

**“EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION:
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE”**

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INTRODUCTION

During the harrowing years of the American Civil War, the College of William and Mary (VA), founded in 1693 as the third oldest college in North America, emptied its buildings to supply young soldiers to the cause. Between 1861 and 1865, no students sat in classrooms, no professors prepared lectures, no books circulated from the library, and no graduates received diplomas. The buildings fell in disrepair. Soaking rain dripped through the roofs that needed to be maintained and snow blew into buildings that needed broken windows to be repaired. The campus was like an academic ghost town. No voices were to be heard for four years. It appeared as if the College would never open again.

Yet, everyday of the War, President Ewing left his house and went up to the bell tower of the College chapel. There he would take the rope in his hand and ring the College bell loudly and defiantly in the face of the distraction that maimed the campus around him. The sound of that bell echoed through the empty buildings and across the abandoned countryside. It was the sound of confession and hope that the College would someday open its doors again.¹

Mindful of Ewing’s example, an opportunity presents itself to ring another bell. It is a bell that peals out a message that needs to be heard, understood, and advanced within the church and the international higher education community. It is the message of evangelical theological education.

In 1980, Kenneth O. Gangel, published an article in *Christianity Today* entitled “The Bible College: Past, Present, and Future” as he examined the state of the Bible college movement in

¹James T. Draper, Jr. “A Vision for a Christian Baptist University,” David S. Dockery and David P. Gushee (ed.), *The Future of Christian Higher Education* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), p. 17.

North America.² Revisiting the topic 23 years and making a broader application, this article looks at evangelical theological education with respect to Past Commitments, Present Realities, and Future Considerations.

PAST COMMITMENTS

Several historical commitments, noteworthy of evangelical theological education, are applicable regardless of cultural setting. They are immutables that are deeply imbedded within our institutions and organizations. May they continue to be perpetuated.

1. **Commitment to Biblical Training:** A thorough knowledge of the Bible has always been central to our institutions' educational goals. Serious devotion to the Word of God as the authority for all of life, both with respect to how we think and how we live, has always been a hallmark.
2. **Commitment to the Great Commission:** The spread of the gospel has been a primary desired outcome for our education programs. A desire to produce world changers and infect students with a passion to win the world for Christ has been paramount.
3. **Commitment to Holy Living:** Issues of character, lifestyle, integrity, and godliness have always been important. There is a concern about belief and behavior, right thinking and right living.
4. **Commitment to Ministry Formation:** This has been the *raison d'etre* of evangelical colleges and seminaries, to equip students for meaningful church-related ministries. Most, if not all, of the characteristics of the institutions associated with ICETE could be summed up with the word "training."

With respect to the past, many of us are appreciative of the rich history of evangelical

²Kenneth O.Gangel, "The Bible College: Past, Present, and Future," *Christianity Today* (February 5, 1980), pp. 34-36.

theological education. However, we must be careful not to become so nostalgic about the past that we fail to respond to the present realities and the future challenges. It is fruitless to try and recapture the past.

Ecclesiastes 7:10 *“Do not say, why were the former days better than these? For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.”*

This passage talks about the danger of nostalgia. There is a temptation to try to live in the past or to reconstruct the past. We all have exciting stories about our institutions and our organizations. In most cases, these are stories of men and women of vision and courage who served faithfully. But the pioneer days are gone. We should not spend too much time looking in the rear view mirror. Some people long for the past because it is safe and comfortable. It is one part of life that appears to be under our control. We can shape it at will, make it look the way we want. We can even idealize it.

What’s the problem or danger with being focused on the past? Why is it not wise to want to go back? One, the past was never as good as we make it out to be. It is easy to glorify the “good old days.” Our predecessors had problems and faced challenges just like we do. Two, a focus on the past may discourage us relative to the present, and three, preoccupation with the past can paralyze us for the future. Our sensitivities become deadened and our vision becomes clouded.

PRESENT REALITIES

In spite of the rich history of evangelical theological education, it may be time to evaluate our respective missions, programs, and contributions to the church and the larger world. In doing so, what are some of the current realities we must face?

- 1. Ministry Training has Changed:** When many of our schools were started, they began as terminal types of training schools for those who were not attending degree

granting colleges, universities, or seminaries. The diploma awarded was often considered adequate for those pursuing a church-related vocation. Today, the needs of many churches and parachurch organizations have changed. The same could be said of the clergy and the laity who are assuming significant ministry roles. Many churches, particularly in North America, are looking for pastors with graduate-level training. Undergraduate theological training is becoming less terminal and more foundational for career preparation.

