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THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES OVER 150 YEARS

Stephen Ridley

My favourite childhood story is the 'Emperor who had no clothes'. The story, if you remember, is of an emperor who is tricked by a cunning tailor into believing that a completely invisible and non-existent suit is, in fact, the most elaborate and daring piece of fashion. Flattering courtiers, ashamed to admit their ignorance in failing to see the fine suit, go along with the story. But the truth will out. As the emperor parades his nakedness proudly in the street, a little boy, with his eyes wide open, simply points out the obvious — 'The emperor has no clothes'. So it is with theological perspectives. As a Church College, it is tempting to look on the clothes rack for a theological robe. Chaplains and Principals weave them for Founders' Days and Valedictories, for Governing Bodies and Prospectuses. They are comforting and re-assuring. They promise warmth and dignity in an uncertain climate. But do they really exist? The following is a survey, starting with the present situation, and then explaining it in terms of the past — the early years, the middle years, and the years of crisis and critique. As a clue to my own opinions, I hope to conclude that, yes, the emperor is still actually wearing some clothes!

The Present — A Snap Shot

Imagine that you are a student coming to the College for the first time. How would the Church College tradition come over to you? You would have read the prospectus — perhaps have noticed how many clergy there are on the Governing Body, that the Principal is a cleric, and that the Chaplain has his photograph dotted about the place. You arrive on the Monday of Freshers Week. On your induction programme for that night it bills the evening meal and then a service in Chapel, before the general introduction in Gladstone Hall. Perhaps you and about 70 others go along to the service, unsure whether it is part of the compulsory induction programme. Afterwards, in Gladstone Hall, the Chaplain and Chaplaincy Team are amongst those select people explaining the College to you. They make a big thing of the College Service, period 3 (11.15 a.m.) on a Thursday. Free timetable so that all can attend. Not compulsory. All denominations. Supposedly no lectures or sports practices — but you know that various college teams turn out then. It's not 'no train, no game' but you wouldn't like to risk it. You may absorb that the Chaplain lives on campus and is full-time, and that the Team are lecturers, and from different Church traditions. Maybe you absorb very little, but you take away photos of the team advertising the pastoral hour on weekday nights (9 p.m.-10 p.m.) and other sheets giving local church times (all denominations) as well as the day by day chapel services and events.

You are probably aware of the 'upfront' nature of Christian societies in College. The Christian Union have got something on every night for the first fortnight irrespective of the Student Union timetable. Eventually you identify that their normal night is Tuesday with an alternating programme of Bible study and guest speakers, catering for a fairly committed 50 or so. The Chapel meanwhile also has an induction programme, but relies more heavily on the daily service slots — especially the 5.30 p.m. student-led ones. You are a little confused over the relationship of C.U. and Chapel, but the majority of non-church going students think they are identical. Old churchmanship divides do not seem to apply, and doctrinal differences are really only appreciated by the connoisseur. Memberships certainly overlap. Advertising for C.U. meetings and College services, meanwhile, is to a high standard. You know they are happening, even if you do not attend.

In the ensuing weeks things settle down to a routine. The inflated numbers at the early services of term level out. Between 15 and 30 people attend morning prayer each day. They are staff-run at 8.50 a.m. (8.45 a.m. Friday) each day. Willing staff are rota'ed for each Monday to Wednesday — a kind of hymn/prayer/reading sandwich. Members of the Chaplaincy Team take responsibility for 'oldfashioned' Mattins on Thursday and 'Rite A' communion on a Friday. About 20 staff faces become familiar from the morning services on different days and from week to week. The regulars include the Chaplaincy Team and obvious College Management — the Principal, Vice Principal and Deans. Out of the same 20-odd staff come the staff attenders at the main college services on a Thursday, although others will contribute to 'oneoffs' or special occasions.

