

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

Out of the whirlwind comes a tempest of questions, holy questions, it seems to me, that call us to account. "Where were you?" God asks Job, among a host of related questions about everything under the sun. "How can these things be?" asks Nicodemus, pondering the mystery of Jesus' words, pondering the mystery of the word of God concentrated in the flesh of our humanity in Jesus Christ, at least in the Christian understanding of things. "Ye must be born again", Jesus said. What does it mean?

How can these things be, too? we might ask, as parents and teachers, as grandparents and relatives, who behold with great pride and joy all of you in the wonder of your graduation day. "How can these things be?" No surprise at all, you say. We could do it. We have done it. No great surprise. And yet, surely, there is something quite special about this day.

Today, you step up and step out, having made the grade. Today, in a moment, in the twinkling of the eye, you will be changed from being students to being alumni, ready and waiting to assume new challenges and embark upon new endeavours. We are all very proud of you, at once sad and glad to see you go. And here you are, for the last time as students, in this chapel; no doubt, at once sad and glad, too! "Parting is such sweet sorrow", but don't worry we shan't be here until the next morrow. This is the day. And it is, I think, a very poignant moment where so much of our life together is captured and signified.

We meet in this place of holy purpose, this place of prayer and praise, this place of holy questioning. For what has been the measure of our gathering? Has it been about the mere "assur[ance] of certain certainties", as T.S. Eliot puts it, the blather of platitudes pious and not so pious, or has it been about a spiritual and intellectual inquiry into the True, the Beautiful and the Good, a serious inquiry into the things of God that ground all our other studies and all our life? "Fides quaerens intellectum", "faith seeking understanding", Anselm teaches us, "Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest", Cranmer exhorts us, "Deo, Legi, Regi, Gregi", the Father-Founder of the School, Bishop Charles Inglis reminds us.

These are all phrases belonging to the activity of holy questioning, to the intellectual and spiritual enterprise of the educational project of this School. The Anselm window is the contribution of the graduating class of 2005 and this year's class of 2006, at once given to the greater glory of God, *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*, but signaling as well the scholastic enterprise in its widest signification. On behalf of the School, let me thank you and let me remind you that this is all part and parcel of who you are, too, as within the narrative pattern of history and education that these new windows represent.

This is your last service here as students and the first service with these new windows that capture something of the quality of our life together as a spiritual and intellectual community which seeks to educate the whole person. How? By

way of holy questioning, the questioning that seeks to know and to grow in understanding, the questioning that has the humility to confront all our assured assurances and not be content with the superficial and the cynical, with the brain-dead and the mediocre. It suggests a certain kind of confidence in reason itself as against the forces of nihilism and dogmatic unknowing, a confidence that is not arrogance but simply the persistent quest to know. After all, only those who know that they are ignorant will always strive to know.

At the very least, there are the questions that confront our culture at its deepest level, questions that address the soul of the culture in its assumptions and attitudes, questions that challenge what Wendell Berry, a celebrated American poet, Kentucky farmer, and thoughtful environmentalist, has called the culture of arrogant ignorance. *"We have often been a destructive species,"* he observes, *"we are more destructive now than we have ever been, and this, in perfect accordance with ancient warnings, is because of our ignorant and arrogant use of knowledge."* Notice that he says *"our ignorant and arrogant use of knowledge."* So often the use is the abuse, not only of the world around us, but also of knowledge itself in all its varied array. *"Arrogant ignorance resembles much too closely an automobile being driven by a six-year-old,"* he notes, *"or a loaded pistol in the hands of a monkey."* Notice, too, the eloquent appeal to *"ancient warnings"* that somehow speak to the fears and worries about the technological hubris of our world and day.

We cannot not be aware of these dangers. Instead, we *"need to go by a way which is the way of ignorance"*, T.S. Eliot suggests. And what Berry, by way of Eliot, has called *"the way of ignorance"*, I would call the way of *holy questioning*, the way that we have pursued in all of the different avenues of inquiry that belong to the collective enterprise of the school.

Oh, I know, you may be thinking, and yes, I think it is possible to think at 9:00 in the morning, maybe even after the night of the prom – just think how challenging it is to try to think at eight-ten each morning – but to return, you may be thinking, what is all this stuff and nonsense? Religious Studies and even Theology itself, as John Milbank, the Cambridge trained philosopher and theologian, wonderfully and paradoxically observes, must surely be viewed as a mere *"fantasizing about the void"* from the standpoint of the secular culture, only to demonstrate, rather compellingly, I think, how the void actually lies in all the sciences that have lost the divine ground of their being and are about nothing more than assertions about appearance, nothing more themselves than the parade of nihilism. He points out, rather intriguingly, how the rise of nominalism after the beginning of the break-up of the medieval synthesis with divines like John Duns Scotus and then, with William Ockham meant the granting of an independent ontology to the empirical and the material which ultimately results in nihilism. Why? Because the phenomenal and empirical world can provide no account of itself. There is no absolute. There is only the void, the sense of emptiness and despair.

