During the English civil war, a time of religious as well as political turmoil, the young George Fox, later to be the founder of the Quakers, went about seeking out priests and dissenting ministers, asking them questions. None of the answers satisfied him, or as he put it, spoke to his condition. Finally, in one of those insights which he called openings, he wrote in his Journal that in 1646, "The Lord opened to me that to be bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ, and I wondered at it because it was the common belief of people."

For a Quaker like me, not only bred at Cambridge but also having returned to breed others, these words are something of a challenge. What would be 'enough'? How do we shape education in our universities and our schools so that our students enter the world as ministers of the gospel, as those who bring good news?

I have to admit that there have been Quakers who would interpret what Fox said as meaning that to be educated at Cambridge, particularly in Theology, is practically a disqualification for ministry. The relations between the university and the Society of Friends have not always been as harmonious as they are now.

In 1653 the first Quaker missionaries came to Cambridge, Mary Fisher and Elizabeth Williams. When they preached outside Sidney Sussex college the students pelted them with stones and dirt, and the town had them whipped
at the market cross. When George Fox visited, he commented that, 'the students were rude'.

However converts were made, and two in particular, James and Ann Docwra gave Friends the cottage on Jesus Lane which became the meeting house.

With the restoration of the monarchy, Quakers with other dissenters were banned from the English universities. This had its advantages. Quakers set up their own schools, to teach what is 'civil and useful in creation' to both boys and girls. Since women did not attend the universities anyway the exclusion of the men too helped with a more equal education. Another advantage was that Quakers with other dissenters were able to develop new fields of endeavour, ironworks, banking, the collection and classification of plants and other areas of science and technology.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the Quaker meeting in Cambridge was moribund. It was when Quakers with other dissenters were admitted to the university that the young men, and shortly afterwards the young women, revived the meeting which has continued to grow.

The eventual admission of dissenters to the faculty of Divinity and degrees in Theology in this and other universities has had a wider benefit. Much of the progress of ecumenical relationships in England can be attributed to the fact that those who are now church leaders studied together, heard the same lectures, read the same books, wrote the same essays, and came to a common understanding which underpins much of their work together.

When the First World War started in 1914 the young Quakers were amongst those who held a Cambridge peace conference and provided several of the men who formed the Friends Ambulance Unit. Philip J. Baker the instigator of the FAU was elected to a fellowship at Kings College whilst he was in France as the first commandant.

That good relationships, though perhaps not complete understanding, between Quakers and the university had been established can be illustrated by the story from 1916 of the application for exemption from military service of Arthur Stanley Eddington, FRS, Plumian Professor of Astronomy. According to the report in the Manchester Guardian, Eddington was accompanied to the tribunal by the vice-chancellor in full academicals, accompanied by a
small 'court'. The vice chancellor made the case that since both of Eddington's assistants were now in military service, Eddington was essential to keep going the work of the university observatory. The Mayor was happy to grant exemption on the grounds of the work being essential. The only person unhappy was Eddington who wanted exemption on grounds of conscience.

All this illustrates that times change, that what was once unthinkable becomes commonplace, often for the better but not always so. Our young people face a present which includes the gross inequality between rich and poor and between powerful and powerless, and a future which includes climate change and the likely effects in migration and struggles for resources such as water. At the same time, in this country at least, there is a growing secularism, so that very few would want to describe themselves as 'ministers of Christ'.

At this point I need to say what I mean by ministers of Christ. Firstly as a Quaker my concept of ministry is universal, that every person no matter what they say they believe, is able to be a minister, that is a servant, of whatever in their inward heart is good and true. They do this by paying attention to that inward quality which some call God, some Christ, some the Holy Spirit, some the Light, some an innate yearning for goodness, and by living their lives in accordance with the leadings of that divine spark.

Secondly I interpret the ministry of Christ as being a matter of how we live rather than what we claim to believe. I draw attention to the work of Christ in which he invites us to join. He announced himself in Luke's gospel as (Luke 4: 18) anointed "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free". In the gospel of Matthew (Matt 25: 31-46) he tells a parable in which the nations are judged on how they treated the hungry, the homeless and the sick. So our 'ministers of Christ' become servants of good news, those who use their talents to pursue whatever helps the poor and oppressed of this world to flourish, who live out values of justice, peace, and truth.

One such minister within the university was Anna Bidder, the first president of Lucy Cavendish college. She was one of those who saw the need for provision for mature women students and did something about it. Generations of Quaker students joined in discussions with her strengthened their faith.
and went on to hold offices of leadership amongst Quakers. In the 1960s, listening to student needs, she was one of a group which wrote, Towards a Quaker View of Sex, a step on the way towards the acceptance of homosexuality and the provision for same sex marriage which Quakers now make. She worked for the flourishing of all, and especially of those whose needs were unacknowledged. She was one of the women who finally received her degree from the university in 1998.

