FLOATING IN THE REAL WORLD

By ANAND C. CHITNIS

SINCE 1968 MY WORLD of work has been a small Scottish university, a new foundation in the wake of the Robbins Report on higher education of 1963. Academics are liable to be ambivalent on the question of their relationship to the real world, that is if they are even able to define what it is. For instance, is the real world that in which their students, rigorously nurtured in developing critical judgment and a sense of values, spend a lifetime marketing Pedigree Chum dog food, alleviated only by periodic 'sales conferences' in such oases as Harrogate's Majestic Hotel? Or is the real world one they face for themselves as parents at the local school (which in my case led to membership of the local truancy committee and all that was revealed there about life in the growing underclass of our society), as advisers to manufacturing industry or as those conducting research into disease or world hunger?

Certainly middle-aged academics of the present generation have cause to wonder about the two faces that the real world has presented to them thus far in their careers, and have probably joined the rest of the human race in realizing that life is about transition or passage. It has proved as impossible for academics to settle to the peaceful unfolding of a planned objective as it was for those whose tale is told in the book of Exodus. In modern parlance, the goal posts are forever moving. The years that followed the report of the Robbins committee on higher education were exciting, and were associated with defined educational purposes, with expansion and with the establishment of brand new foundations. While these purposes have not been disavowed in the quarter of a century since their enunciation, it can be questioned whether the conditions still prevail to enable their realization.

As for the brand new foundations, they achieved considerably more than the mere provision of an increased number of places in British higher education. Each new university had an academic planning board which permitted an examination of the most suitable academic provision in the universities of the later 1960s and beyond. The planners engaged in the exhilarating task of drawing a new map of learning. Breadth of study was especially

emphasized. The process gave academics the opportunity to reassess the subjects that ought to be included in the curriculum of a late-twentieth-century university. Traditional subjects were approached in original ways, new topics of study were defined and perspectives offered. Inter-disciplinarity enriched academic investigation. Before long the traditional departments caught the bug and they, too, were to innovate.

Not only were traditional disciplines re-assessed or viewed in different ways, and not only were newer ones promoted but varied means of grouping academic subjects and of evaluating student performance were implemented in the post-Robbins universities. Schools and boards of studies replaced faculties and the emphasis on final examinations was reduced, credit being given for work done in term-time. The later 1960s was a promised land especially for those in the newer parts of the British university system. Few generations had ever been given such opportunities for redesigning a national system of higher learning.

Academics have now encountered another face of the real world in the course of the last fifteen years, which is unrecognizable from that of the post-Robbins era. The shock may resound for others in rather different work areas. The subtle and not so subtle effects of financial restrictions and structural alterations, initiated by those who ultimately hold the purse-strings, have not been felt by universities alone but by other institutions that contribute to the cohesion and quality of British life, such as the entire system of social welfare, broadcasting and the world of the arts. Whereas the universities withstood the attack from below in the turmoil years of student protest after 1968, it is a moot point whether they can withstand the attack from above, having had to bear massive financial cuts imposed in 1981 and thereafter (which have the potential of bankrupting some of their number) and having to face parliamentary legislation which has the potential of altering their character irretrievably. Now a Pharaoh has arisen who knows nothing of Lord Robbins.

II

Let me indicate first the scale of the underlying financial problem: between 1980-1985, university income fell by 10% in real terms and in the current five year period a further 10% cut in real terms is being applied. Equipment grants fell by 30% between the mid-1970s and 1985 and library costs increased by 84% between 1980-1985, substantially more than the general level of inflation.[1] Incomplete compensation has been given for nationally agreed pay settlements and costs have risen in essential areas of

expenditure in excess of the national rate of inflation on which the annual adjustment of the cash value of university grants is based.

