

WYCLIFFE HALL

- OXFORD -



Statement of Academic Values and Virtues at Wycliffe Hall

Introduction

As an academic community, Wycliffe Hall is committed to the pursuit of truth wherever it may be found and wherever it may lead. As a Christian community, we are convinced that all such pursuit of truth will ultimately lead to, because all truth comes ultimately from, Jesus Christ. This conviction is embedded in the Hall's motto, *Via, Veritas, Vita* (The Way, the Truth and the Life).

We believe that this commitment and this conviction nourish each other - that rigorous pursuit of truth enables us to love God with our minds, and that faith in Jesus Christ grounds the academic imperative to keep exploring connections between observed phenomena, in confidence that all phenomena (and all branches of knowledge) are ultimately related to one another because they are ultimately related to (and derived from) a common Source. Belief in this meta-narrative gives us the confidence and the mandate to keep investigating the relationship between different narratives. Describing Jesus Christ as *Veritas* commits us to the foundational assumption that all truths ultimately cohere and can therefore be explored critically, without limit and without fear. If all truths (and all fields of knowledge) are thus related, then the academic enterprise does not risk running into the dead-end of an atomistic relativism. Monotheistic belief that all things have a common Source thus sits well with the aspiration to be a *university*, and not a *multiversity*.

Wycliffe sees its confessional allegiance, therefore, as motivating and driving its academic commitment. This document outlines the values and virtues that embody that academic commitment, to which we hold ourselves accountable.

A Truth

At its heart, the academic endeavour is rigorous search for truth, wherever that truth is to be found, and wherever it leads. If truth is understood as correspondence with the way things are, then we are confident that all truth will be compatible with, and will (for its full understanding and meaning) point beyond itself to, the One Who Is - the triune God, Who has made Himself known in Jesus Christ, the way, the truth and the life, and Who has given us access to that self-revelation in the inspired Scriptures. We therefore commit ourselves freely and confidently to the pursuit of truth.

Since we further believe that every human being is made in the Image of God, we recognize that the pursuit of truth requires us to be open to learning from anyone and everyone.

B Love

Because of our trinitarian faith, we believe that love is the foundational fact of existence - indeed, that God is love. We believe that love to have been revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, and supremely in His self-giving death on the Cross. We acknowledge His call to 'love one another as I have loved you' as central to all we are and do. For Christians, therefore, love must be the central virtue of both the life of faith and the academic life.

Code of Practice - Liberal Education Values

We therefore commit ourselves, in the pursuit of truth, to attempt to understand what we hear and read from the speaker or writer's point of view; to put the best possible construction upon the positions with which we disagree; to affirm whatever we can affirm and to learn from whatever we can learn from. And we seek to avoid belittling, caricaturing or ridiculing the opinions and positions of those with whom we disagree.

C Humility

Humility is a virtue that is enjoined upon us both by our own finitude and fallibility, and by the vastness of creation and the unfathomability of God. It is also an academic virtue enjoined upon us by the sheer complexity and difficulty of many of the issues we face, and the greatness of the minds which have wrestled with them before us. No human being can speak the last word on any subject, and, if they could, it is unlikely that we would be the one to speak it.

We believe that such recognition of our own limitation fits well with an appeal to the unlimited God for illumination, such as is encouraged by the confident assertion of the University's motto, *Dominus illuminatio mea* (The Lord is my light). Being a worshipping community nourishes us as an academic community and fosters an attitude of epistemological humility - an attitude that we seek to express positively as prayerful dependence on the Spirit of Truth.

D Service

The academic pursuit of truth is done for its own sake. Human beings are endowed with rationality and innate curiosity, and the pursuit of truth is therefore part of our *raison d'être*. However, universities also perform the function of forming trustworthy, intelligent citizens¹ and thus informing public discourse and debate.

Wycliffe shares this evaluation of the pursuit of understanding and truth as essentially human and intrinsically worthwhile. But it also intends its academic work to serve Society (by the formation of intelligent citizens), the Church (by the formation of intelligent preachers and pastors) and the God who has endowed us with a rationality and intelligence that reflect in some way his own.