The evening services are better suited to students. Student-run from Monday to Friday (with the exception of Communion on Tuesday night) they happen at 5.30 p.m. after lectures are over, and offer a break and an opportunity to worship together before a companionable tea in the cafeteria. Staff are very few in the evening — never more than two or three except at the Tuesday communion. Student members are higher than in the morning — between 20 and 45 every night with a recent average of about 30. These comprise a core identified loosely as 'the Chapel mob' and a floating fringe of people who come more or less regularly.

To the incoming student, the chaplaincy is probably most visible through the morning and evening bells for service, and the Chaplain who pops up around the place. For first years there is an informal but compulsory meeting with him, the Dean of Students and Student Union Reps. in the Michaelmas term.

To those on the 'inside' it becomes better known that there are groups to join and social activities as well — the usual round of confirmation groups and invited speakers on a Wednesday night, trips out, including weekends away, and also open house at the Chaplain's Flat on Sunday evenings as well as at other times. People who wish to remain a little more anonymous sometimes attend

the Sunday morning communion (average numbers 12 to 15) which is a strange service, designed to maintain a Christian witness at College, despite a policy of encouraging students to attend local churches.

Then there are the main College services on a Thursday. Absenteeism at weekends, and the 'local church on Sunday' policy, means that Thursdays are the lynchpin of Chaplaincy strategy, and involve the Team in most work. A large part of their four meetings a term, and occasional chaplaincy days, is devoted to the Thursday programme. Each team member is responsible for at least one College service a term. Sometimes they double up. Lengthy sermons or erudite speakers seem not to work with students already punch-drunk with compulsory lectures. The setting is deliberately non-denominational and as comfortable as possible. Thus the setting is Gladstone Hall, not Chapel, and we experiment with seating arrangements and forms of service. The aim is to involve different students and staff, and to give them a broad and lively experience of Christian worship and reflection. A typical Michaelmas term then would include a fairly institutional service at which the chaplaincy team would be commissioned by the Bishop of Chester, to minister for another year. The next week you might have a totally informal service led by the C.U. Another Thursday might be a harvest festival with school children, to show B.Eds and R.E. students different options for future years. Other services might involve drama students, the music department with choir and orchestra, or Health and Community Studies on current Christian topics. In the first term practically anything is possible, and numbers reflect it. Anything from 60/70 regularly, to 250 for candle-lit carol services. In the second term, the going gets tougher and we reckon on a base of 45 going up for special events such as an Easter service which might attract 100. In the third term 1st year teaching practice begins to bite, and exam. panic sets in. Services by then are smaller and more reflective, and retreat from Gladstone Hall to the cosier environment of the De Bunsen centre.

At some services through the year there remains an 'expectation' of attendance. The Founders' Day service in the Cathedral, with a massive publicity effort and near three line whip on the staff, will get between a third and a half of the students there. Valedictory is fashionable at the moment and the Chapel is packed. So too are the Carol services, but realistically, day by day and week by week C.U. and Chapel together probably touch just over 10% of students — perhaps 150 out of 1,100 students, and perhaps 25 out of over 100 academic staff. This then is the sharp end of a theological perspective.

Another facet of the picture is the level of institutional support for Christian things. The College pays some of my salary (the Diocese and charities pay the rest — requiring some Diocesan duties in return), provides an entertainment allowance, and gives me free accommodation on campus. In addition I am allowed a voice though not a vote, on most academic meetings. On a personal level I have immediate and valued access to the College hierarchy responsible for welfare matters. The College absorbs costs for printing, photocopying and Chapel maintenance, and also provides money for the building up of the Chapel com-

munity, in recognition of the fact that Chapel, unlike other clubs funded by the Student Union, is a College responsibility. The Chaplaincy Team also have an important function in keeping the Christian tradition on the map. Publicly commissioned by the Bishop each year, and annually reviewed by a committee of the Governing Body, the Team can act in the upper echelons of college as a powerful pressure group. In recent years they put weight behind the development of Founders' Day, and more recently still submitted a paper giving a preliminary critique of the 'enterprise culture' in education. This kind of activity is sometimes resented, and occasionally appears to be arrogant in tone — as if claiming some moral high ground in a College where, in fact, there are many staff of goodwill and conscience. Nevertheless I am well aware, as a pastoral chaplain, that chaplaincy credibility is better served in College hierarchies by colleagues who understand and share academic pressures.

