

The King's values? Consumer culture & higher education

Introduction

What is an inaugural lecture? As Chaplain at Exeter University for seven years, and as Dean here at King's College for the last twelve months, I have sat through many. Indeed, when I was pursuing my PhD research as a curate in Bromley and used to use the library and attend postgraduate seminars at King's, I remember reading Professor Stanton's Inaugural, *Interpreting the New Testament today*, November 1978 – and so I am honoured that he will be replying tonight. Many inaugurals inform the audience of a new professor's academic research and specialism. Well, this question of the nature of an inaugural fits neatly into my research field and writing, since I have been studying genre criticism for many years. I have considered the literary theory of genre, what kind of books the gospels are, comparing them with Graeco-Roman biographies. For

most of this century, the gospels were considered to be 'unique' literature, *sui generis*. To me, as a classicist trained in literary criticism, this seemed a nonsense and I analysed them in terms of their formal structure and content, as medium length prose works describing the character of a particular person, especially in the light of the evangelists' purpose in writing them as a form of ancient biography.¹

So, to return to my opening question, the issue of the nature of something is one of genre criticism. In reply, we might describe an inaugural as an orally delivered lecture of an hour in length introducing someone within an academic community, allowing the speaker various purposes. I have heard some excellent lectures where the professor has looked *back* at his or her work and explained it clearly for the lay outsider like myself. Others, however, choose to look *forward* to new horizons, to ask questions and push out the frontiers. It is the latter which I shall attempt this evening.

I said that a unique work is a generically nonsensical concept, and yet tonight's lecture is heading that way, for it is not a professorial lecture, but one from the Dean of King's College, which is a fairly unusual post, if not 'unique'. According to the College Statutes:

*The Dean shall be an ordained minister of the Church of England, and it shall be his special care to ensure that the religious purposes of the College are effectively maintained and carried out.*²

Needless to say, those 'religious purposes' are not defined – and it has been interesting discovering what College sends to my desk, apparently including them under that category! However, presumably one aspect must be to look at the College as a whole, and to frame some questions about wider issues, even if one does not have all the answers.

So let us consider these three aspects of my title in reverse order, higher education, the consumer culture and the King's values. I do so with some trepidation, since I am not a professional educationalist, economist, sociologist or theologian – but a classics teacher turned biblical scholar and priest, who is concerned for education, economics, society and theology.

1 The values of higher education

The traditional view of a university

In my Classics degree, I learned that the Academy in ancient Athens, founded by Socrates and Plato, was placed at the edge of the Agora so that its deliberations about truth, beauty and value might inform public debate in the market place. No area of life was immune from Socrates' relentless questioning and the entire universe was studied in the Academy. This universality is reflected in the very term, university. Cardinal Newman begins his magisterial *The Idea of a University* with the ringing declaration that a university 'is a place of teaching universal knowledge'.³ Similarly, Lord Runcie, when he was Archbishop of Canterbury and Visitor of King's, stated in a lecture entitled *Theology, the University & the Modern World* that 'a university is, etymologically, an institution which is *universus*, turned in one direction, focused on a common point'.⁴

This traditional concept of a university as a place where the whole universe of ideas is explored and turned in one direction to benefit society from one generation to

another was well illustrated by the Robbins Report of the Committee on Higher Education, 1963, which set four objectives for higher education:⁵

- instruction in skills
- promotion of the general powers of the mind
- the advancement of learning and the search for truth
- the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship

These two main aspects – the ability to think, with its necessary skills and learning, and the transmission of a common culture – have always been the aims of higher education. Thinking has been a definition of being human since Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am. Professor Dan Hardy stressed the second aspect in his address to the 1992 Higher Education Chaplains' Conference: higher education is 'a means whereby society transcends itself'⁶ – a place where values are researched and transmitted through society. This is seen in the way universities have preserved and extended human culture through the dark ages and more difficult periods of history. Oppressive regimes often begin by targetting universities and academics to silence the voice of truth

and eternal principles rather than contemporary expediencies. We even had to enlist the bishops and others in the fight to enshrine academic freedom within the 1988 Education Reform Act!

So what has happened recently to this traditional understanding of higher education?

Growth in numbers

As we know all too well, the last few years have seen a vast expansion of higher education. At Exeter, the numbers of students in my lectures trebled over seven years. Similarly, the 1992 *Strategic Plan for King's College* projected an increase of two thousand students with a corresponding cut of two hundred staff to become financially viable, which is fortunately now almost achieved. These experiences merely illustrate the national figures:

- 1939 – 50,000 students distributed between four groups – Oxbridge, London, Scotland and 'others'!
- 1969 – 200,000 in universities, plus 60,000 in new polytechnics.
- 1991 – 360,000 in universities, plus 370,000 in polytechnics.
- 1992/3 – the merger of universities and polytechnics gave a total of 890,000.

Now the figure is approaching a million people in higher education. This is a very significant shift in less than a decade from an elitist group of about one in seven 18 year-olds to a mass system involving about one in three.