Increasingly, local churches are doing their own ministerial training rather than looking to the traditional theological college or seminary. This has grown out of a growing frustration over evidence that classical theological education has not adequately prepared men and women for leadership in 21st Century churches. While it may be argued that most churches are not in a position to provide theological education at an appropriate post secondary level, this developing pattern does demonstrate that the needs of the church have changed and may require different types of training.

2. Higher Education has Changed: It is not an overstatement to say that the world of higher education is changing rapidly and dramatically. The number of contextual changes affecting the institutional operations, the culture, and even the foundations of contemporary higher education is significant. These changes create a whole set of new challenges and opportunities for the global higher education community.

At the 2001 Council for Higher Education Accreditation Conference in Chicago, CHEA President, Judith S. Eaton, referred to three crucial changes in the contemporary world of higher education: universalization, “new commercialization,” and internationalization.³ While

³ Dirk Van Damme, “Quality Assurance in an International Environment: National and International Interests and Tensions,” *International Quality Review: Values, Opportunities, and Issues* (Washington, DC: Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2002), p. 3.

all three changes are noteworthy, internationalization is perhaps the most significant development impacting higher education today. While internationalization is not a new phenomenon in higher education, its effects are increasingly apparent.

- **Mobility of People**-Although the trend may have slowed down slightly due to the effects of global insecurity, many countries have experienced the accelerated growth of foreign students. This phenomenon is greatly influenced by various international student scholarships and student exchange programs, to say nothing of spontaneous mobility. Additional staff exchanges are now common exponents of internationalization in higher education. It is a well-known fact that the need for highly qualified researchers in many Western universities is increasingly met by the importation of foreign researchers, leading to a brain drain and the erosion of the knowledge infrastructure in other parts of the world.
- **Mobility of Institutions**-The internationalization trend extends well beyond the mobility of people. There is also the movement of institutions. Higher education is now being exported from one country to another, particularly from the United States. Extension centers, branch campuses, franchising operations, and various other “transnational” higher education arrangements have become commonplace in delivering post secondary education to new markets. This international development is accompanied by privatization or “new commercialization” because of the increased opportunities for for-profit delivery, frequently offered to private providers and corporate business.⁴
- **Mobility of Content and Courseware**-The demand for flexibility of delivery has also led to a third form of internationalization, characterized by moving content, knowledge, and

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 3-4

courseware. Distance education has been a reality for some time, but the expansion of the Internet and the production of appropriate software and suitable courseware has opened the way for the distribution of a “virtual higher education.” It has freed students from the constraints of time and space, but it has also created a new set of challenges in terms of student services.⁵

- 3. Students have Changed:** The world of higher education is also changing with respect to the student population, not only in terms of size but also composition. The demographic revolution is an account of different peoples-rising and falling numbers of younger and older students, men and women, and various racial and ethnic groups. With more international students, more racial and ethnic minorities, more women, more lay people, and more mature adults, the means for delivering theological education to these students must be increased.

Furthermore, the interests, values, attitudes, relational patterns, and styles of worship of students have changed as we attempt to minister to what is frequently referred to as a postmodern generation. They are not the same types of students who studied at our institutions 25 or 30 years ago. They also come to our institutions for a variety of different reasons.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Theological education in many parts of the world bears the characteristics of the western paradigm of Christian higher education. North American and Western European missionaries, many of whom graduated from Bible colleges and seminaries, typically exported this model with little change in purpose, structure, content or methodology in spite of vast cultural differences. Theological education inevitably took on the form of western institutions, the purpose of which “is to educate persons who have a sense of calling to the ecclesiastical ministries of the church by

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4.

offering courses in Bible, theology, church history and practical skills.”⁶

While this educational legacy may be appreciated, the western model of theological education has received considerable criticism within recent years, particularly because of a plea for cultural relativism. Some have even gone so far as to call it “a cultural captivity to the west.”

Missiologist Harvie M. Conn, in addressing the issue of the effects of western presuppositions on two-thirds world training, argued the following:

The equation of learning with schooling, the equation of professionalism with ministry, the equation of teaching missions with western missions, the equation of theorization with knowledge and the equation of practice with praxis (interaction between reflection and action, theory and practice), these false assumptions have lead to institutionalism, elitism, alienation, abstractionism and pragmatism.⁷

Theological educator, Peter Savage, also expressed concern over the fact that colleges and seminaries have been too content-oriented. “This has been the influence of western education and has caused a crisis in third world theological education in the areas of objectives, faculty, curriculum, and measurement.”⁸

Predictably, there was an appeal for theological educators to reconsider the goals and practices of their theological programs. In 1981, missiologist Lois McKinney addressed the topic of “Why Renewal is Needed in Theological Education” at a mission executive’s retreat. A candid review of theological education led to her conclude:

The renewal of theological education will come about only as we focus our efforts upon the church, and make its ministry central. Education for ministry will help us to sharpen our goals, to develop appropriate curricula, to individualize instruction, to plan holistically, and to nationalize and contextualize our programs.⁹

⁶ James M. Gustafson, “Priorities in Theological Education,” *Theological Education Supplement* (Vol. XXIII, 1987), pp. 69-87.

