

**The necessity of
Christian universities**

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Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

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Life is religion.

The thesis that life is religion, which serves as startingpoint for this discussion, is not the result of an "objective", empirical analysis of reality. It is, rather, the fruit of a deep conviction which human thought or fantasy is unable to produce, for this conviction must be revealed from a source external to man. This thesis is no less than the confession that one's total thought-life, all his doings, and even the entire world in which he lives and moves, are utterly dependent upon a transcendent power. In other words, it means that not a single part of human life and of the world that surrounds it exists on its own or functions autonomously, or that is explicable in terms of its own existence and origin. For not only did everything originate from God but it also consists in Him, Who, in Christ, has revealed Himself as the Creator and the Preserver of the entire cosmos.

Paul testifies to that when, in the famous Areopagus speech, he points out that in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17: 28)), and also when, in his letter to the Colossians he writes, that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1: 15-16). "All things were made by him: and without him was not anything made that was made" (John. 1: 3). Only this (covenantal) relationship to God – a relationship in which God remains God and man remains the creature – can human life and the world around be meaningfully interpreted.

That man proved unwilling to honor this covenantal bond, and that instead of being content with the position he was given he tried to usurp God's authority and wanted to be like God (Gen. 3: 5), precisely that turned out to be the source of all subsequent misery (Gen. 3: 17-19).

The fall of the first parents was a radical and comprehensive fall into sin. Each human capacity and every human function became affected by that fall. For that reason Paul emphasizes that the whole creation groans and travails in pain until now (Rom. 8: 22).

The moment we lose sight of this situation we find ourselves in a quandary and, in addition to that, we form a distorted picture of redemption. For redemption is not a mere supernatural, added gift of grace hovering above daily life, but redemption, too, is radical and comprehensive. The redemptive goal is no less than life totally renewed, an entirely new humanity, a new heaven and a new earth, the re-creation of God's own creation now fallen in man's guilt. Therefore the creation, in the midst of its travail, lives in hope; "because the creation itself will be

set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom. 8: 21).

We know from the Scriptures and from our own experience taught by the Scriptures that, although its outcome was decisively determined already on the Cross when Jesus cried "It is finished", the struggle between sin and grace continues to be waged. The fronts are as broad as human life. The matter at issue is the great antithesis that exists between the Kingdom of Heaven and the domain of Satan. That antithesis was revealed by God Himself when he said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3: 15). At issue is not merely, therefore, an antagonism between good and evil in itself, but, rather, the undeniable enmity that exists between Christ and his disciples on the one hand and Satan and his consorts on the other – a very concrete issue. That Christ Himself has said in plain language (Matt. 10). And because the description of the two witnesses in Rev. 11 makes it unmistakably plain that this struggle will gain in intensity we shall do well to reject any illusion of a glorious tranquillity in the days ahead.

We know too that at times the battle line between the fronts can fluctuate unpredictably, especially because the line of demarcation will constantly cut through Christianity, the people of God, itself. Another complicating factor is that the enemy positions are not always plain. For Satan often employs camouflage. The son of perdition has not yet been fully revealed. But over the entire front the "mystery of lawlessness" is already at work. Satan searches everywhere for victims. Only the restraining power of God prevents his total self-revelation (I Thes. 2). For that reason we are constantly and repeatedly admonished in the New Testament, in the gospels as well as in the apostolic letters, to be watchful, sober, and constant in prayer.

We know that the time of the separation of the wheat from the tares has not yet come. Some of the wheat might be uprooted (Matt. 13: 24ff.). The goodness of God is still enjoyed equally by the evil and the good (Matt. 5: 45). Nevertheless, already here and now we are expected to make our choice and position plain. The apostle Paul admonishes us, *with an appeal to the mercies of God*, to present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God; to refuse to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom. 12: 1-2). As the people of God we are called to show forth His marvelous acts (I Pet. 2: 9).