Substantial cuts are grievously affecting a system that is highly esteemed internationally for its scholarship, the relative brevity of first degrees and for a low drop-out rate. The measures would be more suited to a system that had as notorious a reputation abroad as English football supporters and equally in need of drastic treatment. Yet, at a time when Britain is allegedly improving her economic performance in relation to her competitors, some 6% of her workforce has a first degree compared with the FDR's 8%, Japan's 13% and the USA's 19%. Furthermore, government policies are calculated to reduce graduate output in Britain by some 14% in the late 1990s.[2]

Universities seek to encourage the very opposite of shallow and short-term thinking, yet one of the reasons offered for implementing considerable grant reductions to universities was demographic. Whereas birthrate figures indicated that the 1990s would see a substantial reduction in student demand, this was but a crude assumption. As bodies such as the Royal Society have pointed out, demand for higher education does not follow demography alone but such social trends as the higher participation rate of social classes I and II[3] (whose families have not reduced so markedly in size as the rest of the population) and the widening of opportunities to women, social classes IIIM, IV and V, mature students and ethnic minorities. Hence, the demand has been underestimated. It is known too that the demographic downturn is only one of those periodic troughs that have always occurred in history: a new 'baby boom' is already hitting the primary schools. In addition, the Institute for Manpower Studies, has shown that on the basis of the Department of Education and Science's own projections, there will be the same number of graduates (about 113,000) in 1998 as in 1986 as a result of the artificial restriction on places presently being imposed. This poses huge problems for key sectors of the economy: for the demand for teachers of French to be met in the 1990s, for example, 51% of all French language graduates would have to enter the profession.[4] When one's business is considered thinking, it is hard indeed to cope with ill-considered thinking, not least if its consequences strike hard at the heart of one's operations. When one's business is to train others to examine evidence carefully, it is a major affront to see the dismissal or utter disregard of the evidence given in the public prints and the visual media of the real damage being done to the intellectual potential and material fabric of the universities. It is as if the know-nothings command the land.

The values of those who have committed their lives to the cause of university work and those of the present government are proving incompatible. There are, first and foremost, opposing beliefs about education itself, whether it is a force for liberation and the encouragement of autonomy, or whether it is to be vocationally relevant and a means of control. The retrenchment of expenditure on arts subjects, for all their relative inexpensiveness, and the maintenance and expansion of subjects that directly benefit the nation's economic performance have been a facet of the divergence. Philosophy, for instance, has suffered staffing cuts of 25%, a further 10% cut is projected by 1990, and six universities have either lost or are planning to lose their entire philosophy department—this despite a 21% increase in applications for single honours philosophy in 1987.[5] Shortage of money, even at Oxford, is causing some six chairs of history to remain vacant.

Furthermore, the emphasis on size of departments has meant the demise of those that have always been small but which nonetheless played a vital role in the life of universities: it is simply no longer possible for a large number of universities to support two-person departments of fine arts and music. A philistinism is abroad that is undermining the cultural heritage that universities have for generations been charged to preserve, extend and encourage. The ultimate in intellectual sterility and blinkered attitudes was represented by the government's green paper *The development of higher education into the 1990s* (May 1985). Overall, there seems a fundamental lack of appreciation of those qualities which an arts degree can foster, not the least of which is flexibility. Arts graduates have the capacity to become accountants, investment analysts or computer specialists. They can be invaluable in the management of change. Even today there remain employers who consider the quality of trained mind rather than degree subject the key factor in graduate selection.

The spate of early retirements, voluntary redundancies, internal redeployments, phasing out of departments as well as their transfers and amalgamations with other departments elsewhere have taken their toll on the university system. These processes constitute rationalization. In whole areas, no new staff have been appointed for up to fifteen years. The implication of the lack of appointments is that we are simply not training the generation that comes after us, the best students cannot with confidence be advised to undertake research degrees since there will be no posts for them at the end. One presents a more wrinkled face, a more receding hairline and a greyer beard to successive generations of new undergraduates. Departments fail to renew themselves as once they did by a

regular intake of newly qualified postgraduates with fresh ideas and approaches that would appeal to the same successive generations of new undergraduates. Academics are at variance here with the belief that leaner means fitter.

An alternative vision of the kind of community universities ought to be has accompanied the financial cuts. Following a series of efficiency studies, the Jarratt Report (1985) has had a considerable impact on the structure of university government and committees, on the planning process, the creation of cost centres, the establishment of performance indicators, the establishment of heads of departments as managers of human and financial resources and the introduction of staff development, appraisal and accountability. Academics are having applied to them the systems and values of the business world. Management is to replace academic debate and consensus, and career appraisal will establish the alien notion of performance targets and is being implemented without the resources that are devoted to it in industry, resources for development programmes, research funds and more promotions.

