

Christian Higher Education: The Gospel in the Context of Terrorism and Persecution

Rev. Sunday Bobai Agang, PhD

Professor of Christian Theology, Ethics, and Public Policy, ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro, Kaduna State, Nigeria

Abstract

Education is central to any society's civilization, growth, development, security, stability, and sustainability. That is why all progressive societies give it priority. Christian higher education meets these needs and beyond. It is rooted in God's moral vision and perspective. Its primary aim is to inculcate moral and ethical values and knowledge, which can guarantee societal security and stability as well as foster skills and opportunities that are of benefit to the Gospel of the kingdom of God and human flourishing. This paper, therefore, primarily focuses attention on the issue of Christian higher education in the context of insecurity and instability.

Keywords: education, ethnicity, politics, religion, corruption, self-interest, power, and intellectual virtues.

Introduction

"Education is power", they say, and I believe it. Someone once rightly observed that the richest place on earth is the cemetery. That is where unrealized God-given human potentials, which would have brought about tremendous blessings to the human family, have been wasted and buried. Some of them, while they were alive in this world could not acquire educational competencies required for human sustainable development, security and flourishing.

The significance of Christian higher education is underscored by the ancient sage who says, "Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23). Education is largely the bedrock of mental, moral, scientific and technological developments. This truth is self-evident, that in this life, the greatest power is education. Education helps humans to know the truth; and like Jesus Christ puts it, Christian higher education liberates: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Christian higher education teaches the truth that liberates the human mind from its captivity, ignorance and self-destruction. It is the key to wholistic development that any society needs for wise control of her raw materials and the use of her human resources.

The worst that can be done to any human being is to be denied education. It is central to any society's civilization, growth, development, security, stability, and sustainability. Education gives men and women the power that liberates, transforms and ushers them into a world of human possibilities. That is why all progressive societies give it priority.

Christian higher education meets these needs and beyond. It is rooted in God's moral vision and perspective. Its primary aim is to inculcate moral and ethical values and knowledge, which can guarantee societal security and stability as well as foster skills and opportunities that are of immense benefit to the Gospel of the kingdom of God and human flourishing. This paper, therefore, primarily focuses attention on the issue of Christian higher education in the context of insecurity and instability. It explores the relationship between the task of Christian higher education in the context of global phenomenon of terrorism or insurgency. It argues that quality Christian higher education is the key to creating a society that is free from social, economic and political injustices; and unnecessary human rights abuses, which fuel insurgency and terrorism.

1. The Goal and Objectives for Pursuing Education

Terrorism interferes with the basic goal and objectives for generally pursuing higher education. By and large, human beings often have diverse reasons for pursuing higher education. These reasons may include, among other things, acquiring knowledge and truth, which can foster or nurture values, information, ability and opportunities that are of immense benefit to human communities and individuals flourishing. Therefore, educators at the higher educational level must help learners to achieve the goal of pursuing higher education. In Christianity some people opt for Christian higher education because they firmly believe that it will equip their minds to think critically and analytically about how God interacts with his creation. Others opt for Christian higher education because they know that God has given humans the mind so that through it and above it they will find out all the reasons why they must treasure and love God above all else. In the 21st century (Third Millennium), the challenges facing Christian higher education are making any of these dreams extremely difficult to attend.

For example, since the 20th century Christian higher education in the West and North America has been losing its spiritual foundation. Most of them have slipped into what is called "the two spheres model which eased many Christian colleges into secularization." The two sphere model is a situation whereby it is assumed that "a Christian school can have a healthy spiritual life through student activities while going after the academic work

in a largely secular fashion” (Hunter Baker, May 2012.)

Christian higher education in Africa is also faced with a similar challenge. However, in Africa, our contemporary challenges include religious extremism, terrorism and persecution, which seem to overshadow all other challenges in the Third Millennium. As we are aware, the main purpose of establishing most of the Christian higher institutions in Africa was to raise up men and women who will articulate the Great Commission in a manner that makes sense to the Africans. However, with the current situation of religious revivalism, extremism, terrorism and persecution, it is massively difficult to openly preach and teach the Good News. The threat is extremely conspicuous in areas where revived and radicalized Islam holds sway.

Yet, given that African Christian higher education historically “bears the stamp of philosophical analyses, moral insight, discipline and scriptural interpretation that bloomed first in Africa before anywhere else,” (Oden, 10) the present situation might turn out to be an important opportunity for Christian higher education (McAlpine, 6.) To investigate this possibility, the paper examines the context, task, and content of Christian higher education in Africa and its implications for the missions of the church. The primary goal in this approach is to argue that Christianity is an incarnational and a conciliatory religion that cannot be deterred by terrorism or persecution. Christian higher education is largely rooted in the Great Commission, the biblical truth about God’s creation, humanity’s fall and Christ’s redemption. It also seriously considers and respects the truth found in natural sciences. Thus, this paper argues that our approach to Christian higher education and the formation of people of faith must essentially be incarnational in character, vision, mission and core value (s), particularly in expressing itself in a wide range of means and methods (Harakas, 115.)

It seeks also to point out that the terrible thing one can do to the mind is to allow it to be deceived. In an age of endemic global corruption, terrorism and persecution, we have been deceived by the hypocrisies of economic and political greed, self-interest and obsessive desire to dominate fellow humans. In our contemporary society, these evil sinful natural cravings are not easily discernable because they are all cloak in religious attire (Wogaman and Strong, eds., 232.). Consequently, people who are captives of these wicked and sinful natural cravings have successfully “turn[ed] justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood [i.e., a source of bitterness or grief]” (Amos 6:12b ESV.) These challenges enormously contribute to the increasing fragmentation, division, mutual hatred, mistrust and suspicion in our world.

