



## THE CHALLENGE OF CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

**B. J. VAN DER WALT**

Potchefstroom University of Christian Higher Education  
Potchefstroom, South Africa

*This article consists of three main sections. In the first, reasons are given why a vision for Christian higher education is, to a large degree, still lacking in Africa. The following factors are dealt with to explain this situation: (1) the political-economic-social environment; (2) the character of Christianity on the continent; (3) the state of higher education; and (4) the implications of all these factors for Christian higher education. The second main section develops a basis for a vision for Christian higher education by listening to what Romans 12:2 says about the "renewing of our minds." The final section provides an answer to the question how this vision for Christian education could be realized in Africa. A proposal is made for the establishment of an African Center for Christian Higher Education. How this could be done, and what its key activities should be are spelled out in a practical way.*

Although I am not an African by skin color, deep in my heart I belong to the African continent. My ancestors arrived in South Africa in 1727. I was born and raised in Potchefstroom and intend to stay there. I have always been interested in developments on my continent and have tried to update my knowledge through reading and traveling to quite a number of African countries. I am especially interested in the state of Christianity on the continent and its interaction with other religions.

I presume I was asked to prepare this article because of my close involvement with the work of IAPCHE during the past 25 years, from its inception in 1975 with the first conference in

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Address correspondence to Bennie J. van der Walt, 7 Bezuidenhout Street, Potchefstroom 2531, South Africa. E-mail: hannah@intelcom.co.za

Potchefstroom. In spite of all the difficulties we had to face during the last 25 years, I am still an enthusiastic supporter of its vision of Christian scholarship which aims to serve our Lord Jesus Christ in an integral way. This article includes four subthemes. Reversing the order in which they appear in the title, we have the following: (1) the twenty-first century, (2) the African continent, (3) Christian higher education and (4) challenges. The paper, under the following headings, concentrates on the last three.

- Lacking a vision for Christian higher education on the African continent, in which I describe the present situation and its challenges.
- Grasping a vision for Christian higher education, in which I elaborate, especially for my African brothers and sisters, from a Biblical perspective, the vision from which we have to face these challenges.
- Realizing the vision, in which I will suggest some concrete strategies to be considered by IAPCHE on the threshold of this new century.

### **Lacking a Vision for Christian Higher Education**

In this section, attention will be paid to the following: (1) the political-social economic situation in Africa, (2) the state of higher education, (3) the character of African Christianity, and finally (4) the implications of the preceding three items for Christian higher education.

#### *The Political-Economic-Social Situation*

It is not difficult today to fall prey to so-called Afro-pessimism. According to well-informed writers, Africa is politically and economically speaking, beyond the point of crisis; it has reached the scope of a tragedy.

Most of you will be aware of the unstable political situation in many African countries. African states still have to learn what good governance entails and have to develop modern democratic ways of government. This is not the forum to discuss the complex internal and external causes for the continent's political woes. We should at least keep in mind that incompetent and corrupt African leaders are

not the only reason for the political mess in many African countries. The colonialism of the past (political imperialism of European nations) and present day neocolonialism (economic imperialism led by North America) have contributed equally to the malaise.

Economically speaking, Africa's greatest problem is its poverty. Terrible poverty, in turn, has detrimental consequences for the social life of its inhabitants. The following are a few of the grim statistics:

- Thirty-three (of approximately 50) African countries are described by the recent United Nations Annual Human Development Index as the poorest of the world's poor. They lack basic social services, such as health and education facilities.
- Of the about 543 million people in Africa, as many as 184 million have no access to safe water, 436 million lack the most basic health services, and 510 million are without sanitation.
- While in developed Western countries like the United States and Switzerland there are more than 600 telephone lines per 1,000 people, sub-Saharan Africa has an average of only 12 lines per 1,000 people—in some countries only 1 telephone per 1,000 people!
- While industrial nations have an average of 405 cars per 1,000 people, in sub-Saharan Africa the statistics are one car per 1,000 people!
- Add to this bleak picture the deadly AIDS disease. Its impact is calculated to be even more devastating than incessant warfare on the continent.

Poverty is not only rampant in urban areas with their fast-growing squatter camps, and their lack of infrastructure and job opportunities. It is often worse in rural areas where people also have become dependent on money to survive.

Despite these many reasons for concern, there are new, small signs of hope, encouraging leaders like President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa to proclaim an African renaissance for the twenty-first century. Djibril Diallo, the director of public affairs of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), recently said that this new sense of optimism is not misplaced. From a history of negative economic growth, the economies of 33 African countries are now achieving new and even record levels of positive growth.

Their gross domestic product (GDP) is growing faster than the population, contrasting markedly with the previous 15 years of declining per capita income.

*The State of Higher Education in General*

At a conference of the then-proposed African chapter of IAPCHE held in 1992 at Potchefstroom, South Africa, speakers drew attention to the plight of higher education in Africa. It was clear that we were confronted with a crisis of enormous magnitude. What follows is a brief summary of the content of some of the presentations.

HISTORY

Africa was introduced to modern Western, formal education by Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The churches regarded it as one of the most effective instruments of evangelization, while the colonial rulers needed it to provide indigenous auxiliaries for the promotion of Western needs and interests.

The missionaries did not promote tertiary education, except for the training of indigenous church leaders. Their primary and secondary education was mostly narrowed down to the popular three r's (reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic) and Bible knowledge. Because of their anti-intellectual stance, anything beyond that was labelled as "worldly." This dualistic conception of education has affected both state and church policies to the present day.

After independence in about the middle of the previous century, African governments took control of the primary and (few) secondary schools established by the missionaries. New universities mushroomed. Higher education was now viewed as a means towards nation building and national development, filling the vacancies left by colonial administrations. This was a time of high expectations. More and more universities were founded and the student population increased rapidly.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

Today, higher education in Africa is in very bad shape. It is wrong to generalize, but the following are signs of a near total collapse of universities in some African countries.