On a much broader level, the ethos of the College could be described as Christian. There are plenty of welfare agencies and identifiably caring attitudes. Most of the staff subscribe to Christian or Humanitarian views, and this certainly shows in their general goodwill, levels of professionalism, and in their genuine care for students. This atmosphere prevails amongst other staff too, not simply the academics. There is also an interest in promoting voluntary work, and, through a project called T.W.I.N. (Third World in Need) people abroad are helped. The Chapel Committee, significantly under the Chairmanship of the Principal, sponsors this work.

In a central area of College strategy however, there is nothing specifically Christian, and that is in the classroom. As a new student at Chester College I would not expect and certainly would not receive a Christian perspective on what I learn. Unless the subject matter itself required it (such as R.S.), Christianity would not be brought in to illuminate a subject, nor vice versa. Whether there can actually *be* a Christian perspective on academic subjects is hotly debated. I simply mention it here to throw light on the remark in the prospectus that students should learn to reflect on their work 'in the light of Christian truth'.¹ Few would claim that this is true in any educational sense, even if they could define all the words in the sentence. The best the College offers so far is a Founders' Day lecture, recently instituted, which asks a similar question each year — 'What is education really *for*?' Here at least, Christianity could make a contribution, and perhaps further college-sponsored debates will follow, but for the moment individual subject areas would admit no such critique.

Our snap shot picture of a Church College in the 1980s reveals the following. First fairly lively, but voluntary Christian activities backed up by institutional weight, money and personnel. Second, an ethos of caring and professionalism at least in accord with Christian values. Third, central educational and organisational aims which are essentially uninformed by anything specifically Christian. The first two areas cause no debate at all. One would expect a Church College to have these features, and levels of general support, goodwill and even attendance at worship, are something to be grateful for. The third area is the dif-

ficult one. Should Chester College have Christian aims and purposes which are different from other educational institutions? In its 150th year, the College is asking whether it has lost something it once had, or whether it is simply crying over an impossible dream. A look at the history might help.

The Early Years

Chester College was founded in 1839 with very firm intentions. The Founders were clear that they wanted it to be a church education and a highly denominational one at that. They did not want government interference, and their object was to produce Christian teachers who could share their faith with future pupils. According to Gladstone, some of them might even aspire to the higher office of clergy!² Likewise, Bishop Sumner had no doubt that the training of teachers should be for the glory of God.

‘We shall make religion the object of our concern because we hold that the nature of the education should be determined by the nature of the being whom we instruct; and that the being whom we instruct is to be educated in the knowledge of God, because on the knowledge of God his eternity depends.’³

In his book, Bradbury speaks of the air of expectancy and faith which surrounded the famous meeting of 25th January 1839. There was a clear feeling that if quality teachers were produced this would actually create a demand for education. Furthermore the early figures seem to prove it.⁴ Small wonder then that Sumner’s charge of 1844 was full of triumph. . . ‘I look to the Training College now happily established at Chester . . . as one of the bright stars in the present prospect.’⁵

There would have been no question in those early years of the curriculum being influenced by Christianity. The College was the curriculum, and the curriculum was Christianity. Similarly there was no doubt that the teachers must be devout. ‘A system of cold mechanical explanation may enter the head,’ said Slade at the inaugural meeting, ‘but it will never touch the heart.’⁶ In practice this meant a rigorous regime of compulsory services and scriptural exposition. This is well documented elsewhere.