Cut in resources

At the same time, business economics was imposed on the old image of the cushy existence in the ivory tower with long holidays! The 'waste of public money' must be stopped, the fat trimmed back to the bone, to be leaner and more efficient. So this great expansion had to be achieved with no extra resources, but by savings and 'efficiency gains': doing 'more with less' became the watchword.

The 'unit of resource per student', held constant in real terms until about 1988, has been driven down some 30% in recent years; we are facing a further 9% cut over the next three years. In his keynote address to the Churches National Convention on Higher Education last month, Professor Graeme Davics, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) declared that 'there can be few genuinely worth-while industries in this country who have suffered such a resource squeeze.'⁷ While he 'took his hat off' to those

who had achieved this in universities, we all know the enormous cost, as many academics teach these larger numbers of students in the same, now overcrowded, rooms, with the same books in the library and the same hours for tuition. Equally, the devolution of much administration and finance to departments, with professors as budget holders, has changed things significantly – both positively (giving more freedom of choice) and negatively (vast piles of paperwork).

The shift from an elitist to a mass system can be compared with the move from a corner shop with personal deliveries for known customers to the anonymous supermarket of Sainsburys. There are more people going through the store, enjoying lower prices and a wider choice, but the corresponding losses include personal service and questions about the quality of the products.

Accountability

Despite the cuts, this mass system consumes some £4,000 million of public revenue, more than the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the Department of the Environment and the Department of Trade & Industry, all put together. The Secretary of State's requirements to HEFCE and CVCP in December 1994 for quality

assurance include 'value for money and accountability'. Everything today has to be judged by value for money, so the universities have been through different exercises over recent years.

First, *Research Selectivity Exercises* have graded academic departments every few years according to their research and publications, with the next round coming soon. Obviously, it is a good idea to assess research quality – but it has led to the multiplication of papers for publication, to league tables of departments and now a flourishing transfer market like soccer, where universities facing a low grade try to attract with promotion or higher salaries successful names to bring their publications with them! You can improve research by spending less time on teaching, so investigations into *Teaching Quality* followed quickly. *Quality Assessment* reports have covered different subjects across the whole country, complete with league tables at the back (eg Law, Chemistry, History), while *Quality Audits* report on an entire university. Now CVCP and HEFCE are about to set up a single agency for quality assurance.

Obviously, it is good to ensure both quality and value for public money, but the consequence has been reports on reports, with academics producing more and more forms and documents about their research and teaching – which

actually stops them doing their research and teaching! Is this necessarily a good use of their time?

Changes in shape & delivery

My Oxford degree course followed the traditional pattern of set courses, building on one another and leading to final examinations at the end of four years. If you were lucky, you could choose a special subject or two, but that was all. Again, it is all change here too as we have learned lots of '-ization' words. It began with *Unitization* – giving units to separate courses with the laudable aim of ensuring parity between the work load of one subject and another. This led to *Modularization* – allowing people to choose one module from this department and one from another, building up the right number of units. Modules have to be examined at their end, which brings us to *Semesterization*, confining modules and their exams within a semester and thereby allowing wider access for part-time students, non-standard entry candidates and overseas students to take individual modules – and King's is rightly proud of its recent Queen's Award for Export for overseas earnings. Finally, the *Credit accumulation & transfer system* (CATS) allows students to build up credits from different institutions over a period of years.

This has all been very good for wider access, and we are used now to a much broader cross-section of people in our lectures. Unfortunately, it replaces Robbins' 'common culture' with the personal choice of the super-market. It is individualistic rather than community-based, as students come in for their unit and then return to their part-time work, with no time for common activities like sport, societies, or even worship in Chapel. There is no longer a 'set menu', but instead a cafeteria system, encouraging the pick 'n' mix of the supermarket. Some may ask, is it a good diet? Do the units chosen by a student cohere into a rational mixture for a degree? In some quarters, even to ask that question is to be accused of being like Nanny, interfering in their personal freedom!

The university is no longer *universus*, turned in one direction; instead we all offer 'many skills' – the English for the Greek, *pollai technai*. All courses must teach *Personal Transferable Skills* for students' future employment. This is all very well, but look at this list I received from a Dean of a new university which shall be nameless, including such things as communication skills, teamwork skills, problem solving skills, and so forth – but which does not mention the ability to think.

The student as customer

This 'pick 'n' mix' method, like Sainsbury's, leads quickly to the idea of students as customers or consumers, equipped with their fee allocation whom we have to attract with the glittering allure of our new improved product, better than that offered by our competitors. Look at recent advertising by many institutions to fill their places and help the income up to budget.

Meanwhile, not all students bring the same income, since there are differentiated tuition fees – and institutions can even bid for extra places at discounted rates! All supermarkets offer such 'economies of scale'.

This approach is reflected in the *Charter for Higher Education*⁸, mostly concerned for students' 'rights' as customers, in applications, finances, the courses and study patterns. Interestingly, there appears to be nothing in this *Charter* about the rights of university staff – after all, the customer is always right!

Thus higher education is no longer viewed as a treasure, passed from one generation to the next, with a sense of responsibility for the future and graduates repaying the investment by their contributions to society. Rather, higher education is something I buy for myself. I choose to invest in it, or more likely put myself into poverty and

debt to buy it, so that I might benefit at the end financially in getting a job. The repayment is owed not to society, but to the Student Loans Company! This year's drop of 4,000 applicants not taking up their places may indicate that people are beginning to be unwilling to pay this price.

