



Cumbria Humanist Group

**Professor Chris Carr, Vice-Chancellor, University of Cumbria, talking about
"Dispelling the myths: the Church in higher education".**

**Meeting at the Eden Rural Foyer, Old London Road, Penrith
on Wednesday, 15 April 2009 at 7.30 pm**

Since the University of Cumbria was founded in 2007, merging St Martin's College, Carlisle with Carlisle Institute of the arts and the Cumbrian campuses of the University of Central Lancashire, members of the Cumbria Humanist Group have been concerned at the apparent level of influence held by the Anglican Church. The Chancellor is John Sentamu, Archbishop of York; the Chair of the board of directors is Peter Ballard, Archdeacon of Lancaster, and a third of the board (7/21) are directly nominated by the C of E. So we were pleased when Professor Chris Carr, retiring Vice-Chancellor at the university, agreed to address our meeting at the Eden Rural Foyer in Penrith on 15 April, on "Dispelling the myths: the Church in Higher Education".

He began with some background on his own education and career. Although an Anglican he had attended a Roman Catholic primary school in his native Tadcaster in North Yorkshire, where he said he first became aware of the effects of 'indoctrination' in the broadest sense of the word. He then went to Tadcaster Grammar School and from there to Keble College Oxford to study Law. A career in higher education led to his becoming Principal of St Martin's College, Lancaster, in 1997 and then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cumbria in 2007.

St Martin's, like a number of teacher training colleges established by the church in the nineteenth century, retained its link with the Anglican church, as did Christ Church College in Canterbury, which also became the core of a 'new' university, while others such as St Luke's at Exeter (which apparently provided most of the English rugby team in the 1970s!) became absorbed into existing universities and effectively disappeared.

St Martin's at Lancaster had originally been under the auspices of the Diocese of Blackburn and the bishop was chair of the board, while the principal had to be a 'card-carrying' Anglican. No such rigidity existed at the University of Cumbria, and Professor Carr assured us that while seven of the board of directors were appointees of the Church, this was fairly relaxed, with decisions being taken locally and not enforced centrally from Lambeth. The Church exerted no pressure regarding the curriculum, staff appointments and teaching methods, or student selection. So the relationship was essentially historical and benign.

The next meeting of the Cumbria Humanist Group will be on 20 May, 7.30 p.m. at Morton Community Centre, Wigton Road, Carlisle, when Rev. Ben Phillips, Vicar of Stanwix, will talk about "Existentialism, Humanism and Christianity".

If you are interested in Humanism, visit our website at www.cumbria-humanists.org.uk or telephone 01228 810592 or 01768 881245 for more information.

(438 words)

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