

## WHERE SHALL WISDOM BE FOUND?

### INTRODUCTION

As a child, I used to watch *Mission Impossible*, with the introductory phrase 'Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is ....'. Everybody has Mission Statements these days - business and industry - and even now institutions of Higher education.

KCL has one engraved on the glass at front of Strand about the pursuit of excellence in scholarship and learning 'in the service of society'.

Chester has it proudly on website and Corporate Plan, along with your Vision and Foundational Values – appropriate on Founders' Day therefore to consider these.

Yet Mission is an intensely theological term. Mission = sending, and implies a sender, hence why church has always had 'missions'.

Yesterday in my Foundation Hour Lecture, I looked carefully at Chester's statements about its Mission, Vision and Foundational Values in turn – all of which I described as most impressive. I think that the Foundation Roundel with the mission lines of 'Founded in Faith – Caring Community – Serving Society' and the values is extremely attractive. However, the question we were left with was how these statements about values and being held accountable to them actually fitted in with the corporate plan for All Together Better in 2020, with its measurable targets for success (all about league tables and metrics, percentages and numbers for success), not to mention the completely market-driven approach to HE in the current climate. It is lovely to see so many more people present here in Chapel today than last night, so I hope that having it put on your website might enable many more of you to look at the slides and listen to the podcast recording.

Today I shall look at the two readings from Job 28 and John 1 in turn.

## 1 WHERE SHALL WISDOM BE FOUND? (Job 28. v 12)

Look at the whole chapter Job 28:

Vv1-6: human ingenuity looking for metals, and precious jewels – in other words for money and resources.

Vv7-8: birds and animals cannot find this way or see it

Vv 9-11: but human beings can in their desire to find wealth.

Vv12-13: our reading begins – but where is wisdom to be found? And where is the place of understanding?

V 14: Human beings do not know; and not in the sea

Vv15-19: wisdom is more precious than wealth.

V20: refrain - where is wisdom to be found?

V21: hidden from everyone – human beings, animals and birds

V 22: even death and hell only heard a rumour.

The whole business of Higher Education – of the Academy and the university tradition – is to seek out knowledge and wisdom, to find answers. Yesterday we looked at how it all began with Socrates and Plato asking awkward questions in the agora, the market-place – but now it has become a massive industry.

Greek search for wisdom gives us the origins of higher education and the Academy was placed deliberately by the Agora, the market-place, to inform the life of business and the democratic process of the Assembly. Today, however, the market place has affected wisdom with a vengeance. All the consumer speak, such as credit-transfer, devolved budgets, quality assurance, league tables, student satisfaction as consumers and customers and so forth, all confront us with the reality of the market place in the university. Far from the Academy moderating the hurly burly of the Agora, now the market has taken over the academy, as noted last night in the latest government Green Paper from BIS (Business, Innovation and Skills – a department which does not even mention universities in its title any more!). Both society and universities are no longer based on the rationalist hypothesis of Descartes, 'cogito ergo sum', 'I think, therefore I am'. Instead it is 'Tesco ergo sum', 'I shop therefore I am'.

King's as big business – turnover £2 million per day; Queen's award for industry, and for export for overseas earnings. We are just celebrating coming to a successful fundraising campaign, raising the target of half a billion pounds – so now we will have to go on to something even bigger! Similarly in your 2020 Corporate Plan, Chester's target to increase its

turnover by 50%, and looking for more than £15M Research Income by 2020.

Back to Job and human ingenuity to find wealth and resources – but still the question to be asked: If wisdom cannot be ‘bought for gold’ or ‘weighted out in silver’ or precious jewels (Job 28.15-20), then where shall wisdom be found?

## **2 GOD KNOWS AND UNDERSTANDS WISDOM (28.v23)**

Book of Job is a counterblast to the tradition of Ancient Near East wisdom literature – scribes in the royal court, Egypt and Persia – early philosophy, pithy sayings about wise and foolish, from father to son, etc (see book of Proverbs). But Job challenges all that

28.3 – God alone understands way to wisdom

v.24 – he sees everything

vv25-27 – God and creation – his total knowledge of the universe, and how it functions, - and even the physical laws he gave it.

Last night we looked at the history of King’s College London being founded as a counterbalance to University College London, so that no right thinking parent would have to send their offspring to the ‘godless institute in Gower Street’! While UCL had no religious requirements, King's was founded to take the religious dimension of education seriously - as is seen in our motto - *sancte et sapienter*, ‘with holiness and wisdom’. We went on to note how Chester was the first teacher training institution to be founded shortly afterwards in 1839 by a similar combination of church and state, archbishops and prime ministers, and follows the same tradition of combining wisdom, of teaching and scholarship, with holiness, prayer and reflection.

