning grammar rules, but adopting and adapting the patterns of behaviour of the community in which it grows up. Language develops as the child learns the accepted norms of behaviour, including communicative behaviour, within the family and the wider community. This reorientation from rules to patterns represents a sea-change in perspective.

There is no time here to explore the justifications, both theoretical and empirical, for this alternative provisional truth.[61] Let us allow it to stand *pro tem*, and consider what it may have to say that is relevant to faith. The first point is that there is a shift of focus from any individual's knowledge to the behaviour of the community of language-users. Language is absolutely fundamental to what makes us human: a person who is unable to communicate, in whatever form, with others will not develop fully as a human being. Each individual, conceived of in terms of personhood and mind, is largely a communal construction. This is not to

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[61] For an extended discussion, see Garner, Mark, *Language: An Ecological View*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004, pp. 62−78.

deny the indubitable characteristics of each individual—each of us, for example, has a distinctive way of using language—but to see these characteristics as minor variations within an overarching pattern of norms of usage. If the variation at any stage is too great, however, communication becomes difficult or even impossible, and the individual is no longer able to function fully as a member of the community. In language, as in every facet of life, we are creations of our community.

To see language as communal in this way emphasises that we are all critically interdependent, which gives a powerful motivation for working to contribute to the common good. This interdependence is a basic tenet of Christianity and, indeed, of other religions. In the Old Testament, God is revealed through his dealings with a people, the Children of Israel; for example:

> If you obey the Lord your God and faithfully keep all his commands that I am giving you this day, he will make you greater than any other nation on earth … he will make you his own people, as he has promised.[62]

In the Christian view, the locus of God's revelation moved from a particular ethnic group to that of the community of believers, regardless of their historical and cultural origins: the church, the Body of Christ. This is a recurring theme of Paul's teaching, to which he alludes in virtually every one of his letters. To give three of many examples:

> [We] are all members of one body.[63]
> Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, … if any common sharing in the Spirit, … then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.[64]
> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.[65]

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[62] Deuteronomy 28: 1 & 9b
[63] Ephesians 4: 25
[64] Philippians 2: 1-2
[65] Colossians 3: 15

Paul's teaching is most fully expressed in his extended analogy between unity in variety within the church and the crucial interdependence of the different parts of the human body.[66] Each part is formed by, depends upon, and contributes to, every other part.

The linguistic truth outlined above provides an empirically validated theoretical framework that underpins this analogy. The processes of communication, of which language is the preeminent and defining instance, are indispensable to our becoming human and maintaining our humanity. Linguistic communication depends fundamentally on what the philosopher Grice[67] called 'the co-operative principle': conversations[68]—even those expressing disagreement or mutual rejection—are possible only because participants accept an implicit mutual agreement on how meanings are to be made: to put it simply, they share the same language. We are all therefore utterly interdependent: not only metaphorically, but literally. The Christian doctrine of the Body of Christ sanctifies this truth by setting human interaction within the context of the communication between God and humanity. Consequent upon the ultimate self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the imperative of *agape* love, which must determine all our interactions, regardless of status, ethnicity, gender, or other superficial differences.

Here then, finally, is a linguistic truth that can transform our understanding of human nature. In the contemporary world, characterised by both unprecedented global interaction and powerful fissiparous forces, it is an insight that must be stressed and explored, especially by Christians. Within the discipline of linguistics, underneath and beyond the analytical frameworks of grammatical, etymological, or multilingual analyses, there is an exciting opportunity to do so in a systematic, scientific manner.

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[66] I Corinthians 12—14.

[67] Grice, Paul, *Studies in the Way of Words*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1989, ch. 2.

[68] and, by extension, all other media of communicative interaction

St Ursula, or when is a martyr not a martyr?

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St Ursula, who was adopted as the patron saint of Whitelands College, was one of the most popular martyrs of the Middle Ages. Her story circulated in a number of ever more elaborate versions. Here is one, which inspired many of the artistic works which depict St Ursula.

St Ursula's story

Once upon a time … there lived in Britain a pious king. He had a daughter called Ursula ('little bear') who was famed for her beauty. There was a heathen (non-Christian) king who heard of Ursula's beauty and became determined that she should marry his son, who was a prince. He sent ambassadors with fine gifts to persuade Ursula's father that he should give her to his son. This troubled Ursula's father because the other king was much stronger.

