

# Theological Education and Global Tertiary Education: Risks and Opportunities

Alister McGrath

*Principal, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford*  
*Professor of Historical Theology, Oxford University*

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It is a great pleasure to be able to speak to you on the theme of this conference. I speak to you as one who believes passionately that theological education is of critical importance to the future of evangelicalism, and that our seminaries and other institutions of education play a decisive role in safeguarding our heritage, and nourishing our vision for the future transformation of society. In this lecture, I want to address some of the themes you are addressing in this conference, while supplementing them with some additional concerns which I believe need to be part of your overall reflection.

Evangelicalism has always been suspicious of the academic world. Quite rightly so! In the first place, there is the anxiety about the secularism, relativism and pluralism which seems to be endemic in much of today's higher education in North America and Europe. Evangelicals – and, increasingly, many others as well – have noted with growing concern the indications that the modern American academy seems to have more to do with élitism, ideological warfare and what I fear I must describe as faintly disguised hostility towards Christianity than with learning. Some academic theologians have often seemed to be little more than acolytes to these trends, affirming what often turn out to be profoundly illiberal theologies and firing both their opponents and less than totally enthusiastic colleagues, rather than engaging in the dialogue for which the academy was once noted, honoured and valued. Many state universities give the impression that they have become little more than Institutes of Political Correction. It is very difficult to read works such as Paul C. McGlasson's *Another Gospel: A Confrontation with Liberation Theology* (1994) without being concerned about the capitulation to secular trends that seems to be rampant in some liberal North American seminaries.

Then there is the issue of relevance. Why bother with higher education? For many evangelicals, the important thing is to get on with preaching the gospel. Anything else is irrelevant. And the issue of relevance is top of the agenda for many

evangelicals. As John E. Smith points out in his major study of 1963, *The Spirit of American Philosophy*: 'It is no exaggeration to say that in American intellectual life, irrelevant thinking has always been considered to be the cardinal sin'.

Evangelicalism has always shown itself to be at its best in insisting that the gospel is deeply relevant to the life of ordinary people. So why risk sidetracking evangelicalism from some seriously relevant activity by suggesting that it become more deeply involved in higher education?

These are genuine concerns, and I have no intention of dismissing or trivializing them. Others could easily be added to the list; I mention merely these two anxieties to illustrate the reasons why many evangelicals will want to question a commitment to higher education. Yet there is another side to this matter, which causes me to feel that we must become involved in this enterprise, even if it involves taking a calculated risk. Let me explain.

The story is told of a conversation between two of the most celebrated German liberal Protestant theologians of the nineteenth century, Albrecht Ritschl and Adolf Harnack. The more conservative sections of the German Protestant churches had recently gained some significant political victories. Ritschl's advice to Harnack is reported to have been something like this. 'Never mind about the politics – get on with writing the books that will change the way people think. In the long term, that is what will be of decisive importance.' As one looks at the sustained gains made by liberalism in German Protestantism up to the eve of the First World War, the wisdom of Ritschl's advice is clear. To win the long term victories, you have to influence the way in which a rising generation thinks.

Others have seen the wisdom of this. In the period immediately following the Second World War, the World Council of Churches secured funding to allow it to launch a program to encourage potential theological educators in emerging nations to be taught at leading western seminaries. Needless to say, these seminaries tended to be strongly liberal in their orientation. The result? Countless seminaries in developing nations found that their faculties began to be dominated by people who had received their PhDs from institutions dominated by a liberal ethos. By a gradual process, which mingled osmosis and replication, those seminaries often drifted into sharing that same liberal ethos. That lesson has been learned. John R. W. Stott, who is widely celebrated as one of global evangelicalism's wisest and most discerning leaders, saw the importance of this point, and set up a program in England to encourage such emerging leaders to gain PhDs at educational institutions which were either evangelical, or sympathetic to evangelicalism. The results of that program – named the 'Langham Trust', after Stott's flagship church of All Souls, Langham Place, London – have been encouraging. I am sure that other examples could be given, just as I have no doubt that expansion of the financial base of such scholarships must also take place.