⁷ Harvie M. Conn, “Teaching Missions in the Third World: The Cultural Problems,” in Harvie M. Conn and Samuel F. Rowen, *Missions and Theological Education in World Perspective* (Farmington, MI: Associates of Urbanas, 1984), pp. 249-279.

⁸ Peter Savage, “Four Crises in Third World Theological Education,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (Fall, 1972), pp. 28-34.

⁹ Lois McKinney, “Why Renewal is Needed in Theological Education,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (April, 1982), p. 91.

Subsequently, an appeal for reform came from the International Council of Accrediting Agencies for Evangelical Theological Education (ICAA which is the precursor to the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education) which met in 1987 in Unterweissach, West Germany to discuss the topic of excellence and renewal in theological education. Speaking to “The Challenge of Excellence.” James E. Plueddemann, argued that the key to renewal is “international and regular efforts to compel interaction between the world of ideas and the world of senses, between absolutes and specifics, between theory and practice.” This, Plueddemann insisted, “requires a revolutionary paradigm shift” in the design and methodology of theological education.¹⁰

Ken Gnanakan, President of the Asia Center for Theological Studies, Bangalore, India, in a paper on “Accreditation and Renewal”, noted that “God’s renewal of His work is seen primarily when there is an urge to return to basics.” This led him to reflect on theological education’s role in cultivating in learners a longing to know God, a focus on ministry to people, a life shaped by biblical values, and relevant expression of faith in cultural context.¹¹

Similarly, Robert Ferris of Columbia International University stated, “The path to renewal of theological education does not lie in more detailed analysis of the tasks of a pastor or more preparation for clerical roles. Renewal—true renewal—must begin with more biblical understanding of the church and leadership in the church.”¹²

It was also the International Council of Accrediting Agencies for Evangelical Theological Education that published the ICAA Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education in 1984. (A second edition was published in 1990) It specifically addressed twelve

¹⁰ Robert W. Ferris, *Renewal in Theological Education: Strategies for Change* (Wheaton, IL: A BGC Mornograph, Wheaton College, 1990), p. 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

priorities or values: (1) Contextualization, (2) Churchward Orientation, (3) Strategic Flexibility, (4) Theological Grounding, (5) Continuous Assessment, (6) Community Life, (7) Integrated Programme, (8) Servant Moulding, (9) Instructional Variety, (10) A Christian Mind, (11) Equipping for Growth, and (12) Cooperation.¹³

The fundamental presupposition of the Manifesto was that there is a wide agreement among evangelical theological educators on the need for renewal in theological education and on an agenda for such renewal. With such background in mind, this article reinforces many of the key values that were enumerated in the Manifesto with a goal toward responding to the many changes that are currently taking place in international higher education with a particular sensitivity to theological, missiological, and pedagogical issues.

1. Cultural Appropriateness-Contextualization of Course Content and Instructional

Methods:

It is impossible to talk about renewal in theological education, particularly in the developing world, without addressing the issue of contextualization. This issue was addressed by every missiologist or theological educator cited in the previous section. In fact, it was the first priority enumerated by the ICAA in the Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education. “No term captures the thought about the future of theological education more than contextualization,” according to contemporary theologian Max. L. Stackhouse.¹⁴

Before discussing contextualization further, it is critical to define this concept. Precisely what does the word “contextualization” mean? According to research conducted by Joy Oyco Bunyi, former Director of Extension Studies at Asian Theological Seminary, “contextualization is a

¹³ *ICAA Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education*, published in *Theological Education Today* (April-June, 1984), pp. 1-6 and in *Evangelical Review of Theology* (April, 1984), pp. 136-143.

¹⁴ Max L. Stackhouse, “Contextualization and Theological Education,” *Theological Education* (23:1, 1986), p. 67.

reflection and action from the perspective of one's worldview, culture, values, and historical situation."¹⁵ Abraham A. Sitompul, Director of Research for the Lutheran World Federation, stated that "it is the churches' and their institutions' search for fundamental self-understanding, based on and centered in the Bible, yet related to a given cultural and social setting."¹⁶

Contextualization as a word was first used by the Theological Education Fund (TEF) to articulate their vision for the decade of the 1970s. Their aspiration was to seek forms of theological expression deeply rooted in local culture and to develop structures for education and ministry appropriate to third world missiological situations.¹⁷

Since the word "contextualization" was first coined by the TEF, it met with a cautious response within some circles of evangelicalism. There is always the concern that the critical and basic elements of the gospel will be replaced by religious elements in the receiving culture. The fear persists that contextualization may undermine confidence in the absolutes of the Scriptures and lead to compromise and syncretistic tendencies.¹⁸

Like many other controversial issues that the Christian community faces, caution must be exercised lest "the baby be thrown out with the bath water." Although there may be certain dangers with this approach, it should be recognized that contextualization is not only justified, but also necessary.