Ursula was saddened that her father was troubled, so in the night she prayed to God for help and then fell asleep. In her sleep she was given a vision of her future life, in which she was promised the crown of martyrdom without ceasing to be a virgin. So, in the morning she comforted her father, without telling him about the vision, and encouraged him to accept the foreign king's offer. However, she asked for a favour before she was married. She asked for her father and her suitor to choose ten young women like herself, and then for each young woman a thousand more, plus a thousand for herself, and to give them eleven ships, and three years. After three years, she would then be prepared to accept the will of God for her life.

So the father accepted the offer, with Ursula's condition and his own proviso that in the three years' waiting time the prince should be taught the faith of Christ. The envoys returned to the foreign king, who accepted

the conditions, and worked with Ursula's father to identify the eleven thousand young women and to build the fleet of eleven ships. The women learnt how to sail the ships and prepared to set out. But all of this had taken time and the prince now wanted to marry Ursula. Just in time, God sent a great wind which blew the fleet away from the shore so that they arrived at the mouth of the Rhine. On the next day, the women rowed their ships up the Rhine to the famous city of Cologne.

There Ursula had a further vision of an angel, who promised her that she and her company would visit Rome, and return to Cologne in peace. So they sailed their ships further up the Rhine to Basel and then crossed the Alps to make their pilgrimage to Rome. Having visited the tombs of the apostles, Peter and Paul, and stayed a few days, they returned over the mountains, rejoined their ships, and sailed back to Cologne.

The women were unaware that Cologne was now being besieged by a savage army from the tribe of the Huns. They were ambushed, and many were killed, but the Huns did not dare put to death someone as beautiful as Ursula. Their chief asked her to marry him—but she, knowing God had promised she would not marry any man, refused. Whereupon the chief of the Huns himself shot her with an arrow to the heart.

Once the fury of the Huns had spent itself, there appeared an army of angels who put the Huns to flight, after which the people of Cologne cautiously opened their gates and went out to find the bodies of the murdered virgins. They treated them with great honour, solemnly burying the dead. Many years later, a man called Clematius came to the place, guided by divine visions, and built a church there in honour of the martyr Ursula and her eleven thousand virgin companions.

Is it true?

This a wonderful story and we can see why people loved to tell and retell it, adding a detail here or changing a bit there. Telling stories, and particularly stories that incorporate foreign travel, a love interest, miracles and dreams was a very popular pastime for the long winter nights. One is reminded of stories like that of St George and the dragon, or Beowulf, or the stories that Chaucer's pilgrims tell on their journey to Canterbury, many of them taken from the Italian writer Boccaccio. People loved to go on pilgrimages so that they could literally come 'into touch' with the actors in the great stories of the saints: if you visited Cologne you could

touch the relics of the Magi and of St Ursula—and of her virgin companions—and bring back from that very place a medallion with a picture of Ursula that you could show to others. With such a medallion, you were sure to have St Ursula on your side, and, as a martyr famed for her virtue, she would help you in temptation or danger.

That was the thinking of an age very different from our own. It was not so different that we simply cannot enter into it to some extent and learn from it, but an age with different questions. We, of course, want to ask whether any of this can be true. We want to ask how the stories grew up. Then we want to ask whether they can teach us anything useful.

In Thurston and Attwater's edited version of Butler's eighteenth-century *Lives of the Saints*,[69] under 21st October we find not only the story of Ursula in a form somewhat different from that I have told, but a hugely sceptical verdict by the editors on the truth lying behind the stories: 'At some time or other some maidens were martyred at Cologne and … they were sufficiently well known to have had a church built in their honour … perhaps by the beginning of the fourth century.' The editors go on to speak of 'the great and ramified legend of St Ursula and her 11,000 virgins'. The picture, put together from this and other sources, looks something like this:

1. There is a late-Roman inscription, now incorporated into St Ursula's basilica, in Cologne, which records that 'Clematius came from the east; he was terrified by fiery visions, and by the great majesty and the holiness of these virgins, and, according to a vow that he had made, he rebuilt at his own expense, this basilica.' The inscription probably dates from the second half of the fourth century.

2. By the eighth to ninth centuries the virgins of Cologne were included in liturgical calendars and lists of martyrs, so that stories about who they were and how they had died began to circulate. Ursula is first known to have been mentioned as one of five, eight, or eleven virgin martyrs in the ninth century. (Some stories later spoke of eleven virgins and some of eleven thousand.) One possible explanation is that the abbreviation XI.M.V. was used (*undecim martyres virgins*: 'eleven virgin martyrs'). M can both be an abbreviation for 'martyrs' and mean 'a

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[69] Thurston, Herbert J., and Attwater, Donald (eds.) *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1990.

thousand', so the abbreviation could have been misread as 'eleven thousand virgins' (*undecim milia virginum*).