In dealing with our theme, it would be very easy to speak purely in terms of abstractions and generalities. For this reason, I am going to focus on a single case study of an institution which has had to face precisely the questions that you are

considering at this conference. I am going to tell you just something of the story of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford – the institution that I head up. Wycliffe Hall was founded in 1877, as an evangelical training institution for the ministry of the Church of England. It would be located in Oxford, partly in order to try to influence the shape of academic theology, and to benefit from the many academic resources Oxford University offers. It was never part of the university; it was physically located in Oxford, but remained set apart from the University.

In 1996, after a full review of the various issues facing global theological education, Wycliffe Hall became part of the University of Oxford. I want to explain to you the reasons that led us to take this decision, and the issues we faced in taking and implementing the decision.

The reasons for wishing to make this connection were clear.

1. It would allow us to offer Oxford University's impressive range of theological qualifications, from Bachelors through Masters to Doctoral levels, to our students, many of whom might wish to become future educationalists themselves.
2. It would allow our own faculty greater opportunities for teaching and research in Oxford University.
3. It would enable evangelicalism to have a place in mainstream university life.
4. There were certain obvious economic advantages, including shared purchase schemes, leading to larger discounts on many items essential to institutions, from gas to stationery.

Yet there were some obvious concerns – concerns which I am sure you will recognize.

1. How could we maintain our evangelical identity in this new situation?
2. Would we not be vulnerable to changes in university policies, which might be disadvantageous to us?
3. Oxford University places an emphasis upon academic excellence. That is clearly something to be welcomed. But what about aspects of evangelical education which are difficult, perhaps even impossible, to deal with in this way? For example, how about our emphasis upon personal spiritual formation?

In the end, I think we managed to sort all of these issues out. But they are real issues for evangelical education. It might be helpful to note the two factors that have widest relevance, and explore them in greater detail.

1. In the west, educational philosophy is often driven by assumptions which are not especially congenial to evangelicalism. If we are to be part of such a tertiary system, how can we maintain our integrity in such a situation?
2. Many of the values and virtues of an evangelical education are related to forming links between faith and learning. For example, we would hope that our students would bring their evangelical convictions to bear on their own specialist subject areas – such as medicine, economics, or the law. Yet it is not always obvious how best to incorporate these 'worldview' issues into an educational programme. How

can they be tested? How can they be taught? Are there not completely different agendas in different subject areas?

Before turning to deal with these problems, let me explore this second point further, as I believe it to be of great importance. There is a need for evangelicalism to see itself as going beyond a purely theological agenda, and to begin shaping discussion on a broader front. Let me make it clear that continuing engagement with theological debate and education is of major importance, and I have no intention of minimizing the significance of the role of evangelical seminaries in shaping and consolidating our future. My concern is rather to build on the success of that engagement, which allows us to think ahead to the next stage of the evangelical agenda. The success of this next stage depends on the continuing excellence of evangelical theological education, but takes things further – and, potentially, into some very significant territory.

Much has been written in response to Mark Noll's excellent analysis of the current strengths and weaknesses of evangelicalism, set out in his masterly *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Noll's point is that evangelicalism has not, despite its excellent track record in theological and biblical studies, done much to change the way people think outside those narrow realms. What about literature? The arts? Culture? Evangelicalism has done an enormous amount to ensure that the leaders of churches have a firm grasp of the gospel and its application to life. In my work *A Passion for Truth* (IVP), I suggested that 'the evangelical passion for truth must become a passion for the evangelical mind'. And I am convinced that – if we really believe that this is worthwhile – we can do it.