While theological educators must not put culture ahead of Christ, the wisdom of cultural sensitivity cannot be ignored. Educationally, one should always begin with students' needs

¹⁵ Joy Oyco Bunyi, "Contextualization of Theological Education from the Metro Manila Context," (Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, Asia Graduate School of Theology, 1989), p. 5

¹⁶ Abraham A. Sitompul, "Theological Education Today," *Theological Education in Today's Asia* (Madras, India: Christian Literature Society, 1978), p. 357.

¹⁷ *Ministry in Context: The Third World Program of the Theological Education Fund, 1970-1977* (Bromley, Kent: England: TEF Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches, 1972), p. 31

¹⁸ Harvie M. Conn, *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds: Theology, Anthropology and Mission in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1984), pp. 176-177.

according to their context. Curriculum development theorists and academicians have emphasized that societal context is one of the vital considerations in the establishment of educational programs.

The need for pedagogical contextualization can be seen most vividly in the Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education that was presented by the ICAA in 1984:

Indeed, not only in what is taught, but also in the structure and operation, our theological programs must demonstrate that they exist in and for their own specific context, in governance and administration, in staffing and finance, in teaching styles and class assignment, in library resources and student services.¹⁹

2. Church Focus-Determination of Programs, Services, and Resources that Address the Needs and Expectations of the Local Church:

One of the complaints leveled against today's theological colleges and seminaries is that they have failed to serve as a resource for the local church because of their rigid allegiance to a classical model of education. Leith Anderson said it well in *The Church for the 21st Century*:

There is a growing realization that classical theological education has not appropriately prepared men and women for leadership in (local) churches. Much theological education is based on the "academy model" of classical European universities. Students are trained to be scholars. They are given the tools for research and analysis, and then are trained to be theoretical theologians. Certainly there is a need for such specialized training. Without careful scholarship the Christian church would probably repeat the heresies of an earlier era within a generation.²⁰

This expression is not a new concern. Almost two decades ago Harvie Conn complained about the identification of theological education with schooling and the outdated model of minister as pedagogue. Classical theological education often focuses on cognition rather than the reproduction of leaders who reproduce. As Conn put it, "The classical model too often fails to see that the gospel we present and live out is a call to reclaim not only souls, but our culture now claimed by Christ as Lord, the development of

¹⁹ *Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education*, ICAA, 1984, p. 12.

²⁰ Leith Anderson, *A Church for the 21st Century* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1992), pp. 74-76.

a whole lifestyle whose center is the Kingdom rule of the Messiah.”²¹

The church is the people of God, the community of believers. The true church exists where the Word is faithfully preached and where God is truly worshipped by those who share a common life in Christ.²² Recognizing this concept, theological education institutions may need to rediscover the concept of the priesthood of all believers as the congregation, and not a detached secularized academy, assumes its rightful place as the proper context for theological education. Partnerships between theological institutions and local churches must be established. Local churches must not only send students to evangelical colleges and seminaries, but the students must rejoin their congregations when their education is complete. Through congregational internships, pastoral mentoring programs, and other forms of supervised ministry experience, local churches must play a larger role in the training of their leadership.

Furthermore, genuine church renewal demands not only committed and competent pastors, but supportive and trained lay persons. One of the greatest needs within our churches today is for the development of gifted and trained lay leaders.

Simply put, our programs of theological education must be inextricably linked to the church. At every level of design and operation, theological education must be sensitive to the needs and expectations of the local congregation. Our programs must become manifestations of the church, through the church, and for the church. The academy must be a resource center for the church as we join hands with local church practitioner,

3. Theological Grounding-Affirmation of the Task and Values of Theological Education from a Biblical Foundation Perspective:

²¹ Harvie Conn, “Theological Education: Looking for New Models,” *Eternal Word and Changing Worlds*, pp. 113-115.

²² “Five Marks of an Effective Seminary: How to Evaluate Theological Education,” *Christianity Today*, (October 3, 1994), p. 82.

In the brilliant Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat*, lyricist Tim Rice gives the title character a frolicking final song with clever words.