Scientific work as religious activity

It seemed useful and desirable to precede our discussion with these rather general considerations because, even though they are of a non-scientific nature and are not empirically verifiable, they are nevertheless

of decisive significance for the Christian's determination of the position he is expected to occupy in the scientific and, therefore, university enterprise. One still frequently finds the conception among Christians and even in more narrowly defined Evangelical circles that, although scholarship is bound to certain external limits by religion and morality, nevertheless, in terms of its own inner nature it is a more or less neutral, autonomous concern. Even those who explicitly confront the problem of (Christian) faith and scientific knowledge frequently fall victim to this conception. They accept the premise that facts are facts, and facts are the same for Christians. That can hardly be denied. Christians and non-Christians live and think in terms of the same created reality. But frequently they lose sight of the notion that scientific work consists not in giving a photographic but an interpretative and elucidative account of reality by way of a process of analysis and conceptualization. And they forget that in this process the whole man continues to function in all his particularity, including the religious choice of position which motivates his selection of a certain path in his scientific study. In that light it may not even be correct to speak of faith *and* science. Such a formula may leave the impression that these two are relatively independent magnitudes which man, in this case the Christian, must somehow integrate. It is much closer to the truth to say that scientific work itself, due to its creaturely character, is nothing but a believing, religious activity; and that this work of faith and religion can proceed in divergent directions, either toward or away from God. Varying between different individuals, these two directions and movements are, due to the surd of sin in the lives of Christians, interwoven in a remarkable way.

It is clear that when the Christian accepts this situation as his premise (and in the light of God's Word there is no other possibility for him), he will increasingly feel himself a stranger in the area of science, while the spiritual burden laid upon his shoulders gets heavier as he emphasizes his Christian convictions. For the scientific enterprise and therefore the university represents a spiritual power. Regardless of whether or not they are conscious of it, scholars and universities are bearers of spiritual "values". That is true also of those universities which claim to be "neutral" or "public".

That means that Christians who teach or study at a so-called neutral institution occupy a difficult and vulnerable position. For in such a situation there is real danger that they accommodate their position to a thought-pattern not inspired by the Christian religion. That threat will decrease with the extent to which they realize the fallacy of the neutrality-postulate and the modern community ideology. They will become increasingly conscious that they occupy a frequently lonely outpost where it takes all their strength to remain standing. But if they know that God Himself has called them and if they realize that they cannot fulfill this calling in their own but only in His strength, however, they will be able to make perhaps a modest, but nevertheless a significant contribution toward the work of redemption, not only in the hearts

of those among whom they work but in the entire scientific enterprise.

Molding a Christian community

In the light of the preceding it comes as no surprise that in the previous century Christians, and specifically Christian students who studied at universities which flew a neutral flag but were in reality dominated by Liberalism, began to seek each other. They did that, in the first place, in order to give each other spiritual support in an extremely difficult situation, and frequently also expressly with the intention of proclaiming the gospel to the unbelieving world. By way of illustration, we refer to the rise of the Cambridge and Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union, out of which arose first the Student Christian Movement in England and later (after both Unions had withdrawn themselves from the S.C.M. for principal reasons) the Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions. Another case in point is the rise of the Reformed Student movement in the Netherlands. These organizations arose from the conviction that entrance to the university must not imply a farewell to the Christian faith. And though the former movement had a primarily missionary focus whereas the latter was of a more defensive bias, both movements stood for the unabridged gospel.

It is remarkable that this development among students failed to produce its complement among professors. The reason, very likely, is that in the predominantly liberal universities of that day very few confessedly Evangelical instructors had formed a place. Perhaps it is also related to the fact that instructors (including, apparently, Christian instructors) generally have a strong individualistic bent.

That raises the question whether we should be content with that situation. Christianity is not the business merely of individuals but primarily of a community. The Christian faith is the concern not merely of saved units but of a redeemed community, the people of God called to make manifest the marvelous acts of God not only within the believing community but also upon the wide fields of the world. *Together* we are called to carry out that mandate.

This individualism, in addition, contradicts the very nature of scientific work. For in scientific enterprise we are confronted not with hermetically sealed and isolated "specialism", but rather with a principally indissoluble coherence of relationships, objects, structures, and aspects. The validity of this statement is apparent especially to the Christian. He knows of the integrality and coherence of the creation. For that reason the Christian may not and cannot consent to an unconnected division of the sciences into isolated specialisms. Precisely his belief in the unity and the coherence of the creation which in Christ awaits its consummation motivates the Christian to ask the ultimate questions in his field – even if his primary interest lies in a special research-area. He is driven to account for the breadth as well as the depth, and in that way he communicates and cooperates with scholars investigating other areas.

The very nature of the scientific enterprise requires an idea of the totality of all that exists – and that idea is nothing but the theoretical articulation of the thinker's leading religious *motifs*. The articulation of such *motifs* is not just the business of theologians or philosophers, but the mutual concern of all scholars. They need each other in this work. And that implies, in our opinion, that, for the purpose of joint reflection upon the problems of our time and for the purpose of discovering a Biblical perspective upon these problems, Christian thinkers – though dispersed – should seek each other's help. We often remain unconscious of the extent to which our vision in the various scientific disciplines has been darkened by sin. But the liberating power of God's Word can make itself manifest in our persistent and prayerful works.