The early College was run very much as a church seminary. Even in town, the men had to be on their best behaviour. The minutes of the Joint Committee for May 1889 has the charming note:— ‘The Bishop had asked if the men had a smoking room. The Principal had not seen the point of this remark until he realised it was against the men smoking in the street, especially if lounging about the streets in their boating and cricketing costumes.’⁷

There was a strict admissions policy for students. Before 1907 members of dissenting churches were not admitted. Methodists,⁸ as Bradbury suggests, were probably not excluded by the policy of requiring a certificate of Baptism and a letter of commendation from their local vicar. Also required however was the successful completion of a Religious Knowledge entrance exam. When in 1885 pressure built on Chester to drop the exam or accept a standard school qualifica-

tion, the Principal at the time (Allen) was outraged: 'the truth is that the outcry against the requirements of Training Colleges is only another part of the attack on Church education. . . The existing rules are no hardship on any earnest pupil teacher. . .'⁹

Nevertheless even in this early period it was a matter of clerical will and determination against (as they saw it) secularising tendencies. In 1875 a magazine called *The Schoolmaster*, extensively read, and professing to look at everything from 'the teachers' standpoint', was banned by the College because it caused 'insubordination' and sowed 'discontent' between schoolmasters and clergy.¹⁰ It is clear too that Religious Instruction did not always hold the students' interest. In 1876 Chritchley remarks, 'In R.K. . . I have noticed from time to time a flagging of interest on the part of our students and a relaxation of effort, and in consequence have felt it my duty to speak seriously on the subject on more than one occasion'.¹¹ Obviously the Archbishops' inspectors felt the same, because, following their report in 1879, the number of R.K. lectures was increased from 5 hours to 6.¹² Chritchley had no doubt that this was his bounden duty. . . 'The object of this institution, as I take it, is to train and send out . . . not only efficient elementary teachers, but enthusiastic churchmen. . .' To do anything less would be 'to betray the cause of the foundation'.¹³

Even at this stage however, there seemed to be a mismatch between the College as it was at the present moment, and the foundation aims. When the admission of 'dissenters' became policy, through the National Society and the Board of Education in 1907, it was not before a meeting of the Principals of Church Colleges had sent a strongly worded protest. 'It would destroy the unity and corporate life of the College' they claimed. Furthermore they felt that investors (significant!) in the colleges would feel betrayed by this 'breach of faith'.¹⁴ The protest was ignored. In 1908¹⁵ Chester admitted 12 non-conformists but housed them outside the College so that corporate Anglican worship and discipline could continue.

From our own ecumenical standpoint, it is hard to understand the significance of moments like this, but they *were* significant. As soon as all schools were not church schools, and all Christians were not Anglicans, and all funds were not church funds, and all entrants were not Christians — the whole idea of the institutional church college became extremely difficult. The Principals were well aware of the implications. The extraordinary thing is that the Church at large did not. The Archbishops' inspectors of the time were happily commenting on the beauty of the Chapel,¹⁶ congratulating the Principal on the introduction of Saints' days communions,¹⁷ or remarking on the number of unconfirmed men or R.K. lectures in a week.¹⁸ In a sense who can blame them? There was no need for a critique of the studies being taught because worship and R.K. was taken for granted for all students. There was no need for a theological perspective. The worshipping community *was* the perspective — so long as the College remained precisely that. As soon as cracks began to show in that corporateness however, the whole perspective was extremely vulnerable. While churchmen clung

to the idea of a worshipping community producing Christian teachers, they unconsciously paved the way for a time when, for all the best reasons (such as conscience, sincere conviction and dissent) the worshipping community could be completely divorced from subject areas and curricula, and the 'heart' of the College become only questionably the true supplier of the organs.

In the meanwhile, in the early 1900s the Church felt that the Training College was doing the right things. Although bishops attended meetings less often, and some of the Liverpool representatives disappeared to build a cathedral in 1908,¹⁹ they had no reason to worry about Chester. In 1910 they advertised for a new Principal²⁰ and the heart of the matter was there. The advertisement specified Holy Orders and mentioned that there was a College Chapel with daily services, and celebrations of communion on Sundays and Holy days. These were the important features.