The student as raw material

In the *Charter for Higher Education*, the other customers addressed are employers and the local community. This is a different model, in which students are no longer customers shopping in Sainsbury's; instead, they are for sale on the shelf! They come into the institution as raw material which we process, to make the product we serve to government and industry.

Universities can bid for student places at competitive fee prices, manufacturing the same product (eg a humanities graduate) at a lower cost than a more expensive institution elsewhere. The 'output value' added in any process can be calculated from the equation: raw material + processing = product. Professor Monojit Chatterji, head of economics and management at the University of Dundee, has proposed that this 'output measure' to supply teaching quality assurance, instead of

'process inspection' or 'customer satisfaction'. If we take the 'graduating class of degree' of a student and subtract the 'entry qualifications' of the raw material, we can measure the 'educational value added' by the institution.⁹

Benefits & costs

This has been a rapid tour of the many, vast changes of the last decade. Of course, much has brought great benefits and advantages: more education for more people, rather than the elite; higher A-levels and degrees; more publications; better facilities to attract conference trade and so forth. I deny none of this – and I freely admit to enjoying these benefits.

But I have also had to deal with the pastoral implications of it all, caring for those under enormous pressure, for staff trying to raise the quantity and quality of their research and teaching, while filling in all the assessment and audit forms, and for students trying to find their way around the superstore and wondering how to pay the bill at the check-out! All too often, those of us in pastoral care, welfare advisers, student unions, counsellors, medics, personnel officers, end up picking up the pieces of those who have been broken under the strain, and, in some cases, as clergy, having to bury them.

Language as a key to value

Language displays, or betrays, our values – and vocabulary shifts reflect our ideas. Far from being a mark of respect, 'intellectual' is often a term of abuse, while 'merely academic' implies irrelevant or pointless. Look at the market language I have used: the *Customers' Charter*, financially devolved departments and budget-holding professors; students earning credit as customers, or being processed as raw material; quality assurance, and so forth. It is all a long cry from Socrates and Cardinal Newman. In fact, R. H Tawney wrote about this in the *Times Educational Supplement* as long ago as 20 February, 1917:

The fundamental obstacle in the way of education in England is simple. It is that education is a spiritual activity, much of which is not commercially profitable, and that the prevailing temper of Englishmen is to regard as most important that which is commercially profitable, and as of only inferior importance that which is not.

Now that everything has cash value, value for money and a proper return on investment are the only criteria of assessment. In his keynote address already mentioned, the Chief Executive of HEFCE, Graeme Davies,

described his golden rule in his dealings with Vice-Chancellors and Principals as this:

The man who has the gold makes the rules.

A better definition of a 'monetarist ethic' is hard to imagine. At heart, I believe this is a crisis of value, a theological and philosophical challenge to university, church and state alike. I began by suggesting that the Academy in Athens was next to the Agora to inform public life in the market place. Now the Agora has taken over the Academy; we are all at the mercy of the market.

2 The values of consumer culture

Shift of values in wider society

It is easy to blame the government for this – and we all enjoy a good moan in the senior common room! However, while much of this is a direct result of government policy, can we simply pass the blame – or transfer the credit (to use the jargon!) – onto them? After all, we are supposed to be a democratic society, so, like Athens, we get the government we elect, and perhaps too, the government we deserve.

Equally, higher education is not unique in suffering these changes. Similar things have been happening elsewhere. Schools have seen Local Management of Schools (LMS); financial devolution to heads and to governors; incentives for 'opting out' of LEA control; inspections by OFSTED, and so forth. The Centre for Educational Studies at King's has conducted an ESRC funded study, described in their paper 'Market Forces & Parental Choice'¹⁰, while the recent Annual Education Lecture from Professor Paul Black confronted similar issues in 'Ideology, evidence & the raising of standards'.¹¹ The National Health Service similarly has changed from a treasured national institution to a competitive system with an internal market, *Patients' Charter*, league tables of hospitals, budget-holding doctors, with value for money dominating everything from drug lists to which patients can be afforded treatment.¹² Interestingly, the first inaugural lecture in nursing at King's by Professor Wilson-Barnett in 1987 was also on values,¹³ while Dr Stuart Horner, chairman of the BMA Ethics Committee, recently lamented that the BMA's ethical handbook 'displays a menu of alternative ethical approaches consistent with contemporary trends but no clear expression of any value system to which the profession as a whole is committed'.¹⁴

Perhaps this shift of values imposed on universities, schools and the Health Service reflects a shift of values in society which produced the market culture. It is too simplistic to blame the government, even if they have introduced the policies. They are the consequence of the social changes from the period of the post-Enlightenment into the modern world and onto today – and of the accompanying changes of values. A crisis of value is at heart a theological crisis, so how did we get here?