The Education Act of 1988, in the wake of Jarratt, transforms the University Grants' Committee (UGC) into the Universities' Funding Council (UFC), a body which will have unprecedented powers to control the activities of universities and centralize control of hitherto autonomous institutions. The secretary of state is likewise given unprecedented powers to instruct the UFC in the details of how it may control the activities of universities. It is thought that government will contract with universities to provide a given number of students in defined subjects, with the contracts replacing grants. Government urges that university autonomy be safeguarded by increased private funding. There are, however, real difficulties with this proposition: first, the speed of government cuts is such that there is quite insufficient time to replace them adequately. Developing a system such as in the United States will take much longer than into the early 1990s. Secondly, the private donor is constantly being urged as the replacement for a whole range of government social funding, and universities are ill-equipped to compete for funds with other crying needs that may be more newsworthy. Thirdly, private funding can be whimsical and might not necessarily provide for what is most necessary or appropriate for academic development.

The act, too, abolishes academic tenure and its concession to academic freedom has been considered insubstantial. Tenure demonstrated the value that society placed on scholarship by guaranteeing job security to people who made themselves expert in some highly recondite academic area and, thereby, encouraged

them to undertake the long training and high degree of specialization involved. Tenure and academic freedom were also closely yoked together because they guaranteed the right of academic inquiry into any area without fear of any kind of political disfavour and that short-term considerations would not prevent such free inquiry. Tenure has, however, been seen as an obstacle to the reduction of staff numbers and appears to have been abolished for this immediate financial reason. The legislation, however, cannot apply retrospectively to all those in post before November 1987 and who are neither promoted nor change institutions, namely the vast bulk of those presently employed.

Along with the other plagues that afflicted universities, the abolition of tenure served to deepen the sense of insecurity felt by university staffs, even if most of those presently serving were not themselves affected. In any occupation, security is valued not only as a base for commitment to one's work but as a realistic necessity for providing for oneself and one's family. As academics have seen departments closed and colleagues retire early or be redeployed, they have felt increasingly threatened and anxiously await that now expected annual event, the publication of the latest version of their institution's academic plan, to see how near that knife has come to them. Unlike redundant Pedigree Chum salespeople, who can be considered by other companies for their marketing skills, they have little expectation of easy re-employment after twenty years as a university teacher.

I am writing this shortly after learning that two senior lecturers at Aberdeen University have, within days of each other, apparently taken their own lives in face of the cuts that are being inflicted on that institution. I have seen a union official explain on television how academics' very lack of a nine-to-five routine leads to absorption in their work that can often mean working very late, even occasionally through the night, rendering their work part of their very being and rejection of it, therefore, a deeply felt rejection of themselves.[6]

Selectivity has accompanied rationalization: an exercise was undertaken in 1985 which effectively ranked every university department as starred, above average, average and below average. One hazard was that in this, as in other reviews of subject provision, those who were ranked as below average found real difficulties in fathoming how the judgment applied to them had been reached. They were puzzled how information on their department had been collected and assessed with information apparently being collected for one purpose being used for another. No guidance was given on how books published by members of the

department should be chosen, so that the head of an arts department, deliberately choosing the literature so as to indicate the wide spread of interests, found his department rated below average because it was spread too thinly. Selectivity is proceeding through a range of disciplines with the prospect that universities will be placed in tiers, some continuing to undertake both teaching and research, others teaching but only conducting research in selected areas and yet others teaching only. This strikes at the heart of traditionally held beliefs in British universities that teaching and research mutually reinforce each other and that the fundamental characteristic of a university is their conjunction.

The present position challenges one's sense of justice. To take the instance of the Jarratt Report alone, government implemented most of the recommendations for the UGC and the universities, while paying scant attention to crucial recommendations for itself, such as restoring a longer funding horizon, avoiding thrusting crises on universities by sudden short-term changes of course and providing sufficient funds to meet the cost of future agreed staffing reductions.

