

Reflection: A Dream

Last night I had a dream. It was a Tuesday in late autumn. I was in Oxford attending a gathering of college presidents, provosts, and deans from Christian liberal arts colleges and universities based in America. After a morning of meetings about budgets, fund raising, online education, and athletics, the group gathered at St. Aldates Church across the street from Christ Church College. After an inspiring worship service highlighted by a sermon on God and Mammon, a rousing singing of the hymn "Bring in the Tithes," and a closing benediction from Ephesians 3:20-21, a small group of four broke off to find a nearby pub for lunch. They walked down the High Street, passed the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, and turned left onto Catte Street with All Souls College on their right. As they passed the Radcliffe Camera, they agreed among themselves about how central a library is to the intellectual life of students.

They passed the Bodleian Library and the Bridge of Sighs, caught a glimpse of the Sheldonian Theatre, and almost stopped at the King's Arm pub at the corner of Holywell and Parks. But they decided to keep walking and passed Wadham College on the right and St. John's College on the left. They walked up almost as far as the Radcliffe Science Library, where they turned left on Museum Road heading for passage to the Lamb and the Flag, a pub that one of the four had been to the night before. They settled into a little booth facing St. Giles Street. Just across the road they could make out the entrance to the Eagle and the Child, another pub. Sitting near them was an older gentleman wearing a trilby hat with a well-worn haversack by his side. With his red face and heavy build, he looked more like a butcher or prosperous farmer than anything else. No one in the pub paid the old gentleman any attention, and soon the group of four forgot he was even there.

After a round of Strongbow, they tackled their dish of steak and kidney pie, all the while talking about the funding challenges of their college or university. Soon the talk turned to spending on libraries and faculty scholarship. President

For sixteen years **Don W. King** served as the Editor of the *Christian Scholar's Review*, completing his service on May 1, 2015. In the last of three short reflections he relates a dream he had just before stepping down as editor. Mr. King is Professor of English at Montreat College.

Xerxes, a former oil executive, grudgingly admitted the need to fund libraries and faculty scholarship, but also admitted he viewed both as ineffective cost centers. Provost Antiphon, herself a Rhodes Scholar, vigorously defended both, but lamented neither was seen as vital to many on her campus. Dean Fortitude, who had been at his alma mater for forty years, opined that his campus did the best it could given the financial constraints on all departments and programs. Dean Prospero, a well-known financial conjurer, shrugged the discussion off as an insurmountable financial mountain.

The discussion might have ended there, when from the next table the voice of the old gentleman broke in. "Forgive me," he said in an accent that faintly betrayed his Belfast origins, "but I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. Would you mind if I offered a few thoughts?" The group of four, while surprised at the old man's interruption, responded positively and invited him to share his thoughts.

"While I know nothing of the challenges you face, may I suggest that a college or university is a society for the pursuit of learning?" In my dream I know the old man went on and said many other things, but I kept hearing over and over again "a society for the pursuit of learning." The group of four asked various questions, but the old man kept bringing them back to the same idea—colleges and universities should have one over-riding concern: the pursuit of learning. He ended his conversation with this advice: "The two best ways to ensure the pursuit of learning is to invest in building library collections and in supporting faculty scholarship. Older scholars need to make younger scholars so that the pursuit of learning will ever continue." The group of four nodded their heads; each said he or she would return to campus with a new commitment to invest in their society's pursuit of learning.

When they looked over to thank the old gentleman, they were surprised to see he was gone. President Xerxes walked to the bar and asked the pub owner where they might find the old gentleman. At the question, the proprietor smiled and said, "Oh, so you've seen old Jack? He's been dead these fifty years, but every November just about this time, especially if it is a Tuesday, he appears to a select group and offers a bit of advice. Some say he goes on from here to the Eagle and Child and makes another appearance. It would be just like him. If I were you I would follow his advice, whatever it was. I don't think you want him haunting you."

And then I woke up. I hope this dream comes true.