Shift from modern to post-modern society

The Robbins' Report envisaged the transmission of a 'common culture' by higher education. This culture was the modern society of the 1960s and 70s, when I was at school and an undergraduate. Everything seemed very modern – and also post-Christian then. There was no place for God on either side of the Iron Curtain: both the modern scientific materialism of the West and modernist institutional communism of the East had put men into space. The sky was no longer the limit – we were 'to boldly go where no one had gone before' on the Star Trek and there was, in the words of Laplace to Napoleon, no need of the hypothesis of God.

Now it all seems very old fashioned, watching the 25th

anniversary films of Woodstock and the Moon landings. Whether architecture or fashions, nothing dates as quickly as modernity! Now we describe society as post-modern, characterized by a turning away from the post-Enlightenment rational confidence. The bankruptcy of scientific materialism in the West and the collapse of Communism in the East have destroyed optimism. We have abandoned the trek into outer space for the psychotherapeutic journey into inner space. Even *The Next Generation* of the Starship Enterprise has a Counsellor on board, while the latest adventures have them stuck on a rather dilapidated station, *Deep Space Nine*, not going anywhere! The phrase, post-modern, reflects something departing, but without knowing what will replace it. As the Chief Rabbi, a Fellow of King's, said in his Reith Lectures, 'we are caught between two ages, one passing, the other not yet born.'¹⁵ Instead, as post-modern architecture demonstrates, there is an eclectic sampling of different traditions from the past, according to individual taste; just look at the shapes of your latest super-store and filling station!

The pluralism of a post-atheistic society

I believe we are now not only post-moderns, but also

post-atheistic. The modern society may have had no need of God, but its collapse has left a spiritual void. If neither science, nor politics, nor the inexorable processes of human history will improve things, then who will save us? Consequently, any belief rushes in to fill the vacuum. Chesterton's aphorism that when people stop believing in God, they believe not in nothing, but rather in anything, is coming true with a vengeance. As Peter Clarke's Research Centre here shows, New Religious Movements, cults and sects, New Age ideas and philosophies, New Business theories – all have invaded our universities, book shops, governments and society, and it has been even more marked in the former Communist countries. The aching spiritual void must be filled. Pascal's God-shaped vacuum must be satisfied. Augustine's restless heart must find peace. We are back to the crisis of value.

The Robbins' Report's 'common culture' with its shared value system is simply not there any more for universities to preserve and hand on. Instead, the pick 'n' mix of the super-market approach to higher education merely reflects post-modern attitudes in society. In every area, we now have the menu choices of the cafeteria; from all the options, you choose your beliefs – and your values. The Secretary of State's November 1994 review of higher

education began with the question of its purposes. Robbins has been replaced by HEFCE's opening response: 'Higher education has an important role to maintain and communicate the values of a pluralist society, and to have a civilising effect on that society.'¹⁶

That we live in a pluralist society cannot be denied, nor the many benefits of its cosmopolitan multicultural life. Within King's itself, and on the streets around, we find food and clothes, customs and culture, beliefs and ideas drawn from all over the world. It is exciting, interesting and stimulating to live in such an environment. The consequence is the elevation of toleration to the prime virtue; disagreement must be avoided and we must not offend. The one value asserted by HEFCE, is 'equal opportunity'. The problem is that there are limits, as we have found with certain groups here: incitements to violence, hatred and racism cannot be tolerated. But why not? Why should we have the value of 'equal opportunity'? It cannot be argued for from the agreed ultimate ethic of value for money, which just shows the need for some objective ethic.

The moral crisis at the heart of our pluralist culture has been analysed by Alasdair MacIntyre in his important book, *After Virtue*: here he argues that before the

Enlightenment, there was a coherent system of morality derived from the teleological framework of Aristotle (everything has a purpose to fulfil), with those purposes based on the existence and will of God. Since the Enlightenment, the attempt has been to justify morality without recourse to an external framework and this has now failed. The only choice is between the classical position – or the bleak nihilism of Nietzsche.¹⁷

Thus, pluralism inevitably means no objective standard of value. With no external referent, we are at the mercy of a thorough going relativism. Value is no longer objectively there to be found; it is an individual subjective choice to be imposed on reality as we personally find it. The consequences for our understanding of the value of human beings are profound.

The value of human beings

The infinite worth of each human being is challenged from many quarters in pluralistic society. The 19th-century debate about evolution's reduction of human beings from God's children to apes has a counterpoint in contemporary ecology. Some argue that a concern for the planet from humanity's perspective is too anthropocentric, a 'shallow environmentalism' and argue instead for a

biocentric approach, a 'deep ecology' where all life is equally sacred.¹⁸ To believe in the particular value of humans is what Peter Singer calls 'speciesism'¹⁹, a new '-ism' to be resisted by the politically correct. Meanwhile, in biology and genetics Richard Dawkins tells us that we are 'survival machines – robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes', seeking to reproduce by the chance of the blind watchmaker.²⁰ The consequence is bleak: Brian Appleyard quotes Dawkins as saying, 'I don't feel depressed about it, but if somebody does, that's their problem. Maybe the logic is deeply pessimistic, the universe is bleak, cold and empty. But so what?'²¹ At the other end of the macro-system, sociologists note that the collapse of eastern bloc state communism has led to the dominance of the western market system; even the language of Robbins' 'common culture' seems discredited in our individualistic way of life – but the loss has been the substitution of competition for human relationships at all levels.²²