What might help our students to be servants of good news? I shall look at three aspects but I hope that you will consider many more from your own experience. The first is Truth.

I shall be brief on this for it is clear that a primary purpose of education is the pursuit of truth, through research, through argument, through building a supportive and questioning community. But there are some caveats. There is a need for wisdom, to know which truth is worth the time and effort. We would all be better off if we did not know so many ways to kill each other. There is also the risk of distortion when too much money is at stake or when careers depend upon impact. Of those who seek truth need courage and determination and the ability to try again when they are wrong. They need a strong sense of what is good and useful to know, and a just and ethical approach. How do we encourage these qualities?

Secondly, I wish to consider success and what we mean by success in education. For this, I want to look at our gospel story, known as ‘The Rich Young Ruler’. (Mark 10:17-23)

Here we have a young man whose education appears to have been an outstanding success. He knows all the commandments. He has kept them all from his youth. His fortune is earned honestly. Mark tells us this by slipping 'Do not defraud' into the commandments that he keeps. With all this, he is still seeking out a teacher and asking questions. By this world's standards a splendid student. Yet, given the answer to his question, he cannot accept it. He is asked to give up a comfortable lifestyle, to use his money to give justice to the poor and dispossessed, and to follow Jesus on an adventure. And he just can't do it. His wealth and comfort prevent him from being good news to the poor. His education had not prepared him to hear and follow a divine call.
The other party to this conversation is Jesus. He too learnt and kept the commandments. But at the call of God he left behind his previous life, travelled the country, mixed with all sorts of riffraff, annoyed the religious establishment, extended the love of God to everyone, claimed that God reigns if only we will open our eyes to see, and finally was put to death with the terrorists for being such a nuisance.

So which was the success and which the failure? God's verdict, pronounced through the resurrection, warns us that our judgement can be flawed. A tick box approach cannot measure the success of education. Indeed this story tells us that to be learned and to be good, whilst good in themselves, are not enough. It suggests that we need to be counter-cultural, to be able to withstand the values and presuppositions of our society, especially those that put the acquisition of money before all else. How hard shall it be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God We need deeper questions. How can we help students hear and respond to the call of the divine?

This brings me to the third aspect to consider which is the importance of teachers. When any of us look back on our education what we remember are our teachers.

At all levels of education from nursery to university teachers are essential yet often undervalued. Yet teaching is one of those ministries given to the friends and followers of Jesus, one of the ways in which the love of God can be known and shared.

I'm told that during the First World War there were said to be two types of officer, the 'come on's who led from the front and the 'go on's who encouraged from behind. A teacher at whatever level has to be both.

Come on, look at this book: go on, you can read for yourself. Come on, try this problem: go on, see if you can solve this new one.

A teacher has to combine the love of the subject with the love of the pupil and have the humility that puts the flourishing of both before their own ego. Above all, teachers are examples of what they want their pupils to be. They teach through who they are and through what they do.

If we hope that students will go out to be good news in the world we their teachers have to know and be that good news too.

The primary command that Jesus lays on all his followers is to love, love God, love one’s neighbour, love one another, love one’s enemy. Teachers as ministers have to live out this love, in nurture, in challenge and in self sacrifice.
Nurture is the love that supports and encourages - you can do it. Challenge the love that sets high ideals and standards - you can do better than this.

Sacrifice is shown in different ways. I want to honour some teachers. Christa McAuliffe wanted to teach about space from space. She trained to join a team of astronauts and she planned her programmes from space. She died with the team when the Challenger space shuttle exploded. One of the things she said was, I touch the future, I teach.

Gwen Mayor was the teacher in the Dunblane primary school whose body was found in front of her class as she had tried to protect them from the gunman who shot so many. She is buried together with some of those children.

Few are tested in so extreme a way. But many teachers sacrifice time and patience and their own interests for their students. So lastly I mention Graham Stanton, former Lady Margaret’s Professor, whose care for students and colleagues took time from his writing so that he did not finish the book on which he was working. It was said at his funeral that his life was his commentary on Galatians.

The point of teaching however is not to turn students to oneself. Last week, during the week of prayer for Christian Unity, Christians in many parts of the world were considering the story from John 4 of the Samaritan woman, who after her conversation with Jesus, went and told the townspeople to come and see, and brought them to Jesus. After they had heard him teach they told her that it was no longer because of what she said that they believed but because they had heard for themselves.

As teachers, we have to find the place in ourselves where we can hear and respond to the Inward Teacher, the place where we are loved and nurtured and challenged: and we have to point our students towards it by the quality of our lives. But then they have to find it for themselves and we can only rejoice when they do so.

If George Fox came to Cambridge now, I wonder what he would say? Would he still be amazed at how the reality did not match the rhetoric? Or would he find a place where attention was paid to the leadings of God, where the love of truth and justice flourished, a place of hope for the world and good news for the oppressed? I pray that it might be so.