2. The Project of Theological Education in Africa

Those of us who are involved in the project of theological higher education in Africa need to grasp the fact that Christians have to continue with the long walk to social, political, economic and religious freedom. Our continent is indeed an interesting continent. The two Abrahamic faiths—Christianity and Islam—have coexisted for over a century or more. Yet, in a bit to outwit each other, both faiths have mutually distrusted each other to the extent that the entire continent has been labelled as a continent of two contradictions: “religious vibrancy and violence” (PRC: Religious Public Life, 25 November, 2015.)

Christian higher educators need to carefully think of creative ways of preparing their students for the work of ministry in the context of a world largely characterized by enormous mutual hatred, suspicion and mistrust, resulting in increasing fragmentation and destruction. This will necessitate providing a helpful interpretation of what issues are at stake instead of becoming captives of wholesale conspiracy theories. To survive becoming prey to the principalities and powers at work in today’s society, church and academia in the form of religious extremists—Boko Haram, Islamic State, Al-Shabab, Al ’Qaeda, Fulani cattle rustlers, ethnic militancy and so on—Christian higher education needs to craft and develop a kind of spiritual and intellectual training, which will provide the necessary dose of theological immunization their students need. This will involve helping them to rediscover a realistic and prudent African orthodoxy that incarnates cultures; and becomes aware of the diversity in African cultural heritage, values and the human dignity, unity given in creation and redeemed from fallen creation (Oden, 113.)

The interplay between Christian higher education and the Gospel of our resurrected and soon coming King of kings may be a familiar territory to some of us. However, what may not be very clear is what to do with the issue of ethnic, political and religious corruption, extremism, terrorism and persecution (Berman, 527).

At the onset, we need to be clear about the answer to the question, “Who should our Christian higher education and the Great Commission benefit?” It is true that both teaching Christian higher education and proclaiming the Great Commission are both our familiar constituencies. However, for the sake of clarity, consistency and coherency, the focus of the paper is the church, the society and the academia. It argues that Christian higher education is not only involved in preparing God’s people for eternity, but also equipping the church, society and the academia to make the world a better place for human well-being, dignity and flourishing. In other words, Christian higher education in Africa should benefit the church, the society and the secular academy. Since the gospel is the power of God for salvation, deliverance, neutralization and transformation of human hostility, Christian higher education in Africa should benefit the whole gamut of our social life.

Today, this important aspect of the human life is faced with multidimensional challenges. As we

interact with this topic, we are very much aware of situations where ethnic, political and religious extremism, persecution and terrorism have made it impossible for Christian higher educators to continue holding lectures. For instance, in 2015, at ECWA Theological College Kufai, Gombe State, the Academic Dean and several other faculty and students were killed by tribal militias. Similarly, ethnic, political and religious violent conflicts and wars in Central African Republic have led to the closure of the seminary in Bengui. In Burundi, the Vice Chancellor of International Leadership University shared how from May to July 2015 the university was closed down due to ethnic and political war in the country. The expatriates serving at the university had to be evacuated. Here in the Middle-Belt of Nigeria, the Fulani rustlers waging war against the people of Southern Kaduna and rural communities have led to the relocation of the ECWA Secondary School Fadan Karshi to Kafanchan.

As Christian higher educators face the reality of a possible continuation of these acts of terrorism and persecution, both within and without, they must critically and deeply reflect on alternative ways of doing Christian higher education, which will one day make it possible to break the vicious cycle of violence in our region.

In spite of the overwhelming threat to the Great Commission that religious extremism, terrorism and persecution present, there is hope. Thomas C. Oden reported how, historically, “Christianity has found Africa receptive to the good news. For two millennia it has been welcomed enthusiastically in Africa” (Oden, 95.) As such, in this paper, we argue that the opportunity has presented itself again for Christian higher education in Africa to take the lead in finding humane solutions to the problem of religious and political extremisms bedeviling the entire global community. Therefore, we need to grab such great opportunity that our context of Christian higher education in Africa provides. Realizing this need will help us to engage in meaningful and creative theological reflections, which will eventually benefit the church, the society and the academia.

3. Decisive Moment for African Christian Higher Education

He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap (Ecclesiastes 11:4).

This is an age of great opportunity. Today, as ever, Christian higher educational institutions are facing diverse and unprecedented challenges regarding the task of preparing men and women who will be agents of change and transformation in our increasingly divided world. Yet, rather than our difficult challenges being a source of distraction from the main task, Christian educators in Africa need to see them as decisive moments for African Christian higher education. As the saying goes, “tough times do not last but tough people do.”

The truth of the matter is that the human mind is at its best when it is forced to engage in strenuous exercise. Difficult times strengthen and enlarge the human mind. As Deron J. Biles said, “Knowledge learned from study is not the same as understanding gleaned from experience” (Biles, 300.)

Our context of higher education, if carefully harness, will enable Christian higher educators to build an intellectual foundation that will support life amidst the storms of ministry in the Third Millennium. As Antoine Arnauld also points out, “The capacity of the mind is enlarged and extended by exercise” (Arnauld, 1850:58.) Put another way, difficult times are by default watershed for theological reflections.

One of such known difficult times that produced the best minds in theological reflection was the twentieth century. Humankind fought an unprecedented catastrophic World War II and thereafter continued to face the danger of a Cold War until 1989. Yet, J. Philip Wogaman et al observed,

The twentieth century was to be a period of great theological creativity, much of it in Christian ethics. Major figures like Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich were chastened by the persistent evils of war and totalitarianism as well as the hypocrisies of economic greed cloaked in religious garb (Wogaman and Strong, 232.)

These theologians lived during a period when the church was witnessing a time of “Great Reversal.” As such, “Their thought was greatly influenced by the social gospel movement and religious socialism, but they struggle to understand the realities of sin and grace more deeply” (Wogaman and Strong, 232.) For example, in mid-twentieth-century America, Reinhold Niebuhr was the greatest religious intellectual. His generation was characterized by “barbaric genocides, total wars, fascisms, totalitarians, and institutionalized hatreds on a global scale.” However, these socioeconomic and sociopolitical realities become the raw materials for Niebuhr’s theological reflections.