- Academic mediocrity and declining standards.
- Lack of finance.
- Frustration among lecturers and students because of a chronic lack of textbooks and other teaching materials, journals, equipment, and infrastructure in general. There is also concern about job opportunities after completion of studies.
- A lack of properly qualified teaching staff. Little interest in teaching at universities because of poor remuneration. Academic staff overburdened by administration, with little time left for teaching and research. A huge brain-drain of capable men and women leaving the continent.
- Students are left with few models of excellence to emulate.
- Overpopulation because of an explosion in student numbers.
- Frequent student demonstrations and suspension of academic activities.
- Severe poverty amongst students struggling to afford one meal a day.
- Malpractice in the admission of students, plagiarism, dishonesty, corruption, and immorality.
- Curricula more or less irrelevant to the African situation. For example, students completing a course in Computer Studies without any hands-on experience with computers in the class or without the opportunity of being able to use computers in the rural areas where they will have to be employed after the completion of their studies!
- Last but not least, politicization of universities, poor planning, and arbitrary changes in academic programs and policies.

The consequence of this state of affairs is that many African universities, like institutions of higher learning elsewhere in the world, have become mere factories, churning out half-baked rote learners, ill-trained and ill-equipped for the few available job opportunities!

#### THE ROOT PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

It will be difficult to pinpoint the major problems. The following are often mentioned:

- inadequate funding,
- undue government interference,

- a burgeoning student population,
- inadequate attention paid by society at large to the plight of the universities,
- duplication instead of cooperation among universities.

At the moment, Africa, along with the economically advanced countries of the West, is rethinking university education. Questions such as the following are being asked. What should its basic aim be? What practical value does it have? How can it become less expensive? Should it be accessible to and essential for so many students?

### *Christianity on the Continent*

Worldwide, the center of Christianity presently is shifting from the North and the West to the South and the East. This also applies to Africa. Statistics indicate an unprecedented, astounding growth in the numbers of Christians. Two decades ago it was estimated that Africa might become *the* Christian continent of the twenty-first century.

#### A BRIEF HISTORY

We should not forget the contribution of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Egyptian Coptic Church, two of the oldest churches in the world which survived Islamic domination up to today. Neither should we forget the contribution of early Hellenistic Christianity in North Africa, with leaders such as Clement, Origen, Tertullian and Augustine. During the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries the Portuguese (Roman Catholics) also brought the Gospel to the coasts of Africa.

It was, however, only at the end of the nineteenth and during the twentieth century that Christian missions really penetrated inland Africa. The phenomenal increase in numbers is recent, occurring in the previous century. In this sense, Christianity is indeed still young on the African continent—a mere 100 years compared to a history of 2,000 years in some other parts of the world.

We see this rapid increase of Christianity especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The northern parts of the continent are Muslim. In many sub-Saharan countries a large and growing percentage of the population are Muslims. The third major religion is traditional African religion, still very popular amongst many Africans. Many

of the so-called Independent Churches are, in fact, a syncretistic mixture of Christianity and traditional African religion.

All the different sections of Christianity are represented on the continent: Catholic, mainline Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and the already mentioned Independent African Churches. But the fastest-growing of these is undoubtedly the so-called New Pentecostalism, sometimes called Faith Gospel or Prosperity Gospel.

#### CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES

To grasp this latest phenomenon, we should keep in mind that African Christianity is both a localized religion and part of a world religion. On the one hand, traditional African religion and present-day poverty both encourage this kind of faith. On the other hand, it is introduced by evangelists, especially from North America. Its basic teaching is that Christians should share in the victory of Christ over sickness, deprivation, and poverty. A believer has the right to God's blessings of health and wealth. One can obtain them merely by a positive confession of faith. The forces operative in Africa's economic and social spheres are therefore clearly reflected in this type of Christianity.

The one side of the coin is: To what extent is this type of Christianity a consequence or reflection of the present socioeconomic situation? But the other side is: What is the role of these churches in alleviating the political-economic crisis? This type of Christianity is not capable of providing a positive, creative response to the crisis. It does not even address the real, burning issues of Africa, but simply tries to escape from them! If we consider what recently occurred in Liberia and Rwanda—two of the most Christian countries in Africa—there is reason enough for seriously questioning the inherent ability of this new Pentecostalism to improve the political-economic-social situation. I also doubt that it has the inherent power to endure for very long.

Another socially irrelevant form of Christianity is what some authors call Apocalyptic Christianity. It believes that the hardships which Africans are experiencing are the signs of the end-times, a fulfillment of God's prophecies. We simply have to accept them as His will! From this kind of faith we also cannot expect either criticism of the status quo or active Christian involvement to improve the situation.

I note examples of the mushrooming Prosperity Gospel and Apocalyptic Christianity to illustrate that even the latest brands of Christianity are not world-transformative types. They are basically dualistic—like the older Catholic and mainline Protestant faiths. The total spectrum of Christianity on the African continent is infected by the dangerous virus that says life should be divided into a sacred and secular sphere, and it lacks the comprehensive view of service in God's kingdom in every area of life. There is, however, a small group of Christians who adhere to a holistic, world-transformative worldview, though they may not always know how to put these beliefs into practice. Such a broader perspective is slowly developing among different denominations, including Reformed, Catholic, and Seventh Day Adventist groups.

#### BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

African Christianity in general, because of its basic dualistic worldview, may be characterized by the following terms: escapism, pietism, ecclesiasticism, and secularism.