3. It is only in the latter part of the tenth century that the full legend of Ursula and her eleven thousand virgins appeared. Naturally it aroused some scepticism.

4. However, in 1155 a large burial ground was unearthed in the vicinity of St Ursula's basilica. It was presumed that these were the bones of her virgin companions. These bones are now displayed in elaborate patterns in the 'Golden Chamber' of the basilica of St Ursula in Cologne. With so many relics, a large number could be distributed throughout Europe. This was of great advantage to Cologne because it attracted many pilgrims. It is now widely thought that what had been unearthed in 1155 was a common burial ground.

Note that there is absolutely no historical evidence to demonstrate that Ursula ever existed. There had long been doubt about the historicity of Ursula, and she was removed from the Calendar of Saints of the Roman Catholic Church in 1969.

So, the first answer I would give to the question in my title, 'When is a martyr not a martyr?' is, 'When she (or he) didn't exist.' It is extremely easy, and very entertaining, to project onto legendary characters all sorts of wonderful qualities, but for the Christian Church, founded on what it has always believed is historically trustworthy witness to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, pious legends are not good enough. For a person to be recognised as a martyr, he or she must definitely have existed: hence the removal of Ursula from the Roman Catholic Calendar.

Inspiration from Ursula

This is not to say that the stories of Ursula are completely valueless. One can see precisely why they were attractive, to women in particular. While she lives, Ursula remains mistress of her own destiny and after her death is supernaturally honoured. Rather than accepting a life of submission to men and of childbearing, she sets sail on a great adventure which takes her, in the company of thousands of like-minded women, to the great city of Rome. She is strong enough to tell the chief of the Huns that she refuses to submit to him. She becomes a role-model for independent minded women.

Both men and women were attracted to her story. Confraternities grew up under her patronage like the Confraternity of San Orsola in Venice, which at the end of the fifteenth century commissioned the painter Vittore Carpaccio (c.1465-1525/6) to produce nine large paintings depicting the life of Saint Ursula for their meeting room. They are both a celebration of Ursula and a celebration of Venetian life: for instance, the first two paintings show a great interest in the arrival and the departure of ambassadors, which was a regular feature of Venetian diplomacy.

In 1535, Angela Merici drew together a group of women under the patronage of St Ursula to support the pastoral work of the church in Brescia. Amongst that work was catechetical teaching. Similar groups arose elsewhere, also with a particular concern for teaching. By the early seventeenth century, the Ursuline congregations had been formed into a religious order that from 1612 took a fourth vow in addition to those of poverty, chastity and obedience. This was a vow of consecration to the education of girls. The Ursulines were the first teaching order of women in the Roman Catholic Church, and became the most numerous. In a remarkable sense, over the years, Ursula was accompanied by *more than* eleven thousand virgins.

Ursula was also popular with the Pre-Raphaelite artists who took an interest in Whitelands College towards the end of the nineteenth century. Whitelands was founded in 1841 as a college to train women to be teachers. The Revd John Pincher Faunthorpe, who was appointed Principal of the College in 1874, took a great interest in the decoration of a newly erected College chapel. He enlisted the help of John Ruskin, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones. In 1859, Ruskin had paid for the young Burne-Jones to visit Italy. It was Burne-Jones who introduced Ruskin to the work of Carpaccio, and especially Carpaccio's Life of St Ursula. Ruskin was captivated by Carpaccio, and made a detailed copy of the painting in which Ursula is visited by an angel in a dream. This copy is now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. It was Burne-Jones who made for Whitelands College the stained glass window which shows Ursula as a teacher, book in hand, sheltering and protecting three female students.

It is worth noting that Ursula was also extremely popular with the Jesuit Order, which has a particular commitment to the education of boys and young men. The main building of Whitelands, then called Manresa House, was in the nineteenth century the house in which Jesuit novices were trained; their emblem can still be seen in the building in a number of places. For a college which became co-educational in 1966, it is

appropriate that there should be a link with a figure who has inspired virgins, both female and male, to dedicate their lives to the education of young women and men.

When is a martyr not a martyr?