As he taught at Union Theological Seminary in New York, Reinhold Niebuhr deeply engaged the religious thought of his day. His book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932) is not only a classic in Christian thought but also the most influential writing by a most influential Christian thinker. It so eloquently captured the spirit of the age—the sense of catastrophe, the collapse of empires, the rise of organized labor, the increasing complacency of organized religion, and the shattering of liberal sentimentalities (Niebuhr, xi.)

In his carefully crafted theological reflection, Niebuhr identified two keys issues and their far-reaching implications for the Great Commission and the human family—“self-interest and the will-to-power.” He argued that self-interest and the will-to-power make it inherently difficult for the Christian virtue of love to be a simple possibility as many Christians tend to assume. I would argue that these same two issues—self-interest and the

will-to-power—are deeply embedded in our various contexts of Christian higher education. They point to the reality that the original sin is not outmoded; it is still very much present with and in us. As a matter of fact the original sin is behind the global corruption, which enormously contributes to the pervasive evils of injustices, conflict violence, terrorism and persecution.

Today, as we watch the reality of our generation, we cannot help but agree with Niebuhr that the human race is under siege by the original sin. That is, the persistent evils of religious extremism, ethnic cleansing, and other genocidal wars, are all caused by human aggressive natural cravings which manifest themselves in the form of human greed, self-interest and obsession with the desire to dominate fellow humans. Today, these sinful natural cravings lend credence to the perpetuation of the evil of “the persistent hypocrisies of economic greed cloaked in religious garb” (Wogaman and Strong, 232.) It is in that respect that we ask the following questions:

- (1) How can Christian higher education in Africa prepare the church, society and the academia to face the challenges of terrorism and persecution?
- (2) What are the implications of terrorism and persecution to Christian higher education and the task of achieving the Great Commission in Africa and beyond?

In order to do justice to these questions, the paper discusses the context, the task and the content of Christian higher education and the Great Commission in the context of terrorism and persecution.

4. Christian Higher Education in the Context of Terrorism and Persecution

How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, “Violence!” but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted” (Habakkuk 1:2-4.)

We live in a shrinking world that has truly become a global village in many respects. Today you can call anywhere in the comfort of your room. Technological advances in the last several decades have collapsed time and space. Yet our world is more divided and fragmented than ever. Countries across the globe are very suspicious and thus distrust each other. The problem of “self-interest and the will-to-power” that Reinhold Niebuhr had talked about a century ago is still here. Each country cares more about protecting its own political, economic and territorial interests rather than those of the whole human race. This is largely why sincere and genuine commitment to the socio-political problems of the whole human race is ignored. Our political leaders talk about global unity. Their actions are largely covered up in the garment of human rights; and by so doing the masses get deceived, while the elites get away with their corrupt practices, which result in massive injustices and create chain of reactions from the youths. The 2010 and beyond youth restiveness across the Arab Spring is prime example of how social, political and religious injustices are responsible for religious extremism being experienced across the globe in the Third Millennium.

The Christian ethicist and theologian, David Gushee, cited Paul Freston who has suggested that “The training needed for the third-world church now is not so much the conventional pastoral and evangelistic training but the formation of people who can interface with society in various areas of expertise” (Gushee,106.) This reality is what Christian higher education in the Majority World, particularly in Africa, must have to confront.

Hence there is no way our discussion on Christian higher education and the Great Commission can be convincing without us looking at how the global context of political corruption leading to religious extremism, terrorism and persecution may or may not be an impediment to the overarching implications of Christian higher education in our various contexts.

In the 21st century (Third Millennium), religious extremism, terrorism and political oppression have become part of the general experiences of the Christian community across the globe. The question is no longer whether we will be persecuted or terrorized. Rather, the question is how do those of us in higher education who are engaged in proclaiming Christ continue to do so without necessarily been hindered or distracted by religious extremists, terrorists and political oppressors? How can Christian higher educators reposition their theological training in such a way that it prepares Christian leaders who will help the church, society and the academia develop antibodies against the onslaught of forces of darkness storming the church?

First, we must realize that religious extremism, persecution, terrorism and political oppression are clear indication that we live in a sick, decaying and dying world, where the original sin and the god of this age, Satan, still hold sway. As such, we will never have a period whereby we are completely free of disturbances and distractions. In spite of this reality, however, we will argue that conflict gives Christian higher educators an awful opportunity to do a deeper theological and Christological reflection for the common good of the church, society and academia.

Second, as we face the threat of possible elimination, our consolation is in the fact that Jesus Christ, who is to those of us who are called by God, “the power of God and the wisdom of God” have promised that he will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Indeed, God seems to have a sense of humor. He uses mysterious situations, even human destructive tendencies, to bring about the most surprising outcomes.

History is replete with examples of how the early believers faced their tasks in the midst of political oppression, religious extremism, persecution and terrorism.

We are aware that all throughout history, the church and its various ministries have never rested from the activities of religious extremists, terrorists and political oppressors. As long as Satan is still the god of this world, his agents will not leave us alone. Therefore, religious extremism, radicalization, terrorism and persecution must be seen as agents and strategies of the devil to distract the church from its mission of “teaching them to obey all things.” A savvy reading of the Acts of the Apostles will clearly point us to the various scenes of distractions and how the Apostles handle each. The narrator of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke, carefully documented not only the signs and scenes of distraction from the mission of the Church, but also the manner in which the early apostles tackled and handled the problem in order to steadfastly remain in the business of the mission of the church.