- Escapism means that one tries to escape within the safe walls of one's religion from the harsh realities of the outside world. The current situation on the continent strengthens the appeal this kind of world-flight religion exerts.
- Pietism regards the Christian faith as individual piety. It does not necessarily try to escape the harsh realities of life, but gets involved in them in the wrong way. A Christian president will, for example, read his Bible and pray for God's guidance, but his daily political duties do not reveal anything of what God requires of political leadership.
- Ecclesiasticism holds that Christianity is confined to converted individuals and the established churches. Social life (politics, economics, education, etc.) has to be "baptised" or brought into the confines of the church ("churchified") whenever one intends to serve God in these areas of life. Christianity is narrowly confined to the ecclesiastical sphere.
- Secularism is unfortunately no longer confined to the West. It is also a growing fact among many sincere African Christians; in their personal and church life they think and behave as Christians, but in politics, economics, and so on, they are lost. They fail to see the relevance of the Gospel for the real and burning issues on our continent.



At the moment secularization occurs primarily in the growing urban areas of the continent. It creates a gap between secular, urban and traditional, rural people. The result is two different cultures struggling to understand each other.

Unfortunately, the socially activist variety of Christianity (not mentioned thus far because it is so small) is also influenced by secularistic thinking. Christians in this group are usually inspired by a Biblical concern for justice, but they try to achieve their goal by joining the secular powers! Mainstream Protestant-Evangelical groups usually join the ruling party, while Catholics tend to line up with opposition parties!

#### A DIFFERENT VIEW OF RELIGION IS NEEDED

In summary, I would say that Christianity in Africa basically needs a different viewpoint about religion. First, real Christian religion excludes the idea that ministers, priests, and prophets are holier than others. Every human being must live *coram Deo*, in the presence of God. Second, instead of being a small section of our life, religion should embrace the whole of our being and life. Life—the whole of life—is religion, obedience, and service to God! Third, in reaction to the gospel of prosperity it should be emphasized that the Christian religion does not in the first place exist for the benefit of man, his wealth and health, but for the sake of glorifying God. When we serve God, He will also bless us with life in its fullness (John 10:10). The glory of God and human happiness do not exclude each other, but they go together. The gospel of prosperity, however, holds a very shallow view of material prosperity not derived from the Bible but from superficial, secular, Western consumerist culture.

#### *The Implications of the Political, Economic and Religious Contexts for Christian Higher Education*

#### POLITICAL INFLUENCES

Politically, one of the major educational problems on the continent is the authoritarian interference of politicians and governments. We have already indicated that the politicization of academic institutions was one of the main causes for their downfall. An additional problem is that in some cases no clear distinction was made between Christian missions and their educational ef-

forts, on the one hand, and colonialism on the other. After independence, some African governments therefore regarded Christian educational institutions as part of the hated colonial heritage and took over their control; this resulted in progressive secularization. Other new African governments, however, distinguished between Christian missions/education and colonialism. They only took control of the secular part of the mission's educational task, permitting the churches to continue teaching the "Christian part."

Although many African countries have accepted modern liberal constitutions which guarantee religious freedom to all citizens, some of them have tended to favor neutral education. Many, however, allow full freedom to teach in a Christian way. In North and West Africa, Islamic governments may be hostile towards Christian education, but in other parts of the continent, for instance in Eastern and Southern Africa, most governments are sympathetic towards Christianity and Christian education.

#### ECONOMIC INFLUENCES

Our discussion of the state of tertiary education in Africa has already revealed lack of funding as a major problem. Many children cannot even afford primary or secondary education. And of the very few who can continue with higher education, many regard it as a waste because of irrelevance, inferior quality, and the fact that it does not guarantee a job.

#### RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES

I will now deal more extensively with the implications of African Christianity for Christian higher education.

Africa inherited the age-old dualism of the sacred-secular from Western Christianity. Accordingly, the churches confined themselves to Christian education (Bible classes at school and the training of ministers at theological seminaries), while the state was responsible for secular education (which included all the other disciplines). The idea of a Christian approach to all the different subjects is a foreign concept to people not only here but in most parts of the world.

At the 1992 conference at Potchefstroom, a distinction was made between the following three types of Christian higher education on the continent:

- Church-controlled theological institutions for higher learning (some of which may offer liberal arts courses). They are increasing, but have a very narrow perspective. They usually do not know the ideal of Christian higher education beyond the confines of theological studies.
- A few colleges and universities founded and sponsored by Christian groups and denominations. Most of these are only Christian in name, not capable of integrating faith and learning.
- Liberal arts colleges from an integral Christian perspective. With one or two exceptions, this type of Christian higher education never materialized and is still begging for our attention.

A holistic Christian approach to all the sciences is indeed a rare phenomenon on our continent. In South Africa, when one mentions the idea of Christian scholarship, most people do not understand. They usually interpret it as a theological perspective on some secular discipline, for example, theological economics, theological ethics, theological ecology, and so on—mere Christian icing on a secular cake!

#### STUMBLING BLOCKS

Some of the obstacles in the way of establishing genuinely integral Christian liberal arts colleges/universities follow.

- A lack of finances. This is not really a major obstacle, though. Africans can raise the money or get it from overseas.
- Difficulties involved in obtaining approval and recognition (accreditation) from governments. In some countries, this may be a stumbling block. As indicated already, many governments are sympathetic towards Christian education. With limited funds, governments realize that accepting Christian institutions is a cost-effective way to increase educational opportunities.
- A lack of Christian lecturers who really know what Christian education entails. This brings us closer to the real problem, namely, a lack of the vision of a holistic philosophy of education. This I regard as the main obstacle. We will therefore return to it again.

To my mind, Africa today is ready for Christian higher educa-

tion. We should seize the opportunity with both hands! Parents who are disillusioned with state institutions are often choosing to send their children to Christian tertiary institutions where: (1) academic standards are maintained; (2) young people can develop Christian values of integrity, honesty, hard work, and moral uprightness; (3) less disruption occurs because of strikes; and (4) the so-called secular disciplines are taught from a Christian perspective.

#### THE MAIN CHALLENGE

An integral Christian approach to all the subjects remains the ultimate challenge for Christian higher education. Many of the colleges or universities I know still regard themselves as “Christian” for one or more of the following reasons.

