

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY AND MISSIONS

All of the organized proclamation of the Word of God, whether in the Old Testament or the New, has involved some instructional form in preparation, whether that be direct mentor-ing by the Holy Spirit, or by an individual, or some form of school such as the schools of prophets in the Old Testament (1Sam. 10:5, 10, 2 Kgs 4:38, 6:1-2), the Rabbinical schools in the Inter-testamental period, Christ and His apostles in the New Testament (Matt. 11:1), Paul as he mentored small groups of men who accompanied him on his journeys (Acts 20:4), or a stationary school such the one Paul taught at Ephesus (Acts 19:9-10).

In more recent times, we have seen how education has been inspired by Christianity, and how the church has been served by educational institutions. From the beginning of the modern university, an important component (in many instances its most important one!) was the theological one. This is true in Europe, and throughout the world, but especially so in the United States. All of the thirteen pre-revolutionary schools in America were church related and primarily theological, except the University of Penn.

Our term "university" comes from the Latin "universitas," which indicates an educational institution which interests itself in the exploration of all that is knowable. Historically, this has included God and all that can be known about Him and His will for humanity. Even though the vast majority our oldest "universities" have worked hard to dislodge themselves from their roots, it cannot be denied that they are rooted in theology, and in the application of lessons and principles of the study of God and the Bible which pertain to mankind.

Some time ago, a former student returned to visit one of our professors , and as they were discussing, she said, "I came to Harding to discover the world." He responded, "that is the purpose of the university."

Think of what the condition of the church in the United States would be if it were not for our schools. Almost all of those who today are attempting to bring Christ and Christianity to the world were prepared for that task in a Christian school We have a great debt to the "schools of preaching" which have done and are doing such a wonderful job in preparing men and women for world outreach. We are indebted

to Bible Chairs located on college campuses across America. We are indebted to the eighteen Christian colleges and universities in the United States which are related to churches of Christ.

Since I am most informed about the record of Harding University, I will make mention of it, but what I am saying about Harding is duplicated by many other fine American Christian institutions of higher education. Note the following positive contributions that are made to the spreading and strengthening of the church throughout the world.

1. Typically, the faculty and staff of Christian universities are made up of dedicated Christians who have been involved and are still involved in church work at home and abroad. All of our faculty are active members of a local congregation of the church. Many were full time workers with a local congregation before coming to Harding. A large number of our University teachers/administrators preach for, or in other ways serve churches in our local area. Twenty-one of our number have in the past been involved in missionary work within the United States. One hundred and fourteen have been engaged in either long-term or short-term missions outside of the United States. This results in a kind of "hotbed" environment for promoting, motivating, and inspiring students to find and fulfill their individual mission for Christ and our lost world. This stimulation takes place not only in the religion classes, but throughout the curriculum. The majority of faculty leaders of the scores of student mission teams that do both national and international evangelism during spring break and summer break, are from the secular departments of the University. Some of these students end up doing long term missions after graduation.

2. For many years now our church-related institutions have been establishing educational centers overseas. Some of these have been founded by schools of preaching which function to train local Christians in other nations to become preachers, teachers and leaders in the developing churches. Our schools of higher education are now establishing small campuses overseas where U.S. students are invited to study for a period of time in a foreign culture. While there, they study the local language, help local congregations as they have opportunity, and travel extensively in order to learn more about other peoples, their environment, and their spiritual condition. These international programs were intentionally begun to help Christian young people open their eyes to the spiritual needs of the world with the hope that many of them would develop a sense of spiritual mission and return to give a hand. At this time, Harding has such programs in Australia, Chile, England, France, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, and Zambia. We see that this process is effective as many have returned to work in nations they visited while students. For example, just in

Italy alone, Jeff and Tia Brower, Jennifer DiMarco, Tony and Lucy Console, Brandon and Kriston Edwards, Carl and Frankie Mitchell, Robbie and Mona Shackelford, Lewis and Tammy Short, and David and Debbie Woodroof have a Harding background and most of them were introduced to taly either through Harding In Florence, or through Italian campaigns.

3. Harding has pioneered a second major in "vocational evangelism" which is designed to train Christian men and women to do missionary work at their own expense. This second major can only be taken by those who have a "gainful employment" major. Many hundreds have taken this route, and are out working in the world. At present, there are a number of such teams in training at Harding which plan to go as groups to spiritually needy areas in America, find employment and either start a church or work to strengthen an already existent church.

4. In addition, our foreign missions training program is involved in training groups of students who will either join other foreign missionaries working abroad, or will branch out to plant new congregations in foreign fields..

5. Most importantly, I believe we model the "priesthood of all believers" in a most effective way in our Christian Universities. Among all those institutions in America who bear the name "University," it is the Christian University which truly fulfills the meaning of the word "University." Our education is truly holistic in the sense that it includes all of knowledge including that which pertains to God and to spiritual things. As already stated, our students truly "discover the world" here.

6. Christian education does not involve a retreat from what is real, but an accusation against whomever claims to consider all of the knowable, and leaves God and His moral and spiritual truths out of their curriculum. The Christian University drives a wedge into the world of secularity. We do not represent a retreat from real life, but a demonstration of what real life is and can be.

Wherever I go, I stress that at Harding, we have a department of Bible, but, whatever our discipline may be, we are all teachers of the Bible. Here the universal priesthood of believers is seen in practice as each teacher has the opportunity and the mandate to include God in their classes. In the same manner that any discipline will overlap with many other disciplines in its content, so also every discipline at various points will overlap with the moral/ethical, the theological and the spiritual. In the fulfillment of whatever teaching role they may have, teachers in Christian Universities are mindful to engage such areas at the specific points of overlap with their particular discipline.

It seems we are always involved in strategic planning! To be effective, each of us must have a strategic plan for our own input into the Christian aspect of the university. Teachers are expected to periodically review and adjust their own agenda to make it more effective as each strives to demonstrate to self and to God that he or she is carrying his or her part of the load of making our schools worthy of the name "UNIVERSITAS May God so help us!

Carl Mitchell