Luke tells of the fulfillment of the promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit, who was to help them in carrying out the mission of the Church in a hostile society. The Holy Spirit gave the disciples the power they needed to overcome all distractions and be able to get on with the task of preaching the full message of Jesus’ resurrection to the very people who crucified Him. But the very powerful demonstration of the presence of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost entirely proved to be a distraction. That is, when everyone heard the disciples speaking in many different languages, some people charged the disciples of being drunk. They ridiculed the disciples, saying, “They’re just drunk, that’s all!” (Acts 2:1-13.) This charge of drunkenness was a huge distraction to those who were waiting for an interpretation of the mission of the Church. Realizing that this was going to be an impediment to the people, Peter spoke out: when he stepped out with the other eleven apostles he shouted to the crowd, “Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming...” (Acts 2:14-15.) In that way, Peter overcame Satan’s distraction.

A further scene of distraction is when Peter and John healed the man born crippled from birth. The healing produced another moment of surprise and perplexity for the Jerusalem audience: “They were absolutely astounded! They all rushed out in amazement to Solomon’s Colonnade, where the man was holding tightly to Peter and John” (Acts 3:9-11.) Realizing that attention was being drawn to them and not to the Name of Jesus the Nazarene, Peter stepped out again and addressed the crowd, “People of Israel,” he said, “what is so surprising about this? And why stare at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power or godliness?” (Acts 3:12) These words are clear evidence that Peter recognized the distraction involved.

The distraction became crystal clear when Peter and John encountered the Sanhedrin after they healed a person. Because of their fear and jealousy, the Sanhedrin categorically tells them, “Shut up, Men!” In answer to their question, “By what power, or in whose name, have you done this?” Peter answered, “He was healed by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, the man you [Jewish leaders] crucified but whom God raised from the dead” (Acts 4:6-10.) Luke tells of how the Jewish establishment, hearing the apostles’ boldness, warned them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John would not obey this restriction. They asked the Sanhedrin, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than Him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:19-20.) The apostles overcame this distraction by deciding to be loyal to God, who had charged them with the task of proclaiming the Good News to a sick and dying world (Sunday Bobai Agang, 216-217.)

By and large, these scenes of distractions in Acts are clarion call to the fact that “Biblical mission demands that those who claim Christ’s name should be like him, by taking up their cross, denying themselves, and following him in the paths of humility, love, integrity, generosity, and servanthood...” (*Cape Town Call to Action*, 70.) This is the antibody we need against the sinful cravings of self-interest, greed, and conceitedness. They remind us that we are doing our Christian higher education in the context of a world where Christ’s death breaks the wall of hostility and bridges it. Thus, to those of us who are in the business of providing higher Christian education, “the call of Christ to his Church comes to us afresh from the pages of the gospels: ‘Come and follow me’; ‘Go and make disciples’” (Ibid.)

The context of “Go and make disciples” is deeply infected by hatred, mutual suspicion and mistrust. It is a context in which Christian life tends to lose its value in the eyes of the world as well as in the eyes of other fellow Christians because it is largely devoid of love and justice. The *Cape Town Commitment* identified the problem as humanity’s lack of realizing that, “Ethnic diversity is the gift and plan of God in creation.” What is happening today is because of the fact that “it has been spoiled by human sin and pride, resulting in confusion, strife, violence and war among nations.” In spite of this situation, “however, ethnic diversity will be preserved in the new creation, when people from every nation, tribe, people and language will gather as the redeemed people of God” (*Cape Town Call to Action*, 40.)

Christian educators need to take the matter of ethnic diversity seriously. They also need to take God’s concern for justice and righteousness seriously. This will enable them to ask a question about how some of what is happening may be God’s judgment upon a corrupt society, which ‘turns justice to poison and the fruit of

righteousness to wormwood?’ That is to say, sometimes we need to realize that terrorism is both a spiritual and physical reality. Divine judgment can be involved. If we do not pay careful attention we may miss it. We read in Jeremiah where God says, “I will send destroyers against you; each man with his weapons.” The reason being that, “Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and have worshiped and served other gods” (Jeremiah 22:7, 9).

Some ideas that might be helpful here is the fact that Scripture is replete with the issue of “God’s forsaken,” i.e., replacing God with idols of our own imagination. We may claim that we cannot use Jeremiah’s message of judgment to explain the current situation because Gentiles had no covenant relationship with God, like the Jews. However, humanity has the Adamic covenant. This is what the LORD tells humanity: “Do what is just and righteous.” God’s righteous demands never change. He is a God of righteousness and justice.

Besides, one of the reasons that God may be using Satan in this situation is the fact that, in history, persecution and terrorism has served as the watershed of spiritual awakenings and interests in the building of more Christian colleges for the training of men and women for the advancement of the gospel. For example, in the 1930s German Christians began looking for help in understanding the Nazis. They regretted the evil of allowing Hitler to destroy the Jews and other races unabated. Such evil was not supposed to be possible.... Such evil was more than human. As they looked, they returned to portions of the New Testament: “For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).

Moltmann reminds us that we live in a world where we feel threatened. Although all faiths feel threaten in the 21st century, we will argue that the Islamic faith feels more threatened. Moltmann writes, “Those who feel threatened often react suicidally. They become paralyzed like the rabbit facing the snake; they strike the guilty with violence; they consume themselves. These reactions are widespread today” (McAlpine, 3.)

Our local churches and their communities are getting radicalized by a faith that feels threaten and acts suicidal. As Christian higher educators, we need to help our immediate constituencies to grasp the big picture of what is happening today in order that they may put it in the perspective of Christ’s cross. Doing so will help Christians living in the context of religious extremism, terrorism and political oppression to see beyond the horizon of the threat of terrorism and persecution to God’s kingdom of justice, forgiveness, reconciliation and life (Moltmann, 37.) This is why, as Christian higher educators, it is extremely important to understand our context.

Terrorism and persecution, resulting in revival can possibly lead to the founding of new Christian colleges and seminaries across Nigeria. How might persecution and terrorism be a blessing in disguise or contribute to the founding of new seminaries as replacements of the old ones?

