



Letters to a Student

**Staying close to Christ during the
university years**



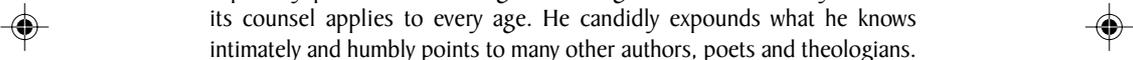


Donald Drew has drawn on his wide experience of the student world in writing these imaginary letters to a Christian young man going up to university for the first time. He has an unerring touch and strikes all the right notes. There is not a trace of paternalism, just a warm, humorous epistolary style spiced with wisdom and affection. I found it irresistible reading and was sorry when it came to an end. Any young person receiving such a book would be sure to find it wholly beneficial and spiritually reassuring. I hope that many will find themselves indebted to Drew through being given this book before a new academic year begins.

Bishop John B. Taylor, Cambridge

I hope this book becomes available across the country because it can only be good for students following Jesus to be encouraged and challenged in so many areas of life – it really does read easily and enjoyably.

Nick Houston, Student



Having known some of the great Christian leaders of the last century, Donald Drew combines, as they did, truth and grace. His book of letters is supremely practical even though it is designed for the university student, its counsel applies to every age. He candidly expounds what he knows intimately and humbly points to many other authors, poets and theologians. His words are uniquely compelling because he is so informed on the past and knows the precise lessons from history inform the present. Throughout a wide diversity of practical topics he writes like an affectionate uncle and peer. At the same time Dr Drew shows how he rests in God and encourages readers to do the same. Very readable!

**Dr Art Lindsley, Senior Fellow,
CS Lewis Institute, Virginia
Fourth Presbyterian Church in Metropolitan
Washington, DC**

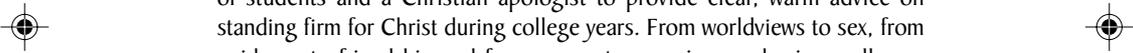
These letters represent the distilled wisdom of a lifetime spent befriending and advising young people. They are full of practical and reliable help across a wide range of concerns. The author's insights about the culture in which students live today makes them worthwhile for that alone. But he aims for Christian integrity of life as well as thought and so has plenty of challenges about lifestyle and attitudes. But he does this without ever being simplistic or legalistic. In fact the letters radiate an atmosphere of cultured humanity, kindness, hope and respect – which is just what is needed today.

Ranald Macaulay, Cambridge



Dr Drew reminds us in his unusual and highly readable book, *Letters to a Student*, that mentoring is critically important to the shaping of young lives. He lovingly and candidly engages the range of issues facing students today, yet does so in a non-sanctimonious fashion. He embraces the total person in all of the complexity and wonder inherent in being human. He is comfortable with the range of experiences and emotions, sadness and joy, fear and hope. In that sense, he is calling his young charge to bring all that he is and does to his Lord. There is no false dichotomy drawn between the 'secular' and 'spiritual'. His challenge to a young person is simple and profound: decisions make a difference. Each one has a consequence. Dr Drew has done us a great service in showing that followership must at its heart be brutally honest and real, lived out in the context of relationship.

Ambassador J. Douglas Holladay, Washington, DC



Every Christian student ought to have older, wiser friends who know God well and have a lot of Christian life experience behind them. I wish I had known Dr Drew when I was a student. In this collection of letters to a student, Dr Drew draws on long experience of being a student, an encourager of students and a Christian apologist to provide clear, warm advice on standing firm for Christ during college years. From worldviews to sex, from guidance to friendship and from prayer to pursuing academic excellence, each short letter is punchy, well informed and readable. Any student would benefit from having this wide-ranging, enjoyable book on their shelf.

Marcus Honeysett, UCCF Teamleader in London

Letters to a Student is a book that encapsulates the essence of Donald Drew and his strong Christian beliefs. In the collected writings what consistently shines through is his humanity, an overwhelming sense of spiritual guidance and an inexhaustible supply of sound common sense based on a lifetime's experience of thoughtful consideration for others.

It is populated with insightful anecdotes, references and interesting stories that cause one to pause and reflect, sometimes from a humorous standpoint but more frequently to consider the often-profound observations about university, society and indeed life in general. I would recommend its inclusion in a survival kit for all prospective university students.

**Sir John Stevens QPM DL,
Former Commissioner for the Metropolitan Police,
London**



Having had two children too, and through, university and with two more children to progress on beyond school, the immense value of Dr Drew's 'Letters to a Student' strikes me very personally. I also had the first hand value of his wisdom as one of my mentors when I was a schoolboy. The style of his book is crisp, direct and cuts straight to the core of so many key spiritual issues, yet it does so in a delightfully human and sympathetic way. By adopting a letter form, it is instantly personal and naturally allows the subject matter to be dealt with in easily digestible portions. And it is the subject matter which is so compelling – wise comment from the perspective or mature experience founded on biblical truths – which makes this book invaluable for responsible parents and apprehensive potential students alike.