Privatization of values & morality

The consequence of this pluralistic culture is that all beliefs and ethical systems are privatized to the

individual: you can believe what you like and others must tolerate it. After all, if the universe is only a collection of random atoms, and life a sequence of genes and extinction, then there is no ultimate meaning or objective value. We can only impose value onto life. Dawkins wants to 'build a society in which individuals cooperate generously and unselfishly towards a common good' but he recognizes that we 'can expect little help from biological nature'.²³ 'To have values, and to care for the helpless, is in defiance of his thesis for it actually weakens the gene pool. In the face of blank meaninglessness, I can only choose to create my own meaning, selecting values or beliefs from the post-modern supermarket – and it is relatively true, true for me. Your truth may be different. As MacIntyre says, 'there seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture'.²⁴ Moral choices have been reduced to expressions of personal preference: I believe this, you believe that. Emotivism is now the dominant ethical system governing individuals' lives. As the Who put it in their song, 'The Seeker':

*I'm happy when life's good, and when it's bad I cry.
I've got values, but I don't know how or why.*

Values in public discourse

However, when we come together in society or in the university, we have to agree some shared value, by convention – *nomos*, as the Athenian sophists called it. Even if there is no objective standard, we need a common denominator for life to go on.

One influential thinker to attempt this from the political left is John Rawls. In his books, *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*, Rawls argued that justice is fairness, and that in a well-ordered society everyone accepts and knows the basic principles of justice. He rejects any reference to a metaphysical truth or 'a transcendent being'; these values are based simply on consensus, 'a certain form of thought and feeling that rational persons can adopt within the world'.²⁵ The problem is that this consensus has broken down. Rawls has not taken sufficient account of Dawkins' selfish gene, and the desire for personal gain evident around us.

Thinking on the 'new right' has been influenced by Friedrich von Hayek's work, starting from the 1940s. Like Rawls, he rejects any external reference to God or a value system. Instead, individuals have to participate in social exchange, the Greek *katallaxe*, which is the spontaneous order of the market, almost elevating it into an

omnipotent god.²⁶ In the famous words of Mrs Thatcher, there is no such thing as society. The market must be free to regulate itself through competition, and thus value for money will be the only value. In an attempt to curb the excesses of the jungle, the contract culture has replaced the traditional professional ethos: customers' charters tell us our 'rights' and provide for financial compensation when services are not delivered, from solicitors to the Tubes.

These are the wider sources behind the change of language in higher education, the NHS and elsewhere and why this is a much bigger shift than merely government policy. It is a change of value across the whole of post-Enlightenment, post-modern society. What they all have in common is the treatment of human beings from a financial perspective. This is a reversal of Kant's dictum that human beings must always be treated as ends not means; now we are means to ends, units of resource, units of production – and value for money is the only way of assessing our worth. Interestingly, the article by R H Tawney in the *Times Educational Supplement* of February 1917 on the problems of persuading Englishmen to take non-profitable education seriously, which I quoted earlier, continued:

the one view of man which is fatal both to Christianity and to any social revolution worth making is that which regards him not as a being with a capacity, if he will use it, for autonomy and responsibility, but as a machine or a slave.

The crisis of value is at heart a crisis of identity. We do not know how much we are worth any more, because we do not know who we are.

If 'academic' means irrelevant, then we can no longer discover identity by thinking, *cogito ergo sum*. The Academy must give way to the Agora, and the supermarket will teach you the only agreed value: *Tesco ergo sum*, I shop, therefore I am. Traditionally, we had a day of rest to rediscover our identity, as individuals, as families, as communities to come together for recreation and for worship – a 'giving worth' to the ultimate value of God, and receiving in turn his gracious valuing of us. Now a family Sunday outing for recreation, giving worth and discovering value is spent at the shopping mall. The Chief Rabbi argues that in the Sabbath rest,

the rich and poor, the employed and unemployed, are equals, members of the same community standing before God. No weekend of leisure and shopping offers the same sharing of

*dignity. We become what we can afford to buy. That is too limited and random a measure of the human condition to sustain a society in the long run.*²⁷

MacIntyre echoes his anxiety about society as he ends his work with what has become a much-quoted, bleak call to arms: he draws a parallel between the contemporary situation of 'our own age in Europe and North America and the epoch in which the Roman empire declined into the Dark Ages.' The difference is that 'this time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time.'²⁸

3 The King's values

Relative vs objective values

Thus I believe that the shift of values in higher education to follow market economics actually follows from the crisis of value in our post-modern, post-atheistic society. In both higher education and the rest of society, Robbins' 'common culture' has broken down into the pick 'n' mix of the super-market or cafeteria; beliefs and values have been privatized while public discourse can only espouse a tolerant pluralism. The madness of a totally relative

system where all beliefs, however wacky or wicked, are equally valid and all species, from amoeba to astronaut, are equally valued derives from the absence of an objective standard.

