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THE VITAL STAKE OF THE AFRICAN CHURCH in CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION'S WORLDVIEW AND SCHOLARSHIP: Two Issues and Some Suggestions for Scholarship Helpful to the Church. .

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Thanks to the dedicated leadership of those associated with the International Association For The Promotion of Christian Higher Education, especially here in Africa, we are enjoying many helpful perspectives this week on "Christian Worldview and Scholarship".

Reformed Christians everywhere throb with excitement and energy at the thought of the Lordship of Christ "always and everywhere". As Abraham Kuyper expressed it: "There is not a single inch of the whole terrain of our whole existence over which Christ does not proclaim, 'It is mine'". Wherever that energy abounds, Reformed Christians spring into action in every area of life; including the area of Christian scholarship.

It is my privilege to remind us how vital a Worldview/Life System (also called a "World and Life View") and a solid contribution of Christian scholarship by those in Christian Higher Education is to the Church; especially to the younger church developing here in Africa.

I speak to you not as an educator but as an ecclesiastic, a churchman. The Reformed Ecumenical Council is comprised of Reformed churches around the world (including several here in Nigeria). Therefore we in REC are keenly aware of the important contribution Christian higher education (and all Christian education in home, church and school) makes to the strength and effectiveness of the Reformed churches throughout the world. Likewise, when "Worldview/ Life System" Christian education that integrates faith and knowledge is lacking, it is very apparent!

Some of you know me through my former role as Director of Ministry for a Christian day school development organization in which capacity I helped the NKST develop "six model high schools"; or you think of my long association with FRIENDS of Hilltop University (formerly ICS, now ICSM) as chairman and now treasurer. I speak to you with that background of course, but primarily on behalf of the REC and its developing member churches in Africa. I speak "on behalf of" but not FOR the African church. We look forward to our Open Discussion when the authentic voice of African church leaders and members can add to our perspectives on the subject.

TWO ISSUES:

I. The Instituted Church, the Kingdom of God and Christian Higher Education: there is a need to clarify the relationships to assure that God's Kingdom thrives in Nigeria.

We confess that the Church is essentially the community of believers which "the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself..." (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21). It has been "from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof..." (Belgic Confession Art. XXVII).

This invisible "community" of believers has through the ages taken on a visible, organized form as "The Church" ("Israel" in the old dispensation; today as a many splended - and a many splintered - denominationally patterned institution).

Just as Christ came preaching, healing and teaching, the Christian Church has desired to do the same. There has been a great effort therefore to establish hospitals and schools as well as preaching centers in the Name of Christ...and as Church. This is the calling of Christians but is it the task of the churches? Many today recognize that in its zeal and great love the Church, especially in its mission work, has often left a non-indigenous legacy, and sometimes a burden to be maintained.

The Church is always tempted to do too much. So all over the world the cry "let the Church be Church" is heard with new force today. It is a cry of the people who want the Church and its ministers ordained to the preaching of the Word and Sacraments to prepare them for LIFE, here and eternally. They want to hear their marching orders from the Word of God and to be strengthened for their Kingdom building tasks. It is always a temptation for a young church especially to siphon off its Ministers of the Word to other tasks because they have been the first ones trained. We must get beyond that. The proposed Hilltop University (ICSM) can help here.

The temptation further exists for the organized church to "claim power and jurisdiction over every domain of life such as science and art, commerce and industry, as well as social and political organizations. Dr. Louis Berkhof in his Systematic Theology concluded that "this is an altogether mistaken conception". He attributed this "Roman Catholic" idea to the fact that there is an "indiscriminate identification of the Kingdom of God and the Church". He notes further "that it is also a mistake to maintain...that Christian school societies...Christian labor unions, and Christian political organizations are manifestations of the church as an organism, for this again brings them under the domain of the visible Church and under the direct control of its officers." Many young African churches suffer from this syndrom of being too controlling.

In contrast, I believe the Reformed community of faith has been well served by **distinguishing between the Instituted Church and the Kingdom of God**. A great vitality comes to Christians who, recognizing the rule of Christ in their lives calling them to serve Him always and everywhere, invest all they are and have in building up the Kingdom of God in this world (or as some more correctly state, **restoring** the Kingdom of God in this world).