Reflecting on all that has happened to him, Joseph sings,

May I return to the beginning;
The light is dimming, and the dream is too.
The world and I, we are still waiting,
Still hesitating—
Any dream will do.

Great romantic poetry, but very bad theology. In the postmodern scene, all the familiar player--reason, tradition, and revelation--have marched off the stage. The rejection of universal truth and absolute moral principles has broken the ideals which formerly linked people from different backgrounds, leaving tribal loyalties that can only serve to divide us. Education that can capture the hearts and minds of 21st Century people must anchor students in God's message of eternal and absolute truth.²³

When we talk about training another generation of Christian leaders, we begin with an appeal to divine revelation, the Word of the living God incarnate and recorded in Scripture. Knowing that we live in a postmodern world where truth is perceived to be highly relative, today's students, more than ever before, need to be biblically literate. They need to know the Bible (content) and how to relate it to their world (praxis). The Bible is fundamental to the teaching and preparation for life and ministry.

Donald Carson of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School stated it this way: "The communication of what the Bible teaches us is our *raison d'etre*; all of us are committed to reading and rereading it, learning and doing what it says. The Bible provides the categories that help us mold and shape

²³ Kenneth O. Gangel, "SWOT 120: Reflections of a Bible College Addict," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges, February, 2002.

the various disciplines by which we serve the church.²⁴

4. Servant Leadership-Implementation of the Great Commission and the Great

Commandment:

An evangelical theological education institution needs to have a clearly defined vision as it looks to the future. Vision is the essential element of an effective ministry, but it must grow out of the institutional mission. Peter Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization, Principles and Practices*, contended that “Non-profit organizations exist for the sake of their mission.”²⁵ The mission should be the “raison d’ etre,” the driving force behind every decision that is made. Although there will be different mission statements for different institutions, evangelical schools should have a mission that reflects a strong commitment to train servant leaders. A theological education institution, that serves as an arm of the church, grows out of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40). Both of these mandates were articulated by Christ himself. Respectively, they are to make disciples throughout the nations of the earth and to love others through doing good to all humankind. These objectives imply a rigorous commitment to the development of mature Christians who are growing in every area of their lives.

This mission should be to develop servant leaders –mature, disciplined, intelligent disciples of Jesus Christ with skills of leadership who will penetrate every walk of life in their respective cultures and indeed around the world. This task is intrinsically worthwhile as an expression of Christian service to others and to the world. Because God is good, we are also to be good and to do good, for its own sake quite apart from any evangelistic motivation. However, we are also to

²⁴ “Five Marks of an Effective Seminary: How to Evaluate Theological Education,” *Christianity Today*, (October 3, 1994), p. 80.

²⁵ Peter Drucker, *Managing the Non-Profit Organization, Principles and Practices* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1992), p. 3.

ensure that our goodness is never divorced from our responsibility to be ambassadors of Jesus Christ. The goal should be for graduates, even as they model excellence in service in their chosen fields of leadership, to win the hearts, minds, and personal loyalty of others for the glory of God and His kingdom.

In the end, the goal of theological education is not only to prepare students for careers, but also to enable them to live lives of purpose—not only to give knowledge to students, but also to channel knowledge into meaningful Christian service.

5. Christian Worldview-Integration of Faith with Learning and Living:

The challenge of Christian education, in the ultimate sense, is to assist students in developing a Christian worldview. All people, whether they know it or not, conduct their lives on the basis of their view of the world (e.g. the picture they hold in their hands of how things work; how things relate to each other; what those things mean; what is most important; and what constitutes duty, loyalty, citizenship, faith, family, meaning, and hundreds of other ideas in the lexicon of human existence).²⁶

“As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7 KJV) Most do not have a name for their worldview, and many have informally cobbled together a philosophy of living that is based on crisis, survival needs, whims, and various personal, family, religious, and political values. Sadly, many Christians live lives largely uninformed by theology, the Bible, and the wisdom of the ages.

On the other hand, evangelical institutions must teach students how to integrate their faith and learning with the way they live their lives, to formulate a Christian worldview. This starts by affirming that the Bible is at the center of all academic programs. The Scriptures are not only the core of the curriculum, but they must be related to the subject matter of all courses. Knowing that

²⁶ William Carey Ringenberg, *Letters to Young Scholars: An Introduction to Christian Thought* (Upland, Indiana: Taylor University Press, 2003), p. vii.

all truth has its ultimate source in God, it must be pursued with honest, open, and thoughtful inquiry. This type of integration takes place through classroom instruction and through practical leadership and outreach opportunities. Students need to be encouraged to make sound judgments in matters of life and conduct. They need to be taught to think, act, and even react from a biblical worldview. The goal is not to indoctrinate students, but to set them free in a world of ideas and to provide a climate in which ethical and moral choices are made and convictions are formed.