1. They originated from churches or church seminaries.
2. They have a Christian basis or vision statement.
3. Church activities are conducted on campus, such as chapel services and the evangelization of non-Christian students.
4. Most of the staff and students are committed Christians.
5. Bible study, theology, or Christian philosophy are added to the regular secular curriculum.
6. Students are educated in a Christian, moral atmosphere.
7. Christian values or Christian ethics is added to subjects taught from a secular perspective, or
8. Care is taken with the correct application of scientific results.

All of these reasons together, though, are not really enough to call an academic institution “Christian,” because they do not go to the root of the issue, namely, the transformation of the sciences from within every discipline. They may, therefore, even serve to conceal the fact that such an institution has not really grasped the authentic meaning of Christian higher education. The most difficult task that remains to be tackled is an integral, holistic approach in every discipline!

In summary, it is clear that it is not yet time to harvest the fruits of genuine Christian scholarship on our continent. The time is ripe, however, for sowing the seed, for planting the ideas that will assist Christians from different denominations to grasp and hold onto a radical Christian vision.

### Acquiring a Basic Vision for Christian Higher Education

Much has already been said and written about our vision for Christian higher education. This second main section of this article will serve as a reminder. It is addressed mainly to my African brothers and sisters.

Our Biblical text is Romans 12: 1–2: “I urge you, brothers [and sisters], in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” These verses contain at least the following: (1) a warning, (2) a command, and (3) a promise. We will look at each one of them, and conclude with a ten-point vision for Christian higher education.

#### *A Warning*

Paul’s admonition deals with this world and what our relationship towards it should be.

#### THIS WORLD

“This world” is no longer the world of a few decades after Christ. It is our contemporary world, the twenty-first century. It is the African world in crisis. It is the global, secular world of which all of us are increasingly becoming part. Our task is to interpret the signs of our times (Matt 16:3), to understand our world so that we can become involved in practical, meaningful ways.

One of the most important ways to heed the signs of our time is to realize that what we see is the result of spiritual forces. We are engaged in spiritual warfare: “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12). Paul starts with the visible forces—rulers, authorities, powers—and moves towards the evil forces inspiring them. What do the evil, dark spiritual forces of our time look like?

Many Christians look outside themselves, at witchcraft, demon possession, and so on, to identify these forces. Others would sug-

gest that a religion like Islam epitomizes the forces of evil. Even though these forces are real, however, we don't have to look for the world outside ourselves. A secular worldview has already infiltrated deep into our own hearts and has infected our lives. This secularistic worldview is our most dangerous enemy, and to be able to fight against it we must first understand it.

Five characteristics of secularism are the following:

- While one usually associates religion with specific rites or rituals, it is not necessary to engage in acts of worship to be religious. Secularism is a kind of alternative religion. It increasingly shapes the fundamental character of our societies in Africa.
- In secularism we notice a shift from the worship of spiritual powers (external to the human person) to secular powers (identified with the power of the human person). Man himself is worshipped!
- Closely related to idolization of the human being is the idea of autonomy, of being a law unto oneself. This implies rebellion against God who is the absolute authority!
- Three of the most important means which man today uses to prove his power and autonomy are science, technology and economy.
- The main feature of secularism, however, is not the denial of the existence of God or the sacred, but the separation between the sacred and the secular, between religious faith and everyday life (which includes scientific knowledge). Secularism does respect individual acts of worship. And one should not be deceived into measuring the secularization of our African societies by the place and scope that is given to formal acts of worship in public life, because secularism allows room for such public worship. In many cases governmental, business, and educational activities may, for example, start with prayers and devotions, but what happens following such ceremonies does not reflect obedience to God and His Word.

The result of secular religion is spiritual darkness. The "freedom" (autonomy) and "progress" of the West have brought to Africa enlightenment, but a new kind of darkness, perhaps more dangerous than that of traditional African religion. Secularism's

influence has become so pervasive on our continent that we don't even recognize it!

#### OUR RELATIONSHIP TOWARDS THIS WORLD

From the above it is clear that I mean "world" in a negative sense: our contemporary cultural environment is dominated by the idea that God and His will do not really matter.

Throughout the ages Christians have advocated basically three different approaches or attitudes towards their surrounding culture: isolation of Christianity from culture; conformity between Christianity and culture; and reformation/transformation of culture.

At times the first approach can be very popular, as we have seen in the escapist tendencies of contemporary African Christianity. This attitude is, however, difficult to uphold, because, whether we like it or not, Christians are part of their cultural environment.

Our text from Romans specifically rejects the attitude of accommodation: "Do not conform to the (cultural) pattern of this world." This second viewpoint is the easiest and most popular way on our continent today.

The correct viewpoint is neither to flee secular culture, nor to conform to it, but, as Romans 12:2 indicates, to transform it. Unfortunately, not many adhere to this viewpoint, because this attitude is much more difficult to practice than either world flight or world conformity—especially in the field of scholarship.

How should we challenge secularism in scholarship and education?

1. Oppose the compartmentalization of life into a sacred, or religious, and a secular, or worldly, sphere, because religion is fundamental to every person's existence.
2. Acknowledge the fact that faith and knowledge are inseparably interwoven. The basic question is not whether faith influences science, but what kind of faith does so.
3. Expose the illusion that scholarship and science are value-free. Secularism disguises, but in no way diminishes the deep religious character of the contemporary academic enterprise.
4. Recognize the secularist worldview, which is implicit and taken for granted in present-day academic work.

5. Reject the way in which science today is revered as if it has unlimited religious authority.

### *The Command*

Paul's command tells us where to start if we want to transform our contemporary secular culture, which both influences and is strongly influenced by higher education. Four points require our attention.

#### OUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE

The first part of the command states that, as new Testament Christians, we should offer not only what we have, but also ourselves to God. Because the Bible does not support a dichotomistic view of man, "body" does not indicate something separate from our souls, but our entire, visible human existence (i.e., all aspects of our lives), including scholarship. Our vision, therefore, does not start merely with the renewal of our minds. It begins with a willingness to follow the example of Christ and offer ourselves. It implies that Christian scholarship will require persistent, hard work, total commitment, and self-sacrifice. We will have to become humble servants of God and men.

#### TRANSFORMED BY THE RENEWING OF OUR MINDS

If we don't want to conform to the world, we should start not with the world, but with ourselves. Usually we emphasize a change of heart: a reborn heart is an absolute prerequisite for being a Christian. But our text emphasizes a renewed mind. This should not come as a surprise. Christ already summarized all God's laws not only as "love [him] with all your heart and all your soul" but also "with all your *mind*" (Matt. 22:37). Only when our minds are also renewed, are we entirely transformed! What does it mean to have a Christian mind?

The renewal of our minds has to do with the development of our lives as Christians. Our perspective on the world and our place and task in it are clarified. We acquire what is today called a Christian worldview or, in theological terms, a kingdom perspective. For about a century, evangelism and missionary activities have been directed at saving people spiritually, but leaving their minds without a clear, Biblical direction. The consequence is that while sub-



Saharan African countries boast an average of over 50% Christians, these Christians have very little impact on society.

I have tried for decades to develop a Christian worldview within the African context. I was therefore particularly encouraged to read the following words from one of our prominent Christian leaders in Africa: "The battle, therefore, is for the Christian mind, to think Christianly and to grasp the full implications of the Lordship of Christ over all areas of life. This implies the necessity to develop a Christian anthropology and social philosophy."

A Christian worldview is founded on God's Word and inspires us to serve God in an all-encompassing way with our whole bodily existence. Without a renewed mind, a Christian worldview, and a Christian philosophy (i.e., theoretic reflection on our worldview), Christian scholarship will remain a foreign concept. The obverse is also true: a renewed mind will have no peace with present day secular scholarship, but will aim at transforming it in order to be pleasing to God.

#### APPLIED TO CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

All of this can be further elaborated with the image of a tree. The roots of the tree symbolize the Christian religion. It is rooted in the fertile ground of God's three-fold revelation in creation, the Bible, and Christ. Religion is the basic dynamo of our lives. The trunk indicates our Christian worldview. It is the prescientific broadening of our mind/vision/perspective on the world and our task in God's creation. The branches of the tree represent philosophy, diversified in different philosophies, the scientific deepening of our worldview perspectives. Finally, the fruits symbolize the different scientific disciplines like physics, sociology, economics, and so on. Our religious worldview and philosophical presuppositions influence our scholarly insights and effect these different disciplines.

With the preceding I have wanted to emphasize that the ideal of Christian scholarship does not, and can not, start with the different disciplines. It must "grow" organically from our Christian religious commitment, develop out of a comprehensive, world-transformative worldview and should be grounded in a genuine Christian philosophy. Christian institutions which do not continuously nurture this three-fold basis will not be able to produce integral Christian scholarship in the various disciplines.

Further, Christian scholarship cannot be achieved by a few elite scholars without deep roots in a Christian community. The result will be a hot-house plant. No, the comprehensive vision of the service of God in all areas of life has first to be planted, and grasped, at the grass roots by ordinary church members. This was clearly illustrated in the Netherlands when Abraham Kuyper established the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880. For about the first 80 years of its existence this Christian institution was morally and financially supported by the Reformed Christian community. In Africa we have the problem of an educated elite who often live a life remote from that of ordinary people.

Our strategy in promoting Christian higher education should therefore not be a top-down approach. We should rather look for places where the Spirit is moving the hearts of the people, where the correct vision is developing, in order to nurture, strengthen, broaden, and deepen that vision. A concrete example is the many theological institutions in Africa. IAPCHE should not alienate itself from them by ignoring them because many of them have such a narrow perspective. Right from the start, we should get them on board in all our activities. Otherwise, IAPCHE may be regarded as a foreign invader. We should also try to participate in their activities. In these ways we could plant our vision and encourage them to expand their curricula with, for instance, courses in a Christian worldview and philosophy.

#### CONTINUOUS TRANSFORMATION

Finally, we are reminded in Romans 12: 1–2 that the offering of ourselves and the renewal of our minds does not happen once for all time. The use of the imperfect tense in this passage clearly indicates that God requires an ongoing or continuous reformation. If we don't reform, we will conform to the deformation of this world. Our task is never completed in this life, because the pressure of secular culture to conform will remain with us. This brings us to our third main point.

#### *A Promise*

The encouraging promise is stated as follows: "Then you will be able to approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2b).

We will firstly approve or accept God's will. It will replace our sinful human will, expressed in the idea of autonomous scholarship. God's will is expressed in his different laws and is summarized in his central commandment to love God and our fellow-creatures. Everything is falsified if it is not inspired by true love. The essence of reformation—also of reformational scholarship—is our return, in humble obedience, to God's will. God's fundamental commandment of love has to be concretely expressed in a variety of ways in our different human activities—for example, in marriage, justice in politics, stewardship in economics, care of the creation, and so on. We will next try to indicate how love can guide our academic work. For the moment, we will keep it simple by saying it should be service in love.

This new norm will change the basic aim of our academic work. It will, for instance, replace the following current, one-sided goals: (1) knowledge for the sake of knowledge (the ivory tower idea of scholarship); (2) knowledge as a means to acquire personal status or fame; (3) knowledge as a means of nation building, of filling vacancies; and (4) knowledge for the sake of economic, technological, and military power. The knowledge provided by different disciplines should be of service in many areas of life, but the central norm should be love, not fame, power, or wealth. This implies that we as academics must become servant leaders of society.