The Middle Years

The crucial fact to remember is that until 1953 the numbers at College were only 153. Even in 1965 there were only 550. These then are the middle years. The point of them is that for a long period of time it was possible to hold the College together as a worshipping community, through sheer charisma and interpersonal relationships. There is no doubt that the College remained robustly Church and establishment oriented. The atmosphere of the period, and one to which old boys testify, is of a close-knit, highly disciplined community, relatively divorced from the local community, and aware of its own distinctiveness. Residence was certainly the key factor in this. In 1924 staff discerned that students were escaping via the Art Block, so a large wall was built to ensure proper discipline.²¹ As late as 1959 there was a huge discussion over whether students should be allowed home at weekends. Council decided that absenteeism 'threatened to destroy the whole value of residential college life and all that it implied and sought to do'.²² Here again is the recognition that somehow corporateness is all, so that even if college services were no longer compulsory, nevertheless the College itself had something about it which the theologian could call an approximation to 'the body of Christ'.

If you worked together you also worshipped together. It is fascinating that at the same time as Astbury declared attendance at Chapel voluntary (1937)²³ he also opened a gallery in the chapel in order to accommodate the whole College. There was obviously an expectation that students and staff would worship, simply as part of being at the College. This included being able to respond to requests from the Dean, for the College to attend Mattins at the cathedral every month or every other month, on a Sunday morning. There was obviously no fear of the students not turning up.²⁴ In the post-war years attendance, at least on Sundays, (for which we have records) go down, but in a gradual slide, and the same tone of regularity and certainty remains. Solemn moments in the nation's history, such as the abdication of Edward VIII before,²⁵ and the death of George VI²⁶ after the war, are recorded with a surety as if the Second War

had never happened. This is still the era of the established habit of Church and State. In these years it was still possible, on the 100th anniversary of the Chapel, to complete a staff meeting and then adjourn en masse for worship²⁷ in Chapel, with a Garden Party and exhibition to follow. Ecclesiastical dignitaries meanwhile came to nearly all important events. Bishop Fisher appeared for the centenary in 1939, and then as Archbishop in 1954. He is almost a symbol of the apparent continuity of the era.

Dotted here and there however are indications that the present structure could not last. In one sense ecclesiastical representation within the College could not have been stronger. In 1930 Blackburn Diocese was asked to send representatives, and responded, though with a struggle to find enough willing and capable volunteers.²⁸ The actual Church hold on the College was slipping. In 1934, the Archbishops' inspectors unobtrusively became 'visitors'. 'It was agreed', runs the minute of the meeting 'that it was undesirable that the visitors should include within their function the condition of the College buildings and College finance, but it was further resolved that the visitors should have a right to enquire into the finances of the Chapel and of the Chaplaincy.' It was done so amiably that the Bishop was apparently very satisfied by the proceedings, presumably because the College still had an overtly Christian ethos.²⁹

At national level and perhaps at a College 'gut' level doubts were beginning to creep in. One of the first minutes of the re-opened College in 1945 was a report from the Principal on a meeting of the standing conference of Church Colleges.³⁰ The main subject had been 'the extreme ignorance of students in fundamental Christian doctrine'. In 1949 the Church was obviously less supportive. There was a request from the archdeacon asking if official church visitors could visit the College, to collect information to enable them to 'refute the charges being made . . . that the colleges were of little value to the Church'.³¹ It is probably no accident that the prospectus of 1951 amounts to a defence of the College. It begins with the question, 'Why does the Church of England maintain 25 Training Colleges including Chester?' Further on it answers — 'Character training is more important than imparting knowledge and the Church holds that this can only be done by a Christian teacher. Without a religious foundation, education is but a sham'.³² Likewise in a committee note of 1950 there is an anxious comment on the students who have passed the certificate of proficiency in Religious Knowledge — 'If the College is carrying out its proper functions, a very large proportion of its students should be competent and willing to teach scripture in schools of all types. . .'.³³

The world was changing rapidly and the College wondered about its identity. It even worried about its name. Should it explain itself a little more? In 1957 they looked at their history, and a minute records that 'the consensus of opinion seemed to be that the College should be named after one of the saints'. It did not happen, but the train of thought is interesting. When in doubt, look to the Church tradition. But in 1957 things were beginning to move too quickly.

