

# REAL ISSUE

## The Resurrection of the Evangelical Mind

**C**hristian Student Action (the student ministry of Agapé) has been working in the UK for 28 years, equipping students in evangelism and discipleship. One of our aims has been to permeate the academy with Christian values and principles and bring Christian intellectual nerve back to the heart of university life. Students have a key role in this challenge, but so do the Christian academic community who are needed to take a lead in faith, witness and most crucially in the whole area of integration of faith and academic discipline. Our prayer is for a resurrection of the evangelical mind, a mind that is under-girded by a fear of the Lord and equipped to engage with those who lead the way in shaping our country and culture.

Although the academic community don't always feel like it, they are one of the most influential groups in our country, if not *the* most influential. Throwing into the equation that it is from university graduates that most nations draw their next generation of leaders, it adds up to the fact that university staff are strategically placed by God for tremendous influence and worldwide witness for Jesus Christ.

In recent years, Christian scholars throughout the world have begun to act in response to this opportunity by receiving help and equipping to communicate their faith with students and colleagues, and by undertaking intentional research which helps bring a biblical perspective to their field of study and on key apologetic issues.

Agapé's desire is to help set up a network of academics in the UK for interdisciplinary stimulation, to 'think Christianly' about individual disciplines, to practically encourage and equip university staff to communicate their faith in their workplace, to bring the academic community together with evangelical purpose.

To this end, we invited Christian Leadership Ministries (our USA arm) to send a group of experienced academic staff to the UK last May, to meet with as many academics here as possible. You may have been one of the 50 or so UK academics who met with them, and if so we hope you found this a useful and faith building experience.

Their purpose in coming was to learn what is already taking place; to find academics who have fruitful ministries on campus and gain insights from them; to generate interest in faith on campus; to begin to help Christian academics connect with others in their fields; and to find academics committed to accomplishing this goal. You can find a report of their visit on page 6 of this issue.

We believe that this publication is the next step in encouraging and equipping university staff to communicate their faith in their workplace, and in networking Christian academics for fellowship, encouragement, and for sharing ideas and approaches to ministry.

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## The Christian Scholar in the 21st Century

Many Christian academics long to serve God more effectively, and they see their role as scholars as offering them important strategic opportunities for service. I believe their roles are strategic, and I have some thoughts on how evangelical scholars can begin to develop their ministries more effectively. This is to be the general theme of the highly important conference "The Resurrection of the Evangelical Mind" to be held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December this year at the Renewal Conference Centre, Solihull, West Midlands. The conference promises to be a time of reflection, challenge and unique fellowship for faculty. I ask you to join me there.

In reflecting generally about evangelicalism and the academy, I find that evangelicalism has always been suspicious of the academic world--and rightly so. There is much justified anxiety about the secularism, relativism and pluralism, which seems to be endemic in much of today's higher education. Evangelicals--and, increasingly, many others as well--have noted with growing concern the indications that the modern academy seems to have more to do with elitism, ideological warfare and rampant antireligious propaganda than with learning.

Then there is the issue of relevance. Why bother with higher education? The important thing is to get on with preaching the gospel. Anything else is irrelevant. And the issue of relevance is at the top of the agenda for many evangelicals. As John E. Smith points out in his major study of 1963, *The Spirit of American Philosophy* [Oxford University Press, 1963], "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 a 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 what I am suggesting. Yet there is another side to this matter, which causes me to feel that we might want to consider taking a 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 Ph.D.s 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

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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 Ph.D.s 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 substantial.

Yet my argument is not simply that evangelical seminaries have a vital role to play in the consolidation of evangelicalism. The vision I wish to set out is broader. 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* [W.B. Eerdmans, 1994]. 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 recent work *A Passion for Truth* [InterVarsity Press, 1996], I suggested that "the evangelical passion for truth must become a passion for the evan-

gelical mind." And I am convinced that if we really believe that this is worthwhile, then 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 that my dream has to do with 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 has to do with my roots in the Reformation, and my firm belief in the idea of the "priesthood of

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all believers". Why is it that evangelicalism sometimes seems to focus its educational resources on pastors and clergy, rather than the laity?

But what if we were able to look ahead to a day when we would have financiers who knew as much about the Christian 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.

Now these are just some general reflections, which help me begin to understand why the evangelical scholar has a real role to play. Now let's get specific, and start looking at the details. 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 this: "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 his "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. 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 Christian 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 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 the upcoming conference "The Resurrection of the Evangelical Mind" to be so important is the

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*... a Christian resource to the global academic community.*

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 come 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? 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.

