**The State of Global Christian Higher Education:**

**And the Grand Challenge and Opportunity for the Future**

By Perry L. Glanzer

Christianity helped birth the university over eight hundred years ago. Rodney Stark claims baldly: “The university was a Christian invention.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Or as another scholar of Islamic higher education observed, “The university is a twelfth century product of the Christian West.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Indeed, one could argue that for the first 500 years of the university a secular university did not exist.[[3]](#endnote-3) Today, however, almost every university created in Western Europe before 1900 no longer identifies as Christian.

The good news though is that Christians continued to create colleges and universities and not just in Europe or in the West. Indeed, the first modern universities in almost every continent (except Australia) and most countries began with the help and support of Christians. Consider our host country today. Kuk-Won Shin traces the origins of contemporary higher education to colleges established by missionaries in the late 1800s and early 1900s. He observes, “Christians institutions were the pioneering leaders of Korea’s modern higher education since it began 115 years ago.”[[4]](#endnote-4) The same is also true in my own country as well as many others.

 While this story of creativity and global institution building is impressive, we cannot live in the past. So what is the state of Christian higher education today? Fortunately, the creation and sustaining of Christian higher education continues. Today, there are still 1100 Christian institutions around the world that fit what a group of us define as a college or university and identify as Christian. Around half are Catholic and the other half are Protestant with around a dozen Eastern Orthodox institutions.

 Moreover, many of these institutions are contemporary creations. Outside of North America, the current center of Christian higher education, over 200 new universities have been created since 1980. Here are some highlights of the current creativity:[[5]](#endnote-5)

* Africa has been a hot spot, with 59 new Christian colleges and universities founded between 1989 and today.
* In Europe, the main action has been in the formerly communist nations, where 17 of the 19 Christian universities formed in the past twenty years have been planted. In contrast, there are only two recently founded Christian universities in Western Europe: one is Liverpool Hope University, a Catholic and Anglican joint venture in England; and the other is the University of Ramon Llull, a Catholic institution in Spain.
* In Latin America, 32 new Christian universities have arisen since 1990, and 15 of them are Protestant.
* In Asia, 20 institutions have been created since 1989, led by Indian Christian churches, which founded 12 more since 1989. These numbers probably fail to make clear the numerical growth among institutions that started before that time as Bible colleges or seminaries and have since broadened to universities. Consider our host university, Baekseok University, which has grown from 610 students twenty years ago to over 15,000 students. Hongdong University has also become a premier university of 4,000 students in twenty years. As Kuk-Won Shin noted, “Christian institutions of higher education occupy 38.3 percent (61 out of 159) of the four-year private colleges and universities.”[[6]](#endnote-6)

What does this mean for IAPCHE members? I hope it reminds you of what God is doing around the world. You are part of a worldwide movement for Christ that, despite the powerful individuals and groups involved in secularizing universities, continues to grow both in terms of the number of institutions and in terms of the number of students.

 Still, as we seek to strengthen our current institutions or build new ones we must recognize that we face immense challenges. Of course, the church in each country faces its own unique difficulties, but there are some common challenges. This talk will focus on a central underlying feature of those challenges and then unpack how this feature also provides a unique difficulty for secular universities and a tremendous opportunity for Christian universities.

**The Central Challenge**

Here is the central challenge. Over the past two centuries the state has been the most powerful shaping force affecting higher education. The nationalization of most higher education systems means that a central ministry of education or some other government entity controls the funding and the authorization of degree granting in higher education and determines the legal framework for private higher education. In the worst of cases, such as in communist countries, the state outlaws Christian forms of higher education or highly regulates it. In the best case scenarios, liberal democracies enable a wide variety of Christian universities. Indeed, few Christian universities exist in countries that do not have a liberal democratic polity. Furthermore, when liberal democracy was undermined in certain countries, such as during military dictatorships in Brazil and Nigeria, or under communism in Eastern Europe, the growth of Christian universities slowed, reversed or was not even possible. The existence and growth of Christian higher education relies upon government policies that allow diverse forms of religious universities, and these policies are almost always the creation of some type of liberal democracy.