Crisis and Critique

In 1955 student numbers in College stood at 155 — all men. By 1965 numbers were over 550 and women had been admitted. By 1975 there were over 900 students, the B.Ed degree had arrived and the first B.A. courses were beginning in 1976. The College had expanded massively. Practically all the student hostels, now familiar names, were opened in the post-1953 period. The national scene is well known. Massive expansion in teacher training was followed by the desperate surge into diversified courses, as the demand for teachers fell off in the '70s. Chester survived. Others did not. Suffice to say that in 1970 there were over 25 Anglican colleges in England and Wales. Today the number is down to 13, and of these only nine have full autonomy.

This huge expansion exposed the College to radical new thinking about itself right across the board. The public face of the College remained robust in its assertion of Christian values. In 1968 we are still reading in the prospectus that 'the Church believes that knowledge without spiritual development is of little worth. . . ' It continues . . . 'In view of the belief in the essentially spiritual basis of all education, opportunities for corporate worship must be one of Chester's major concerns. Chapel is voluntary but it is hoped that all students will feel sufficiently interested to want to be involved'.²⁵ The Chapel section in the same prospectus is tougher . . . 'While attendance at Chapel is voluntary, this part of our work is necessary for all except those who deliberately withdraw on grounds of conscience'. It is evident that the Chapel at least was fighting to build back all-college worship into the agenda. Others were happy simply with a vague 'spiritual dimension'. The intimate environment which had held different perspectives together, no longer existed. Inherent weaknesses were coming out.

However, consciences were pricked and enormous efforts were made. Staff members within the College sweated before massed student audiences to give (compulsory) lectures on important Christian, moral, educational and relational themes. The personal tutorial system dates to this time — whereby every student was linked with a staff member. There were weekly tutorial slots devoted to discussion of the Christian faith. In these ways at least, it looks as though the College was trying to retain the community and corporate features of the pre-expansion days.

For committed Christians, and particularly the Chaplain, it must have been a very difficult time. The expectation that all staff and students jointly carried the Church College tradition was simply not met in practice. Worshipping numbers were small, and it is clear that fingers were pointed at staff whose only crime was that they took responsibility, and furthermore only in a part-time capacity, for worship. The *Collegians* of the period certainly from 1961³⁶ illustrate this crisis of confidence, and scape goating. In 1967 a plaintive voice writes . . . 'Is Chester College Chapel dying? In a word — yes. Why? Because people just don't care'.³⁷ By 1970 however, the tone is more aggressive. . . 'Much criticism is being made of the Chapel at the moment, with the implication that Chapel is no longer an effective or even worthwhile body. This is good

since such criticism is really self-criticism.³⁸ A good look in the mirror is then suggested for the fault finders.

Throughout these years the theme of Founders' Day sermons is the same. In 1967 'it is essential to restate our faith as a basis for our educational effort'.³⁹ In 1970 'a church college stands for a doctrine of man which influences the curriculum in content, structure and relationships'.⁴⁰ In the meanwhile the Chapel refused to die. In Michaelmas 1967 the College service was introduced at 9.00 a.m. on Thursday morning, soon to be 9.15 (Easter 1968), 12.05 (Michaelmas 1968) and settling to 11.35 a.m. in 1975 before the present arrangement of 11.15 a.m.⁴¹ Numbers at these were actually very impressive where we have accurate records. 1971 was a particularly good year with numbers running at levels similar to today and of course, at a time when total numbers of students in College were smaller.⁴² Huge efforts were being made. The variety of names in the 'official slot' of the chapel registers is in sharp contrast to the two or three signatories of Astbury's day. The more experimental, less denominational services clearly attracted greater numbers as they still do today. The question mark against all these efforts, however, was sustainability. How long could lecturers and a part-time chaplain pump in this kind of energy? Compulsoriness, meanwhile, was no longer an option, and sheer esprit de corps was difficult to generate in a College five times its original size. Could the Chapel still claim to represent the heart of the College, as only a small proportion of staff and students came?