Finally, we need to be aware that evangelical scholars come in two different categories: the teachers and the re-

searchers. 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? 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 believe that the December conference will help us to make preparations for the great task that lies ahead. I hope and trust that we will all come away with a sense of vision and wonder, which will give us a new sense of purpose and perspective on our lives as scholars.

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## US Academics visit UK—May 2001

From May 14 to May 19, seven US academics from a range of disciplines and university bases met with approximately 45 university staff here, in cities across the country, including London, Newcastle, Oxford, and Birmingham. These visits were a learning process – what is it like to work on campus in the UK, what daily struggles do staff face, and what resources do they wish for? The meetings are the first step towards bringing people in the UK together to consider these problems and to start thinking about the solutions. One head of department said, "whatever else comes out of this, your visit has been a catalyst in bringing us together to talk about the issues we face on our campus and how we together can be a witness to our students and colleagues." The American academics also shared some of their experiences of sharing their faith with their faculty in a non-threatening way. After a lunchtime meeting, one comment heard was "I have been inspired to go away and look at my yearly calendar, to see how I can structure in some opportunities to tell new students I am a Christian and offer to share more if they would like to know."

The following is a brief summary of the findings of the visit, which fall broadly into five categories:

### 1. The staff/student divide

It is felt that there is often a great distance between staff and students – relationships are very definitely teacher/pupil, especially regarding undergraduates. Relationships with students are not treasured or strived for amongst staff, and are, in many places, unusual.

### 2. Isolationism

Time pressures on academic staff mean that their extra-curricular activities are restricted, often to church activities – "church is the place where I do my Christianity"

being a typical comment. Unless they meet someone in their department or at church, staff generally don't know other Christians on campus. It is felt that there's a strong anti-Christian feeling on campus. Some said that their Christianity affects their job only in that they pray for their department when alone in their office. The Chaplaincy generally seems to have a good relationship with the university authorities on campus, but is restricted in its activities. One lecturer (who sits on his university's Religious Activities Committee) said that chaplaincies may have an "evangelical slant but [are] not an evangelical platform". Various staff fellowships exist on campuses around the UK, but these are not currently interconnected. In some places the chaplains run a group for staff, but these are reported as often being social groups, and therefore not meeting the needs of academics: "there are three things I would want from a staff Christian grouping: for it to be evangelical, to build up fellowship, and to take time to look at integrating our faith and our work – nothing effective has happened in this area before."

### 3. Culture and Ethics

The UK seems to have a strong culture of 'appropriateness'. It is generally believed that lecturers shouldn't share their faith with their students because it will be seen as inappropriate, irrelevant and even 'cheesy' to talk about Jesus. Lecturers are afraid of offending their colleagues and students – people are often reserved and only share superficial things with 'friends' at work. Many find it difficult to combine Christianity with academic work as it is perceived as irrelevant.

Many people said they feel sharing their faith infringes on students' personal rights. Just as staff can't date students, sharing a personal faith would be a different form of abuse: "if you are involved in the power

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structure of the department, it is unethical to proselytise”. One lecturer told us that he made a career decision to remain a researcher, not a lecturer, as he feels he can then share with students. One person questioned the professional ethics of bringing Christianity into sensitive areas of academic life, eg. working with vulnerable people who have come to you for advice, which could lead to charges of manipulation later.

#### **4. Excellence and validity as a witness**

Staff feel that they must be highly respected and established before they come forward as Christians - those who are average or mediocre will not have their beliefs tolerated; that they must be excellent in every way (in character as well as academically) before their Christian witness could be valid; that if they are not exemplary, they will be ignored / side lined / attacked / ridiculed. “It’s hard to raise your head above the ramparts” seemed to be the general view – there seemed to be a lot of fear that they are ‘not good enough’ to become known as Christians and be effective witnesses on campus. Administrative staff perceive themselves as less important than teaching staff – they feel their beliefs will not be taken seriously

#### **5. Ignorance**

Staff said they do not know how to make the most of their opportunities to witness; how to bring Jesus up in conversation or how to share their faith in a non-threatening way. Junior lecturers feel unsupported on taking up their first position – they do not know how to make contact with other Christians on campus and do not know where to go to get help in understanding their new role and what they can do to witness for Jesus on campus.