Faced with such thorough going relativism, MacIntyre suggests that the only outcome is the nihilism of Nietzsche and the 'intermittently fashionable' existentialist despair and angst. Most human beings recoil from this bleak conclusion – unlike Dawkins' acceptance of a cold and empty universe already quoted. Instead, we take refuge in a residual morality, after its basis has gone: 'the language and the appearances of morality persist even though the integral substance of morality has to a large degree been fragmented and then in part destroyed.'²⁹ The objective standard has gone – yet we still want its implications.

For example, let us look at the original King's charter of 1829 under King George IV. In response to the petition of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Duke of Rutland and the Bishop of London, it states:

we, being desirous of maintaining indissolubly the connexion between sound religion and useful learning, and highly approving the design of instituting a College, in which

*instruction in the doctrines and duties of Christianity, as taught by the United Church of England and Ireland shall be for ever combined with other branches of useful education ...*³⁰

This connection of 'sound religion and useful learning' is explicit in the College motto, *Sancte et Sapienter*, 'with holiness and wisdom', and it is still preserved in the current Charter where the College's objects are 'to promote education ... instruction in branches of learning ... and to provide instruction in the doctrines and duties of Christianity.'³¹ Doctrines and duties – what you teach and how you behave – are inseparably linked. Even if, quite rightly in a modern multicultural institution, not everyone accepts Christian beliefs, there is a real desire in this College to hold on to the values of its tradition. Thus the Mission Statement reads: 'King's, in line with its founding principles, will continue to foster the highest ethical standards in a compassionate community'. Furthermore, 'all students will be encouraged to follow an additional course, the Associateship of King's College, which further challenges them to think systematically about their values and beliefs' – and the AKC is the particular responsibility of the Dean's Office.

The Christian tradition, with all the world's major faiths,

has always offered the objective standard that human values, and particularly the value of human beings, are based in the external reality of God. If both universities and individuals alike are searching again for value and meaning, can we present anew the ringing Christian affirmation that we can make value claims through the objective standard of God who in turn affirms the unique value of each human person as his child? As Bishop Irenaeus put it in the 2nd century, 'The glory of God is a human being fully alive' (*Against the Heresies IV.20.7*).

The 'doctrines of Christianity'

The Charter referred to the doctrines of Christianity. If we take each of these in turn, we will see how they reaffirm human worth.

The Doctrine of *Creation* suggests that we have value because we are created by God 'in his image, male and female,' blessed and affirmed by him: 'And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good' (*Gen. 1.27-31*). The *imago Dei* in every human being gives them ultimate worth and value, beyond their selfish genes – and beyond what their market value might be. The early church Fathers stressed that the *imago Dei* includes the capacity to think and to be moral. Again,

note the link of the intellectual and the ethical – between the university’s task of learning and promoting values.

Yet we are also *fallen* creatures, and the image of God in us may be obscured. The human capacity to know, to love, to think, to be a person in the image of God, may be almost lost because of our own sin, and the results of others’ sin on us – pain and poverty, physical or psychological oppression, deprivation of liberty or the means of life. This can include institutional sin such as the dehumanizing effect of contemporary values or policies. Yet in the story of the garden of Eden, God did not give up on the human project: he made garments for Adam and Eve and clothed them (*Gen. 3.21*). He continues to love his human creation, to deal with their shame and to assist their nakedness. It is because we are fallen and not perfect that we need universities to expose evil and oppression, and to discover new ways in science and technology, in the arts and culture, in the social sciences and law, in medicine and education which will assist the continuing liberation of the children of God from all that oppresses us.

The doctrine of the *Incarnation* is a visual demonstration that God values human existence sufficiently to share it, to take it upon himself. All that is affirmed by the

Creation is confirmed by the Incarnation. In my most recent book, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?*³², I have outlined the four different portraits of Jesus in the gospels. In each case, the writer was concerned to depict the real human character of Jesus as he understood him. The incarnation of God in human form, and the story of that life written in human biography, both underline the worth and value given by God to the particularity of a human life. Anderson argues that because ‘Jesus Christ constitutes not only the fulness of deity, but also the complete expression of true humanity, it is clear that humanity has been given an exceptional ontological status in the person of Christ’.³³ If God so values human life, then who are we to reduce it to the value of sparrows to be bought and sold in the market place (*Luke 12.6-7*)? He knows what it is like to love and to be hurt, to be useful and to be rejected, to live – and to die. For the *Atonement* also demonstrates God’s total valuing of human beings. We are given worth and value because Christ died for us while we were yet sinners (*Romans 5.6*) – an infinite price was literally ‘paid on the nail’. Supremely, Christ’s *Resurrection* proclaims that human beings are not just a collection of chemicals assembled together for the merest hint of time, but have an eternal destiny. Because he was raised from death, we

shall all be made alive in him (*1 Cor: 15.22*).

After creation, fall, incarnation, atonement and resurrection, the last things of *final redemption and eschatology* reveal the ultimate values and purpose in the universe. I have already mentioned the way pre-Enlightenment morality was built on Aristotle's teleological ethics: there was a *telos*, an end, or purpose for human beings – and mediaeval depictions of judgement, however gruesome, reminded people of the need to give an account to God for how they had treated other humans and his creation. There will come a time when all will be assessed by quality control and external audit: however, the criteria will not be economic but those of the very love of God himself.