Not only was revivalism important in giving birth to colleges, but it also was a major means of stimulating the spiritual development of the students, especially during the nineteenth century. Although the college leaders were Christian in orientation, the majority of the students were not, and the periodic revival served as the most effective method for bringing a large number of students to Christian conversion. Therefore, the nineteenth-century colleges played a larger role in evangelizing their students than do contemporary Christian colleges, with their higher percentage of Christian students (Reid, et al).

Religious revivalism is largely a manifestation of ‘self-interest and the will to power.’ Christian higher education can bring about revival so needed in a continent in transition with shaky foundations. For example, “Both in the late colonial period and the early to mid-nineteenth century, revivalism was a major factor in motivating religious leaders to found new colleges. Zeal created by the First (1730s-1740s) and the Second (1800-1835) Great Awakenings led to the founding of Princeton, Brown, Rutgers and Dartmouth in the mid-eighteenth century and to the single most prolific period of college founding in American history: the second generation of the nineteenth century (Reid et al).

In sum, Christian higher education can survive in any turbulent context. Therefore, Christian educators must learn to think and live in critical dialogue with and reflection on their contexts of terrorism and persecution. That will mean that Christian educators who proclaim a God who loves the world, must learn, as never before, how to, in spite of terrorism and persecution, love their neighbors who include people of other faiths. We need to teach our students to understand that “Reconciliation to God and to one another is also the foundation and motivation for seeking the justice that God requires, without which, God says, there can be no peace. True and lasting reconciliation requires acknowledgment of past and present sin, repentance before God, confession to the injured one, and the seeking and receiving of forgiveness (*Cape Town Commitment*, 40).

Conflict often indicates or signals the end of an era and the ushering in of another era. The Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment are prime examples. Violent conflict put us in a stage of agitation in that we hardly sit down to reflect deeply about what God might be doing in our time and through us. Violent conflict signals the death of an old order and the birth of a new order. This is hope-raising.

5. The Task of Christian Higher Education

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 23-24.)

The need to understand our context is necessitated by the fact that our tasks as Christian higher educators involve proclaim Christ, admonishing those who believe in Christ and teaching them to obey his commands. To make the condition conducive for obedience to Christ, we must also engage in the demolition of arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and taking captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. Therefore, we cannot ignore the need to pay careful attention to the causes and factors militating against the knowledge of God’s truth in our generation. These factors include religious extremism, terrorism, political corruption, oppression, and persecution.

6. The Various Tasks of Christian Higher Educators

The primary goal of our mission as Christian higher educators is the interpretation and proclamation of the birth, ministry, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and its implication for the human race. The second goal is engaging *the powers that be* by calling them to their responsibilities to the people whom they are called to serve, through ensuring freedom, order and justice (Agang, 2015:214). This means that Christian higher education involves what Richard Malik calls the two tasks of evangelism: *saving the soul and saving the mind*. In other words, our task involves (1) Spiritual salvation and (2) intellectual salvation.

According to Uncle John Stott of blessed memory, Christian higher education has these primary concerns and stages: proclamation, admonition and instruction. In proclamation, we broadcast Jesus Christ who has become the power of God and the wisdom of God to all those who are called. In admonition, we admonish those who have been saved by the power of the Holy Spirit to stay firm in the faith. In instruction, we teach those who will be agents and conduits of God’s continuous grace, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation in a sick and dying world.

Christian higher education focuses its attention on the totality of the individual, taking into account his developmental processes—chronological, physical, psychological, spiritual, intellectual, and so on (Billiyock, 48).

The New Testament demonstrates the inseparable nature of our task. We are called and instructed to proclaim the gospel to all nations and teaching them to obey the gospel. We must recognize that mission and theological education are inseparable. Both tasks are integrated in the Great Commission, where Jesus describes disciple-making in terms of evangelism and ‘teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.’” Christian higher education or theological education is part of the mission of the church beyond evangelism. It includes Christian social responsibility and action.

The Cape Call to Action reminds us that the task of Christian higher education involves providing sound theological education. This includes, among other things, keeping abreast the fact that “The mission of the Church on earth is to serve the mission of God, and the mission of theological education is to strengthen and accompany the mission of the Church” (*Cape Town Commitment*, 68.) It reminds us that we are *first* and foremost called

- to train those who lead the Church as pastor-teachers, equipping them to teach the truth of God’s Word with faithfulness, relevance and clarity; and
- To equip all God’s people for the missional task of understanding and relevantly communicating God’s truth in every cultural context. Theological education engages in spiritual warfare, as we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ (*Cape Town Commitment*, 69).

Therefore, it urges all institutions of higher theological education “to conduct a ‘missional audit’ of their curricula, structures and ethos, to ensure that they truly serve the needs and opportunity facing the Church in their cultures” (Ibid). As we are aware, our institutions’ founders were motivated by the fact that the God of the biblical witness is a God who loves His creation and desires the reconciliation of the world to himself. Thus, reconciliation to God and to one another must become the driving focus of Christian higher education. For example, in spite of the reality of a world of hostility, hatred, fragmentation, division and brutality, Christian higher educators are called to proclaim, admonish and teach the Gospel of God’s demonstration of love and desire for reconciliation with a disobedient human race. God seeks to unite the fallen world back to himself through Jesus Christ’s life, death and resurrection. The church and its institutions of higher education are some of the fundamental means through which God makes his plan for the world known.

This clarification of the task before Christian higher educators is important. Every generation of Christians understand the task before it based on the situation obtainable (Steinnetz, 253.) In our generation

today, what is our task? To understand our main task is tantamount to understanding what is critically at stake: the message of the cross.

The message of the cross is an embodiment of God's compassionate and passionate love to a disobedient and rebellious human race. Paul writes, "For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all" (Romans 11:30-32.) God has shown Christians mercy as a demonstration of his love and patience with a disobedience human race. This message of God's mercy should be a central piece of our Christian higher education curriculum. It is a message that needs to be taught carefully because it helps us to understand why the matter of justice, religious freedom, dialogue, conflict resolution and reconciliation is very critical and a necessity.

