

C-A-N/CWR: Conceptualising a Christian University in the UK  
**Call to action – discussion starter: 6 key clusters of questions**

**1. What is a university and what are its purposes?**

- nature: universality, of scope (comprehensive + integrated); of access (non-elite); of recognition
- purposes:
  - acquisition/advancement of knowledge: *research*
  - transmission of knowledge: *teaching*
  - *service* to society, including global society: i.e. full human flourishing, not just economic growth, thus also:
  - *critique* of society
  - *formation* of persons not only training for job market

**2. What is the current health of the university? (how ‘inadequate’ or ‘sick’?)**

- *multiversity*: disciplinary dis-integration (silos), over-specialisation/professionalization (LPUs)
- *fragmentation* of individual disciplines: eclecticism, both theoretical and methodological: lip-service to ‘interdisciplinarity’ but rarely realised in practice (ie is ‘multi-’ but not ‘inter-’)
- *commercialisation*: too dominated by corporate funding; skewed to serving ‘global competitiveness’
- *consumerisation*: unable/unwilling to cultivate virtues; neglect of student well-being (exception: Harvard course on ‘Reflecting on my life’)

**3. What is the nature/purpose of ‘Christian scholarship?’**

- *cultural*: engage in shaping of culture, pursuant to ‘cultural mandate’ – to explore every dimension of God’s creation (‘Book of Nature’) in their distinctness and interrelationships; and so to ‘bless the world’
- *integrative*: exhibit wholeness, facilitate communication across and within disciplines and thus also enable true inter-disciplinarity:
- how is integration to be realised – what are the ‘core’ integrating disciplines?
  - theology (as ‘queen of sciences’); thus ‘theologies of...’; and ‘religious studies’?; also learns from other disciplines
  - (Christian) philosophy: clarifies core theoretical concepts underpinning disciplines and supplies ‘trans-disciplinary’ concepts (eg ‘purposiveness’, ‘meaning’, ‘lawfulness’ etc?); also learns from other disciplines
  - both shaped by biblical studies?
  - other core, integrative subjects (eg history)?
  - also serves to expose non-neutrality of scholarship
- *missiological*: ‘Christian scholarship follows mission’ – advancement of Gospel of Kingdom (redemption of fallen culture); today, ‘decentre European Christian Humanism’
- *prophetic*: normative critique of society, but also exposure of whatever is dehumanising, by means of truthful empirical description (to be done by natural sciences, social sciences, arts/humanities): Christian scholars would thus pursue fresh angles, tackle neglected fields (eg sociology of family) and factors (religion), challenge faulty paradigms, etc
- *apologetic*: enhancing intellectual plausibility of Christian faith: not only vis a vis ‘athesim’ but also ‘rival spiritualities’ in global context
- *diaconal* (service to church): not primarily traditional ‘ministry training, but being ‘men [and women] of Issachar’ who understood the times and knew what the people of God should do’ (1 Chron 12:32)<sup>1</sup> – in every area of life
- *patient!* think in generations not years, and don’t be reactive to current events, latest enthusiasms
- regard ‘excellence’ as pursuant to those goals, not end in itself or just to win ‘credibility’ in mainstream (though also needed)
- goals is not to be ‘distinctive’ for its own sake, ‘but ‘authentic’, ‘faithful’

**4. Channels for promotion of Christian scholarship?**

- committed, well-formed individuals working in secular institutions (how formed?)
- institutes/centres within universities (eg Faraday Institute; MacDonald Institute, Anscombe Centre, Cambridge Institute for Religion and International Studies, etc)
- informal groups within departments/universities (faculty fellowships/reading groups/research partnerships etc)
- academic associations (eg generic ones like C-A-N; discipline-specific ones like Association of Christian Economists, Christians in Science, etc); and independent research institutes (eg KLICE)

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<sup>1</sup> Check out the US-based ‘Issachar Fund’!

- mentoring relationships between senior and junior scholars ('ashrams'?) – needn't all be Christians (eg Andrew Basden's ICT research groups)
- ongoing programmes within the university (eg Developing a Christian Mind, summer school on Law and Religion, both in Oxford), or outside it (eg FiSch, based at WYSOCS, Cambridge Scholars' Network)
- postgrad conferences eg Transforming the Mind
- pre-university or postgraduate year-long 'foundation' courses in Christian worldview/scholarship
- pastoral/vocational support for postgrads eg Christian graduate societies; Mark Surey's work with postgrads; etc
- 'Cathedrals Group' universities – where open and supportive

## 5. What would be the character/purposes of a Christian university

- to pursue *all of the above purposes listed in 1 and 3 above....*
- by means of sustained, concentrated, communal pursuit
- committed to Christian worldview (eg Scripture/tradition? Core concepts such as purposiveness, agency, dignity, equality, etc etc)
- outward-facing: not competitive with secular universities but teachable, cooperative, supportive, and corrective: seek conversations/partnerships, yet without losing identity
- define wide scope of academic freedom
- creedal basis? Perhaps an 'educational creed' (ie Christian philosophy of education') rather than doctrinal?
- ecumenical? How broad a basis?
- admissions policy? open to all students
- hiring policy? criteria (eg signing up to Educational Creed?)? (eg of Lahore Christian university hiring Muslims?)
- career progression policy? performance criteria to reflect Christian vision of scholarship/teaching/service, not simply imitate REF culture
- governance structure?
- why establish?
  - where secular universities judged to have fallen away from purposes so far that an alternative is called for – for the common good of scholarship and society
  - where above channels deemed not sufficient to advance cause of Christian scholarship/formation
  - where mainstream universities seem to stifle possibility of Christian scholarship/formation
  - for its own sake?
- how initiate?
  - research-led or teaching-led? (ie start with postdoc/postgrad, MA, BA, Foundation Year etc)
  - virtual university?
  - distance education model?
  - evolve out of existing institutions eg denominational seminaries (eg Oak Hill, St Mellitus, etc), interdenominational theological/Bible colleges. Adv: institutional credibility/momentum/trust/funds. Disad: how escape existing narrow focus on theology/church ministry training and denominational/constituency agenda?
  - gradual transformation of a Cathedral Group institution?
  - start from scratch (eg model of A C Grayling's 'College of Arts and Humanities'; seek charter like Buckingham University)?

## 6. Leadership/constituency/support?

- key academic leadership needs to be research-active scholars with some experience of secular universities (thus not, as in some theological colleges, those with mainly church ministry experience)?
- leaders with 'nerve', risk-takers, innovators, mission-oriented – yet also able to generate trust, confidence
- many may be younger generation of emerging scholars, not yet totally embroiled in secular careers
- seek broad ecumenical recruitment of students, staff and supporting constituency
- not too dependent on single HNW individual donors (and establish very clear arms-length relationship, at outset)
- start small, consolidate, learn from best practice (and mistakes), expand gradually: big vision, small steps
- key conditions:
  - well-conceived, integrated, widely-endorsed, constructive, shared vision of Christian scholarship
  - critical mass of well-formed, proven Christian scholar-teachers
  - significant supporting constituency who understand and share vision and are willing to send their children and offer financial support
  - available, qualified servant-leaders
  - suitable institutional location/partnership
  - ecclesiastical and governmental support