Yet, liberal democracies shape Christian universities in important ways. The first obvious way liberal democracies shape Christian universities is that most liberal democracies do not have an established religion. As result, most tend ***not*** to support religious institutions financially and (with a few exceptions) Christian universities must almost always be privately funded. According to our research, only 7 percent of Christian universities receive the majority of their funding from the state. These institutions are in Europe (e.g., Belgium, England, the Netherlands, Poland, and Slovakia) where some form of what scholars call principled pluralism exists.[[7]](#endnote-7) Furthermore, only 15 percent receive any direct funding from the state, and the majority of these institutions are in Western Europe (e.g., France, Germany, Hungary Norway, and Portugal) or India. In contrast, most Christian institutions around the world are now largely privately funded and will likely remain so in the near future.

This lack of funding is not necessarily a problem. The reception of state funding appears to lead to secularization. The Free University of Amsterdam is a good exception. Consider Europe. There are more Lutheran and Presbyterian institutions in Latin America or Asia than in Europe. There are more Anglican colleges engaged in overtly Christian higher education in Africa than in England.[[8]](#endnote-8) The exception to this secularization pattern appears to be India.

In places where Christian universities are growing the most, it is largely due to new freedom for privately-funded universities more generally. So Christian universities prosper in countries that allow a large degree of privatization, as in Brazil, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, India and Nigeria, while they are virtually nonexistent in countries with very little by way of a private sector in higher education, such as Austria, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.[[9]](#endnote-9) The result is that the fortunes of Christian higher education will largely rise and fall with the freedom and prosperity of private higher education in countries around the globe. Of the 71 Christian colleges and universities started since 1995 (47 of which began in Africa) only four received some sort of government funding. Even in countries such as India, where Christian colleges receive government support, an increasing number of the new institutions are privately funded institutions.[[10]](#endnote-10)

The need for Christian education to be private poses a distinct disadvantage to many Christian institutions when it comes to academic achievement and prestige. Students, by and large, prefer to enroll in well-funded public institutions with low or no tuition charges and which tend to be selective in admissions. Private institutions, including private Christian institutions, are in such contexts the students’ “fallback” options. What should be noted, especially for Americans, is that while older private Christian universities around the globe may be more selective and prestigious, most private Christian institutions around the world are relatively new institutions that serve a wider audience and are not prestigious. The exceptions to this generalization are North America, South Korea and some of the older institutions in India.

Finally, this reality also means that global Christian higher education will always struggle to address another global trend in higher education—inequalities in access. Despite the rise in the number of students attending higher education, the privileged classes have maintained an advantage when it comes to access to higher education.[[11]](#endnote-11) Private Christian institutions, which by necessity require more tuition than state-funded institutions, will always have difficulty addressing this problem. The few that make extraordinary efforts to admit low-income students, such as Christian institutions in India that make outreach to lower classes part of their central mission, will be able to do so due to aid from the state. But aid from the state, usually has increased regulation attached to it.

Third, even various forms of liberal democratic government may highly regulate private Christian higher education. For example, the first Baptist university in Europe located in Romania used to require students to obtain a dual major in theology and another practical discipline. They knew their congregations could not support full-time pastors. Plus, they wanted their graduates in every discipline to be theologically literate. Unfortunately, government regulation established through the Bologna Accords forced them to discontinue this practice. In Ukraine, the Christian university in that country does not receive any funding, but the state still controls who attends the university. In England, the few remaining Christian universities can only control the faith outlook of faculty and administrators they are hiring in three positions—chancellor, chaplain and theology chair. Here in South Korea, Kuk-Won Shin has pointed out how the Ministry of Education micromanages certain elements, including even the purpose statements, admission policies, and curriculum of universities. He notes, “In having to comply with government control, Christian institutions become almost indistinguishable from other universities except they continue to offer chapel services and a few courses on Christianity.”[[12]](#endnote-12) The state sets up the rules of the academic game, and it controls most of the players in the game.

**The Grand Challenge to Liberal Democratic Universities**

**and the Christian Opportunity: Human Identity**

Yet, secular universities in liberal democracies face their own major challenge. I call it the challenge of human identity. Figuring out who we are is one of the most important and fascinating life quests. More than 800 years ago, one of the early medieval architects of the university, Hugh of St. Victor proclaimed, “This is our entire task—the restoration of our nature and the removal of our deficiency.”[[13]](#endnote-13) To restore our nature, we have to know what it is. Christian Smith, a sociologist serving on the faculty at the University of Notre Dame, recently wrote in his book *What Is a Person?* “What are humans? One would think that of all the personal and scientific subjects we study the one we would be the most interested and proficient in understanding would be ourselves, human beings.”[[14]](#endnote-14) One would think.