The Principal of Edinburgh University has summarized the state of affairs as follows:

> 'Accountability', 'Audit', 'Management Structures', 'Value for money', 'Efficiency studies', 'Performance indicators' are already the government buzz-words which portend the future to come. Universities will be fighting new kinds of battles—and very important battles for the preservation of our cultural heritage and the ideal of a University as a place for teaching and the advancement of knowledge in a climate of academic freedom. . . . But the passion for cost efficiency is going to lay disproportionate emphasis on those aspects of what we do which can be measured and given numerical values—such as amounts of money, student number, size of buildings and so on. What of the things we pride ourselves upon but cannot express in the kind of simple numbers that an accountant can understand—teaching students to think, the maintenance of academic standards, the encouragement of original thought and ideas, the development of critical faculties?[7]

III

How are academics, or anyone else who recognizes their predicament from our story, to face the real world now that it has caught up with us? How do we cope with such a thoroughgoing clash of values? How slow of speech like Moses we find ourselves, unable to tune in to the prevailing ethos, the business culture, quite unable to speak well in terms that will be heard! Where is our

Aaron? Or rather, using real world language, where is our 'clout'? Unlike nurses we cannot hope for sympathetic portrayals of our dilemma in the popular press. In certain institutions and departments, low morale manifests itself so clearly that 'I will free you of the burdens . . . but they would not listen so crushed was their spirit' (Exod 6,6 and 9) are apt verses indeed. The foot-soldiers have no monopoly over low morale: vice-chancellors themselves frequently present a divided leadership and seem too enfeebled to fight the government's plans even though they know they are impractical, ignorant or malevolent. How can one really accept the Ignatian injunction as contemporarily expressed by David L. Fleming's translation: 'no obstacle seems to be so formidable that it cannot be faced and overcome' (Exx 315)?

I hope what I have described speaks to readers in other work situations. How can we fight off whatever makes us less than we could be? If the path had proved straight, if the Robbins dream had been realized, if the green field sites had trebled in size to be filled with even more plate glass, if now half our school leavers went to university, and many, many more women, and more of social classes three, four and five, and more of our ethnic minorities . . . what then? Would we have been happier and more fulfilled? Or would we not have been challenged in quite the same way to change, to develop, to destroy the golden calves we have fashioned for ourselves?

Many academics have found these times a genuine turning point in their lives. They had proceeded as on a conveyor belt from distinguished school careers to distinguished undergraduate and postgraduate careers and clambered on the ladder that is the lecturer's scale. The way was clear to forty years thereafter, to retirement and a pension at sixty-seven. Then, the way which they had so unquestioningly taken for granted suddenly proved dangerous. They considered their position, they thought of all sorts of other activities they would prefer to be doing at the time of life they had reached,—those perhaps, of which they had hitherto only dreamed. They took the settlements offered. They trained as teachers in Rudolf Steiner schools, bought smallholdings, devoted themselves to pressure groups for the cause of the differently abled or applied themselves full-time and lucratively to their hobby of making models of medieval scientific instruments for the American university market. The unexpected twist in the long straight road led to a fulfilment they never expected. They made more of themselves. The straight road ahead can make us less than we might be simply because it does not challenge us. The diversion to unexpected even dark byways can enrich in ways we never expected.

What of those of us who stay? I can only try and analyze my own responses to the situation in which I now find myself. I am deeply concerned about our security. I say 'our' because my wife and I are both academics, in different subject areas, and so our home is naturally sensitive to the rumours that abound about university cuts. Our daughter is forever reporting the latest confident assertion of a contemporary at school, whose father is also an academic, that the university is about to go bust. The local newspaper has an uncanny way of breaking stories before our employers have informed the staff of whatever plans may be afoot and neighbours are always asking 'what, exactly, is happening up there?' (Closure would have a disastrous impact on local house prices!) We try to be straight with the children but it is not an easy task when future prospects may not even be clear to the university principal, let alone those further down the line. Despite all this, I want security primarily for my family so that they can be provided for now, seen through their higher education and then, perhaps, my wife and I can face late middle age together and all that that may bring. I think we do want to know that we can meet our financial commitments: the mortgage redemption date seems an aeon away, the house requires constant attention. We live life at such a pace for some eleven consecutive months of the year that we really look forward to a long break away in the summer and this, too, has a high priority in our expenditure.