However, an incidental meeting now and then will not suffice. More lasting arrangements will have to be made.

Reformational research centers

In this connection we are thinking, in the first place, of the establishment of research centers in specific countries and continents. Even if they are staffed with only a modest but highly qualified research team consisting of three to five scholars representing distinct faculties these centers can perform significant work.

The activities which can be performed by such centers include, among others: (1) the regular preparation and organization of shorter or longer study-conferences at which Christian scholars are given the opportunity for an intensive exchange of opinions about the relation between problems in their own special field of study and the Biblical foundations of their lives – and therefore also the relation of their problems to those in other areas; (2) the stimulation and support of the formation of reformational Christian study groups among both faculty and students at universities and colleges; (3) the preparation and maintenance of bibliographies of Christian scholarly publications, so that those who desire these may be as fully informed as is possible; and (4) the stimulation of, and, eventually, independent publication of literature in which the attempt is made to further the development of Biblical, reformational scholarship.

We are convinced that such research centers do not have to be elusive Utopias, but can be real possibilities for Christian endeavor. In this connection, for instance, we are thinking of the plans of the Association for Reformed Scientific Studies in Canada. Evangelical Christianity all too frequently assumes a defensive attitude in the area of science and has been content with an apologetic stance. Much more than has been done, it must – armed with the sword of the Spirit – turn to the attacks. Upon the answer it gives to the question whether it understands its assignment in this area depends – for a large part – the position which evangelical Christianity will occupy in the world of tomorrow. The envisioned research centers could be a significant medium to sow the

seed of God's Word in the world of learning. Here an eminently Christian task awaits us.

These centers should also gradually become retreats able to accommodate scholars for occasional periods of concentrated study. For that purpose they must be furnished with adequate libraries containing especially publications which deal specifically with problems of faith and scientific knowledge. For other material they should have the opportunity to resort to a general academic library. Especially for this reason, too, it seems advisable to establish these centers near an existing university. That is desirable also for the promotion of the highest possible degree of direct contact with the academic world, for these centers should remain in constant contact in order to keep abreast of developments. Only in that way will they find it possible to pursue a well-directed policy.

Christian universities

The question remains, however, whether we should be content with the establishment of such research centers, and whether we should not proceed in the direction of establishing Christian universities. I am aware of the fact that by asking this question I am touching an issue upon which there exists no agreement, neither within the evangelical community nor within the framework of the International Association for Reformed Faith and Action. All the more reason to bring up the issue for explicit discussion!

This matter was thoroughly handled recently by a study committee appointed at the initiative of the Dutch Missionary Council, with an eye to extending aid to Indonesian Christians engaged in scientific work. The committee was unable to reach a consensus. The majority was persuaded that such support should be offered also for the further development of existing facilities for advanced Christian education. The minority disagreed.

In the preceding paragraphs we posited the thesis that the various disciplines are religiously qualified and possess an inner coherence. That means that the religious choice of position has consequences not for one or more specific disciplines only but for the whole scientific enterprise. The religious startingpoint both unites and directs – a fact attested by the existence of distinct schools of thought. The world of science is a unity. It presses us by its very nature toward a systematic unfolding of (created) reality and the development of a conception of the whole. This is an obvious normativity, a law which one cannot ignore except at the cost of becoming an emaciated specialist or a superficial eclectic who lacks a truly scientific, scholarly vision.

It is clear that here the Christian community faces a task which it can perform meaningfully only within the framework of a Christian university. Lacking Christian universities as concentration centers for study and education, Christians will not be able to wield real influence and

power – in the spiritual, Biblical sense of that word – in the area of scholarship. Nor will they be able to make a really distinctive contribution toward the development of the various disciplines. And because scientific knowledge continues to gain in importance in human society, the result will be that a science without Christian foundations will become an increasingly greater threat. Here we are confronted with a pastoral problem of the first order – one that may not be underrated, for it is a problem that confronts professors as well as students.