Against that and yet, as embracing it and perhaps, even offering redemption to what belongs to its profoundest impulses, we have this wonderful narrative in the nave of history and education, a wonderful narrative annealed in glass that points us to the academic enterprise in the fullness of its integrity and truth.

But faith, you say, what is that but something purely private and personal? *Fides quaerens intellectum*. What does that mean? Faith in God? Yes, but importantly, faith in the knowability of things, faith that is undemonstrated knowledge, faith that is right opinion, but opinion nonetheless, which is the only and necessary starting point for all and any form of knowing. "*Faith seeking understanding*", we must say, is unrelenting in its desire to know. Anselm's classic phrase challenges the hubris of all our arrogance and seeks to redeem our dogmatic ignorance.

"*Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest*", Cranmer prayed in what is one of the great prayers of learned and classical Anglican divinity, capturing in a prayer what actually belongs to an entire programme of literacy and learning in which he played no small role. "*Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest*", you are thinking, - probably about a second breakfast, but never mind - does that mean just the Scriptures? Or does it reach out to engage the whole realm of serious intellectual endeavour? Sir Francis Bacon obviously thought so, taking that phrase and employing it in one of those under-appreciated gems of literature, a literary essay entitled *Of Studies*, acknowledging that some books warranted precisely that degree of attention to be paid to the highest things; "*read, mark, learn and inwardly digest*", indeed.

But to what end? Simply our own private and personal enjoyments? Simply our own ends and purposes? Simply our own profits and pleasures? No. *Deo, Legi, Regi, Gregi*, claims Bishop Charles Inglis, signaling strongly a purpose for the education of the school he founded. Not the individual, but the individual *for* the good of the larger community without which the individual is merely □□□□□, no need for me to translate, you get it. For Inglis, and for the school there is this strong sense of purpose to the educational project.

You who are the graduates today celebrate something more than your own achievements. You celebrate your inclusion in the purpose of the institution in its attempts to be faithful to its principles, principles so wonderfully captured in the school motto, *Deo, Legi, Regi, Gregi*: for God, for the Law, for the King, for the people. We live not unto ourselves but for one another in the order and purpose of the institutions in their integrity that circumscribe and shape our lives. Ultimately, we live *for* God, the purposive *for* informing every other aspect of our lives.

Such things have been before us in the bleary-eyed wonder of early winter mornings but are now before us as *annealed in glass*, visible in other ways for us to consider. But even more, they are before us in order to be lived. "*Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one/When they combine and mingle, bring/A strong regard and aw[e]*" (George Herbert).

Out of the whirlwind, in the lesson from *The Book of Job* which Monica read, come the questions of God to us, questions which call us to account. *"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?"* The question echoes profoundly the question of God to our humanity in the Garden of Eden, *"Where are you?"* God's questions are for us, for the purpose of the growth of our understanding in humility and truth, even in the face of our follies and our foolishnesses. *"You taught me language"*, Caliban protests to Prospero in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, *"and my profit on't/ Is I know how to curse."* And yet he, too, is called to better account by the spectacle of wisdom as forgiveness that convicts the conscience in the commonwealth of love. *"I'll be wise hereafter, and seek for grace,"* he says.

Like Nicodemus in the lesson from *The Gospel according to St. John* which Anton read, we come seeking the grace of understanding. *"Ye must be born again"*, Jesus says, literally, born from above. *"How can these things be?"* Nicodemus asks, wanting to know and learning through the dialectic of questions that it means to think analogically, literally, to think upward by taking a hold with the mind the heavenly things that have been opened out in our midst.

It is not too much to suggest that your time here, whether it has been one year or seven, has been like a whirlwind, a whirlwind of so many things that issues forth in the wonderful events of this day. We have been together through so many things, through hard times and sad, through tragedy and comedy, through frustration and celebration. We have laughed together, cried together, fought together, thought together, been too much together and at times not enough, sung together, prayed together and even danced together. And no, it is not true that I stepped on Madeleine's toes, either literally or metaphorically! We have all been together in the intensity of the educational purpose of the School, in the commitment to holy questioning that always brings us to account. We find our being and the truth of ourselves in the foundations that have been laid before us, the foundations of creation, and the foundations, too, of the School, foundations laid by the grace of God.

God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind. And where was Job? Sitting on a dung-hill in misery and sorrow. His proverbial patience is really about his suffering. But the questions of God to Job redeem Job's own questions and he is, quite literally in the story, raised up out of the misery of himself and into the felicity of the praise of God. He is called to account, to the purpose of his being, precisely through the divine tempest of holy questions. There is for him, as for us in *The Tempest*, *"a sea-change into something rich and strange."*

Today you go forth from the School but only, I hope, to enter into a new phase in the same fundamental enterprise of seeking to know and as servants of the truth in all that you do. Do it all, I pray, to the greater glory of God. Go in the grace of holy questioning.

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

(Rev'd) David Curry

Chaplain

Encaenia Service

June 17th, 2006