And that is why it is right that you should have the Foundation Hour Lecture yesterday to “encourage students and staff to be aware of the origins of the University as a Church of England Foundation . . . and to consider the influence” of your Mission, Vision and Values on your current life – and fantastic to mark the long-term service of people who have given 10, 25 and even 40 years’ service to this Mission and Vision!

By definition, God is omniscient – and all wise.

In Proverbs 8, wisdom is personified as female figure at God’s side, who comes and dwells among human beings, ‘pitches her tent’, calls to us and

seeks to instruct us in the way of wisdom – even though we often ignore her.

Thus the development of knowledge and wisdom, the intellectual search and the development of science all flow from Christian basis that there is meaning and purpose in universe; God has put his laws there – and we ‘think the thoughts of God after him’. Science = knowledge – and most of early scientists very religious people.

Yet apparent conflict of God and science (Galileo, Darwin) – even in figures like Dawkins today.

But there can be no such conflict – for the search for science, knowledge and truth must lead to the source of all of those – God himself.

### **3 THE FEAR OF THE LORD (28.28)**

It is not enough to do best science in the world, or get the most information and knowledge – still different from wisdom.

As T S Eliot put it so well:

‘The endless cycle of idea and action,  
Endless invention, endless experiment,  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;  
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.  
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance,  
All our ignorance brings us nearer to death,  
But nearness to death no nearer to God.  
Where is the Life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?’

*(Choruses from the Rock, I)*

There is a difference between information and knowledge, and even more between information-based knowledge and wisdom.

It is not enough to have a university or even HE sector which finds out all human knowledge – like the information industry – searching through the mines under ground. It’s not enough to have the right to award postgraduate degree (as Chester gained in 2007) – ie PhDs – doctorates in philosophy, even we do not ‘love wisdom’ – which is what *philo-sophia* actually means.

Not even enough to find and know God in our search.

It is what we do with that knowledge which is crucial for wisdom – and this takes us back again to the life of this university.

Knowledge alone can be used for good – or for evil.  
Splitting the atom – power and energy – or the bomb?  
Research into DNA and the human genome – cure diseases – or alter the environment and even the nature of human beings?

What will you do with the ‘Endless invention, endless experiment’, the information and knowledge you discover here?

#### **4 – JESUS CHRIST – THE WORD AND WISDOM OF GOD**

In John 1, that Jewish wisdom tradition is used to explain the incarnation of God in the human person of Jesus, the one who has revealed God to human beings. The first Christians, of course, would not have seen themselves as ‘Christians’ at all – they were Jews, brought up on Job and Proverbs, who knew the scriptures about the figure of the Wisdom of God coming and dwelling among them – and it is that which St John draws upon in this extraordinary hymn at the beginning of his gospel.

He describes Jesus in terms of both the Word and the Wisdom of God – God’s self revelation who does not just impart information about God, or even the knowledge of God – but is also nothing less than the Wisdom of God who becomes human and lives, dwells, literally ‘pitches his tent’ among us (John 1.14)

Chester was the first purpose built institution of higher education to train teachers in this country and you are rightly proud of your 175 years of this tradition. Jesus the Teacher is also the Word and the Wisdom of God –and it is the use of knowledge in the ‘fear of the Lord’ which is wisdom according to this text from Job 28.28 – and to depart from evil is understanding.

If we want to know what God’s wisdom is like, if we want to know the wisdom to know what to do with the information and knowledge we have learned, we find the answer not in a system or even in a philosophy, but in a person, the person of Jesus of Nazareth who brings us into personal relationship with God. Therefore this Foundation Hour and Founders’ Day service rightly includes a stress on accountability to God for what we do with what we learn – and for the need to use that knowledge and wisdom for the benefit of everyone in society.

## CONCLUSION

And so I want to conclude as I began with Your Mission Statement, your Vision and your Foundational Values – which you wish to honour and to which you say you want to be held accountable.



We looked at them in a little detail in last night's Foundation Lecture and they are brilliantly summarised in your depiction in the Roundel:

‘Founded in faith’

‘Creating community’

‘Serving society’

And in a moment we will celebrate those who have embodied these values and served the University and through that, even served Society itself for so many years.

It is right to celebrate your Founders' Day and all the extraordinary good intentions of your Foundation. It is also right to have celebrated your 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary recently – congratulations again. But now is the time to go forward, to look towards your 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary and to ensure that you continue being

‘Founded in faith’

‘Creating community’

‘Serving society’

Upholding the ‘dignity and worth of every individual, the vital role of education in the service of society, and the inherent value of the pursuit of truth and freedom of enquiry’ – and make those values, rather than the metrics of the marketplace economy, the measures of success which you honour and to which you want to be held accountable – and may God bless you richly in this venture and this exciting future.