When we approve of God's norm for our academic endeavors, we will also discover that "his will is good, pleasing, and perfect." Of all possible norms or values, it is the very best to follow! Our research, teaching, and administration—the entire life on campus—will be blessed. Adhering to this basic norm will not make us weak or powerless. On the contrary, it will strengthen us to fight the powers of darkness in the world of academia. This will be done not with our own power. With the armor of God (fully described in Eph. 6:14–18) we will be able to stand firm. With such power we will "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:5a).

### *The Essence of Transformational Scholarship*

Romans 12:1–2 is a clarion call for the transformation of the whole of life. We have listened to God's warning, his command and his

promise. We now know that our entire life should be a service of love in which we reform God's deformed creation according to His will. In conclusion, we will try to capture the basic contours as well as the challenges for Christian higher education. They can be summarized by the following catchwords.

- **Visionary.** Christian scholarship is directed and inspired by the vision that we are called to loving service in God's all-encompassing kingdom, of which our scholarly endeavour is an integral part.
- **Integral.** Grounded in a holistic Christian worldview and philosophy, Christian scholarship rejects every kind of dualism and demands that every discipline be made captive in obedience to Christ.
- **Rigorous.** Christian scholarship may never be an excuse for sloppy, superficial work. Our high academic standards and integrity should be such that they gain the respect of our academic peers, non-Christians included.
- **Critical.** We will test the foundations of scholarly endeavour, uncover its worldview and religious presuppositions, and not take the currently normative frame of reference for granted. We will at the same time apply self-critique, a willingness to lay our academic work before God to be tested by his Word and Spirit.
- **Open.** We should never use our Christian approach as an excuse to safeguard our work from the scrutiny of colleagues who do not share our faith. We should be open to dialogue about and criticism of our work.
- **Relevant.** Because Christian scholarship is service in love, it cannot be practiced in isolation. It should be meaningful and relevant to one's time, country, and people. It should be constructively engaged in solving the hardships people face daily on our continent.
- **Culturally sensitive.** We should openly acknowledge that every academic discipline, in one way or another, is shaped by our cultural context. We should not uncritically accept contemporary Western culture, nor the African cultural traditions and frameworks, but should be both critical and open to the good in both of them.
- **Communal.** Because Christian scholarship is not the task of individuals, it requires collaborative endeavor between those work-

ing in the same discipline, as well as interdisciplinary cooperation.

- **Global.** Christian scholars should work together not only with those in the same discipline or the same geographical region but, also because we are so few, in a global setting. International organizations such as IAPCHE can play a vital role in providing a network that facilitates such cooperation and exchange of ideas.
- **Modest.** Christian scholarship should be aware of the danger of intellectual arrogance and be modest about its own insights. We should be willing to learn from the scientific results of scholars who do not share our basic beliefs. We should also acknowledge the value of everyday knowledge of, for example, farmers and laborers, and should be humble enough to learn from them.

Thus far, we have described the African context, especially its lack of vision for Christian higher education. We have also stressed the need for a vision for Christian higher education. Now we want to indicate how we can possibly face these huge challenges. How can our dream be turned into reality?

### Realizing a Vision for Christian Higher Education

I have to confess that the third section of this article was the most difficult and challenging to write. The task given to me was the following: "What strategies could/should be considered by IAPCHE to help educational reformers address specific issues in my region (Africa), and how could IAPCHE do so in bold and creative ways?" I was overcome by a feeling of depression. Can we really do anything on such a vast continent characterized *inter alia* by dire poverty, few human and other resources in the field of Christian higher education, a lack of vision about Christian higher education, huge difficulties in communication, and isolation from the rest of the world?

But, keeping in mind the vitally important role of Christian higher education for the future of my continent, I realized that we have to start somewhere. According to God's own Word, we should never despise the day of small beginnings (Zech. 4:10). A small mustard seed sown at this conference may become a big tree in the course of the century we are entering now (cf. Christ's parable in Matt. 13:31–32).

The following proposals were discussed with a few individuals, as well as at a small conference on Christian higher education held in South Africa during the first week of January, 2000. The response I received encouraged me to submit these proposals here.

### *The Proposal*

In 1992, I proposed the establishment of an African chapter of IAPCHE. Experience during the last 10 years proved, however, that this will not be nearly sufficient to deal with the immense challenges we are facing on the continent. To depend on already overworked volunteers, widely scattered all over the continent, thousands of kilometers apart, and with communication sometimes impossible, is not the answer.

Therefore I am now proposing the establishment of an independent African Center (or Institute) for Christian Higher Education. I know that it is a very ambitious suggestion, but I am convinced that the only way we can possibly get something off the ground is by having such a “dynamo” or “power station.”

My proposal may simply appear to be a reduplication of the work that IAPCHE is already doing in the rest of the world. Our experience over the past 25 years has, however, already proven the need to decentralize or regionalize IAPCHE’s activities. In spite of the fact that many of our basic needs with regard to Christian higher education (for example textbooks and the training of lecturers) may be the same everywhere, the economic, political, social, and cultural contexts in which they have to be fulfilled are different, in each instance even unique. Furthermore, action may and should be stimulated from the central office of IAPCHE, but it can be executed only locally. A top-down strategy will not work.

### *Funding*

Because of the finances needed for the necessary infrastructure—a small office and one or two paid, part-time staff, facilities which even IAPCHE cannot afford at the moment—the most obvious sponsor(s) would be one or more financially strong institutions for Christian higher education. IAPCHE, as a worldwide community of Christians, should facilitate obtaining the

necessary financial help. IAPCHE may also decide to establish a special African Fund, in order to make an annual grant towards the maintenance of the Center/Institute. Financial institutions (like banks) can be approached as donors. A small additional amount may be collected from individual scholars and institutions from Africa in the form of membership fees. If, furthermore, the churches could also be mobilized to support and contribute financially, I don't see any reason why it will not be possible to establish the Center.