**Lt- Gen. F R Dannatt,
Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps**

Being taken through the three years of a student's university experience with all the issues, thoughts and problems that come with that, as well as being taught so much in terms of biblical truths, personal reflections, contemporary student problems, Christian unions and prayer, was really helpful.

Katherine Cooper, student



Letters to a Student

Staying close to Christ
during the university years

Letters from an older friend to a student friend



DONALD J DREW

CHRISTIAN FOCUS





SOLI DEO GLORIA

To the memory of my parents, teachers and mentors
past and present
and
to students who are wanting purpose and meaning
in their lives.



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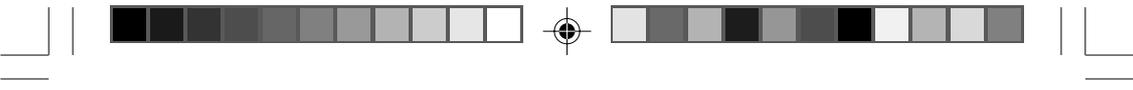
FOREWORD

Every young Christian should have a Donald Drew in his or her life – a wise, older Christian friend whose encouragement, counsel, and care are an invaluable guide through the crucial early years of life. Obviously we all have our families. In most parts of the world we also have school teachers and many of us have also had influential figures such as ministers, sports coaches, music teachers and university tutors to whom we owe so much in different ways. But for me and many others I know, the place of an older Christian friend outside these other roles has been decisive and irreplaceable. Donald Drew has been just that in my life and in the life of an extraordinary number of others I know and *Letters to a Student* gives an idea why.

I first met him when I was twelve and a shy new boy in the school where he both taught English and was the Housemaster of the house that was the main rival to my own. Since I was in a different house and he taught only the upper forms, I knew him only from a distance during my first years at the school.

All that changed when he became my teacher in the sixth form and English became my favourite subject. Looking back, I am amazed at the profound influence Donald had in my life, both then and since. It is quite simply true to say that he inspired in me a life-long love for words, for the beauty and clarity of the English language, for the deep humanity and brilliance of William Shakespeare, for the robust traditions of the English stage, for the importance of enjoying the classics long after school days are over – and most importantly of all for me – an appreciation and love of writing and public speaking. And all this in the context of his clear and attractive faith in God.

I have written or edited more than twenty books today, but I had absolutely no thoughts of being a writer when I was growing up. It was he who suggested the idea of my first book to me, almost accidentally and many years after leaving school. He is



Letters to a Student

also responsible for my start in public speaking, though in that case his influence was more deliberate.

All the way through school I was far too shy to think of speaking in public, and though there are remarkable orators in our family history, I had no idea of it then and my parents had given me no encouragement in that direction. He, however, helped put me forward for my first debate – to propose the motion that “This house regrets the Russian revolution.” The correctness of that argument was far less evident then than it is today, and my opponent was the champion debater in the school. So doubtless I over-prepared and I could have given the speech word for word ten years later. But what sealed the evening as a milestone moment in my life was not winning the debate; it was the little four-word note that he passed to me as I sat down, signed with the characteristic flourish of his initials – “DJD”. That thoughtful note was such an encouragement and inspiration to me that I made a commitment that night to take as many opportunities as I could to learn the art of public speaking.

Many years have come and gone since that evening in my final year at school, and Donald Drew has been a constant part of many of them – first in England, then at the L’Abri community in Switzerland, and most recently in the United States where his annual visits are eagerly anticipated by an astonishing number of people of all ages who find in him a wisdom and encouragement that is as rare as the finest gold. Much is said about “mentors” these days, and much of it flatters only to deceive. But Donald is the real thing. He is a born teacher, an unashamed lover of ideas and of English, a connoisseur of beautiful music, a veteran walker and great mountain climber and a passionate lover of the Matterhorn in all its splendour and many moods.

But that barely begins to describe the man. Far deeper still, he is a magnificent friend and an older brother in the faith whose character and experience of God are the result of years of walking with Christ, whose wisdom comes from his own learning from the great saints of his lifetime and the giants before them, whose love



Foreword

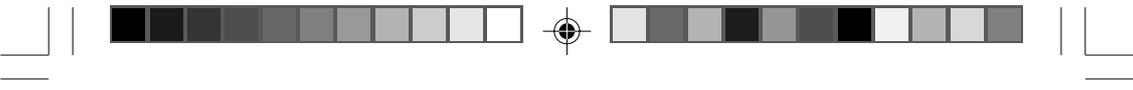
is generous and constant, whose counsel is unerring, whose prayers and notes of encouragement are legendary, and whose fun and youthful spirit is as fresh as the day when each of us who are his friends first met him.