But why should we want to do this? Would it not be a distraction from the real work of evangelism and pastoral care? I concede that we must ensure that these are not neglected, and the issue is that of *supplementing* these concerns, not displacing or replacing them. But the goals are laudable, and the results potentially enormously significant. Evangelicalism has been given a hard time in the liberal arts colleges, being depicted as intellectually vacuous, culturally destructive and spiritually simplistic. Evangelicalism is portrayed as something you grow out of, not something you grow up within. I am quite sure that evangelicalism, firmly grounded in the truth and relevance of the Christian gospel, has the potential to extend its influence into the higher education sphere. Not only would this invalidate the seductive stereotypes which are force-fed to our students; it could also lead to the values and beliefs of evangelicalism percolating into areas of our culture where it is at present a silent absence.

It would also be potentially enabling to our lay people. Am I the only one to be slightly uneasy that evangelicalism seems to have concentrated so much of its resources in seminaries, concerned to educate future clergy? What about the large numbers of lay folk, who have a vision for what the Lord could do in and through them in their everyday work? While I am thrilled by what has been achieved already, I still long for us to be able to give our lay people – who run supermarkets, businesses, corporations and governments – access to those same rich resources.

Maybe it's to do with my roots in the Reformation, and my firm belief in the idea of the 'priesthood of all believers'. Why is it that evangelicalism sometimes seems to focus its educational resources on pastors and clergy, rather than the laity?

What if we were able to look ahead to a day when we would have financiers who knew as much about their faith as they did about economic theory? And more than that – not simply that they knew about both, but were able to relate them, and bring them together in such a way that we could talk about 'evangelical economic theory'? You can extend this list as long as you please. My point is simply that we need to make connections with what is going on in the real world, and allow the gospel to bear on the issues that are facing those who live and work in our complex modern culture. We cannot allow the gospel to be squeezed out of that culture because it is seen to be of no relevance on account of our failure to make those connections in the first place.

I take comfort from the fact that I am not dreaming alone. I have had the privilege of speaking at many evangelical colleges at which the formation of a Christian worldview is of major concern. Gordon College and Wheaton College come to mind immediately. It is clear that Seattle Pacific University is going to be a significant presence in this field. Regent College, Vancouver, has established a distinguished track record for resourcing the laity and market-place ministries. Many here today will have read Arthur Holmes' *Contours of a Christian Worldview* and his later *Idea of a Christian College*. The Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities, based in Washington DC, is, in part, a response to the vision of the difference that a Christian education could make to the future movers and shapers of the nation. And I have no doubt that many other colleges and para-church organizations could be cited as sharing this vision.

The point I want to make, however, is slightly different. At the moment, evangelicalism tends to send its best people to teach in seminaries or be taught in seminaries, so that they can go on to minister in our churches. That's great news for seminaries (who get good faculties) and congregations (who get good pastors and preachers). But what are we doing to encourage evangelicals to take on the really big roles in business, education, the law, and government? That means encouraging them to relate their faith to life – but it also means encouraging them to see that they can serve God faithfully and effectively in non-church ministries.

I head up the Church of England's largest seminary, and often have the privilege of hearing students testifying to the ways in which God has called them to serve as ministers in that church. Yet sometimes their testimonies make me cringe a little. They talk of 'being called to full-time ministry'. Now I know that they mean 'professional ministry within the church'. But their words seem to imply that ordinary Christians aren't engaged in ministry. Isn't there a need for us to correct this misperception?

For me, one of the most exciting aspects of the Reformation was Martin Luther's redefinition of the idea of 'calling'. In the Middle Ages, the term typically referred to a

potential monk being ‘called’ to leave the world, and enter a monastery. For Luther, it meant that God called every Christian to serve him in some way in the world. As Luther noted when commenting on Genesis 13:13: ‘what seem to be worldly actions are actually the praise of God and represent an obedience which is well pleasing to him’. There is a need to recover the sense that God calls people to serve him in the world, and affirm, encourage and equip them to do just that.