In order to understand how the issues of social justice, religious freedom, dialogue, conflict resolution and reconciliation are parts and parcels of our main task, we need to look back at the interplay between religion and social relations. In general, "Religion has become a major issue in social relationship" (Abdu, 151.) Of course, this is not the first time that religion has become a critical issue in our social relationships. It has been so all through its history, particularly in its interplay with socio-political realm of human endeavours. However, each time it is recognized as a critical factor in our social relationships we need to carefully reflect on its implication on both our religious and public life. As Christian higher educators, we will need to make sure that the religious influence is a positive factor instead of a negative one. This is how Christian higher education can become a conduit of blessing to the church, society and academia. Christian theology and ethics should engage in deep reflections that help the church, society and academia to dislodge the kind of ethnic, political and religious sentiments that engender bitterness, hatred, mutual suspicion and mistrust.

In sum, our challenges can become the gate way to new theological and ethical outlooks, resulting in human flourishing. This will not happen automatically. Christian higher education, therefore, must help its constituencies—the church, society and the academia—to form a solid Christian conscience.

The formation of Christian consciousness is one of the fundamental tasks of Christian higher education. In our African context, this is very important because of the fact that before we became Christians we were deeply rooted in our traditional worldview and to a large extent we are still defined by our traditional religious heritage. This underscores the need for Christian higher education in Africa to focus on forming sound Christian consciousness that is all-embracing or wholistic. This approach will require African theologians and ethicists to pay careful attention to all spheres of our social life—religious, social, political, and economic. It is when this happens that we will have the effective training that God and our societies expect from all of us who are engage in the business of Christian higher education.

In a world whereby human beings have lost track of a sense of human dignity and the sanctity of human life, the task of Christian higher education must be multidimensional. Basically, it must include a careful appraisal of how the African mindset interacts with and influences the two Abrahamic religions—Islam and Christianity. We must also examine the underpinning impacts of such interactions and how it may possibly help or hinder a rich theological reflection that will result in creative-alternative, which produces a humane society in a context of mutual hatred, suspicion and mistrust. In this sort of context, we must help our students and even some of our colleagues to imbibe a life of sacrificial, delivering, and compassionate love, justice, and peace.

To build a community of deep Christian consciousness in our contemporary Christian higher education, the Bible must be the central focus. That is to say, for our task to benefit the human family it must involve raising a generation of young men and women who will live a life that is rooted in biblical worldview. For instance, the founder of Methodism, John Wesley was able to raise a generation of men and women whose lives could be characterized as lives that matter. One of his disciples was William Wilberforce, the slave trade abolitionist. Wilberforce was the leader of a group of British Parliamentarians who were nicknamed the "Clapham sect" or "the Saints" by newspaper journalists. They were members of the Clapham parish church. John Wesley's balanced preaching—evangelism and Christian social responsibility—enabled them to take both the private and public life seriously. They focus on a way of life that really matters by speaking against the social, economic and political injustices and dehumanization of human beings perpetuated by the politicians of their day. They committed themselves to studying the Bible, to fully understanding it in all its truth and to obeying its revealed truth (Stott, 11).

Wesley preached and taught a gospel that sees Jesus as the Lord of all of life—church, society and academia. Wesley and his disciples were able to save the English speaking world from catastrophic revolution like France's. They were able to raise up free societies and communities where people's rights were given due process. Through his preaching of a holistic gospel—evangelism, social responsibility and action—Wesley formed a community of deep Christian consciousness, character, and vision.

To live a life of meaning and value to the church, society and the academia in this age of phenomenal religious extremism and radicalism, we need to take a cue from the peaceful alternative that Jesus advocates in

the Sermon on the Mount. In 1989, one of the theologians of World War II, Jürgen Moltmann writes,

We need an essentially new way of thinking if the human race is to survive. . . . Since Hiroshima ‘the bomb’ has changed the world at a stroke, but Christian theology is only slowly becoming aware of the new situation in which all its traditional concepts for dealing with power, terror and war have become antiquated. Rockets are launched faster than the speed of sound, but the Spirit is still going on foot (Moltmann, 19.)

Moltmann has been able to preach and teach the gospel of hope to a world threaten by human terrorists and global natural disasters. He believes that we need to create a theology that gives a humane future. This will require creative ways of reflections (Jürgen Moltmann, 24-25.)

Christian higher education is supposed to help its constituencies - the church, society and academia - to form a Christian worldview that is capable of resisting all distortions of biblical truth. This is very important because of the fact that before many of us became Christians, we grew up in cultures that were deeply rooted in our traditional worldview and were characterized by our traditional religious heritage (Rwiza, 31.) Rwiza maintained that “Africa has gone through bitter experiences triggered off by colonialization and modernity. But, in spite of all this, there seems to be African traditional values that have stood the test of time” (Ibid). Rwiza advocates the need for Christian higher education in Africa to focus on formation of a Christian consciousness because he recognized that there is a dichotomy between the formation of Christian conscience provided by the Church and the actual life experienced by Christians in Africa today.¹ What Rwiza advocates will entail paying careful attention to all levels of our social life—religious, social, political, economic and so on. In other words, our task must include an appraisal of how the African mindset works and how that might have been contributing to a lack of comprehensive grasp of the gospel message we proclaim and teach our students (Morris, 35).

To live a life that matters in an age of religious extremism and radicalism, we need to take a cue from the peaceful alternative that Jesus advocated in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus carried out his ministry between the successful nonviolent protest of 26 CE that removed military standards from Jerusalem and the failed revolts of 66-70 CE. In that ministry, he addressed issues of peace and violence because such issues were part of the political culture of his day. In addition to those who supported guerrilla warfare, those who resisted Roman authority nonviolently, there were also Jews who were the willing accomplices of Rome. Tax collectors were the most prominent representatives of that group to appear in the Gospels. They were often perceived as both personally corrupt and political disloyal.