Making connections between faith, living, and learning is a primary purpose of theological education. Faculty, staff and students make these necessary connections by establishing and maintaining relationships. The result is more than academic process; it is more than sharpening professional skills; it is more than getting a degree that will lead to gainful employment. It is learning how to relate one's faith in practical terms to others so that there can be a conscious influence for Christ in the world.²⁷

6. Community Life-Cultivation of Communities that Promote and Facilitate Growth:

The movie "Field of Dreams" is frequently aired on television after being released at the theaters in 1989. The leading actor, Kevin Costner, played the part of a midwestern farmer who had the notion that if he built a baseball diamond in the middle of a cornfield, he could resurrect a baseball team from the past. His famous line was, "If we build it they will come." When the deceased players finally emerged to play their dream game on his field, one young man blinked his eyes and asked, "Is this heaven?" The disappointing response was, "No, . . . it's Iowa!"

Many Christian students, who walk onto the campuses of evangelical colleges and seminaries, may blink their eyes and ask the question, "Is this heaven?" However, with no disappointment you can say, "No." Because institutions of Christian higher education are made up of imperfect

²⁷ Larry J. McKinney, *Equipping for Service: A Historical Account of the Bible College Movement in North America* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges, 1997), pp. 201-202.

people, the claim cannot be made that the campus is heaven. However, our campuses should be Christian communities where students and faculty have the opportunity to grow to their fullest potential in Christ.

Steven Garber, in his award winning book entitled *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior During the University Years*, discussed three outcomes that he believed any successful postsecondary education experience needed to include:²⁸

- A Place to Belong: “Form friendships with others who have the same worldview”

The theological education institution is an academic community but it is also a Christian community. It should be a setting where students live, study, pray, worship, work, serve, and sometimes even debate together. It should be a setting where students learn in the company of friends. These friendships should provide security both when they succeed and when they fail. It allows the delicate balance between “challenge” and “support” to be lived out. It is a community where students can grow to their fullest potential in Christ.

- A Place to be Led: “Find faculty who can incarnate that worldview”

The theological education community should provide students with the opportunity to build relationships with caring leaders. Students not only have an opportunity to be part of a community with peers, it also affords them the privilege of being impacted by faculty and staff who can teach, challenge, and even lead them to a deeper understanding of the Lord and their world.

- A Place to Become: Frame a worldview in a pluralistic world”

The theological education community should provide a true sense of meaning for how students can relate to the world in which they live. Students must be encouraged and led

²⁸ Steven Garber, *The Fabric of Faithfulness: Weaving Together Belief and Behavior During the University Years*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1996), pp. 108-124.

in becoming more like Christ, in order that they can impact their world.

Simply put, Theological education institutions are Christian communities that must look for ways to foster growth in their students. This type of growth can take place through classroom instruction, chapel services, field ministries, and a wide variety of co-curricular activities. But student development also grows out of the informal interactions of all members of the academic community. Theological education institutions have the responsibility for the development of complete, holistic, students—the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of their lives. Students should be provided with the highest quality experience possible while attending theological training schools. This involves both attending to needs and enriching lives.²⁹

Our educational programs also need to focus on encouraging and facilitating life-long learning. The completion of an academic program, or even the acquisition of skills to engage in ministry should not be our final goal. Institutions need to equip students not only to complete the course but also to engage in a lifetime of ongoing learning, development, and growth.

7. Academic Excellence-Communication of Strong Academic Values to the Church and the Higher Education Community:

Evangelical theological institutions are continuing to make advances in terms of gaining credibility within the larger higher education community. Increasing numbers of colleges and seminaries have qualified for various forms of accreditation or have university- recognized education. Many of these institutions now hold membership with their respective evangelical accrediting agency and possibly with a regional or national accrediting association. Urged on by these associations and by prevailing educational norms, theological education leaders have expanded their programs, incorporated more liberal arts subjects into the curriculum, and graduated increasing numbers of students with standard bachelor's degrees. Some of the larger

²⁹ McKinney, pp. 203.

colleges have even established their own seminaries or graduate divisions. Their library holdings have expanded. They are taking advantage of new instructional technology. Their administrators have acquired appropriate credentials for their specific tasks. Their faculty members have earned graduate degrees and have taken time off to conduct research and attend professional meetings in their fields. In short, theological education institutions have become more recognized within the larger academic community. These advancements should be perceived as positive. High academic standards for students and faculty should be expected and advanced. Evangelical higher education can be academically respectable and still foster a heart for Christian service.