With this we have also pointed to the deepest motives which led to the foundation of the *Free University of Amsterdam* in 1880. In the famous address, *Souvereiniteit in eigen kring* (Sovereignty in its own sphere), with which Abraham Kuyper opened this institution, he posited the inner unity of science and scholarship with great lucidity. Moreover, he stressed in a pointed manner that this unity can only come to full expression when it is elaborated and applied out of a communally accepted basic principle. For without such a principle the ways will quickly run in diverse directions. In this he detected the foremost line of division between those who desire to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ also in the scientific enterprise – in accordance with Christ's own claim that all power has been given to Him – and those who, for whatever reason, do not desire this. With respect to this Kuyper rejected the possibility of a lasting synthesis.

High Standards

In order to reach its goal, a Christian university should conform to high standards. Those standards must be of a religious-ethical as well as a religious-scientific nature.

By *religious-ethical standards* we mean, in this connection, that those who affiliate with a Christian university must realize that *together* they are called of God to perform a task in the world of scientific research, study, and education; and that they should perform their task in communion, ministering to each other, to the Christian community at large, and to the world. In the exercise of that active, communal ministry too it should become evident what it means to be Christ's disciples.

By *religious-scientific standards* we mean that at a Christian university we must not be content with a devotional framework in the form of worship services, Bible circles, and so on – however necessary these may be. The real point to a Christian university is, specifically, the inner renewal of the theoretical enterprise itself, through the power of the Word of God, through that which the Holy Scriptures teach us about the continuing struggle between light and darkness, grace and sin, the *civitas dei* and the *civitas terrena*, about the Consummation of the age in the Son of God, about the new heaven and the new earth in which God will be all in all. Driven by these fundamental Biblical truths, it must make a scientific contribution to the knowledge of the facts,

relationships, and structures which confront us in the world which surrounds us as the creation of God, and to the knowledge of laws and regulations which hold for these relationships and structures – including the Word-revelation in its creaturely aspects (the Word became flesh!). And all this for the greater glory of God. This is no minor challenge. Nevertheless, we may not set our aim lower than this. And we must remember that we shall be able to carry out a task of such proportions fruitfully only when we realize that God has indeed called us. Otherwise we may not even begin, or, if attempted anyway, our work will soon begin to erode under the process of secularization. We need but remind ourselves of institutions like Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Leyden, and Geneva, which began as reformational institutions but which became estranged from the Christian religion. They function as warning signals to those institutions in the world which can still be characterized as Christian.

Potential dangers

The road which a Christian university must travel is neither easy nor without danger.

It is not impossible, for example, that a Christian university turns into a “Christian bulwark” behind which one attempts to ward off every kind of non-Christian influence and behind which one constantly busies himself with the cultivation of a narrow, sectarian way of life—instead of an institution at which he tries, in obedience to the Word of God, to be academically engaged in training young scholars for the task which awaits them in the world. A Christian university may never become an end in itself. The university must, to the contrary, give itself in ministry to the world – also to those institutions which still look upon science and philosophy as mostly an autonomous affair. In this way it will be one of the most significant services rendered by a Christian university to the so-called neutral or state universities to produce men of principle, thoroughly trained and highly qualified, with a thorough awareness of the problems of the contemporary world, who should be eminently eligible for positions in these institutions. It is important, also, in this connection, that those who are affiliated with the Christian university participate constantly in the scientific discussion in the larger context of the academic world. Every false and unnecessary isolation must be avoided. Such isolation is only the neglect of the real dynamics of the Word of God, for that Word compels us to carry out our task in the world.

Another, hardly imaginary, danger is that a Christian university becomes so susceptible to the influence of the surrounding world that it, as it were, begins to drift along with the tides of the day, fails to be sufficiently critical of the forces which confront it, and, as a result, begins gradually to lose its distinctiveness. The need for recognition by

institutions professing no particular basis frequently plays, consciously or unconsciously, a significant part in this process.

The desire for recognition is in itself completely legitimate. It should be expressed in a high level of scholarship. But in a Christian university this should never be fulfilled at the expense of the evangelical mandate which it must carry out in the world. As soon as that is done, the demands of science begin to compete with the demands of principle, and then the time of spiritual exile and bondage for the Christian university is at hand. A Christian university, if it is to do justice to its name, should, both with an eye to its students and the outside world, manifest clearly that it is *in* but not *of* this world. That holds for its scholarship as well as for its entire behavior. Paul's admonition in his letter to the Ephesians, "You did not so learn Christ!" directs itself to that work too. Christian scholarship is the attempt to put scientific thought, communally exercised under the liberating yoke of Christ and His Word, in order that in this work, too, a testimony may be given to His Lordship and His redemptive grace. However brokenly, however imperfectly, such a university may function as one more sign of the faithfulness of God toward the world by Him created. It can be a means to remedy the spiritual schizophrenia so many Christians manifest toward science.

