**Address by Simon Lee, Cambridge Theological Federation Graduation 19/01/16**

Congratulations on your achievements. You deserve your certificates, which should be treasured, but what you have accomplished and absorbed cannot be contained on any paper or on-line record.

So this is a day for reflecting also on the wider lessons of your time here and on how they might unfold in years to come. It would be good to think that even on this last day, you can learn something new about life, yourself and the experience of learning in a community. In our case, you have pioneered a system known as Common Awards, in a partnership between Durham University and your houses in our Cambridge Theological Federation. You probably identify strongly today with Durham, with Cambridge and with your particular house but an example of what I mean about other benefits is that the value of the Federation might come to assume more significance later in your life: ‘Oh, you were part of that, so you will be good at this …’

Our website tells us that the Cambridge Theological Federation is an ecumenical partnership of nine institutions, with over 300 students, from 25 different countries, founded in 1972. So the Federation has been an ecumenical witness for over forty years with thousands of students benefiting from learning, worshipping and socialising together in this unique ecumenical collaboration. It is often only later, however, that you can appreciative the formative impact of an encounter.

For we cannot always know at the time which aspects of our student days will later have a profound influence on us. Indeed, we may never understand how some aspects of our university experiences have shaped our lives. What seems peripheral or inconsequential or is just not consciously noticed may turn out to be of lasting significance. It may even be that the more important the influence, the less obvious it is at the time it first strikes. In *Camford Observed*, Jasper Rose and John Ziman looked sceptically at Oxbridge but even they ended their analysis in a glow of mysticism: ‘It is impossible to pin down what a college gives its undergraduates. Its gifts are impalpable and indefinable. Some graduates talk of their time in College as an experience that has transfigured their lives; this is a mysterious term, well suited to describe a mysterious process ... ‘

There two kinds of universities in the world, according to a professor in the 1940s, writing under the pseudonym Bruce Truscot. He said that the way to tell is by the matriculation oath, the promise you are required to make at the start of your studies and how it relates to this moment, when you receive your certificate.

‘In the Scottish universities ... all undergraduates, on matriculation, make a solemn promise … It is interesting to compare the form of the declaration made at Edinburgh with that used at Glasgow. Edinburgh inclines to the sentimental: I will be ‘dutiful and industrious in my studies’ and ‘will pay my debt of gratitude and good will on every occasion to the best of my powers, so long as I live’… Contrast the Glasgow formula, which is commendably and rigidly practical: ‘I will not wilfully damage the fabric or furnishings of the University and will make good, to the satisfaction of the Senatus, any damage caused by me.’’ (Bruce Truscot, *Red Brick University*, 1943)

I trust that you have not been kicking the pews but what kind of duty and ideally what kind of benefit might you continue to have after today? As it happens, I have an opportunity next week to talk elsewhere about my own experiences in this regard, of the delayed action and benefit of student encounters. I will spare you the details but, for example, when I took my final exams as an undergraduate and went abroad for further study, I lent a first year student my Roman Law notes. Two years later, I returned to claim them (I appreciate this does not work so well in the era of email attachments), found her in the library and yes, Reader, I married her. It took even longer for a mission in my own first year to make its influence felt. In the days before my first university exams, I could easily have skipped that university mission to revise. This was extra-curricular, I didn’t have to go but I’m glad I did. The speaker was a Belgian, Cardinal Suenens, a high priest of ecumenism. He talked about Hope: ‘to hope is not to dream but to turn dreams into reality’. For a couple of decades I didn’t think about that. But it came back to me when I was coming to Liverpool to be the head of an ecumenical university college, a merger of three colleges, which was looking for a new name. That is when it suddenly clicked, not just what he had said but the meaning which came with his experience and wisdom and the spirit of that mission. Other people then took forward the name and the virtue. If Liverpool Hope University seems an obvious choice now, the three colleges had not agreed on a name for twenty years since the start of their own federation.