So the possibility of the integration of faith and life is both important and exciting. An evangelical educational institution might well offer the possibility of doing just that. But now we come to the difficult part. How can we do this, given the restrictions that global tertiary education imposes on us – for example, in relation to validation? What if ‘quality assurance’ criteria include principles which we regard as unacceptable? There are clear issues here, which will vary from one locale to another, and will probably demand local solutions. Yet it highlights a risk – the risk that becoming part of an educational community demands that we conform to its agendas, expectations, and cultural norms. These, as has often been pointed out, can easily be determined from a standpoint which is at best neutral, but occasionally hostile, to Christian faith. A further issue is that ‘evangelicalism’ is often branded as ‘fundamentalism’ by those hostile to our aspirations, raising anxieties among many secular educationalists. These are concerns, and must be respected. There are risks involved in moving into global tertiary education contexts, and we need to be honest about them. Some are global, others local.

But my real concern in this paper is with the opportunities that such a development will bring. The risks can only be seen in their proper context when the advantages are fully appreciated, and the challenges that they raise for us. In what follows, I want to explore these under the following headings.

1. The priesthood of all believers and the leadership of evangelicalism
2. The importance of a Christian worldview
3. The importance of Christian spirituality

All these, I believe passionately, are of major importance to our movement as it seeks to develop its educational mission in this new century.

## **1. The priesthood of all believers and the leadership of evangelicalism**

I’m not a native of North America, and so often tend to find out about its rich tapestry of history and beliefs by watching movies. I remember watching *Witness* when it first came out. The image that remains firmly in my mind from that film is not the violence of downtown Philadelphia (although I could hardly ignore that), but a single incident, narrated without a spoken word – the Amish barn-raising. This image points to a corporate understanding of ministry. All are involved (in different, but significant ways) in the overall project. A single Amish farmer can’t build a barn on his own. He may know how to, and he may have seen others do it. But he needs others to do it with him. All are involved, with all their gifts, giving rise to something which one single person could not – and, in any case, I would want to argue, should not – do.

There is little doubt that the early church expanded without feeling the need for professional ministerial structures. Michael Green comments as follows on this aspect of the Christian life of this formative period:

The early disciples themselves were, significantly, lay, devoid of any formal theological or rhetorical training. Christianity was from its outset a lay movement, and so it continued for a remarkably long time . . . in contrast to the present day when Christianity is highly intellectualized and dispensed by a professional clergy to a constituency increasingly confined to the middle class. In the early days, the faith was spread by informal evangelists and had its greatest appeal among the working classes.

The history of the early Christian church suggests that a number of changes resulted from its acceptance and expansion within the Roman empire, especially after the conversion of Constantine. Increasingly, the role model adopted by Christians for understanding the organization of the church tended to be the Roman state, rather than the less grandiose models of ministry offered by the New Testament. Bishops tended to become people of power, with the idea of *episcopus* as 'pastoral responsibility' gradually becoming eroded by the more seductive notion of 'power' or 'status'. The honorific practice of kissing a bishop's hand emerged during the fourth century, to be gradually superseded in the fifth by that of kissing the bishop's ring.

The rise of monasticism can be seen as a protest against these developments. The monastic movement had its origins partly in a flight from an understanding of the Christian life which rigorously excluded the laity from any spiritual authority within the church. The monk was originally one who chose to by-pass the increasingly centralized hierarchy of the institutional church, in order to recover the apostolic idea of the vocation of the ordinary Christian. The monastic movement of the fourth and fifth centuries was primarily a protest against the marginalization of the laity in matters of spirituality and spiritual authority. By his very existence, he was a silent protest against the growing priestly authoritarianism of the early church. Anthony of Egypt, perhaps the most famous of such monks, remained a layman. The Reformation recovery of the 'call of the laity', given theological expression in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers and firmly embedded in the structures of Reformation spirituality, may be seen as picking up this central feature of early monastic spirituality, in order to recapture the power of its vision in early modern Europe.

The Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers thus gives every Christian believer, male and female, both the *right* and the *means* to ensure that his or her church and pastors remain faithful to their gospel calling -- and authorizes us to use them. The sixteenth-century Reformation can be seen as a collective protest on the part of the people of God against the errors and the failings of their ministers. But with the Reformation came a slogan -- a slogan that needs to be heard, and acted upon, in today's church. The slogan is simple: *ecclesia semper reformanda* -- the church must always be reforming itself. In other words, reformation is not a once-for-

all event, but a continuing process. Those who claim to stand in the evangelical tradition need to return to their roots, and rediscover the need for continual correction, reform and criticism of their ideas and actions.

Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, linked with that of the material sufficiency of scripture, leads him to this challenging conclusion: precisely because all believers are priests, all are charged with the responsibility of maintaining the true faith, against the distortions of those who, claiming to be their leaders, ought to know and act better. Hasn't God given his Spirit to ordinary Christians? Luther's question, asked tongue in cheek, seems more relevant and urgent than ever today. The Reformation principle is that of the public accountability of preachers to the word of God, and the right of all believers to read and interpret scripture, and challenge their pastors where they appear to deny it, depart from it, or subtract from it.

A modern interpreter of this doctrine is the famous Swiss Protestant theologian Karl Barth. For Barth, theology is far too important to be left to such people. It is a matter for everyone who believes, and thinks about his or her faith. It is a matter for anyone who wants to think responsibly about God, and the tasks and opportunities which faith in God brings.

Theology is not a private subject for theologians only. Nor is it a private subject for professors. Fortunately, there have always been pastors who have understood more about theology than most professors. Nor is theology a private subject of study for pastors. Fortunately, there have repeatedly been congregation members, and often whole congregations, who have pursued theology energetically while their pastors were theological infants or barbarians. Theology is a matter for the Church.

Theologically speaking, the essential corollary of the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers is the Reformation doctrine of vocation, which declares that the fullest possible actualization of the potential in the talents and endowments of each individual is not merely a means of fulfilling personal ambition but an instrument for obeying and glorifying God.

Now we have a role to play here – a role in helping people discern their calling within the corporate priesthood of the people of God, and then enabling them to live out that calling in the world. This is about discernment and mentoring – but it is also about professional education of the highest calibre, to enable those who wish to do so from an evangelical perspective to achieve the highest standards of excellence. This is going to be hugely difficult. But it is a vision worth pursuing.

## **2. The importance of a Christian worldview**

We owe our students two fundamental things; to reassure them of the trustworthiness and reliability of the gospel, and to help them begin to make the connections with the world around them – especially those areas of that world in which their future service

may lie. For some that will be politics, for others physics, and for others economics. And the big question they want to ask is this: what difference does my faith make here? How does my faith affect my attitudes and actions in my chosen area of calling? They will need help – and they will rightly look to us for guidance.

One thing we might offer them is reflection on how we relate theology and our chosen sphere of ministry. Throughout his lecture courses on Christian doctrine at Tyndale Hall (later Trinity College), Bristol in the 1960s and 1970s, J. I. Packer argued that theology served three functions:

First, it deepens our understanding of Scripture, God, human nature, the church, the world, and so forth;  
Second, it controls our thinking and living as Christians;  
Third, it assists communication of the Christian faith in mission and evangelism.

On Packer's view, theology is thus essential to the life, thought and ministry of the church – a view I warmly endorse. But it goes far beyond that: it offers all Christians a foundation for their engagement with the world. It is, so to speak, the rock on which they build their house of engagement with the world. This means we need people who have already given thought to this – who have already tried to make connections, and can thus offer a double stimulus to their colleagues and students – to do *the same*, and to do it *better*.

So let me begin by focusing on the role of the academic – the teacher. Many Christian academics long to serve God more effectively, and see their role as scholars as offering them important strategic opportunities for service. My purpose here is to affirm this belief, and offer some thoughts on how evangelical scholars can begin to develop their ministries more effectively.

There is much justified anxiety about the secularism, relativism and pluralism which seems to be endemic in much of today's western higher education. Evangelicals – and, increasingly, many others as well – have noted with growing concern the indications that the modern American academy – to choose one particularly important example – seems to have more to do with élitism, ideological warfare and rampant anti-religious propaganda than with learning. Yet we need to be in there, as salt and light.