I want, now, to return to my question, 'When is a martyr not a martyr?' because 'When she (or he) didn't exist' is only half an answer. The word 'martyr' is taken from the Greek word '*martyros*', which means 'witness'. It is a word occurring frequently in the New Testament, where is it used as widely as we use the word 'witness' in colloquial speech today. The key question, then, is, 'How and to what does the 'martyr' bear witness?' The answer of the New Testament is that the 'martyr' bears witness to Jesus Christ both by the way he or she lives—and dies. At the beginning of the *Acts of the Apostles*, Jesus says to his eleven disciples, gathered on the Mount of Olives,

> You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my *witnesses* ('my martyrs') in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'.[70]

The narrative that follows shows how some of them lived, but it tell us little about how they died: all we know is that James, brother of John, was put to death with a sword.[71] Stephen, however, was the first Christian to die for his faith. We are told how Stephen was put on trial before the religious authorities in Jerusalem, and how 'false martyrs' (false witnesses) spoke against him. Stephen is given a long speech demonstrating the failure of his own people to recognise the action of God, especially in Jesus, a speech which so enrages his accusers that they seize him and stone him. Before his death, Stephen is filled with the Holy Spirit and granted a vision of 'Jesus standing at the right hand of God'. As he is being stoned, he prays, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit' and then 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them'.[72] This is a deliberate echo of the death of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, where he says, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing',[73] and, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit'.[74] In *Acts*, when Paul has himself been arrested, he

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[70] Acts 1: 8.
[71] Acts 12: 2.
[72] Acts 7: 60.
[73] Luke 23: 34.
[74] Luke 23: 46.

refers to Stephen as a 'martyr' whose witness was crucial for his own conversion.[75]

There is a great deal more to be said, particularly from the *Book of Revelation*, about the link between Christian witness (*martyria*) and a Christ-like death. The key point about the martyr's *death* is that it bears witness to Christ because the martyr dies 'in the same spirit' of trust and forgiveness. With the persecution of Christians in the early centuries of the church, there was a great deal of reflection on the witness and the example of the martyrs. They were believed to have passed directly to heaven. It was also believed that those who had not been baptized but died with faith in Christ were effectively baptized through the shedding of their blood.

A striking modern example of someone who died in exactly this spirit is Nurse Edith Cavell, whose statue stands outside the National Portrait Gallery in St Martin's Lane, London. She was credited with saving the lives of German, Belgian, and British soldiers alike in occupied Belgium, but was condemned to death by a German military court in 1915. Shortly before she died, she said, 'Standing as I do in view of God and eternity, I realize that patriotism is not enough. I must have no hatred or bitterness towards any one.' It is a really telling remark because it shows the difference between the Christian ideal of martyrdom and other ideals of a noble death, such as sacrificing one's life for one's country in battle.

In the end, of course, only God knows the human heart, but the Christian ideal of martyrdom is that of bearing witness to Christ by a death like his. Only if a person voluntarily yields his or her life—not seeking martyrdom, but humbly accepting it as God's will for her, and without bitterness towards her killers—is it appropriate to talk of Christian 'martyrdom'. From a Christian point of view, then, a person who dies without forgiveness for all, including the killers; who offers violent resistance; or dies without trust in Christ, is not a martyr.

Unfortunately, Ursula fails on all counts; not because she may not have had such Christ-like qualities, but because she is a legendary figure onto whom people have for hundreds of years projected whatever qualities they wished her to have.

Nevertheless, the legend is not valueless, not only because it gives us such an interesting insight into what we might call 'medieval feminism', but also because for nearly five hundred years the figure of Ursula has inspired such devotion to the cause of education, especially

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[75] Acts 22: 20.

education for women. If one is looking for a modern figure with a similar attractiveness and power to inspire, I would choose Malala, who came so close to death for her belief in women's education. Why is it, one asks, that in some parts of the world there is still such hatred and fear of women's education? And a question for us is this: are we in our institutions offering the sort of education for which some women (and men) are prepared to die? After all, it is not by what we think about the figure of St Ursula we would want our colleges to be judged, but by the quality of education they offer equally to women and to men.

NOTES FOR AUTHORS

Papers should directly address, or be broadly relevant to, the general theme of the place of faith in higher education. Although Whitelands College and CUAC are Anglican bodies, contributions are invited that relate to any religious tradition and from any interested person or group. Contributions may take a variety of approaches, including but not limited to:

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- ❖ The presentation and/or critique of empirical studies
- ❖ Reviews of the literature
- ❖ Position papers
- ❖ Historical perspectives
- ❖ Theoretical perspectives drawn from academic disciplines
- ❖ Book reviews

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