#### *Location*

I propose that this Center/Institute be established and registered (as a nonprofit organization) in South Africa, because South Africa (1) has the greatest concentration of people involved in Christian higher education, compared to the rest of Africa, (2) can provide the necessary infrastructure, (3) may be in the best position to acquire extra funding from the private sector, and (4) is now open to the rest of Africa and the world at large. People from outside South Africa, with whom I have discussed the idea, agree with me.

#### *Governance/Supervision*

The initial planning and eventual supervision of the Center/Institute can be done by an international advisory board or committee of knowledgeable and willing people of whom the majority should be from the African continent. To save on travelling expenses most of their advice and supervision could be done by e-mail or fax.

A small local executive committee can assist the leader or director of the Center in the handling of day-to-day matters.

To ensure close cooperation between the Center and IAPCHE, it may be necessary for the director of the Center to be a permanent member of the Board of IAPCHE (apart from the second African representative, who will be appointed for a limited term).

The people with whom I discussed this idea favor an independent Center. They realize that financial independence will be impossible, but believe that it should be free institutionally, politically, and ecclesiastically, as far as its basic policy is concerned, in order to serve as wide a community as possible.

*Key Activities of the Center*

If the above can be realized, the following are the most urgent needs to be taken care of, in the order of priority:

- A network of individual Christian scholars.
- Close cooperation between Christian academic institutions.
- Training of capable and committed Christian lecturers.
- Writing and publication of teaching resources from a Christian perspective.

#### A CONTINENT-WIDE NETWORK OF INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN SCHOLARS

In order to break down the frustrating isolation in which we have to work on the continent, the first necessary step is to identify the people already involved in Christian higher education, as well as the potential among others still lacking the vision. The aim is to establish a (computerized) network of regular contacts right across the continent. IAPCHE is setting a good example with its annually updated directory of its members. More African scholars should be identified and the specific individual needs of every scholar should be mentioned.

#### CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN EXISTING CHRISTIAN ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

The strategy here is to start where the vision of Christian higher education, however small, has already taken root. Countrywise, a few of these institutions are the following.

**South Africa:** Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education,

The University of the Free State at Bloemfontein, and

The Heidelberg Institute for Christian Higher Education at Sibasa in Venda.

**Zimbabwe:**

The Christian College of Southern Africa (CCSA) in Harare.

**Kenya:** Daystar University in Nairobi, and Scott Theological University in Machakos.

**Nigeria:** Hilltop College in Mkar, Benue State.



Most of these have already hosted a conference for Christian higher education, in four different cases, with the involvement and financial aid of IAPCHE. Those four are Potchefstroom in 1975 and 1992, CCSA in 1991, Daystar in 1997, Hilltop in 1999, and Heidelberg in 2000.

These contacts should, however, be followed up with real co-operation and reciprocal aid in a variety of ways, with, for example, exchange of curricula, provision and exchange of textbooks, telematic or distance education materials, exchange and training of lecturers and (postgraduate) students. For the time being, smaller colleges may also acquire accreditation through existing universities. The idea is that the African Center for Christian Higher Education acts as a catalyst to stimulate, and even structure, such forms of collaboration.

#### TRAINING OF CHRISTIAN LECTURERS

One of our continent's greatest problems is a lack of human and other resources. First, we will take a look at the ways in which the crucial problem of human resources can be developed. The need for Christian servant-leaders in all areas of life is emphasized by many writers on the African situation (see Bibliography). Christian education is no exception. Without committed leaders in this area, there can be little hope of a Christian approach in different disciplines, let alone establishing and maintaining a Christian institution for Christian higher education.

The second step is that students and lecturers have to learn to approach their specific disciplines from a Christian worldview and philosophical perspective. This step is the most crucial, and the most difficult to achieve. In addition to theology and philosophy, which provide the more general perspective for Christian higher education, a distinct Christian approach needs to be developed in most of the other disciplines. People who can assist our African students and lecturers to do so are usually connected with institutions outside the continent. As Africans, however, we can in no way afford expensive studies abroad. Thus we will need bursaries granted by our wealthier sister institutions in Western countries. Christians in Europe and North America enjoy educational institutions and resources that are luxurious by global standards. It should not be overlooked that the prosperity which has facilitated

the development of Western institutions relied heavily, during centuries of colonialism, on non-Western peoples and resources. One of the key challenges facing Western Christians is to share their wealth for the benefit of their brothers and sisters in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

An important responsibility of the Center, therefore, will be to investigate different possibilities for overseas studies and to advise African students and lecturers accordingly.

#### MOST NEEDED TEACHING RESOURCES

Apart from the indispensable human resources, the second most vital resource is scholarly and educational material from a Christian perspective. It is almost nonexistent in Africa. A few bibliographies on Christian scientific endeavors are available, although not many scholars are aware of them. But even if one has access to these bibliographies, it is very difficult to obtain the books or articles themselves. The Institute for Christian Studies (Toronto) and IAPCHE will accordingly render an immense service to the whole world with their proposed bibliographical project, which includes a document delivery system.

One should distinguish between the more basic, worldview-philosophical material, providing the broader kingdom-perspective, and materials which develop a Christian approach in specific subjects. An example of the last mentioned is the series developed by the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities in Washington and published by Harper. (*Business, Biology, History, Literature, Music, Psychology, Sociology, etc. Through the Eyes of Faith*).

When the proposal for closer cooperation between institutions (as mentioned above) is implemented, it may be discovered that some institutions already have some materials available which could also be used elsewhere (e.g., the introductory courses in Christian Philosophy and Business Ethics at Potchefstroom University). The recommended method could be similar to that already applied by the Center for Christian Scholarship at Calvin College or the (unfortunately now defunct) Institute for Reformational Studies at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. Capable lecturers from different Christian institutions can be selected and invited to stay at the proposed Center for a period of time to produce a required textbook for a specific subject, in a "writers' workshop."