Talking of starts, what happens next in your ministry and mission will, I trust, be fulfilling for you and uplifting for others but don’t despair if there is in some enterprise a false or delayed start, or a wrong turn. Fifteen hundred years ago, Saint Benedict left the formal world of education, in his case in Rome, decided to become a hermit and so went to live in a cave. He did not become a priest, he never left what we would now call Italy and the first two times he was called to lead a community, dissident forces in the staff room tried to poison him. Yet he overcame these little local difficulties and became patron saint of Europe. St Benedict’s Rule has remained constant for 1500 years, perhaps because of the wisdom of its opening injunction to ‘listen’, to observe.

When the Cambridge Theological Federation began in 1972, Archbishop Michael Ramsey gave a lecture, saying we would be disappointed if we expected the federation or ecumenism more generally to be ‘tidy’. There will be times of difficulty. Perhaps then an encounter during your time in this Federation will inspire you and, through you, others. I mention Michael Ramsey also because he had been a professor (and before that a student) here in Cambridge and then was Bishop of Durham, prefiguring your partnership experience of Cambridge and Durham. Before he became Archbishop of Canterbury, he was Archbishop of York and gave missions in the universities of Cambridge, Dublin and Oxford. When he came back here, with our rich tradition of Cambridge graduands going out to China, he said in 1960 that, ‘The last century saw the wonderful spread of Christian faith in Asia and Africa, a stupendous missionary century’ but ‘Meanwhile, godless systems invaded ancient homes of Christian civilization: Russia, Germany.’ He asked, ‘And what of the decay in our own country?’ His answer was this hope: ‘Perhaps we in England may one day learn the Christian faith again from Christians of Asia or Africa. If so, I should love to think of a black Archbishop of York holding a mission to the University…and telling a future generation of the scandal and the glory of the Church’ (see, A M Ramsey, Introducing the Christian Faith, SCM, 1961, revised 1970). Like the mission I attended in 1977, this must have had an impact on people there but also on others around the world and in later generations. For example, I was privileged to be in York Minster in 2005 when Dr John Sentamu (of Ridley and this Federation) became the Archbishop of York. He recalled those words of Dr Michael Ramsey and said, ‘Well, here I am.’

Well, here *you* are. Thank you for the gifts which you have brought to the Federation and the gifts that you will bring to the Federation and to others as the gifts to you unfold in the years to come. And don’t worry if the gift lies buried within or otherwise does not seem to be recognised. Many women in the Church over many centuries know what it is to give without receiving recognition. But my message today is that sometimes it is the unnoticed gift which, in the long run, makes the greatest difference.

For example, if you look at the programme, you will see the symbol, some say logo, of the Federation which I had a hand in designing, supported by others here present and others unseen and unknown. That is part of the reason why the Laing Trust has generously funded my post, to help for a short while the longer run members of the Federation reflect on identity and mission. If you have read my explanation on the website, thank you! If not, this last comment can illustrate my initial point about learning something new right up to the moment you take away your certificate and more. Either way, this illustrates the point about how long an influence can take to manifest itself.

Soon after the Federation began in the 1970s, some Christian treasure from the fourth century was found in Water Newton, Cambridgeshire in one of those pre-Time Team archaeological digs. It can be seen now in the British Museum. The fourth century is before St Benedict’s time. One item is a silver bowl, donated by two women, Innocentia and Viventia, whose names are recorded on the rim. In the logo on the programme and on the website, the lettering of ‘Cambridge Theological Federation’ echoes the style of their names on the bowl. In our more abstract design, you are looking down on the bowl, you see a circle, which is represented here by nine curves, symbolising the nine institutions, making up the whole circle of the Federation and also picking out the letter C for Cambridge. Near the centre of the symbol, we have added the Chi Rho, from Greek letters in Christ, which appears with the names of the donors on the bowl.

The strengths of this early Christian treasure as a symbol of the Cambridge Theological Federation include that it is the gift of fourth century women in this part of the world, a gift of faith, a thing of lasting beauty, twice as old as the University of Cambridge and pre-dating the splits in Christianity. My hope is that your gifts will touch lives in our time and for generations to come and that when you have the opportunity decades hence to reflect on the gifts of this Federation, you will discern the influence of encounters which have inspired your vocation, your ministry and your mission.