Do you have an older brother or sister in the faith to be your constant friend and ever-available counsellor? Do you have someone in your life to encourage the cultivation of your gifts, someone who will be there when you hit a spot of trouble, and whom you know is always thinking and praying about your best? Sadly, there are not enough Donald Drews in the Christian community today.

These *Letters to a Student* obviously lack the unique warmth, the inimitable touches and unforgettable idiosyncracies, of the real man who is behind them. But they come with the wisdom, care and encouragement that we his friends appreciate so much, and that we all need as we in our turn seek to follow Christ in this crazy old world today.

Os Guinness





PREFACE

These letters derive a great deal from working with students over many years and in particular from two older friends and their wives, Bob Kramer who suggested the idea and Os Guinness who endorsed it. My grateful thanks are due to them and other friends including John Barrs, Timothy Blake, Ben Griffiths, Doug and Ann Holladay, Ryan Holladay and Becca Newell, Katherine Cooper and Nicholas Houston, all of whom read the manuscript and urged me towards the printing press. I am indebted also to David Porter who painstakingly scrutinised these Letters and to Mary Byham who turned many hieroglyphics into a readable manuscript. All these folk may take some credit for the 'perfections'. The imperfections are mine.

I would like to express my thanks to Anne Norrie, my Editor, for unstinted helpfulness and to the staff of Christian Focus Publications.

My sincere thanks are due also to those busy friends who kindly and willingly endorsed this book and to another busy friend, Os Guinness, for his generous and affectionate Foreword.

Should I have failed to acknowledge the source of a quotation, an insight or turn of phrase, my apologies are due for that was not intentional. As for omissions, I plead as did Dr Johnson: 'Ignorance madam, pure ignorance.'

D.J.D

NOTE: All author royalties from the sale of this book will go to encourage HELP A CHILD (established 68 years ago) which gives financial support to Christian partner organizations in several countries in Asia and Africa. The support is for helping children in need who, in children's homes, receive love, care, food and education and hear the gospel of Christ.





ON GOING TO UNIVERSITY

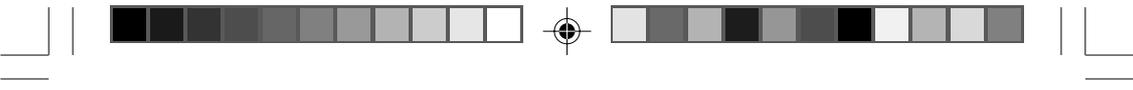
Dear Richard,

So you go to university next Friday. Congratulations and celebrations! I am pleased to know that it is the one of your first choice. During your progress from toddler to teenager there have been several rites of passage, stepping-stones with a wider gap between them each time, that have led you onward. An increasing number of your contemporaries, for various reasons, are hoping to enter one of our many universities or colleges. My generation went, believe it or not, to one of only 17 universities to enjoy what such institutions alone can give. There are now 84 classified universities in the United Kingdom.

We thought it not a right but a privilege, something special. So it is and I loved it. We went to university because we wanted to learn and learn how to learn. Your having had a Gap Year will, I think, increase eagerness to study because from a small boy, you've never been a sluggard!

The student world has always been an exciting place, crammed with people of all sorts and activities of all kinds. The poet William Wordsworth's expression of his early admiration for the French Revolution can be applied to many students' feelings at having been at university or college: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven!" It is a unique, once-in-a-lifetime experience comprising all manner of valuable and valid experiences, as you will be aware from having perused the *Alternative Prospectus!* And you will be unlikely to have such unusual freedom again. Most of the thousands of students entering university will not have enjoyed such independence before, nor experienced such a variety of societies and clubs and sports.

With such exciting options open to you, I hope you are ready unashamedly to speak up and tell other Freshers that you are a Christian, and they will be impressed if they know that you have also signed up for one or two other societies and clubs!



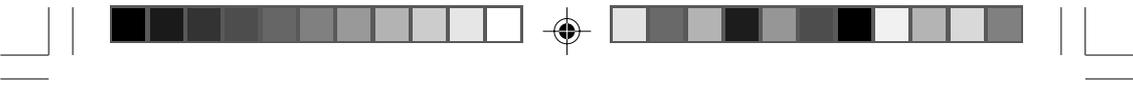
Letters to a student

From now on there will be no more roll-calls, no being home at a certain time, no getting up at a certain time – a free-for-all and for many students, perhaps most, it's their idea of paradise! But reality will sweep in: tutors set essays, lecturers require your attendance, bills have to be paid.