So how can evangelical scholars – whether working in the areas of biology, history, theology, or physics – serve God within the academy? First, we need a sense of *vision*. We need to realize that each of us can make a difference. Through God's good grace, we can help people capture a sense of the wonder and glory of the Christian gospel. Sometimes it will be through the things that we say; at other times, through the things that we do. In his providence, God has placed us somewhere special – somewhere that he can use us. We all need to start asking questions like these: 'Why has God placed me here?'

The basic issue is building a vision – a vision of who God is, and the way in which he can take and use us. We need to catch a fresh vision of the glory of God, and the wonderful fact that this God takes pleasure in using weak and foolish people such as ourselves to further his purposes and advance his kingdom. One of the things Paul had to be taught through the ‘thorn in the flesh’ incident was to realize that the grace of God was sufficient for him, and that God’s strength was made perfect in weakness. Believing that we can make a difference to people is not about being arrogant; it is about trusting in the grace and promises of God.

Second, we need to ask what special opportunities are open to us through the subject which we teach at our tertiary institution. For example, the physicist will be able to point to the remarkable ordering of the universe, and see this as pointing to the wisdom of God as its creator. John Calvin suggested that astronomers and medical physicians were in an especially privileged position in this respect. They, he argued, were able to see the wisdom of the invisible God embodied in his works of creation. A professor of English literature would be in a position to introduce students to the writings of Dorothy L. Sayers, G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis – important works in their own right, yet possessing an especial importance on account of their ability to mediate some of the central themes of Christianity.

The need to identify apologetic and strategic possibilities in our areas of teaching or research expertise leads naturally on to the third point – the importance of fellowship with other evangelical scholars. It is easy to become disheartened and discouraged. Being an evangelical scholar can be lonely at times. It helps to meet up with others, and find comfort in their company. We can pray together. And we can exchange ideas. What approaches have worked for us? It is important to share wisdom and insights, many of which are won at great expense. One of the reasons why I believe this conference to be so important is the opportunities it will bring for networking, dialogue, prayer and fellowship.

Fourthly, we need to identify role models – that is, scholars who have managed to bring together faith and learning in their own professional careers, and whose wisdom and example can be an inspiration to others. By this, I do not mean that we blindly and woodenly imitate them! Rather, they care to be seen as an encouragement and inspiration. We seem to have lost sight of some of the great themes of an earlier period in evangelical history, in which what we would now call ‘mentoring’ was seen as being of immense importance. Yet this is something that we can recover. Those who have given much thought to bringing together faith and scholarship have both the privilege and responsibility of helping those at an earlier stage in their careers who are seeking to do the same.

So who are the leading Christian scholars in the field of literature, history and cosmology – to mention only three disciplines out of the many possibilities. How do we identify role models? For ourselves? And for those who we shall teach? And perhaps just as importantly, how do we ensure that there will be role models in the future? My own impression of the situation, based on close observation of the situation in the United Kingdom, is that such figures of excellence seem to have just

happened. In other words, there was no conscious attempt by others to encourage them to develop such a role; it was something that just developed as things went along.

Maybe we need to be more proactive here. Maybe we need to try to identify the future role models early, and encourage them to deliberately and purposefully plan for this possibility, prayerfully and in consultation with colleagues. Their future role could be immensely important and helpful. We need to give thought to this now. Your institutions could be providing the role models for future generations in your region of the world.

Finally, we need to be aware that evangelical scholars come in two different categories – the teachers and the researchers. Each has their own distinct gifts and merits, and both must be honoured and encouraged. Many owe the consolidation of their faith, and the beginnings of their attempts to relate faith and learning, to the patient teaching and personal example of those who first taught them, and introduced them to the great themes which would shape their future careers. Great researchers can stimulate that process of reflection and consolidation still further, and turn a sure and steady flame into the white heat of someone on fire with excitement about God and their discipline. But the foundation needs to be there first.

St Paul used the analogy of the human body in making the point that every member of the body of Christ has a role to play. We must not allow ourselves to value one member more than another, when all are required for the healthy functioning of the body. Whether we are committed to teaching or to research at the cutting edge of our field, we need to keep this broader perspective in mind. We all need each other; together, we can do things for God which we could not possibly manage on our own. And we need to be reminded once more of our total dependence upon the grace of God, in case we begin to get big ideas about our own importance!