Jesus’ agenda of nonviolent forms of resistance was an option among other options such as, armed revolt, compliance, and withdrawal (fight or flight): these were the political options available to the Jews of first century Palestine. Jesus addressed the first three—nonviolence, revolt or compliance—of these options.

While he did not recommend compliant consent to the indignities and injustice of Roman rule, he did accept in his larger group of followers the tax collectors who were the despised collaborators of Rome. The oppressive and unstable societal conditions of first century Palestine created conditions that undermined the dignity of ordinary citizens. Jesus repeatedly suggested behaviour that allowed persons to assert their own dignity in response to humiliation without recourse to anger, vengeance, or violence (Johnson, 23-24.)

Jesus’s ministry paid careful attention to the social dynamics of political power and injustices. In our Christian higher education we must not ignore the reality and implication of human cruel use of power in the church, society and academia. Christ’s ministry, dead and resurrection give possibility of peace even in situations of ethnic, religious and political violent conflicts. When we read the Great Commission in the light of Jesus’ manifest vision in Luke 4: 18-19 (cf. Isaiah 61:1-2), we cannot help but recognize the fact that this is the year of the Lord’s favour and the day of the Lord’s salvation. We therefore have the responsibility of teaching our students to love their enemies as themselves and to pray for their salvation instead of wishing them God’s judgment or even killing them. In our Christian higher education, we need to raise students who are full of faith, Holy Spirit, God’s grace and power.

Students of Christian higher education in Africa need to understand the priority of Christ’s peace for the poor and oppressed in our societies. This is why justice, love and peace are our concerns in the present world. That is to say, “The biblical foundation for our commitment to seeking justice and *shalom* for the oppressed and the poor,” includes the fact that we love God’s world. The *Cape Town Confession of Faith* puts it thus:

We share God’s passion for this world, loving all that God has made, rejoicing in God’s providence and justice throughout his creation, proclaiming the good news to all creation and all nations, and longing for the day when the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea (Cape Town Commitment, 19.)

We must teach our students to adopt the lifestyle of reconciliation. The *Cape Town Call to Action* says that this in practical terms is demonstrated when Christians:

- (1) forgive persecutors, while having courage to challenge injustice on behalf of others;
- (2) give aid and offer hospitality to neighbours ‘on the other side’ of a conflict, taking initiatives to cross

- barriers to seek reconciliation;
- (3) continue to witness to Christ in violent contexts; and are willing to suffer, and even to die, rather than take part in acts of destruction or revenge;
 - (4) Engage in the long-term healing of wounds after conflict, making the Church a safe place of refuge and healing for all, including former enemies (Ibid, 42.)
 - (5) As Christian higher education bears witness to Christ, Christian educators need to help the students they train grasp the fact that “It is solely in the name of Christ, and in the victory of his cross and resurrection, that we have authority to confront the demonic powers of evil that aggravate the human conflict, and have power to minister his reconciling love and peace” (Ibid.)

Once we are able to grasp the importance of our task, no matter the circumstances we will be on our way to success. To stay focus in a confused and threatened world, we need to know what our task is - to love with all passion. However, we must remember that the highest task we can perform is servicing God and the human family with utmost integrity and humility. Basically, our task include demolition of arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and taking captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

7. The Content of Christian Higher Education

Genuine Christian higher education is an embodiment of the Great Commission. Put in another way, without the Great Commission there is no Christian higher education. Thus Paul writes, “We proclaim Him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom. . .” (Col 1:28-29)

Here are some great truths that provide the biblical rationale for our missional engagement in Christian higher education.

- *Human beings are lost.* The underlying human predicament remains as the Bible describes it: we stand under the just judgment of God in our sin and rebellion, and without Christ we are without hope.
- *The gospel is good news.* The gospel is not a concept that needs fresh ideas, but a story that needs fresh telling. It is the unchanged story of what God has done to save the world, supremely in the historical events of the life, death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus Christ. In Christ there is hope.
- *The church’s mission goes on.* The mission of God continues to the ends of the earth and to the end of the world. The day will come when the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ and God will dwell with his redeemed humanity in the new creation. Until that day, he Church’s participation in God’s mission continues, in joyful urgency, and with fresh and exciting opportunities in every generation including our own (*Cape Town Commitment*, 8.)

Based on these consistent biblical truth distilled from the Cape Town Commitment, the Christian higher educators will do well to dialogue with their context of terrorism and persecution. For dialoguing, besides being a pedagogical strategy, demonstrates an attitude of honesty, transparency, and humility on the part of the Christian educator. It is an appropriate vulnerability (Murillo, 16.)

Those of us who are in the business of Christian higher education today have a rich heritage of Christian traditions and experiences to learn from. First and foremost, we must acknowledge that the churches across the globe continue to participate in “some of the most destructive contexts of ethnic violence and oppression, and the lamentable silence of large parts of the Church when such conflicts take place. Such contexts include the history and legacy of racism and black slavery; the holocaust against Jews; apartheid; ‘ethnic cleansing’; inter-religious, political and ethnic violence; Palestinian suffering; caste oppression; and tribal genocide” (*Cape Town Commitment*, 40.)

Second, Christian higher education has at its foundation the careful presentation of Christ. Thus, Christian higher educational institutions, who “by their action or inaction, add to the brokenness of the world, seriously undermine our witness to the gospel of peace. Therefore, they must teach biblical truth on ethnic diversity” (Ibid.) That means, in conflict situations what is important is to know the real threat. For example, Paul in his epistle to the Colossians knew what was at stake: the Supremacy of Christ. The church in Colosse was in danger of losing its grasp of Christ’s supremacy. Instead of being the integrator of all things, Christ was being integrated into the Colossians’ schemes. Instead of Christ alone, they wanted Christ plus—Christ with supplements. Paul wanted the Colossians to know that Jesus is not one of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He is not even the greatest of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He is the one “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). Therefore, Paul writes, “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Col 1:28-29).