The (computerized) texts may be published at one place or simultaneously at different places and in different countries. This procedure would also solve the problem of imported textbooks becoming so expensive, because of the poor exchange rate of most African countries, that students cannot afford to buy them.

Furthermore, more conventional methods could be used. The Center could investigate the use of other media and promote much cheaper correspondence/distance/telematic education, in order to reach a wider audience in written lecture notes, on tape, on video, and so on. Educational radio programs, which reach many homes in Africa, may also be considered in the case of introductory courses.

#### *Additional Activities*

Apart from the above four key activities, as time and finances permit, the Center may also consider the following

- **A small, biannual newsletter.** To update individuals and institutions on the activities and opportunities which the Center offers, an inexpensive newsletter will be necessary.
- **Regional and continental conferences, seminars, symposia and consultations on Christian Higher Education.** Such activities will be necessary in the future, but for three reasons I think we should downgrade them as priorities. First, they are often too general and do not tackle the nitty-gritty of the Christian approach in a specific discipline. Second, they tend to degenerate into “talk-shops.” Third, they are expensive, absorbing money which could be used profitably for more urgent needs. When one gathers educators and scholars, one’s goals should be clear, and the meeting should be structured as a workshop to produce the results envisaged.
- **Empowerment through research and training.** Instead of ordinary conferences, I would like to emphasize the urgent need for research consultations designed to enable a small number of Christian academics to engage in thorough research and reflection on carefully selected issues. All over Africa there is not only a lack of research materials like books and journals, but also many lecturers at tertiary institutions simply do not know how to do research and write down the results. They are not equipped to teach their students basic research skills.

The emphases at such academic meetings should be the following: (1) research methods and skills, such as observation, analysis and evaluation; (2) identification of salient issues; (3) identification of causes, trends, historical patterns, and so on; (4) identification of short-term and long-term consequences or implications of issues, ideas, values, and structures; and (5) developing abilities and skills in inference, deduction, prediction, projection, judgment, summaries, conclusions, and proposals.

The Center should compile a list of the most urgent topics concerning Christian higher education to be researched, and disseminate the information through its newsletter. Scholars who want to participate in the program will have to submit a research proposal including at least the following: a research description, objectives, methodology, sources and research plan.

- **Itinerant lecturers/consultants/trainers, and instructors of academic skills.** Academics from the West could use their sabbaticals or the opportunity of free time after their retirement to assist our African institutions in a variety of ways, especially if they are willing to do so free of charge. One outstanding example is the excellent work Dr. Stuart and Mrs. Joy Fowler of Australia have been doing in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and South Africa (during stays of about three months per year) by way of lecturing, curriculum planning, and helping to obtain accreditation for different institutions.
- **Sustained contact with the international community of Christian scholars.** Apart from possible funding of the Center from outside, we have until now mainly pointed out what can be done inside the African continent. African scholars cannot afford, however, to isolate themselves to an even greater extent. The Center should, therefore, also (without overlapping with IAPCHE's work) make contact with the following outside Africa as part of its mandate: (1) individual Christian scholars (to be invited as guest lecturers, speakers at conferences, research fellows, consultants, and so on); (2) regional and international associations for Christian education in general, (i.e., on primary, secondary and tertiary levels); (3) organizations promoting a Christian approach in a specific subject (e.g., sociology); (4) Christian colleges and universities abroad; (5) the editorial boards of scholarly journals; and (6) Christian publishers.

## ADOPTION

Let me conclude with a final suggestion and appeal to our brothers and sisters outside Africa. The majority of the existing Christian colleges in Africa are small and financially weak. They are struggling to merely survive. What a beautiful gesture of real compassion and fellowship it would be if each one of the stronger Christian institutions in the West adopted one of these colleges! Different kinds of agreements between educational institutions are common today. (Even a small beginning could be made, such as was the case in the United States with the establishment of "The Friends of Hilltop," seeking to assist a small sister institution in Nigeria in a variety of ways.)

Such adoption should not be done in a paternalistic way, insensitive to African conditions, or simply with the goal of extending one's own empire. The approach of the stronger Western institutions should rather be, according to the example of Christ, that of a servant sharing with others. This could be done in numerous ways, for example, authorizing African institutions to use their study materials at a nominal fee along with the permission to adapt them according to local needs. Or they might provide accreditation, to enable small institutions in Africa to grant degrees. (One example in this regard is the assistance provided by the National Institute for Christian Education of Australia to a young institution in South Africa.)

Africa would also greatly benefit from an international Christian Academic Studies Certificate (CASC) as proposed (cf. draft of 29/4/1999) by Dr. Harry Fernhout, president of the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto, Canada.

\* \* \*

We started this section with considerable despair about the possibilities for Christian higher education on a vast and poor continent. But, "rather than shouting against the darkness on our continent, we should light a candle. Because with only one, small candle, our continent will not be dark any more." This was the advice given to me by a Christian brother after our Christian higher education conference in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1991. He reminded me of our basic calling to be the light of the world (Matt. 5:14). Since then I have been following his advice and have tried to apply it in the present proposal. Blessed by God, an African Center for Christian Higher Education will bring the light of God's king-

dom to many hearts. It will be like a city on a hill and a lamp on a stand (Matt 5:14–16).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, let me quote two portions from Scripture to encourage our Christian brothers and sisters in Africa. In the first quotation, Paul reminds us that those whom the Lord calls to his service are not necessarily the wise, influential, and noble: “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him” (1 Cor. 1:27–29).

The second selection from Scripture provides a long list of Paul’s hardships, the last part of which also describes our present situation in Africa: “beaten, and not killed; dying, and yet we live on; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (2 Cor. 6:9, 10).

If everything we do could be guided by the same strong Spirit, I see a new renaissance, the renaissance of Christian higher education on our beloved continent, on the doorstep of the new millennium!

\* \* \*

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