A great challenge lies ahead. How can we bring our faith to the life of the academy? How can God continue to be found at Harvard? At Oxford? In Tokyo? In Nairobi? At wherever we have the privilege of teaching or researching? Some immensely challenging and exciting times lie ahead. We need to prepare for them. I hope and trust that we will all come away from the conference with a sense of vision and wonder, which will give us a new sense of purpose and perspective on our lives as scholars and teacher.

### **3. The Importance of Christian Spirituality**

Having worked in theological education for some time, and spoken to many who work in other forms of Christian education in the secular sphere, I have come to have a growing awareness of the importance of spirituality within education. It is not enough just to understand our faith – important though that is. We must learn

to appropriate it at the inmost level. The importance of this has long been recognized in seminaries – but it needs to be offered to anyone who is going to play a leading role as a Christian, whether in church, government, society or business. *It's not enough to get people going – we need to keep them growing.* If they are going to face spiritual stress in their chosen sphere of service, we've got to make sure that we equip them with resources to copy.

Let me share my own experience with you at this point. In my first period as a Christian, I found my attention focusing on *understanding* my faith. I continue to regard this as being of the utmost importance. There is a marvellous coherence to Christian doctrine, and wrestling with the great truths of our faith provided me with both spiritual encouragement and intellectual challenge – just the sorts of things I was talking about under my second point. Yet all was not well. I realized that my 'knowledge' of the Christian faith was rather dry and cerebral.

Part of the difficulty was that I was, like most people of my generation, deeply influenced by the Enlightenment, whose influence lingers in the west, and unfortunately has been exported, more by accident than by design, by western educationalists. On this rather attenuated view of the gospel, Christianity was all about *ideas* – and it was important to get those ideas right. As a result, theological correctness had become something of an obsession with me. I had failed to realize that the gospel affects every level of our existence – not just the way we think, but the way in which we *feel* and *live*. The Enlightenment had championed the role of reason, and vetoed any engagement with emotions or imagination. Yet writers such as Jonathan Edwards and C. S. Lewis stressed the importance of precisely these aspects of our lives. I gradually came to the realization that my faith was far too academic. I needed to discover something which I had improperly suppressed.

My realization of the importance of spirituality began about 1989, but really blossomed from about 1992. I was invited to lead a regular summer school course in Oxford on 'medieval and Reformation spirituality'. This allowed me to engage with some of the great texts of Christian spirituality. As my students and I wrestled with these texts, we found ourselves challenged to deepen the quality of our Christian faith though being more open to God. I found that the quality of my Christian life deepened considerably as a result.

I also found myself wanting to explore how others had grasped the importance of spirituality, and so found myself being drawn to writing a biography of J. I. Packer, widely regarded as one of evangelicalism's most distinguished theologians, who stressed the importance of theology to spirituality, and vice versa. Researching and writing that biography (which took five years) helped me appreciate both the importance of this theme, and also the considerable personal contribution which Packer had made to its discussion and application. It also helped me understand more of the history of evangelical Christianity in England and the United States in the second half of the twentieth century.

As I mentioned earlier, my basic understanding of Christian doctrine has not changed over the last ten years. I remain deeply committed to the fundamentals of Christian orthodoxy. What has happened is that these ideas have taken on a new depth, both as I appreciated more their implications, and as I realized that my grasp of the totality of the Christian gospel had been shallow. Perhaps I could say that I experienced a deepening in the quality of my faith, rather than any change in what I believed.

