



Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Fellow Graduands,

I am honoured and very moved to receive this Doctorate and to be the subject of Professor Horrell's intimately researched oration! In referring to my books he overlooked an early publication on Theodicy called "Why do People Suffer?" The only problem was that when the proofs arrived from the printer they had left off the question mark so the title of the book ran "Why do People Suffer James Jones". This is what the people of Liverpool have been feeling for the last 15 years! And perhaps what my Professor of Theology thought when I was a student here!

When I was a vicar I was visiting an elderly lady on her 100th Birthday. As she reminisced on her childhood she told me how at the end of one term she had come home with her school report. At the bottom the teacher had written "She's a dreamer!" She thought her Victorian mother would be furious. Instead her mother tossed it aside and said "Then let her dream".

One of the differences between education and instruction is the invitation to use your imagination, to dream. And it is the imagination that lies at heart of brilliant research and of a compassionate society. If the imagination is neglected we lose the faculty to place ourselves in the shoes of others – to imagine what it is like for people different from ourselves. A society without imagination becomes a cruel body without compassion.

There's an ancient Chinese fable about an old and barren couple who were visited by a Genie and offered two wishes. The first was for a child and it was immediately granted. The second request was more difficult. They asked for the child never to feel any pain, never to suffer. Although the Genie pleaded with them to choose another wish they refused. The story ends with the elderly parents dying and fortunately never living to see their child grow up to become the greatest tyrant ever to rule the land.

Having the imagination to feel what other people are going through is the key to a civilised society.

As I trace back through my life there is so much I owe to this University in the development of my own imagination. The Debating Society which Enoch Powell visited after his infamous River Tiber speech; Dram Society and the Gilbert and Sullivan Society whose "Yeoman of the Guard" was one of the first productions to fill the newly opened Northcott Theatre for every performance; the Chapel choir which led me to my first ever broadcast on the BBC. It was a service for All Souls broadcast live on Radio 4 - from the Devon and Exeter Crematorium Chapel! Since there was no regular congregation they bussed in the relatives of all those cremated in the previous year! The place was packed. I was shown to my microphone. There on my seat was a small white card and embossed in black letters was my name: James Jones. I picked it up proudly, turned it over and read: "In Memoriam"! Someone once said that at the outset of your career it's not a bad thought to think what one day will be said of you at your funeral.

Meanwhile fellow Graduands I congratulate you all on your achievements and pray that you will leave this place with imaginations enlarged and equipped to create a society that is civilised and compassionate where truth and justice are non-negotiable principles on which you build your career and lives.

Thank you.

© The Bishop of Liverpool