A matter of faith

From this point of view the foundation *and* development of a Christian university is no simple task – but a task entirely of faith. Before it is begun, the cost must be counted in every way. The central point is that dedicated Christians be found, ready to give themselves to that work and ready to meet that standard. The staff must not be divided with regard to basis and goal. As soon as that happens, the university begins to lose its power and dynamic. There must be a clear strategy. Experience may teach that at times the strategy must be changed, but that change is the concern of the university as a *community*, the task of all. Once again, the scientific enterprise is not the business of mere individuals but of joint and mutual dedication to a definite purpose. If that is true for any university, how much more for a Christian university!

We are aware of the fact that the possibilities for the establishment of the most modest Christian university depend, to a large extent, upon the potentials of the Christians for whose country or continent it is planned. But that is not, in itself, the decisive factor. For much depends as well upon the attitude taken by evangelical Christians to contemporary culture, their opinion about the place occupied by science in culture, and their understanding of the task which awaits them in that culture. For that attitude determines the direction of our work and prayer in this world. We live in a time when also in the so-called Christian West the process of secularization spreads itself in an alarming and penetrating manner, at times even into the heart of the Christian church. Science plays an important role in this process. This contains a challenge which

requires a response from those Christians who desire to live by the Word of God. *Periculum in mora!* There is danger in delay. For the matter at issue is not only the development of philosophy and science as such but also the spiritual welfare of the men and women who are engaged in it.

It is quite likely that each start will be modest. Thus it was whenever Christian universities were founded in the past. The Free University of Amsterdam – in 1880! – is an example of small beginnings. The Christian universities established in Indonesia, after the second world war are another. But in spite of extremely trying circumstances, these universities too, are reaching forward in the conviction that they are expected to go forward, not only for the sake of the Christian community but for the sake of the entire population which they wish to serve. More examples could be cited, not only in Asia but also in Africa and other continents.

Evangelical Christianity should thoughtfully reflect upon this matter. This article is intended as a stimulus and contribution to that reflection and to action which can possibly issue from it. For there is a task here, indeed, a calling, which we may not avoid because of Christ, to Whom all power and authority has been given, not only in heaven but also on earth.

The Free University, Amsterdam.

[Reprinted from *International Reformed Bulletin* (Oct. 1965), organ of the International Association for Reformed Faith and Action (International Office: Borssenburg 4, Amstelveen, the Netherlands).]

EDUCATIONAL CREED

Believing that Scripture reveals certain basic principles intensely relevant to education, we confess:

LIFE. THAT human life in its entirety is religion. Consequently, scholarly study unfolds itself as service either of the one true God or of an idol.

SCRIPTURE THAT Scripture, the Word of God written, in instructing us of God, ourselves and the structure of creation is that integral and active divine Word or Power by which God, through His Spirit, attaches us to and enlightens us in the Truth, which is Christ.

CHRIST. THAT the Christ of the Scriptures, the Word of God incarnate, is the Redeemer and Renewer of our life in its entirety and therefore also of our theoretical thought.

REALITY. THAT the essence or heart of all created reality is the covenantal communion of man with God in Christ.

KNOWLEGDE. THAT true knowledge is made possible by true religion and arises from the knowing activity of the human heart enlightened through the Word of God by the Holy Spirit. Thus religion plays its decisive ordering role in the understanding of our everyday experience and our theoretical pursuits.

SCHOLARSHIP. (a) THAT the diligent pursuit of theoretical thought in a community of scholars is essential to the obedient and thankful response of God's people to the cultural mandate. The task of the scholar is to give a scientific account of the structure of creation and thereby to promote a more effective ordering of the everyday experience of the entire community. **(b) THAT** because of God's gracious preservation of creation after the fall, men who reject the Word of God as the ordering principle of life provide many valuable insights into the common structure of reality; nevertheless, the central religious antithesis of direction in life remains. We therefore reject the possibility of the synthesis of scripturally directed thought with any other system of thought.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM. THAT scholarly pursuits are to be undertaken in the God-given freedom of a complete and voluntary submission to the Word of God and the divine laws that govern human life. The responsible freedom of the scholar must be protected against any constraint or domination of church, state, industry or other societal structure.

SUMMARY. THAT all scholarship pursued in faithful obedience to the divine mandate will heed the normative direction of God's Word, will acknowledge His Law to which creation in all its spheres is subject, and will bow before Christ's Kingship over all scientific work.

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