Yet, the reality is that secular universities have often failed to prioritize or even address this matter adequately. As C. John Sommerville wrote in his book, *The Decline of the Secular University*, “If there is one thing that should raise the question of the secular university’s irrelevance it might especially be in the failure to justify or even make sense of the concept of the human.”[[15]](#endnote-15) Part of the reason for this failure is that state-sponsored educational institutions in liberal democracies are limited in the metaphysical commitments they can pass along to students. Universities may be starting to realize they need to give this question more attention. Harvard recently set about hiring a Fellow for College Programs and Initiatives Position that would help students explore questions such as “Who am I?”[[16]](#endnote-16)

Of course, despite secular universities’ limitations in this matter the reality is that secular colleges and universities must offer some answers to the question of human identity since they must operate with some concept of the human. What Sommerville says about professional education I think is true of all education, it “depends on some particular understanding, even some ideal, of the human.”[[17]](#endnote-17) In practice, many secular universities often settle for focusing upon setting forth ideals regarding three particular aspects of human identity. All three approaches, however, have their problems.

**A Citizen**

Since most universities are now state universities the dominant approach is to see the person primarily as a future citizen. This proves true even at elite private institutions. For example, “The mission of MIT is to advance knowledge and educate students in science, technology, and other areas of scholarship that will best serve the nation…”[[18]](#endnote-18) Former Harvard president Derek Bok in his book, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, sets forth one of the two identity-related goals of higher education as preparation for citizenship, by which he largely means national citizenship.[[19]](#endnote-19) He basically repeats Thomas Jefferson’s argument that education is necessary for a liberal democracy to survive and prosper.

Yet, liberal democracies, by their nature, are supposed to recognize that we are more than just citizens. It is only in more totalitarian or repressive countries that the state totally defines who you are. If we are more than just citizens, who are we? Here is the tension for liberal democracies. If we are persons with dignity and rights, what is the source of that dignity and those rights? Our social agreement or contract or something else? As Brad Gregory of the University of Notre Dame writes,

But if nature is not creation, then there are no creatures and human beings are just one more species that happened to randomly evolve, no more ‘endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights’ than is any other bit of energy matter. Then there simply are no rights, just as there are no persons, and no theorizing can conjure them into existence. The intellectual foundations of modernity are failing because its governing metaphysical assumptions in combination with the findings of the natural sciences offer no warrant for believing its most basic moral, political and legal claims.[[20]](#endnote-20)

In other words, the liberal democratic state and its universities have difficulty and restrictions when it comes to providing a foundational answer to these types of questions.

**The Professional Self**

Beyond focusing on creating good citizens, the second most common identity secular universities emphasize concerns the students’ professional self or person. In *Our Underachieving Colleges*, Bok sets forth his second identity-related goals of higher education as preparation for a career.[[21]](#endnote-21) When I entered the university, I thought its primary purpose was to provide me with job training, and most students I interview across the United States also identity this goal when asked what the purpose of the university is. The mission statements of many institutions reaffirm this goal. Peking University’s leader notes, “The university has effectively combined research on important scientific subjects with the training of personnel with a high level of specialized knowledge and professional skill…”[[22]](#endnote-22) Or as Dr. Sung Kee Ho, former president of SungKyul University in Korea said a decade ago, ““Our society has impatiently demanded . . . professional workers.”[[23]](#endnote-23)

Indeed, much of global higher education focuses upon developing the professional self. Around the world, educational aims and priorities are being subjected to a reductionistic impulse that exalts professional degrees. In a number of universities in the United Kingdom, humanities and arts majors now must pay higher tuitions than business, science and technology majors. Across Europe, the Bologna Accords enforce a three-year bachelor’s degree in most subjects, which all but eliminates any provision for general education or many electives. All across Asia, says Philip Altbach, the leading scholar of global higher education, the social sciences and humanities are in such rapid decline in enrollments that they seemed to be in a death spiral.[[24]](#endnote-24) Even in the United States, where general education requirements are a pervasive part of a standard undergraduate education, this common standard is under fire, as are traditional humanities and social sciences degrees.