Christians, more than anyone else, should be models of excellence, for we worship a perfect God and are charged with proclaiming His praises (I Peter 2:9). The aim of all we do, including our learning, is to bring credit to Him (I Cor. 10:31, Col. 3:17). We are expected to work “heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men” (Col. 3:23).

Since Scripture teaches us to fix our minds on whatever is excellent and “worthy of praise” (Phil. 4:8), we may be sure that God does not delight in poor spelling or grammar, superficial research, or illogical reasoning. He expects us to be models of craftsmanship and quality in both handling His Word and applying it to our lives.

Scholarship holds no fear for the Spirit-directed believer. It can be, as James Sire declares in *Discipleship of the Mind*, “an act of worship,” for it glorifies the God who created human intelligence. Just as prayer, witness, and fellowship should manifest His glory, so also should study. To send out servants of Christ who reflect His excellence in full measure is a worthy goal.

8. Educational Creativity –Demonstration of Flexibility in Leadership Roles,

Academic Levels Served, and Educational Models:

Theological education institutions must remain educationally flexible in order to relate to the needs of a contemporary culture. The founding of theological schools was no doubt a response to

the perceived needs of particular churches and communities. Throughout history, institutions have adjusted their curricula to meet the needs of the time. The same type of educational and cultural sensitivity must continue. While holding a grip on the prominence and authority of the Bible, institutions need to keep their training programs current with today's needs just as their leaders did in the past.³⁰

Recognizing the need for academic flexibility, theological education institutions must always be looking for new and improved ways to provide quality education. Institutions must be looking for new groups of students, new geographic centers, and even new curricula to complement the present student bodies and educational programs. The leadership needs of society in general, and the church and Christian organizations in particular, are becoming more varied, which may necessitate adding to or modifying the present programs. If institutions are going to attract more and different students, they must develop new academic delivery systems using instructional technology, distance education, and other forms of continuing education to attract nontraditional students.

With regard to technology, theological education institutions have traditionally provided instruction through oral communication and the printed media. It must be realized that today's generation wants to be educated increasingly via media experience and interaction. Computers and other forms of instructional technology such as on-line education are here to stay. Theological education institutions need to be proactive in developing instructional technology rather than being forced to catch up. Technology provides an opportunity for teaching eternal values to those who are part of this information age.

Theological education institutions must pursue the use of different methods or academic delivery systems that have demonstrated effectiveness, particularly with respect to the cultural

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

context. It is not right to stay fixed on one method just simply because it is traditional, familiar or even trendy. Educational methods need to be utilized in a spirit of innovative flexibility and experimentation, but always with a goal of educational effectiveness.

If anyone would have asked in 1970 which nation would dominate the world in watch making during the 1990s and now into the twenty-first Century, the answer would have been obvious: Switzerland. The Swiss had dominated the world of watch making for the previous sixty years.

The Swiss made the best watches in the world and were committed to constantly refining their expertise. It was the Swiss who developed the minute hand and the second hand. They led the world in discovering better ways to manufacture gears, mainsprings, and other working parts. They even led the way in waterproofing techniques and self-winding models. In 1970, the Swiss made more than two-thirds of the watches sold in the world and laid claim to as much as ninety percent of all profits.

By 1980, however, they had laid off thousands of watchmakers and were down to less than ten percent of the world market. Profit domination dropped to less than twenty percent. Between 1979 and 1981, fifty thousand Swiss watchmakers lost their jobs.

Why? They had refused a new development—Quartz Watches—that had been, ironically, invented by the Swiss. Because it had no mainspring or knob, it was rejected. It was too much of a paradigm shift—too big of a change for them to embrace. Seiko adopted it and, along with others, became the new leaders of the watch-making industry.

The lesson of the Swiss watchmakers is profound. A successful, secure past can quickly be destroyed by an unwillingness to adapt to the future. It involves more than not being able to make predictions about the future. That may happen to anyone at anytime. It results from an unwillingness to be future-directed in outlook.³¹

³¹ David S. Dockery and David P. Gushee (ed.), *The Future of Christian Higher Education*, pp. 4-5.

Perhaps I Chronicles 12:32 states it best, “The men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what to do.”