Traditional theology makes a distinction between two senses of the word 'faith'. On the one hand, there is the 'faith which believes' – that is, the personal quality of trust and commitment in God. On the other, there is the 'faith which is believed' – that is, the body of Christian doctrine. Using this way of speaking, I could say that, in my case, the 'faith which is believed' remained unaltered. What developed, matured and deepened was the 'faith which believes'. The New Testament often compares the Kingdom of God to a growing plant, or a seed taking root. What happened to me was that a plant which had grown to some extent underwent a new spurt of growth, leading to increased strength and vitality. I tried to convey something of what I had discovered in a book called *The Journey*, which attempted to show how the Christian journey was both illuminated and assisted by reading Scripture in-depth, rather than superficially.

Now it may well be that some of you here today will feel that you can identify with my earlier and rather academic approach to faith, and are fed up being told by their doubtless well-meaning friends that they just need to know more *facts* about their faith. Yet it is fatally easy to teach in a Christian educational institution, and project precisely such an understanding of spiritual development. My experience is that we need to *go deeper*, rather than just *know more*. Perhaps we all have to discover that we have simply scratched the surface of the immense riches of the gospel. Beneath the surface lies so much more, which we are meant to discover and enjoy. The greater our appreciation of the wonder, excitement and sheer delight of the Christian faith, the more effective our witness to our friends, and the greater our enjoyment of the Christian faith.

Enjoyment? Yes! 'What', asked the *Shorter Westminster Catechism*, 'is the chief end of man?' The answer given is rightly celebrated as a jewel in Christianity's doctrinal crown: 'to glorify God and enjoy him for ever'. This brief statement sets us on a journey of personal exploration – to gain a fresh apprehension of the glory of God, so that we might return that glory to God and have our spiritual lives enriched by the knowledge of such a God. To catch such a glimpse of the full splendor of God is also a powerful stimulus to evangelism. Was it not by catching a glimpse of the glory of God in the temple that Isaiah repented to the divine call to go forth in service? Good theology is essential to mission and evangelism! By catching a vision of God in all his radiance and glory, we long to serve him now and finally be with him in the New Jerusalem.

Spirituality is all about the way in which we encounter and experience God, and the transformation of our consciousness and our lives as a result of that encounter and

experience. Spirituality is about the *internalization of our faith*. It means allowing our faith to saturate every aspect of our lives, infecting and affecting our thinking, feeling and living. Nobody can doubt how much we need to deepen the quality of our Christian lives and experience, with God's gracious assistance, and live more authentic lives in which we experience to the full the wonder of the love and grace of God. It is about ways in which we can foster and sustain our personal relationship with Christ. Christian spirituality may be thus understood as the way in which Christian individuals or groups aim to deepen their experience of God, or to 'practise the presence of God', to use a phrase especially associated with Brother Lawrence (c. 1614-91). We need our students to have these resources, and we need our faculty members to model these.

Yet we find these resources in the most unlikely places. Dallas Willard, perhaps one of the most important contemporary evangelical spiritual writers, teaches in the School of Philosophy at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. He has taught there since 1965, where he was Director of the School of Philosophy from 1982-1985. Here we find an evangelical ministering at the heart of a secular university, with professorial rank. We need people like Dallas in our own institutions, ministering to those who will need resources like this throughout their lives. But how, I wonder, are we going to raise up folks like this? And how are we going to inspire them to want to devote their lives to serve others in this way?

I don't know what the best answer to this question is. But I'm not sure that we need to find the best answer before we start trying to do something about it. Whatever we do, we need to help our students and our faculties develop ways of thinking and behaving as Christians that will sustain them – what Dallas Willard calls 'habits of the heart' in works such as *Renovation of the Heart* and *Spirit of Discipline*.

## **Conclusion**

I must end. I am sure that this conference will spend much time discussing the politics of educational philosophies in the west and the emerging nations, and that you will learn much about the best practice in such matters as faculty development, curriculum development, and the funding of tertiary education. These are all important, and must be addressed. Yet what we need to keep alive is the vision of the difference that the gospel can make, and its impact upon and through tertiary education. Your institutions can be like beacons on hills, the spiritual oases in which tomorrow's leaders can shape their vision for the future, and allow the gospel to impact upon our world. In matters such as this, perspective is a vital issue. If I have a plea to make, it is simply this: *do not let details overwhelm the vision*.