 The result is that higher education becomes simply an instrument for developing good professionals.[[25]](#endnote-25) The growth of state university, I believe, contributes to this trend, but private universities also play a role. Around the world, private schools in particular are often linked to commercial or soft technical fields (e.g. accounting and IT rather than math and engineering) that are cheap to teach and promise immediate salaried jobs. Consequently, they reduce investment in libraries, labs, cultural offerings, community service, general education and research.[[26]](#endnote-26) They simply are concerned with producing competent professionals and have difficulty contributing to setting forth ideals about what it means to be a flourishing human being.

**Providing Competencies and Happiness for the Private Self**

Beyond these two identities, secular universities in liberal democracies largely insist their job is to give students the tools or capacities to construct their own selves. Secular universities are then tasked with helping individuals acquire various capacities that might increase students’ personal happiness. The job of the individual student in this view is what certain American authors call self-authorship.[[27]](#endnote-27) You are responsible for planning and building yourself, your identity, your story, and your purpose in life. The fundamental job of the university is simply to give you some tools to help with that building. For instance, beyond the two identities mentioned above Bok, described the remainder of the job of universities as helping students develop six capacities or tools for building: 1) learning to communicate; 2) learning to think; 3) living with diversity; 4) preparing for a global society; 5) acquiring broader interests, and interestingly, and 6) building character.

Yet, there is a problem if universities simply focus upon supplying instruction to help students acquire tools for building their lives. Speaking of this kind of limited approach, Arthur Holmes noted, “It does nothing to unify a person or his view of life, and it might well encourage the view that life has no overall meaning at all. It simply creates a connoisseur of the fragments of life. But a jack of all trades is a master of none, a fragmented education.”[[28]](#endnote-28) There is little that brings the competencies together into a coherent whole or a beautiful life structure.

Of course, the reality is that if a university proclaims to take this approach it is ultimately either incompetent or dishonest. If you hope to give someone the best tools for building something, you need to know what they plan to build. In truth, if the university is providing tools for building the self, it really does have some implicit idea of what a well-built self entails. After all, universities almost always present some components of the vision of what kind of self they are hoping to help students build. In some ways, secular universities are hypocrites when it comes to student formation.

If there is something that holds all of these competencies together in America it is the goal identified by Columbia University’s Andrew Delbanco in *College: What It Was, Is*, *and Should Be*. He suggests that one of the purposes is that universities should contribute to the student’s life-long pursuit of happiness.[[29]](#endnote-29) American students, not surprisingly, reflect this outlook that is implicitly communicated by the university. A recent national survey my colleagues and I asked Gallup polling to undertake for us sought to determine American college students’ purposes. We found that the top purpose students identified by the over 2500 students surveyed was to “be happy.” Over four fifths (81 percent) strongly agreed that this was their purpose. It beat the next closest purpose by eleven percentage points. In contrast, loving God received only 38 percent support, and serving my country or community received only 35 percent support.

The problem with identifying happiness as a unifying purpose though is that it does not prove helpful when choosing among competing loves and identities—a core process to figuring out the good life and the good person. A famous American sociologist Robert Bellah described the problem in this way, “If selves are defined by their preferences, but those preferences are arbitrary then each self constitutes its own moral universe, and there is finally no way to reconcile conflicting claims about what is good in itself.”[[30]](#endnote-30) After all, our various identities and the competencies we use to enhance them will compete. In building the good life or setting forth ideas about the good person, one must make decisions about which structure to design. Students, however, are not taught how to use the tools they receive to make this decision. They are merely encouraged to gain competencies that will help them choose.

**Responding to the Challenge of Identity:**

**Teaching what it Means to be Become Fully Human in the Christian Tradition**

Christians and Christian universities have an opportunity to answer this challenge that secular institutions cannot answer. We can help students with one of the greatest quests of all, and we can let them know they are more than a bag of competencies, professionals or citizens. Moreover, they can know that they do not have to face the burden of creating their identity alone. The most beautiful reality, although some in the contemporary university will tell us differently, is that we do not define everything about ourselves. God, our creator, defines who we are.

What this means then is that theology—the study of God, is the life blood of the Christian university. I use the metaphor “life blood” for a reason. The problem with the medieval metaphor of theology as “queen of the sciences” is that it places theology in palace of the academic castle away from other disciplines. If God defines who we are though, then theology must be the life blood that flows through every discipline in the university. It should not be sequestered to one department. After all, it animates and gives life to learning and the university.

How does God enliven us? We must start by listening to the beginning of Genesis where God makes an amazing description of human beings He is going to create and enliven.

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26-27, NIV)

As this passage reveals, we receive our foremost identity, being made in God’s image, from God.