The opportunity for Christian Higher Education, "manned" by leaders imbued with a Christian Worldview/Life system (ie. teachers, administrators, governing board members and a Christian support community including the church) to prepare a team of Christian leaders to fill the leadership roles of society, an army of Christian soldiers to stand up to the enemies of righteousness and a Godly force for justice and peace is the challenge of every age. Africa needs such Christian lay leaders!

To meet that challenge requires that the deeply committed leaders (mentioned above) provide an ARENA FOR TEACHING, LEARNING AND SCHOLARSHIP THAT HAS A STABILITY BORN OF PURPOSE AND IS MARKED BY GOOD PERFORMANCE. There must be a community of teachers and students (and the other named leaders) who respect one another, are free from the cares of this life (ie. have appropriate facilities, are paid adequately and on time) and are self-less in their goals and efforts. Such an "Arena" - college, university, institute - can be a GREAT blessing to the Christian community...and to any nation.

The Church DOES have a VITAL STAKE in the existence and encouragement of such institutions however. For it realizes that in them future leaders will emerge to bring Christian leadership to all areas of life. This has been stated well recently by Dr. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. of Calvin Seminary in an article: "Why Christian College Education Matters". He observes, "The main trouble with secular higher education is that it cannot provide a Christian student with the help she needs to form a truthful view of the clash between the kingdoms (the kingdom of Christ and the "kingdom of this present darkness). In fact, secular higher education today is full of a kind of moral relativism in which this clash does not even matter...I propose a more excellent way. Why not help our college-age sons and daughters learn-with adult power-to form a Christian vision of reality?"

This of course PRESUPPOSES THAT THE PROFESSORS WHO TEACH HAVE THAT "Christian Vision of Reality" (see copy of Dr. Plantinga's article provided for you) and can teach their subject creatively, sharing that vision with their students.

Yes, so vital is the stake that the Church has in the existence and encouragement of such institutions of Christian Higher Education that can provide youth with "a Christian vision of reality" that the churches were usually the founders of them. In the town I live in, Holland, Michigan, Dominie Van Raalte founded Hope college shortly after the immigrants came in 1847. He declared "this is my anchor of hope". Dozens, perhaps hundreds of institutions in new lands likewise were Church-founded; many beginning for the training of pastors, then teachers and then Kingdom Builders in EVERY area of life.

But inevitably, history shows, they tended to become disengaged from their founding churches; as James Tunstead Burtchaell has documented in a recent publication, The Dying of the Light. "Countless colleges and universities in the history of the United States were founded under some sort of Christian patronage" he writes, but "Most of these colleges and universities no longer have a serious, valued or functional relationship with their Christian sponsors of the past."

We do not have time to probe all the reasons for this "disengagement" (often just the result of domineering church attitudes and "educators' preference for autonomy"). But this history reminds all who care about Christian Worldview/Life system education to engage in the scholarship as a community of faith that will ensure continuing "performance" equal to the "purpose" envisioned by the founders.

Suggestions:

Developing institutions (such as ICSM, for example) can easily become preoccupied with practical concerns. While attending to these is important (and can be achieved, eg. with the help of FRIENDS), it is much more important for all involved (board, faculty, administration, church) to spend time on refining the institution's purpose...and then addressing questions of governance, policy and performance. A team of leaders representing all, addressing matters in a scholarly fashion can make a lasting contribution and avoid "disengagement" with the church - although the "ownership/governance" structure may change. James Burtchaell speaks of a "melancholy" he feels because "these colleges and universities no longer have a serious, valued, or functioning relationship with their Christian sponsors of the past." He expresses the wish that "all had successfully cultivated their denominational affiliations, and that they could have helped their churches intellectually in the process."

One of the guarantees that "the lofty goal of uniting faith and learning" will not result "in the triumph of learning over faith" (with consequent disengagement) is the promotion of such team scholarship.

The Christian Church in Nigeria (not just one denomination but ALL those "given a place at the table" of the institution) can continually benefit from the scholarship of Worldview\Life System faculty members who, "free from earthly cares" can contribute their insights to the church over many years. This has been the glad experience of sister churches in the REC as scholars contribute to Church issue studies etc.