I stay, then, because my contribution to family provision is needed and I have been able to see, with the help of a long midst-of-life retreat experience, just how central to the meaning of my human existence my family is. It is a God-given task for me to think of my family and cope intelligently and responsibly with the practical demands of earthly life. I accept that to turn my back on what is happening in the British university system would be irresponsible simply because I could secure no job with the same remuneration in the place where we live so contentedly at present. To move would imperil either the situation where we can both live and work in the same area or, obviously, our family life. In stating this, I trust I am indeed 'choosing the better'. I also feel the situation has the potential for actually living out the second kind of humility (Exx 166). To quote again Fleming's translation:

> Just as 'I have come to do your will, O God' is the motivating force of [Jesus Christ's] life, so the only real principle of choice in my life is to seek out and do the will of my Father. With this habitual attitude, I find that I can maintain a certain balance in my inclination to have riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, or to desire a long life rather than a short life.

Leaving aside whether or not I actually have a realistic alternative, and I probably do not, I nonetheless choose to stay because I passionately believe in what I am doing. I really enjoy lecturing, even admitting to a little touch of the theatrical. I also believe I can render complex historical questions comprehensible and I find real rewards in reading for myself and then conveying to others the new perspectives on history that my fellow practitioners continue to offer. There is real excitement in what I call the 'Bad King Richard, Good King John' syndrome, where one takes a received story and shows how the latest evidence and arguments turn it on its head. I trust my own feelings here; they have a quality that I often experience when I am teaching that leaves me in no doubt that what I am doing is good and that I should, with his guidance, make the most of the talents God has given me as long as he permits.

I am assisted by the whole enterprise of historical investigation of which my own work is just a miniscule part. Interpretations of past historical events are constantly renewing themselves, a God-given exemplar to us all indeed. My field of history is a busy one and historians all over the world are currently both interested and active in it. It does wonders for my self-esteem to see the frequency with which my writings are cited in the work of others. I confront evidence that I have achieved some professional success, which is another reason for staying, to develop further such reputation as I have hitherto acquired. In acquiring it, I recall the stake that others have in me, those, for instance, who have taught me and those who have given so freely and generously of their time in commenting on my work in draft, whose concern cannot lightly be thrown away.

The value of history lies beyond the subject itself: its intellectual rigour, its capacity to impart how to gather and use information and fashion arguments are of great utility and of much value perhaps especially in the contemporary world. In choosing to stay, I hope I can take and make opportunities to fight for the intrinsic values of my discipline where I can. Again I have no doubt that these values are in themselves good and God-given. However, I need not repeat the difficulty in the present situation of representing this case and my own experience leaves me with no illusions. Numerous opportunities are presented here for living out the third kind of humility as expressed in Fleming's translation (Exx 167):

> I so much want the truth of Christ's life to be fully the truth of my own that I find myself, moved by grace, with a love and a desire for poverty in order to be with the poor Christ; a love and a desire for insults in order to be closer to Christ in his own

> rejection by people; a love and a desire to be considered worthless and a fool for Christ, rather than to be esteemed as wise and prudent according to the standards of the world. By grace, I find myself so moved to follow Jesus Christ in the most intimate union possible, that his experiences are reflected in my own. In that, I find my delight.

I have chosen to stay because I believe I can make some contribution to the troubled scene, however small. I recall two years ago attending my last meeting as an elected academic member of the University Court, in Scotland the supreme governing body of a university. Buried in the agenda was a proposal to name the bridge across the loch in the heart of the campus after Nelson Mandela. The proposal had gone through subsidiary committees, a meeting of one of which I had been glad to miss because of my own internal turmoil on the subject. I feel passionately about justice in South Africa but wondered if such a token gesture made any real contribution to the promotion of it. On the other hand, one can infrequently resolve such large questions at a distance. I have always envied my wife who, as a London graduate, took the chance some years ago to join the few who have ever been able democratically to vote for Mandela, when he stood as a candidate for the chancellorship of London University. Anyway, the subsidiary committee had been unable to present a united view to the Court who had to make the final decision. After hearing both points of view from the chair of the estates and buildings committee (a distinguished former Scottish nationalist M.P. who wanted the name, if the bridge was to be named at all, to have a Scottish resonance) and from the student president, the chair of the Court opened the matter for discussion. I suddenly found myself making all the points I would have wished to make about South Africa and going on to argue that naming the bridge was not the best way a university could uphold the ideals of its own charter, an article of which prohibits any form of discrimination. Indeed, rather than supporting mere tokenism, I went on to propose instead that the Court and the students endeavour to raise money together for a permanent scholarship which would enable a succession of black South African students to come to the university and study. This met with unanimous approval. A plan had been suggested in which all parties could co-operate.