Thus, the key doctrines of the Christian drama all stress the importance of the ultimate worth of human beings in the love of God, beyond mere market value for money.

Human beings as moral beings

There is an intuitive feeling for human worth seen in our instinctive reaction to horrors such as concentration camps or child murders. Such crimes lead us to doubt the humanity of the perpetrators. Equally there is the altruistic urge to protect or save others, particularly the

weak, elderly or disadvantaged which leads many people to great acts of heroism – even if the outlook seems hopeless, or the person in danger is worth little in terms of economic or genetic value. The objectivity of this value of human beings points to the existence of God. Moral values apparently come to us as external, objective demands which cannot be reduced merely to personal preference, but which place us under obligation to do something which is not necessarily that which we wish to do or in our own interest. This fact suggests an absolute reference point: as Ian Markham, a graduate of King's, put it, 'these moral truths are grounded in the character of God.'³⁴

In the bleak nihilistic universe of Nietzsche, Richard Dawkins or monetarist ethicists, those who do not contribute to the gene pool or give 'value for money' in economic terms can be discarded, hence the drive for 'efficiency savings' in the NHS or higher education and the ever growing waste heap of the long term unemployed. Those who have an uncomfortable feeling that something is not quite right about this bear witness to the objective moral demands of the Creator God that all his people should be valued for who they are, not what they do, for their created nature not what they produce.

Community values vs individualism

I suggested above that we face the shift from the transmission of a 'common culture' to the selective individualism of the super-market or the pick 'n' mix cafeteria system. If students are customers who come into the institution and take what they need when they can fit it in, and the staff are here to serve them, then where is the sense of community, of being *universus*, turned in one direction? The recent changes in higher education have significantly affected the sense of community; greater numbers make relationships between tutors and students difficult; the expansion of the timetable has destroyed the shared lunch hour; the short examination semester turned the Strand into a ghost town; all expressions of community, whether in the Staff Club, the Union societies or sports teams, have been reduced, reflecting the individualism of the customer culture.

The Christian faith has always been communal rather than individualistic. Its major sacraments are baptism, the initiation into the common life of the Body of Christ, and communion, a sharing in the corporate life of God, eating one bread and drinking one cup. This ritual of the inaugural is a kind of initiation ceremony here in the Great Hall – and it is good for the King's community to

gather in this way. But above this hall stands the Chapel, placed deliberately at the centre of our activities. The College regulations state that beginning of term services and corporate eucharists should be protected in the timetable, so that the community might gather – though this is often ignored! Yet the corporate tradition continues as every morning prayers are said, including the College prayer. Is this merely a quaint hangover from the past, or actually a small protest against the individualistic customer culture and a reminder that we are here on earth to serve God and others, rather than ourselves?

More particularly we pray that the seeds of Learning, Virtue and Religion, here sown, may bring forth fruit abundantly to thy glory and the benefit of our fellow creatures.³⁵

In the HEFCE submission to the Secretary of State's review of higher education, a single paragraph attempts to stem the tide of individualistic concern for the present:

A respect in which HE stands apart from most other institutions is that it can legitimately claim to be concerned not only with the interests of society today, but also the needs of society in the future, and can justify its actions and decisions on these grounds.

*To this extent, it is answerable not only to the Government of the day, but also to a longer term interest.*³⁶

Brave words, but ones which cannot be sustained on the basis of short-term value for money ethics promoted elsewhere in their documents. Archimedes soaking in his bath, Isaac Newton dozing under the apple tree, or James Watts boiling his kettle were not looking to upgrade their research rating or produce a value for money return on these activities – yet the contribution to future generations of these idling moments is incalculable!

Only a traditional communitarian ethic of being *universus*, turned in the one direction of a future hope, can stand against the individualism of the here and now profit. The Christian community as the body of Christ looking to the eschatological hope of the consummation of everything in the mercy of God has often provided this, as is seen in the role played by communities and monasteries in the transmission and preservation of knowledge through past dark ages.

The values of those of other or no faith

I am conscious that I have been speaking as Dean, out of my Christian tradition, in which King's was founded and

grew. But I am aware that there are many who do not share that tradition, but who wish to affirm the ultimate worth of human individuals. One interesting aspect of King's being multicultural is discovering how people of other faiths share this opposition to relativism; we agree about the centrality of God for all things, but especially for human value. From a Jewish perspective, the Chief Rabbi's new book stresses that only an orthodox faith can sustain civility.³⁷ Similarly, Dr Zaki Badawi, Principal of the Muslim College of London, has noted that 'both Islam and the West share a Semitic origin of their faiths and the Hellenistic roots of their thought.'³⁸