Yet there is another side. Many people who know what they are talking about would say that much of the contemporary university culture is rotten at its core, a statement that includes curriculum, teaching and morality. Campuses have been likened to brothels where sex of various kinds is widely and uninhibitedly available. Mercilessly driven by the media, the urgency for teenagers and young adults to have earlier and earlier sex has no parallel in British history. It is even assumed that if a teenager has not had sex, there must be something wrong with him or her. A chorus of increasingly deregulated TV, the Internet, DVDs, cinema, pop music and teen magazines unite in singing of sex as the apogee of being a young adult, even though for some it may be an attempt to find a denied love and some meaning for their lives.

As for religious beliefs in general, anything goes: pick 'n' mix from a spiritual supermarket. The chameleon-like word 'spirituality' covers any way of making a person feel better, such as pop psychology, closeness to nature, the occult, astrology and especially New Age ideas. There's plenty of "spiritual awareness" (whatever that may mean) but little if any, spiritual alertness, discernment. It's an area where no assumptions are made, no questions are asked. This makes it easier for you initially to be accepted as a follower of Jesus Christ but you'll soon be asked to justify your convictions. In addition to Christian or religious societies, there will be a number of other 'faith communities' who guard their members and are intolerant of others' beliefs.

You will find many students who, despite appearances, have a deep-seated sense of meaninglessness and hopelessness. They may have come from homes in which there are often few books or interesting conversations. Even more come from scarred or unloving, crumbling or crashed families and bring hurts and harms



On going to university

with them. Most of them will have to confront at close quarters issues of personal identity and their emphasis is likely to be self-expressive rather than accepting responsibility for themselves. Debt, the pressure of part-time jobs, loneliness, having to deal with a backlog of reading because of years of gazing at TV; each of these will need some putting right. And there will alas! be a number of folk who realise they ought not to be at university at all. These and other pressure-points contribute to suicide being now, after accidents, the second most common cause of death for young people between the ages of 15 and 24.

Students, provided they have really sorted out why they are at university, should be alright as long as they resolve to live sensibly, find reliable friends and do not lose sight of their priorities. These same requirements apply to you. At first, you may feel lonely and even homesick. But when you remember that each Fresher is thinking similar thoughts and feeling similar things, look forward to what is ahead and go for it! Self-awareness and strangeness should swiftly pass. Smile at the next student you meet and the one after that which will help to remove the strangeness and to settle you!

As a follower of Jesus Christ, you will have potential friends in the Christian Union. Each of you Christian Freshers needs to identify with the Christians already there, in order for you to be seen to be a body making an impression on the student body. Right from the start, nail your colours to the mast. On arrival, find where the CU meets and get stuck into it and you'll find like-minded people who need you as you need them. Also find friends elsewhere. When one's years at university or college are over, one wants to be able to look back on them as a time when, among other things, some wholesome friendships were formed and contact was made with some fine men and women who gained one's respect and affection, when, as Os Guinness said, "the blood ran fast and the mind ran deep".

You are at university in the Midlands and student life in Britain is varied. For example, some things will apply at vocational training



Letters to a student

colleges that do not apply at a university. In the same way, not all CUs are run on the same pattern. I am glad to know that you have already found a church. Some churches seem unsatisfactory and not to everyone's taste. If I were in your shoes, I'd want a Bible-based, Christ-centred, caring community where I was among folk who were as "afraid, difficult, damaged and sinful as I was", which, if it disappeared tomorrow, I'd desperately miss. I hope you find that yours is one of these, a church whose members arouse people's curiosity. You students in the CU need a church to remind you of the larger world and to feed you spiritually, while you need the CU individually and collectively to remind the university that the God who is there is the only God who is there.

In conclusion, may I gently and firmly remind you that you are not at university primarily to evangelize your contemporaries! You are there to get the best degree you can. You gained entry principally on account of your academic achievements and anticipated attainments, not because you are a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. To you, much has been given. From you, much will be required. Get naturally alongside your contemporaries, regarding them as real human beings made in the image of God, to be loved not for what they project, but for themselves. They're not 'gospel fodder' as some kinds of evangelism might imply. Be friendly to all who cross your path, find godly, fun-loving believers and keep your priorities a priority, top of the list being what you told me some weeks ago, that you are going to show whose side you are on.

All good wishes

Donald

PS. Did you know that you are one of 1,859,600 enrolments in the various higher education institutions in the U.K. during the academic year 2001-2002!