Now I have served on many committees and doubtless have acquiesced in numerous appalling decisions and have in other ways been ineffective. I find much satisfaction, however, in recalling the soothing of this irritant and diverting the interested parties into constructive channels. I mention it in the hope of inspiring others

to see how situations can present themselves where one's values and one's gifts can come together and enable a significant contribution to be made to a given set of circumstances, be they minor or potentially explosive.

Lastly, I stay because, as has already been suggested, the spiritual potential of the situation becomes increasingly apparent. It is tailor-made for helping me question my self-sufficiency, appreciate that God is in control and see the good in weakness which reminds me how much I need him and depend on him. It presents very real opportunities for personal growth. What faith is required to let go our security and our values and to find them instead in co-operating with God's plan, ever mysterious! I may not fathom his ways, I may not yet know why he allows his own good created human intellectual and creative activities to be threatened or snuffed out, but I can endeavour to let go of my ways, my desire to be in control, to cut God down to my size. I have, in short, an opportunity in a life and work situation to practise detachment and to let God be God. In the words of a contemporary reading of the Principle and Foundation (Exx 23):

> All the things in this world are gifts of God, created for us, to be the means by which we can come to know him better, love him more surely, and serve him more faithfully.
>
> As a result, we ought to appreciate and use the gifts of God in so far as they help us toward our goal of loving service and union with God. But insofar as any created things hinder our progress toward our goal, we ought to let them go.
>
> In everyday life then, we should keep ourselves indifferent or undecided in the face of all created gifts when we have an option and we do not have the clarity of what would be a better choice.

There are rational arguments to reinforce this challenging perspective. A previous generation of academics had to bear a burden that must have seemed heavy at the time: how did they view the foundation of Robbins' universities with few, if any, classics departments? How could a university be a university without Latin and Greek? Is my generation, in its turn, to be the unquestioned arbiter of what culture is and whether or in what form it is to be preserved, and act as would-be gods? Secondly, the academics of the new Robbins foundations who displayed innovation and creative energy on a scale unparalleled by their kind this century, surely they are no enemies of enterprise? Nor, surely, are those who have redrawn academic boundaries in the last score of years, who have provided stimulating teaching and have conceived and implemented a range of innovations, academic and otherwise in

their universities? It is a challenge to personal growth to recognize the value of enterprise and its value for so many in prompting personal development. Enterprise culture can embody responsibility for self, as good and as necessary as the welfare state is in providing opportunities and the necessities of life for others. The cultivation of a balanced view is one way of dying to self.

I find it hard in the face of morale-sapping situations to respond to new challenges, to rise from the depths and respond to the invitation of trying to do the things I know best in new ways, to grow and be renewed. Indeed it is hard to listen to the opportunities for personal and community growth when my spirit is crushed and I feel threatened. There is little interior peace, however, in clinging tightly to the worldly causes I have espoused and I hear voices of colleagues, in my own and in other institutions, that are encouraging and prophetic. One is the President of the Historical Association who has written:

> Some of the things we tried to do cannot be done any longer. It is easy in these circumstances to succumb to anger or indifference. It is convenient to feel we have not been properly treated. The problem, as I see it, within the Association, within universities, within colleges and within schools, is to maintain our confidence without yielding to the self-righteous assumption that every development that has occurred within my teaching lifetime has become sacrosanct.[9]

