

Our Christian Foundation- Stuart Alred

Politicians, priests, and the public debate whether we still live in a "Christian country." One thing is clear: Christianity is in decline in the UK, particularly among young people. This raises important questions for us to consider. Why do we, at Blundell's, continue to stand on our Christian foundation? Why do we gather in Chapel each morning, sing hymns, and participate in Christian festivals? And why do we continue to offer students and staff opportunities to develop personal faith? The short essay proposes that we do so because it is good.

Enriching Traditions

When Old Blundellians visit the school or recall their time here, Chapel often ranks high among their treasured memories. For many, Chapel is the heartbeat of the school. This is where we come together, where we sing, where we are reminded of our shared story. It is a space for inspiration, challenge, and reflection, providing a meaningful start to our day. Pew Research (2019) reports that people who attend religious services tend to be happier and many self-help experts emphasize the importance of a strong daily routine. Chapel at Blundell's offers both. Regardless of faith background, all are welcomed in Chapel and encouraged to consider life more deeply than the rest of a busy school day allows.

Our special services continue to provide moments of meaning and tradition, shaping people of good character giving us 'roots' and a sense of being grounded. Remembrance services at Blundell's allow students to reflect on themes of sacrifice, duty, and gratitude. The names on the walls of those who have gone before us serve as a poignant reminder of the legacy and history that Blundellians inherit, encouraging reflection on the contributions and sacrifices of past generations. Together we sing 'we kneel where are fore-fathers knelt, they trod these courts before us.' The message of light in darkness and hope in challenge—found in the wonder of Christmas and the beauty of Carols by Candlelight—reminds us of love, friendship, and togetherness. These values remain as important as ever, and we are pleased to see the Chapel overflowing on such occasions.

Our Christian Roots

Peter Blundell built our school on the belief that education should be intertwined with Christian principles. These principles have profoundly shaped some of our most treasured values. We believe every person has equal worth because, according to Christianity, every individual is made in God's image and possesses inherent dignity. The well-known Christian teaching, "Love thy neighbour as thyself," has inspired countless people to treat others with kindness and respect. We remain committed to the dignity and worth of each person.

As Blundellians enter an ever-changing world, they benefit from knowing where we have come from, how we arrived here, and where we should seek to go next. Historian Tom Holland argues in his book *Dominion* that many of the moral values that shaped modern Western society have deep Christian roots such as mercy, charity and concern for the marginalised. These ideals align with what are commonly regarded as "British values" and are also broadly reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Christianity provides not only moral guidance but also an anchor for understanding why these values exist and where they have come from. It is important for our students to trace this source from the past to help guide them and inspire 'wings' of aspiration into the future.

A Diverse Future

If we wish to understand our world and its people, we must understand Christianity. In global terms, Christianity is not declining—it is migrating. Over the last century, South America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania have seen millions of new Christians. The majority of the world's Christians live in the Global South, with over 600 million in South America and 600 million in Africa. In the UK, Christianity is currently growing in London, largely due to immigration. Around a third of the people on our planet identify as 'Christian'.

Religious literacy and empathy will enable young people to relate to others, appreciate diverse perspectives, and contribute to a harmonious society. Friends, neighbours, colleagues and bosses will likely be 'religious' and we want our students to be well practised at building positive relationships through genuine understanding. Our students enter a future shaped by multiple religions, spiritual traditions, and secular worldviews and within that, Christianity remains the world's largest therefore our students can only benefit from a reasonable depth of understanding.

Religious Education

Our Christian foundation motivates us to embrace, support, and encourage people of all faiths and none, in critical thinking. Our minds are a gift and should be developed through wisdom, knowledge and truth. Our Religious Studies department explores the major world religions with academic rigour. Early in the school, we teach Ethics, Philosophy, Islam, and Buddhism. At GCSE, we compare Christianity with modern secular views, while at A-Level, we explore Philosophy, Ethics, and the Development of Christian Thought through OCR's excellent resources.

Our Religious Studies department does not seek to persuade students to adopt a particular belief but rather to encourage them to think well about beliefs. We seek to shape settings where people can be true to their own perspectives whilst also being open to listen and learn to others. We

believe that warm, generous, healthy, diverse debate, agreement and disagreement are important for education and also for a healthy pluralist society. We have a deep and genuine respect for the integrity and insight of other traditions, beliefs and for the freedom of religious belief for everyone.

Personal Faith

"Flush of morn divine, Thy Son proclaimed Thee nearer" we sing in our school hymn, written by A.L. Francis (Headteacher 1874–1917). This hymn proposes, that in Jesus, Thy Son, God has moved closer to us. It claims that God is real and that we can understand Him by learning about Jesus. At Blundell's those who wish to explore personal faith and belief have an opportunity to do so in such a way that promotes individual choice and intellectual curiosity. Additional groups and events, such as 'Open Door' on Friday nights, provide a welcoming space for students to discuss faith, ask questions, and build friendships in a relaxed setting.

Several Christian parents support the school through prayer, seeking blessing on the lives of our students. Research from the Templeton Foundation suggests that prayer has positive effects on those who engage in it. By faith, we believe that our prayers also bring blessings to the school. Christianity is not imposed at Blundell's; rather, it is presented as an opportunity for reflection, discussion, and discovery. Those who identify as Christian find support and encouragement, while others learn to live in a community where different beliefs are respected, contributing to an environment of mutual understanding and enrichment.

Conclusion

The Christian foundation of Blundell's remains firm as we honour our history and traditions. We are not owners; we are stewards of something truly special. We respect the roots of our values and handle them with honest enquiry. We explore faith not with dogmatism but with curiosity, as we navigate the mysteries of life together. Our hymns, the creeds of the Church, Christians and even the Scriptures could be mistaken. But we believe we are better for having considered them with intellectual integrity.

As Blundellians are prepared for the challenges that life brings, they may yet find that the firm foundation on which this school stands is the firmest ground for their own lives as well. If not, the journey of our traditions, questions, opportunities and understanding remain good for each student.