If this is truly our identity it has enormous implications for Christian higher education. Christian professors understand this point. When I and some colleagues surveyed over 2300 professors at 46 different Christian universities in America, we asked them to provide examples of how they integrate the Christian intellectual tradition with their teaching.[[31]](#endnote-31) One of the most dominant ways they understood Christianity changing their teaching can be summarized in the words of one professor, “Students and professors alike are image bearers,” or as another professor wrote, “Students are viewed as whole persons, image bearers of God.”

What does it then mean to be created in the image or likeness of God, and how does this understanding help us set a unique vision for global Christian higher education? While a wide range of meanings have been set forth about what it means to be made in God’s image based upon the few Biblical references,[[32]](#endnote-32) scholars largely agree that at the highest level what it means to be made in God’s image involves two aspects.[[33]](#endnote-33)

**A Special Connection and Relationship**

First, being made in God’s image means we all, every human, shares a special connection and relationship with God. It is important to recognize that, biblically, this status is true of all people, no matter their sinfulness and no matter whether they have certain human excellences such as reasoning ability. In Genesis 9:6, God declares to a fallen people, “Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.” In other words, the fall did not take away the fact that we are made in God’s image. Similar to what it means to be “in Christ” and fully reconciled to God, it is something given by God’s grace.

What does this claim mean for education and society as a whole? Like the Trinity, all members have equal dignity and unique gifts. As one of the Christian professors we surveyed stated, “Every person is made in God's image…We are all valuable and have gifts from Him.” This outlook is tremendously expansive. For Jon Amos Comenius, the famous seventeenth century educational philosopher, considered the father of modern education, the idea that every human has dignity derived from being made in God’s image had profound educational implications. It meant we should seek

for the full power of development into full humanity not of one particular person or a few or even many, but of every single individual, young and old, rich and poor, noble and ignoble, men and women—in a word, of every human born on earth, with the ultimate aim of providing education to the entire human race regardless of age, class, sex and nationality.[[34]](#endnote-34)

Comenius was the first to argue for universal education for everyone and his motivation stemmed from his belief that we are all made in God’s image and need education for development. Today, Christians should seek the development of all students, national or international, poor or rich, male or female. Of course, around the world this may take different forms. In India, it is expressed through Christian colleges seeking to educate not only the elite, but also the untouchables. In Ukraine, it meant the Christian university invited the mentally handicapped to participate in communal worship. In your country, it may mean something else.

 The reality also means our education must be characterized by a respect for human dignity. Indeed, educators in our survey especially focused on the matter of worth and dignity. One teacher shared, “I strive to treat my students as individuals created in God's image and therefore with intrinsic worth.” Still another noted, “All students are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with respect.” Admittedly, Christian colleges sometimes fall short in this endeavor. In North America, what currently threatens the reputation of various Christian universities, including my own, are questions about how we treated students and whether we showed favoritism to others. In these cases, we need to confess our shortcomings to God and each other and move forward to live out our high vision of humanity.

This outlook applies to teachers as well. In Africa, the former IAPCHE president told the story of how one professor was attracted to a Christian university, because of how administrators treated professors. At a secular university, he had seen a dean actually physically kick a lower faculty member with no repercussions. When visiting Ukrainian Catholic University a few years ago, the president told me that to emphasize respect for humans made in God’s image in their context was to provide clean bathrooms and classrooms, avoid bribery and corruption, and establish respect between professors and students. Since Christians had not been allowed to attend advanced higher education in the former Soviet Union, the university initially hired a number of non-Christian professors. As one philosophy professor related to me, when these professors began to be treated with dignity, experienced clean facilities, did not have to deal with bribes, and were paid decently, a number progressed on a faith journey to become Christians.[[35]](#endnote-35) Viewing humans as made in God’s image should profoundly change our educational environment in whatever culture or context we live.

Of course, this reality also has implications for our earthly citizenship and the sustenance of liberal democracies—both in terms of material resources and in terms of political arrangements. The economist Deirdre McCloskey writes that the key reason the West acquired great riches was the liberation of the common person to use their ingenuity. Equality blossomed, “not an equality of outcome…equality before the law and equality of social dignity. It made people bold to pursue betterments on their own account.”[[36]](#endnote-36) It also transformed their political institutions. As Brad Gregory, a historian at the University of Notre Dame, writes,

The modern secular discourse on human rights depends on retaining in some fashion—but without acknowledging—the belief that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God, a notion that could be rooted in nature so long as nature was regarded as creation whether overtly recognized as such or not. [[37]](#endnote-37)

Science cannot provide us with human dignity. A state does not provide one with dignity and rights. It only protects what humans already have. As Thomas Jefferson noted, we are endowed with dignity and rights by our Creator. Only God can do that.