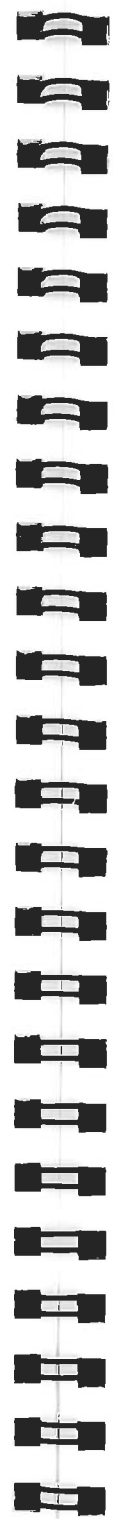
Bede Griffiths, the former Benedictine monk and Prior of Farnborough Abbey who has spent most of his life in a Christian Ashram in India, agrees with Alasdair MacIntyre in likening our times to the end of the Roman Empire. In *A New Vision of Reality: Western Science, Eastern Mysticism & Christian Faith*, he appealed for Christians to join together with other world faiths against 'the materialistic philosophy which rejects fundamental human values'.³⁹ Finally, Ian Markham has argued that, far from religion being privatized and kept out of public discourse, the greatest threat to contemporary pluralism and tolerance comes from the secular rationalist.

*who has given up the quest for truth and therefore moral debate and rational dialogue ... [and] cannot avoid the dangers of nihilism. Truth-claims depend upon the conviction that the universe is intelligible, and that in turn depends upon belief in God.*⁴⁰

In 1942, Archbishop William Temple proposed his social programme in *Christianity & the Social Order*, rooted in human value:

*The dignity of man is that he is a child of God ... His true value is not what he is worth in himself or his earthly state, but what he is worth to God; and that worth is bestowed on him by the utterly gratuitous love of God.*⁴¹

Although this was an explicitly Christian programme, Temple clearly expected many people out of the 'abundance of goodwill' to join in.⁴² There are many of 'good will' in King's who cannot share its Christian tradition of belief about God, yet who wish none the less to align themselves with it in its valuing of human beings; in other words, to live as though there were a God who values everyone. Interestingly, Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggested that Christians in the modern world had to live



etsi Deus non daretur, as though God were not a given; perhaps atheists in the post modern world need to live *etsi Deus daretur*, as though there were a God, to help us rescue ourselves from the bleak cold universe where the only means of assessing worth is value for money!

Conclusion

We have ranged widely over my title's three fields and I have betrayed some incompetence no doubt, but I hope this inaugural has introduced some of my concerns for King's at present. Let us close as MacIntyre does, with his barbarians, not at the gates but already ruling us. The close alliance of higher education and the church preserved culture and values through previous dark ages in monasteries and colleges, and later universities. Unfortunately, neither church nor higher education currently look fit for the task of doing so in this dark age since both have been being governed by the barbarians of market forces for some time.

In the church, we have adopted the language of the market place from local churches and Diocesan structures right up to General Synod. Churches must provide their

diocesan quota, parishes are amalgamated, non-income generating specialist ministries, like Chaplains, are under threat or have been cut. Furthermore, like much of higher education or other institutions, the church is preoccupied with its own interminable internal wranglings or surviving its monetary crisis, reorganizing its structures as proposed in the Turnbull Commission's report recently.

Dan Hardy and the Robbins' report expected higher education to be the community to preserve culture and transmit values to future generations. This lecture has shown how universities have faced the real world of limited resources by adopting market speak and a monetarist ethic of value for money.

However, if anywhere is able to stand for a different way, King's College should – perhaps as a way of responding to the Principal's challenge to staff this year to consider now how College might develop in the future after its painful decade of stringent reorganization. I began with genre theory, questioning whether anything is 'unique', but the tradition of King's College is fairly unusual in its partnership of the church and higher education. I have demonstrated how that partnership was explicit in its founding charter and has continued through to today's charter and Mission Statement. The motto,

sancte et sapienter, 'with holiness and with wisdom', is worked out in our life together in several ways.

- King's holds to its Christian tradition in the appointment of a Dean and Chaplain, yet it has broadened this out in its concern to be a 'compassionate community'.
- It has one of the liveliest departments of theology and religious studies in the country, including the teaching of major world faiths and not just Christianity, yet also we have such things as the Centre for Medical Law and Ethics and plus all the work on medical ethics which goes on in KCLSMD and UMDS.
- It has a lively Christian tradition of worship seen in the Chapel choir and the student societies, yet now enriched with other faith communities, with which I have already been involved.

And the Dean is charged by Statute 10(2) with ensuring that all these 'religious purposes of the College are effectively maintained and carried out'. Some have asked me, 'What does the Dean do all day long?' After all, I do not generate money for the College in student fees or research income! I have only a limited contract to prove

'value for money' on my post. Even worse, because of the partnership between college and the church over my funding and appointment, I have two lots of assessors to satisfy. But perhaps the continuation of the Dean's office – and the honour you do me in attending this unusual inaugural – is a sign that the alliance of the church and higher education against the barbarians is not yet dead. My hope is that King's might be able to research and develop the values of all human beings, holding true to its religious tradition, *sancte et sapienter*, yet open to the benefits of a pluralist society; to be able to encourage thought and learning, and to hand on to future generations the infinite value of human beings, the King's values – both the values of King's College and the values of the King of the Universe himself, 'for he is gracious and he loves humankind'.

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- 4 R Runcie, P A B Clarke, A Linzey, J Moses, *Theology, the University & the Modern World* (Lester Crook, 1988), p 14.
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