9. Outcomes Assessment-Evaluation of Educational Programs on the Basis of Specific Objectives:

Educational institutions must demonstrate that they are accomplishing and can continue to accomplish their respective missions, institutional goals, and program objectives. They must improve their performance through a regular and comprehensive system of assessment and planning. Central to this process should be the systematic and specific assessment of student learning and development through a strategy that measures students’ knowledge, skills, and competencies.³²

Measuring learning outcomes or evaluating concrete evidence of student academic achievement in higher education is continuing to emerge as an important dimension of public concern and accreditation review. In the eyes of the public, evidence of student learning outcomes has become a principal gauge of higher education’s effectiveness. Government agencies and accreditation associations have never been clearer in their demand that graduates should possess appropriate literary and communication skills. Students, parents, and the public increasingly want to know what the learning they gain in particular academic programs will mean in the marketplace of employment and in their lives as citizens and community members. Churches and mission agencies also express a desire for graduates of theological institutions who have the appropriate biblical knowledge and the necessary leadership skills to serve effectively. Meanwhile, the growing presence of technology and distance education further underscores the salience of learning outcomes because traditional markers of academic achievement, like numbers

³² *Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges Criteria*, pp.5 & 15.

of classes completed and credits earned, are often absent.³³

Another consideration that cannot be ignored is biblical stewardship. Theological educational institutions must be accountable for their effectiveness in carrying out their mission and their programs. It is necessary and responsible for institutions to evaluate their programs in light of student results so that there is a valid basis for judging the degree to which goals are being met. Being called to accountability by government and accrediting agencies, the church, and the general public can result in greater educational effectiveness.

10. Cooperative Spirit-Collaboration among Evangelical Theological Education

Institutions and Agencies:

This presentation has addressed topics related to theology, missiology, and pedagogy, however, professional educators now talk seriously about “synergogy,” a term that describes a learning process focused on students helping one another rather than competing against one another for grades. Some believe that evangelical theological education is desperately in need of organizational synergogy. Despite struggles for financial, human, and even student resources, ways must be sought to cooperate rather than compete.

There is a need for unity and diversity in terms of mission, models, and methods for evangelical theological education. As the discussion continues, it must be conducted in an open, non-threatening environment where there is respect for the differences that exist. There needs to be a strong demonstration of unity within evangelical theological education ranks, particularly with regard to shared values, a core of biblical and theological studies, and a shared purpose of educating students for service-oriented ministries. There also needs to be respect, mutual understanding, and appreciation for how different institutions and individuals carry out of work of

³³ “A Statement to the Community: Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes,” *Council for Higher Education Accreditation Monologue*, pp. 1-8.

theological education, particularly in different cultural and theological settings.

There is a great freedom in kingdom thinking, acknowledging that God is working throughout His world and not just at our own institutions. James Edwards puts it this way: “The church is indeed diverse, but the goal of the church is not diversity. It is rather unity with God, which is a gift of the Spirit when the church seeks to live in conformity with God’s will as revealed in Scripture. The church is most universal when it is most particular in proclaiming the sole, saving efficacy of Jesus Christ and by bearing a clear, moral witness, both personally and socially.”³⁴

CONCLUSION

We are now living in the 21st Century, a time of rapid growth and change. There are many challenges and opportunities that face us as evangelical theological educators as we provide leadership for our institutions and our higher education agencies. Will it be possible for theological education to remain distinctive and yet varied? Is it possible for theological institutions to teach a variety of professional studies courses and still maintain a strong core of biblical/theological studies? Is it possible to gain broader academic recognition and still be firmly tied to our rich evangelical heritage? Can an institution be academically respectable and still foster a heart for Christian service? Can an institution take advantage of new academic delivery systems and still serve the holistic needs of students? Can theological education institutions continue to train the kinds of leaders that today’s church needs?

The answers to these questions will help to determine the future of evangelical colleges and seminaries. We will no doubt change, however, we must also remain committed to our core values. We will have to change if we are going to remain relevant, but not at the expense of our

³⁴ James R. Edwards, “Unity Not of Our Making,” *Christianity Today* (August 6, 2001), p. 50.

evangelical distinctives. These core values need to be affirmed if your institutions and/or your associations are going to be true to themselves. This has been our pattern in the past as we have adjusted curricula and programs to meet the needs of a changing church and a changing society. The same sensitivity to time and culture needs to continue. We must remain flexible in order to respond to current needs of the 21st Century but not at the expense of the core values that have been identified in this presentation and shared by your respective higher education association.

Yes, the needs of the church and related ministries are changing. Although there will always be the need for workers in traditional pastoral and cross-cultural ministries, there are a wider variety of ministry opportunities available today than ever before. There is also a greater need for qualified lay people who are equipped to serve the church as well as in the marketplace.

The spiritual needs of the world, in depth and scope, are also greater than ever before. The issue is not whether there is a need for equipping Christians for service, but rather, how will the need be met most effectively? Theological institutions that are firmly committed to biblical education must continue to carry out the critical ministry of equipping students for His service.

May this article serve as a ringing bell that proclaims the important role that theological education plays in the church and the world. We are grateful for our Past Commitments. We are cognizant of the Present Realities. We are focused on Future Considerations with a clear understanding of our Core Values.

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