In sum, in a world besiege by religious extremism, terrorism and political corruption and oppression, the content of Christian higher education must include what Philip E. Dow calls the development of Christian virtuous minds. That is to say, if we want to make a difference in our contemporary world, we must have a curriculum whose content includes the development of Christian intellectual virtue or character. Dow identifies

and explains seven of them:

- i. **Intellectual Courage:** Those who are intellectually courageous earnestly want to know the truth, and so they take risks in the pursuit and promotion of truth. They are willing to reconsider their own beliefs, even if this scares them. But once they have done so, and come to a belief about what is true, they are willing to stick to their guns, even if the majority mocks or threatens them.... If we are not courageous thinkers we are unlikely to be truly honest thinkers.... Courageous thinking habits are at the heart of growth and progress (Dow, 28, 30.)
- ii. **Intellectual Carefulness:** NASA has succeeded in its space programmes because of intellectual carefulness over the years.... If we are able to develop the habit of thinking carefully, the general trajectory of our lives will be fundamentally changed for the better.... Plagiarism is the result of intellectual carelessness.... Paying close attention to evidence and taking care that we don't hastily pass over important information will not only produce a higher rate of success in every area of our lives, but it will also necessarily create the peace of mind and confidence needed to tackle life's opportunities and obstacles. Intellectual carefulness is not something that we can turn on and off at will. Instead, it is something that we develop over time if we are willing to work at it (Ibid, 33, 35, 38.)
- iii. **Intellectual Tenacity:** In both our action and thinking habits, tenacity is often the difference between success and failure, fulfillment and frustration.... Real achievement and authentic success require thinking habits rooted in tenacity. Tenacious thinking is also needed in order to grow beyond our current limitations.... Without tenacious thinking habits, the promise that awaits each of us will forever remain out of reach (Ibid, 39, 42.)
- iv. **Intellectual Fair-mindedness:** Fair-mindedness is not relativistic openness.... Those who are fair-minded earnestly want to know the truth and thus are willing to listen in an even-handed way to differing opinions, even if they already have strong views on the subject. In addition, they attempt to view the issue from the perspective of their opponents, believing that they do not always have the most complete or accurate vantage point on a given issue. The secret of intellectual fair-minded persons is that they have chosen to put the truth above allegiance to their ego or cherished opinions. Without that basic commitment to truth, authentic fair-mindedness is not possible (Ibid, 49.)
Intellectual Curiosity (Acts 17:11): Without the desire to know more, growth in every area of our lives is virtually impossible. We entered the world wired for curiosity. Intellectually curious character is easier to develop than the other virtues (Ibid, 56, 59.)
Intellectual Honesty: Intellectual honesty is not primarily about the process of getting knowledge but rather about how we choose to use or present the knowledge we already have. In that sense, intellectual honesty is the link between the rest of our thinking and our actions... the aim of intellectually honest people is to communicate what they know with integrity. Because their main objective is to help others to get at the truth, they are consistently careful not to use information taken out of context, to distort the truth by describing it with loaded language or to otherwise mislead through the manipulation of statistics or any other type of supporting evidence (Ibid., 61.)
- v. **Intellectual Humility:** Authentic humility is simply an attempt to see ourselves as we really are. Applied to our thinking, this means an uncompromisingly honest appraisal of the capacities and limitations of our minds against the standard of an all-knowing, infinitely intelligent and always true God.... Intellectual humility is notoriously elusive, but when it does become a habit, the rewards can be life changing. Because intellectually humble people value truth over their egos' need to be right, they are freed up to admit the limits of their own knowledge. This freedom naturally produces a teachable spirit and the habit of humble inquiry that are at the heart of sustained personal growth (Ibid, 70, 72.)

Finally, the Bible is the primary content of Christian higher education. We will notice that much of these fantastic ideas by Philip E. Dow are distilled from the Bible, particularly the fruit of the Spirit. This then means that the fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians is one of the key contents of Christian higher education.

Conclusion

Christian higher education and the Great Commission must be carried out in the context of religious extremism, terrorism, political corruption and violence. We must not allow these contemporary challenges to Christian higher education to distract us from the main tasks: Proclaiming, admonishing and teaching the church, society and the academia.

Of course, Africa's destroyers or terrorists are many. For example, corruption across the continent has continued to widen the gap between the haves and the have-nots to the extent that even in countries where God has blessed the inhabitants with natural wealth, poverty continues to grow unabated. This is coupled with the unjust distribution of resources with the increasing lopsidedness between the rich and the poor. Logically, this

situation brings about perplexity, resentment and anger, which result in religious extremism and terrorism. Our world is best described by Nelly Garcia Murillo who observed, “We are taught to love people and use things. Often however, even among self-proclaimed Christians, there are those that passionately cling to things and use people . . .” (Murillo, 6.) Murillo further argued that “The most wonderful commandments, to love God above all things and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, remain and have even greater significance now” (Ibid.)

Our global world is largely faced with not only religious extremism but also human-made natural terrorism. Our abusive relationship with nature explains many of the natural disasters that affect us today: global warming, droughts, floods, the hole in the ozone layer, water shortages (Lake Chad is shrinking and affecting an estimated 20 million fishing communities in Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria), trash, lack of energy for cooking and working, and excessive heat and cold. We tend to assume that nature is an endless resource that we can continue to exploit for maximum profit (Ibid, 8.) Illogically, we forget that we are part and parcel of the ecosystem that God created for our wellbeing and that if we abuse public trust or resources and nature, we will bear the brunt whether through the form of global migration, war, global warming or global terrorism.

The impacts of global challenges can be felt the world over because of the technological advances that have made communication across the globe extremely handy and possible. How do we at this conference reflect in a manner that can help us reorient Christian higher education in a way that organizes curriculum and methodology toward problem-solving?

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