This summary report aimed to pull together information from academics across England. Some meetings were more positive than this, where lecturers’ reported that they regularly socialise with students, but these seemed to be the exception rather than universal. Certainly it seems that university staff feel they are unsure of how to share their faith with their students and colleagues. Agape is praying that The Real Issue and other similar resources may be able to start to help lecturers’ respond to God’s call on their lives to be his ambassadors on their campus.

If you have any comments on this report, or would like to make suggestions or contributions for future articles or resources, please contact Lindsey Redgate in the Agape office.



Back row, left to right: Tom Talbert (CSA staff), Jim Stock, Ron Carter (US professors), Andy Atkins (CSA national director), Jim Painter, John Walkup, Phil Bishop (US professors), Dave Wiley (CLM staff)  
Front row, left to right: Carole Carter (wife of professor), Lindsey Redgate (CSA staff), Andrea Scott (US postgrad)

# Starting the Year off Right

The new students are arriving, loaded down with boxes, anxious for their parents to leave -- and excited about this new adventure called university. They are at a point in their lives where they will make some crucial decisions. Not only will they decide what they will do, but often they will decide what it is they really believe. What impressions will they get from their teachers?

As the academic year begins, one of the most powerful things we can do is to let students know who we are and what is really important in our lives. One of the simplest times to do that is during the first week or two of class each term. This is one of those things that ought to be required. You see, we have a huge problem in the university: students spend 3, 4 and sometimes 5 or 6 years there and never have a lecturer who identifies themselves as a Christian. In fact, many Christian academics are so afraid they will do or say something "religious" that might offend someone else, or worse still, get them in trouble, they bend over backwards not to let their Christian beliefs or opinions be seen or heard on the campus. The message being communicated, more by what is not said than by what is said, is "*it is not possible to be educated and also be a Christian.*"

Unfortunately, the opposition is not quite as silent on this score as we Christians are. I have had many Christian students tell me of being ridiculed for their Christian faith in class by atheistic professors. Many lecturers have causes they push in their classes – feminism, homosexuality, drugs, sex, abortion – the list is endless. Often the cause has nothing whatever to do with the subject matter of the course, but no matter, the lecturer has a platform and uses it. The bottom line is that students are daily being exposed to ideas, philosophies and schemes diametrically opposed to Christianity. They are seeing Christian ideas and ideals questioned, belittled and ridiculed. It is not at all surprising how effectively the message is being communicated., "*there is something fundamentally incompatible with being educated and being a Christian.*"

So what is the solution? For one thing, Christian lecturers need to identify themselves to their students as Christians. How? Certainly it would be inappropriate to devote significant amounts of class time for the presentation of one's Christian beliefs. However, if you are a committed Christian, your mindset and your approach to your discipline will be influenced to a great extent by your commitment to Christ. In fact, one might argue that you would be doing your students a disservice by not making them aware of your particular perspective.

One way to ensure your students know who you are is to bring your faith into your very first class introduction, in their first lecture of the year with you. For example, you could say something like this: "I am Professor Smith and will be teaching Econ. 101 this autumn term. I have my Masters and PhD from Oxford and I have been teaching here for 15 years. My wife, Mary, and I have 3 children. I enjoy tennis and boating. My wife and I are actively involved in our church, because our faith in Jesus is an important part of our lives. My office hours this term are listed in the syllabus..."

Sometimes lecture courses bring up issues which you can use to show how your Christian faith affects all your thinking. For example: "You're absolutely right, Jon. Profit maximization is not the only acceptable objective for a corporation. There are a number of objectives that firms ought to consider in business operations. In fact, as a Christian, I believe there are a number of very important personnel, environmental, social and other objectives that firms regularly ignore."

Also, students often pose questions not appropriate for class discussions, but tailor-made for after-class consideration. For example: "That raises some very interesting ethical consideration, Jennifer. As a Christian, I have some strong personal views on this issue. If any of you are interested, I'd be happy to stay after class and discuss them with you."

Your choice of research topics may have reflected your personal interest in the interplay between religious and academia—making students aware of papers you have written in the past which may help them with their studies and also present your Christian worldview can also be a way of identifying yourself as a follower of Jesus.

This article was adapted from Joseph Mellichamp's book, *Ministering in the Secular University*. Published in 1997, this book has been invaluable in giving academic staff information and ideas about effectively integrating faith and professional life, from initial steps to identify yourself as a Christian to how to start a faculty prayer group. It is full of practical advice and real-life stories which promise to inspire and challenge.

To order a copy of this book contact Lindsey Redgate on 0121 765 4404 or [csa@agape.org.uk](mailto:csa@agape.org.uk)