E Excellence in Teaching and Research

The subject matter of theology warrants, requires and sustains the most careful and rigorous attention, and all other fields of knowledge are worthy of a like attention, as (we believe) they explore different aspects of a God-given reality, and constitute, in effect, attempts to think the thoughts of God after Him. As a community, we therefore desire our teaching and learning to emerge out of serious intellectual engagement and to issue in lives that are compatible with that teaching. We intend that our research, as a community, should engage creatively with and contribute fruitfully to the academic study of theology, and should feed and inspire the Church, and Society at large.

And we intend that our teaching should inspire and equip our students to think theologically and rigorously for themselves.

F Community

Precisely because it relies upon the mutual confrontation and engagement of different perspectives, the academic task has always been seen as one that cannot be undertaken alone. Universities and colleges are essentially academic communities, set up as arenas in which that confrontation and engagement may take place. They are 'colliders', where what is learned comes largely from the collision of different positions.

¹ The phrase ('intelligent citizens') comes from Rowan Williams' Inaugural CUAC Lecture at Canterbury Christ Church University, 28th September 2012.

Code of Practice - Liberal Education Values

Similarly, the Christian Church believes that growth in knowledge and understanding is a process that requires engagement with others. It is 'together with all the saints' that the dimensions of God's love may be known. Indeed, academic language ('fellows' and 'fellowship') betrays the original Christian context from which the whole concept of the University developed.

Wycliffe seeks to be both an academic community and a Christian community - a place of mutually beneficial and mutually supportive collision, and a place of fellowship at every level. We seek to foster a spirit of enquiry and exploration in one another.

G Honesty

Honesty is one of the virtues to which we are committed by our confessional allegiance. It is enjoined upon us in the Scriptures especially in our commercial, legal and personal interactions. It applies no less in an academic context.

We therefore commit ourselves to honesty, and the transparency it requires, in all our treatment of the thought and writing of others. We seek to learn from all to whom we listen and with whom we engage, and we will conscientiously attempt to distinguish between what is our own thought and expression, and that which is the thought or expression of others.

H Critical Rigour

It is part of Christian anthropology that every human being is finite and that our perspective is therefore limited, and that every human being is fallen and that our perspective is therefore fallible. To minimise those limitations, we need to supplement our own finite perspective with the finite perspectives of others. To acknowledge our fallibility is to acknowledge the need for every position to be subjected to serious and multi-faceted critique. If we are all prone to error, then criticism is a gift that helps us to see where and how we may be wrong.

Every human being is made in the Image of God - and therefore warrants being attended to in eager hope of gleaning insight and truth. But every human being is also fallen, and their perspective cannot simply be adopted uncritically but must be subjected to the 'stress test' of criticism. Only so may truth be sifted from error.

Wycliffe therefore commits itself fully and gladly to rigour in the critical task. We will encourage one another to examine and ask questions of every position, and to allow - and indeed welcome - questions of our own views and beliefs. We aspire to befriend the awkward question and the inconvenient piece of evidence and the disturbing argument as aids in the pursuit of understanding. And we seek a critical faith that has faced the questions and is aware of the issues, and emerged purer and stronger the other side of that refining.

I Freedom

We believe that, in creating humankind, God endowed us with the gift of free will, including the capacity to think, decide and act for ourselves. We believe that this makes love possible and life meaningful. Furthermore, Christians serve One who allowed others to desert, deny or betray him - One who refused to impose his agenda on others by force. We believe ourselves to be constrained by this divine respect of human freedom.

This applies in particular to the realm of our intellectual lives. Though - in fact, *because* we are a community committed to the person of Jesus Christ, we are committed to being a community where all are given the space to come to their own conclusions, without compulsion.

J Openness

It is an essential part of Christian anthropology that every human being is made in the Image of God (Genesis 1:27), and that that Image, though obscured by our fallenness, is not expunged.

Code of Practice - Liberal Education Values

This belief requires us to attend to any human being, in anticipation that we may learn from them, that our understanding and knowledge of God might be expanded by the angle on Him that they uniquely reflect. The Bible shows itself open to expansion and enrichment from outside the People of God by, for example, incorporating elements of the wisdom traditions of Egypt.

We therefore commit ourselves to listen to, engage with, and learn from those whose views are different from our own.

This openness to different perspectives does not entail any loss of faith in or commitment to our own. This liberal educational value does not entail subscription to liberal theology or liberal morality.