During the next few years the College and Chapel settled down to new self-understandings. Discussion was, and still is, at a high level. Symbols of identity abound in this period. In 1958 the first candle-lit carol service attracted crowds in Chapel. A Cathedral Founders' Day was established in 1969 as a public witness of what the College was supposed to be. Chapel was filled with donations and dedications.⁴³ In 1981 a staff conference was held on the identity of a church college, with a 'vigorous call from the chaplain' for greater attendance at Chapel.⁴⁴ In 1982 the Certificate of Christian Studies was established as a voluntary course within time-table time, for students who wanted to enhance their RE teaching qualifications. Since then it has become a National Certificate, backed by the Archbishops — a kind of resurrection of the old episcopal Certificate given to accredit early Chester students. In 1983 the Cross was erected on the Cloister steps. 1984/85/87 saw the arrival of the Chaplaincy Team, a full-time residential Chaplain and a clerical Principal. The new student village became known as Church College Close and in 1988 the Founders' Day Lecture was established.

So we come to the present day — back to where the essay began and to the original question — 'How real are the clothes which the Emperor is wearing?' One school of thought is cynical. All these are empty symbols compared with the past. A survey of the remaining church colleges, carried out by the Culham Institute between 1981 and 1986, gave conflicting evidence. On the one hand it concluded that the church colleges were distinctive, but on a cumulative case, such as overt Christian witness, staff-student relationships, etc. Moreover, these

characteristics 'were not a haphazard or accidental occurrence, but one which is purposeful and the outcome of deliberate policy'.⁴⁵ On the other hand, it was quite clear, from results specific to Chester College, that neither staff nor students gave high priority to church needs, Christian insights or evangelism, and no one believed that the Christian foundation had any effect on the curriculum. People were still broadly in favour, however, of Christian 'influence' and the production of RE teachers and caring professionals.⁴⁶

Faced with all this, I remain optimistic and not cynical. The earliest founders of the College located the heart of their endeavours in the worship of God. This, at least, survives today, and is heavily backed by the institution. I suspect that Christians in College in the 1980s simply have to work harder at being Christian. No one can be carried in a school assembly routine any more, and we can no longer expect values to be perpetuated unless they are articulated. That is quite a challenge.

The final question asks what project a church college might reasonably embark on in the present. The Founders had no model for bringing Christianity to bear directly on secular studies. Many would say this is THE great challenge facing Western Christianity, let alone nine smallish church colleges. Hearts quail before a project so large. When members of our own college produced an excellent set of papers on the subject,⁴⁷ they were received with politeness rather than enthusiasm. Perhaps the whole project sounds too dream-like, but like the Holy Grail, or an invisible set of clothes, which might become visible — it holds my interest. There is a big national conference this year.⁴⁸

In the meanwhile, Chester College is still here. God is still worshipped. The Emperor is still wearing some clothes.

Footnotes

I am grateful to Juliette Day, a Chester College student, for allowing me to use her research, 'Chester Diocesan Board of Education — Reaction or Innovation? Church response to the education debate of the 1840s'.

1. Current Prospectus, p.4.
2. Quoted in Bradbury, p.34.
3. Bishop Sumner, 'Charges', 1838, p.8.
4. Bradbury, p.49.
5. Bishop Sumner, 'Charges', 1844, p.13.
6. Quoted in Bradbury, p.55.
7. CR86/1/3: May 1889.
8. Bradbury, p.60.
9. CR86/1/3: May 1886 (annual report to the Joint Committee).
10. CR86/1/2: 1875.
11. CR86/1/2: 8th Dec. 1876.
12. CR86/1/2: 14th Dec. 1879.
13. CR86/1/2: 12th Dec. 1875 (annual report to the Joint Committee).
14. Reported in CR86/1/8 (The meeting was of the Principals of the C.E. Training Colleges, Fri. 7th June 1907).
15. CR86/1/8: 1908.