I have found much encouragement, too, in the works of the contemporary spiritual writer Thomas H. Green S.J. He is an accomplished exponent of the art of 'floating', which seems a valuable skill to acquire for those immersed in the real world of work. 'Learning to float', he observes, is counter-intuitive and that is why many people do not even take the risk: we have to do the very opposite of what our self-preserving instincts urge us to do.[10] He has continued:

> the activity of the floater is quite unlike that of the swimmer. The swimmer is in control of his or her direction and speed, whereas the floater responds to, co-operates with the wind and the current. The floater's activity is dynamic receptivity: God is the sea in which he or she floats. Or, to vary the metaphor, God is the lead dancer and the soul is the partner completely attuned to the rhythm and the pattern set by her partner. She does not lead, but neither does she hang limp like a sack of potatoes.[11]

This last phrase indicates that the ideal is not to surrender meekly to fate, as it were, but actively to co-operate with the

Lord's design. Once an accomplished floater, one naturally 'lets go and lets God' and it becomes increasingly natural to relax with him.[12] Even accomplished floaters, though, cannot feel they have achieved the ultimate goal simply because God is so imperfectly grasped in this life.

I find that the Emmaus story has a message, too, for those of us in the world of work, whose dreams have apparently been shattered and whose lives seem suddenly empty. It is a story of not giving up, but turning round and going back into the situation with a wholly new perspective. 'Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free' (Lk 24,21). What the freeing of Israel may mean to each one of us, the individual's own dream, I can now see needs constant re-thinking in the face of life's challenges. I pray for the grace to be able to float and I thank the Lord for the spiritual perspective he has offered me in my confrontations with the real world. With his help, I can make something of the spiritual dimension and learn more of companioning others along the way.

NOTES

[1] Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals of the Universities of the United Kingdom: *The future of the universities* (London, 1986), p 20 and 16. Vice-chancellors in Britain are the equivalent of college presidents or chancellors in the United States. In Britain, chancellors are honorific figures who confer degrees on graduation days and are otherwise rarely seen. In some cases, more's the pity!

[2] *Ibid.*, p 2.

[3] The British Registrar-General classifies the population for census purposes by occupation into five classes, with the major professions such as law and medicine in class I, lesser professions such as teaching in class II, clerical and skilled occupations in III (IIIM refers to manual workers), semi-skilled, unskilled and unemployed in IV and V.

[4] Institute of Manpower Studies: *Graduate supply and demand into the 1990s,* Report no 150, (University of Sussex, 1988).

[5] *The Guardian,* 10 June 1988.

[6] See also the reflection of a psychiatrist on his time as a Scottish university principal, W. A. Cramond, 'On not being a psychiatrist', *Australian and New Zealand journal of psychiatry,* (1987) 21, pp 453–461. On p 458, the author observes: 'Academics in general, for all their high intellectual abilities, can be highly emotional and insecure people. All too often their identity has been shaped or measured by scholastic success. One pleased one's parents by being top of the class at school and so one's identity in later life is confirmed by academic rewards, papers published, books written, prizes and awards gained.' I am indebted to my colleague, Dr. David Bebbington, for this reference.

[7] This is part of a message sent to the meeting of the general council of the university of Edinburgh, November 1987.

[8] I am indebted for so much during the time he was a member of the team at Craighead Retreat House, near Glasgow to Rev. Tom McGuinness S.J. and would particularly acknowledge here the help he gave in clarifying my thoughts on the ensuing section.

[9] Robbins, Professor Keith: 'Silver lining', *The Historian* (Spring, 1988), p 9. The author, who once taught at one of the new Robbins universities, tells a wonderful story in this article of how, in an interview, he was once mistaken for his namesake. Andre Brink's *Rumours of rain* (Flamingo ed. 1984) is a novel which brilliantly evokes the refusal of an Afrikaner businessman to grow and let go. He is shown much love by a succession of people, his mother, his wife, his best friend, his mistress, his son, all of whom give him opportunity after opportunity, every one of which he spurns. A moral tale far beyond the bounds of Afrikanerdom.

[10] Green, Thomas H.: *When the well runs dry: prayer beyond the beginnings* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1979), pp 143–144.

[11] Green, Thomas H.: *Weeds among the wheat: discernment: where prayer and action meet* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1984), p 174.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp 174–175.