Nor need or should this expectant attentiveness be uncritical. Listening does not imply assent or endorsement.

K Fearlessness

The refusal to allow critical questions of our theology - or, indeed, of any theoretical construct - is a form of idolatry, treating as infinite that which is finite. There is nothing to fear - and much to be gained - by engaging in the critical process.

If what we believe is true, then it can withstand any criticism to which it is subjected. Of course, the ways in which we understand it, and give expression to it, being finite, are bound to be inadequate and likely to be partially at fault. Criticism can therefore help us construct a less inadequate understanding and expression of what we believe.

We therefore aspire to an intellectual fearlessness that, far from being a threat to faith, reflects a confidence born of faith.

L Equality

As Christians, we are committed to the principle of Equality for reasons that are integral to our faith. The Biblical usage of the concept of the Image of God extends to every human being what, in other Ancient Near Eastern literature, was reserved for the king. The New Testament understanding of the Cross is that it broke down the barriers between human and human, as it broke down the barriers between creature and Creator. We therefore see the principle of Equality as grounded in the understanding of humanity to which we are committed by our confessional allegiance, and we seek to live out that principle in our life together as a Christian community, including our teaching, learning and research.

[For Wycliffe Hall's Public Sector Equality Duty policy, click here.](#)

a Truth

Confident in the correspondence of all things with the Creator of all things, and of all truth with The Truth, we gladly commit ourselves to the pursuit of truth, wherever it may be found and wherever it may lead. And we recognise that the pursuit of truth requires us to be open to learning from anyone and everyone.

b Love

We commit ourselves to loving engagement with those who take opposing positions from our own, to representing their positions fairly and expressing our opinions winsomely. And we seek to avoid belittling, caricaturing or ridiculing the opinions and positions of those with whom we disagree.

c Humility

We shall seek always to bear in mind the vast complexity of creation, the intractability of many of the issues we face, our own limitations, and the greatness of the minds which have wrestled with the same issues and challenges.

- d Service**
- We intend our academic work to serve Society (by the formation of trustworthy, intelligent citizens and the informing of public discourse), the Church (by the formation of intelligent preachers and pastors and the informing of the Church's public discourse), and the God who has endowed us with a rationality and intelligence that reflect in some way his own.
- e Excellence in Teaching and Research**
- We commit ourselves as a community to the highest standards of teaching and learning, seeking to inspire our students to think theologically and rigorously for themselves. We believe that the best teaching emerges out of first-hand research, and so aspire to be a community of scholars producing work that will contribute to academic debate at the highest level, feed the Church and contribute to Society.
- f Community**
- We commit ourselves to the ideal of being a community of mutually supportive exploration and engagement, even - indeed, especially - in our disagreements.
- g Honesty**
- We commit ourselves to honesty and transparency in all our treatment of the thought and writing of others.
- h Critical Rigour**
- Knowing ourselves and every human being to be finite, fallen and fallible, we commit ourselves to the critical task, encouraging one another to ask questions of every position, and to allow - and indeed welcome - questions of our own views and beliefs.
- i Freedom**
- We commit ourselves to being a place of academic and intellectual freedom, where care is taken to allow all to come to their own conclusions, free from the fear of compulsion. We believe that hectoring should have no place in either a Christian or an academic community.
- j Openness**
- We commit ourselves, in all our academic work, to listen to, engage with, and learn from those whose views are different from our own. We expect to be expanded and enriched by such engagement, because we believe that every human being is made in the image of God.
- k Fearlessness**
- We commit ourselves to aspire to intellectual fearlessness in facing critical questions and in the pursuit of truth wherever it may lead.
- l Equality**
- We commit ourselves, as a Christian community, to the task of treating every human being as of equal and infinite value, and, in our appointment, admission and employment practices, to acting within the conditions of the 2010 Equality Act and in accordance with our Public Sector Equality Duty policy.

Code of Practice - Liberal Education Values

VERSION CONTROL					
Version Number	Policy Gatekeeper	Date of Approval	Committee	Date to Take Effect	Date of Next Review
V.6	MFL	24.11.14	Education	24.11.14	Hilary 2017

It is the responsibility of the Gatekeeper of each policy to check annually whether there have been any legislative and/or University policy changes that are relevant to Wycliffe Hall.