**Reflecting God**

From this basis, we can move to the second important implication of what it means to be made in God’s image. God *intends* for all human beings to be the physical reflections of God here on earth.[[38]](#endnote-38) This part of the image is the potential. We are the seed and God gives us the potential to become a fruitful tree that reflects God’s already existing capacities.[[39]](#endnote-39) In this way, Christian universities share a vision for human flourishing that is not merely manufactured by the state, derived from a profession or simply linked to random human feelings of happiness.

Part of this potential is that all humans have unique gifts to develop, which include the following: 1. unique creating capacities and a royal stewarding capacity; 2. the ability to attain excellence in particular identities or vocations such as parenting, citizenship, vocation, friendship, and more; and 3. the ability to embody truth, virtue, and beauty. These are not simply random abilities; they are God-ordained capacities that need to be nurtured for growth.[[40]](#endnote-40)

1. **Creative and Royal Stewarding Capacities**

First, we must recognize that humans are endowed with creative and royal stewarding capacities. If there is anything we know about God from Genesis 1, it is that God is a creator. Thus, it would make sense that humans are also designed to create. Educationally, the implications for Christian educators are clear. As mentioned, we have created thousands of educational institutions and over a thousand Christian universities. This creativity also extends to majors and the curriculum. In America there are over 1500 academic majors from which students can choose—an increase of 25 percent from a decade ago.[[41]](#endnote-41) One would hope that Christian universities would be at the forefront of this creativity everywhere on the globe. Creating universities, creating majors, creating culture that adds and enhances human flourishing—these are all expressions of being made in God’s image.

Moreover, as image bearers of God we are not merely to exercise our creative capacities without regard for the rest of God’s creation. In fact, being made in the image of God makes us different than the rest of creation. Just as God takes care of his whole creation, we are to rule over or steward it as well. Those of us in the university have a special stewardship responsibility. This calling is aptly summed up in a wonderful phrase suggested by a group of authors with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning. They describe the goal of those who receive Ph.D.’s as being “stewards of the discipline.”[[42]](#endnote-42) Our academic disciplines are an extended human dimension of God’s creation. Humans continue to build up storehouses of knowledge that need to be stewarded. What exactly this stewarding process involves proves complex. Chris Golde in this explication of the Carnegie phrase above argued that it requires three things: “someone who will creatively generate new knowledge, critically conserve valuable and useful ideas, and responsibly transform those understandings through writing, teaching and application.”[[43]](#endnote-43) I believe this description mirrors what I would suggest are the three tasks of the Christian educator, although I prefer to use a slightly different language that echoes the Biblical story: 1) creating new knowledge; 2) creating new learners and practitioners of the discipline, and 3) redeeming fallen learning and practices within the discipline. In this view, creativity and stewardship are not random capacities that aid are selfish pursuit of happiness or professional goals, but they are essential expressions of who we are created to be.

Of course, this stewardship is not something limited to the curriculum. It also involves stewarding the actual universities we create with regard to the budget, the personnel, and even the grounds. Do Christian universities expect stewardship for excellence at every level of the university? I found it interesting that a variety of new Christian universities arising in Central and Eastern Europe have sought to place significant effort in creating beautiful campuses. For example, Ukrainian Catholic University, has designed a campus known for its beauty. In fact, the mayor of the town came to them to ask advice about lawn care. They witnessed by creating beauty and stewarding their campus. This then is true stewardship which is not simply for one’s self. It is for God and others.

1. **Embodying Christ’s Truth and Virtue**

What are the other highest purposes God has for human development? It is not simply critical thinking, learning to communicate, living with diversity or acquiring broader interests. Christians prioritize certain capacities more than others for a reason. Why? Again, if we are made in God’s image, we need to know God in order to know who we are. Christians believe as Colossians state, “Christ is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). Consequently, if you want to know a visible image of the invisible God, we must know Christ. Jon Amos Comenius writes in his famous theology of education, *The Great Didactic*. "Christ, the son of the living God, has been sent from heaven to regenerate in us the image of God…now he has been called…the archetype of all who are to be formed in the image of God.”[[44]](#endnote-44) Or as C.K. Chesterton said, Christ is “more human than humanity.”[[45]](#endnote-45) What are Christ’s qualities?