II. A SECOND ISSUE is the adequate and proper preparation of covenant youth for leadership and the influencing of all youth under the care of those in Christian Higher Education.

Although founded by one or more churches and governed by a board of their choosing, a CHE institution usually opens its doors to all qualified potential students. They represent an income stream and an opportunity for influencing each generation. Many, even most of these will be covenant young people from the supporting churches. Some will be "seekers" after truth, not affiliated with the supporting churches; perhaps not even Christians. The Church has a vital stake in the preparation of all of them.

As the result of a long study by the REC's Commission on Youth and Christian Education (in cooperation with its Commission on Theology), our member churches have adopted "Seven Universal Themes" concerning Covenant young people of the Church (these themes have been published in Reformed Youth Arena, Dec. 1997. A number of copies are available for conference registrants). Themes 6 and 7 have some principled and pedagogical significance for CHE as well: "Instruction of Christian youth is designed to structure the response and growth of faith" of the Covenant young person and "Youth should be given the opportunity to exercise their office as believers appropriate to every stage of their growth in maturity and faith." A careful study of these and the other Universal Themes will benefit all who work with young people of the churches.

Institutions of CHE are not first of all evangelistic efforts. But the influence of mature, model Worldview/Life System Christian teachers cannot be underestimated, especially in today's secular, pragmatic world.

The Church has a vital stake therefore in how covenant and non-covenant young people are prepared for service in the Kingdom of God.

Suggestions:

1. That a commitment be made by all CHE faculty to teach more effectively to increase the Christian Church's and community's depth of understanding of all the disciplines of study.

A former Pew Foundation executive who has spent much time in Africa is very hopeful about African development. But when asked "Will Christianity in Africa make a difference?", he reports that "Many veteran Christian leaders in Africa, both african and expatriate, worry about the depth of Christian commitment, its relative lack of social teaching, and the poor equipping most Christian leaders have for teaching parishioners to build their lives and then insist on honesty in business and public affairs." This, he reports, is the result of the tendency for the churches "to think in narrow terms about the faith - as an escape from the world's problems rather than an answer to them." Consequently the Faith is "in many places a mile wide and an inch deep." Worldview/Life System CHE can do something

about that! As Dr. Carpenter stated, "Personal piety alone will not solve the problems of Africa. A Christian world and live view that addresses African questions is desperately needed". Continuing faculty development is therefore essential for them to make this contribution.

2. A commitment must be made to take a personal, spiritual interest in students and to teach more interactively for their growth and confidence. Interestingly, one of the factors of disengagement of the schools from their spiritual founders was the tendency to defer matters of spiritual and personal conduct to administrators (deans, later chaplains etc.) and away from faculty. There is great benefit in teachers modelling and sharing personal faith in learning with students. Likewise, there is great value in stimulating thinking, discourse and decision-making rather than a system of rote memory or uncritical feedback. Any university is only as good as the teachers in its classrooms.

3. Write, publish, invite dialogue, share influence through articles and sharing scholarly research. Use print, church meetings, conferences.

Examples:

1. Reformed Youth Arena published in cooperation with the Commission on Youth and Christian Education of the Reformed Ecumenical Council is the only journal of its kind available to the wider Reformed world. You are invited to contribute to its pages. Likewise The Theological Forum and Mission Bulletin of REC.

2. Faculty papers prepared to explain your understanding of teaching your subject are valuable contributions to encouraging Reformed teaching. I leave a copy of such a paper with you (soon to be published in RYA). Articles on your subject may be published or "picked up" by other journals (eg. Christian Educator's Journal).

3. Contributions to church papers bring your thinking before members of the church and encourages dialogue among church members.

4. Participation in Conferences and Consultations such as the proposed REVIEW and RENEW Consultations (see descriptive paper) help to strengthen scholarship.

Yes, the Church has a vital stake in the contribution of Christian Higher Education as it develops leaders for church and society...for the Kingdom of God in West Africa. It deserves your best effort.

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RESOURCES MENTIONED:

Systematic Theology L. Berkhof 1994 Eerdmans Publishing Co.

The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches. J.T. Burtchaell 1998 Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, Mich.

IS THERE HOPE FOR AFRICA?: A lecture by Joel Carpenter, Calvin College.