Christ embodied truth. As Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” This is not simply the practice of rationality. Historically, scholars have tended to focus upon human rationality as distinguishing us from the animals and not enough upon grasping, telling and embodying truth. This is why today most universities talk about developing critical thinking instead of the ability to discern truth. To develop critical thinking is a wonderful capacity, but grasping and embodying truth is the highest exercise of this capacity. Biblically speaking, Christ is revealed not merely as the one who exercises critical thinking but as the one who tells us and embodies the truth. Being able to seek, identify and tell the truth is the most exalted capacity for those bearing God’s image. As one professor stated in our national survey, “I see my students as made in the image of God. I assume they can recognize truth for themselves, at least when the ground is cleared of gross misconceptions through argumentation and their own investigation.” Even better, we must recognize that the triune God embodies truth in a personal way. The professor who demonstrates a love for truth in his or her subject field embodies this capacity in a manner particular to his or her calling. The student who learns to do the same also demonstrates this capacity for truth seeking, telling and living.

Second, a central New Testament motif is that Christians should imitate Christ through following his virtues, particularly his self-sacrificial love, but also his forgiveness, servant leadership, humility, and acceptance.[[46]](#endnote-46) This emphasis is not surprising. The language of virtue is one of the primary forms of language used to depict God, who is described as “compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, forgiving, just, holy” (Exodus 34:6-7).[[47]](#endnote-47) Just as we are called to create as God created, we are also commanded to image God by demonstrating God’s virtues. After all, advanced creative capacities can be used to build weapons of mass destruction or life-giving medical treatments. We can create economic systems that lead to exploitation, corruption, and the inhibition of human creativity or those that enhance human flourishing. Virtue directs our creative capacities.

 The virtues revealed by God may involve a different kind of virtue than that prioritized by those seeking form good citizens. In American character education, a number of states have passed a variety of laws to support the teaching of virtue. The top three virtues taught are honesty, respect, and responsibility.[[48]](#endnote-48) In the former Soviet Union and in China today, students are taught the virtues of love for the motherland, hard work, civilized behavior and respect for the law.[[49]](#endnote-49) These are all noble virtues. Interestingly though, one finds certain virtues missing from these national lists—the same virtues we are explicitly told to imitate by Christ—the virtues of humility, servanthood, forgiveness, faith, hope, love for one’s enemies, and sacrificial love for all.

 A Christian university bears the identity of Christ. If we are to be like Christ, we must imitate the way that Christ modeled. As one professor in our survey noted, “It is important that I as a professor treat students with respect, kindness, and patience and model Christ’s love for each of them.” Ultimately, we must be willing to teach and live a life of sacrificial and suffering love. This is the ultimate pinnacle of what it means to be a Christian university and offer whole person education. To teach students that the greatest life is one that is laid down in love for God and others. It may involve suffering and even death, but the ultimate goal of whole person education is this ultimate aim.

Interestingly, this past year Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft and one of the richest men in the world, hosted a video contest asking entrants to answer the question, “What does it mean to be human?” The winner selected by a group of teachers and students was an 18 year old freshman who explained that what makes humans more evolved than ducks and elephants is that they can extend compassion beyond their own immediate circle to “all of humankind,” thus sharing “an infinite circle of compassion” and demonstrating “a responsibility to ourselves, to our planet, and to each other.”[[50]](#endnote-50) It is no wonder she won. Extending love to all of creation is what God does. It’s also the pinnacle of what makes us human. As the apostle Paul says, “But the greatest of these is love” (I Cor. 13:13b).

 If universities in the Christian tradition seek to develop students to their highest capacities, they must help students cultivate particular virtues, especially love that is properly ordered to the highest truth – the triune God. Consequently, their curriculum should be different. I found an inspiring set of general education courses at Hong Kong Baptist University with titles such as “the Good Life in a World of Self-Interest,” “Moral Heroes in an Immoral World,” and “Virtuous Living in a Virtual World.” These make it clear that the university is not just interested in the private self, or even the professional or civic self.

1. **Social Identities**

In Genesis God imbues us with unique identities (e.g., male and female) and also gives us the capacity to take upon ourselves other created identities. In other words, one of the other aspects of being human involves the social identities we inherit or create and take upon ourselves. Similarly, Scripture continually reveals God to us through these social roles and images. God’s character is revealed through the role of particular professions (e.g., potter, shepherd, teacher). God is also presented to us as a king, parent, a friend, parent, and husband. Of course, these images do not at all capture the whole of God just as we cannot be reduced to our human roles.

Still, with humans, our identity also becomes intertwined with these social roles. We inherit roles such as that of being a son or daughter, a male or female, and a member of a particular family, race, and nation. We take upon ourselves other identities, such as being a husband/wife, father/mother, a certain profession, members of various social groups, and more. While these identities do not define us completely, they comprise an essential part of who we are. A component of our divine calling is to fulfill those roles creatively, to steward them to the best of our ability, and to pursue truth, goodness and beauty within them.

I would argue that most American universities have largely lost this outlook apart from professional formation, since they are guided by Enlightenment ideals. They focus on providing you information or knowledge instead of wrestling with what it means to be excellent in these identities. Students take classes about the constitution, marriage and family, or health where they are provided basic knowledge, but framing the endeavor as the moral pursuit of excellence by asking, what is a good marriage, a good family, a good citizen or a good steward of your body, is not at the center of the course. In contrast, a Christian university can and should focus on what it means to be a good citizen, family member, steward of one’s body, one’s culture, friends, community, and profession.[[51]](#endnote-51)

Clearly, they should emphasize some of these more than others. For example, if universities fail to provide professional education and skills they fail at one of their core tasks—equipping students to be excellent in a profession or what many Christians prefer to label a calling. Indeed, whereas in the past many Christian colleges and universities emerged from Bible colleges or seminaries a new pattern has also become more pronounced, particularly in Europe. New Christian institutions are starting by offering technical and professional majors because of the specific needs in these fields and the financial benefit of focusing upon high-demand lines of work. One finds this trend not only in the countries in Western Europe (e.g., the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom), but in Africa and Asia as well. One finds Christian universities focused on producing teachers, health professionals and social workers. There is something noble about creating institutions that meet the professional needs of students, and I think this trend is a positive development in Christian higher education.

Yet, a Christian university focusing on professional education should be different. While we should seek to educate students to be excellent business people, doctors, scientists, educators and more, we also want them to think about how to integrate one’s various identities. What does it mean to be a good Christian, parent, spouse, citizen, Christian, friend, citizen and more?

**Human Excellence without Idolatry**

In order to fully understand, how to develop and achieve excellence in various capacities and identities, however, it is important to recognize that our capacities and identities can also be corrupted when humans worship the creation or their own creations. In other words, our capacities and identities can only be properly fulfilled when undertaken in the context of worshipping and glorifying God first. Otherwise, they become idolatrous objects of devotion, and we lose ourselves in the process. This is true whether the identity is one’s national identity, professional identity or personal identity. This is why God placed a clear restriction on our creative capacities: “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below” (Exodus 20:4). The restriction is not simply upon making images. It pertains to making images for certain purposes related to the previous command, “You shall have no other gods beforeme” and the command immediately following the creation restriction, “You shall not bow down to them or worship them” (Exodus 20:3,5). Adhering to this restriction is the toughest job of the university, which is in the business of creating. After all, humans, and particularly universities, are always creating potential objects of idolatry. Yet, idol worship in whatever form diminishes our full humanity. This is the greatest danger and challenge of focusing upon our civic, professional or personal identity. They become potential idols.

 This outlook has implications for how we should approach the curriculum. We should not merely prioritize high status identities and majors. The good news is that Christian universities are different. Consider the sixty-eight Christian universities started since 1995. As mentioned earlier, forty-four of these institutions originated in Africa. All but five of these African institutions provide a major in business, management, or commerce. Over half (25) also provide majors in some kind of information technology or computer science. While clearly emphasizing practical professions that can help the local population, they also provide service-oriented professional majors such as teaching, social work, nursing, and economic development that focus on serving the common good of the community. Twelve offer education degrees, ten offer degrees in the health sciences or nursing, ten more offer degrees in agriculture and nine offer law degrees. Even without the state financing, these new Christian universities show significant commitments to offer higher education in the so-called service professions.

 This outlook has implications for how Christian universities interact with national governments. Christian universities today must constantly make clear that while they seek to shape good citizens, humans are not primarily citizens. We are more—and we are only fully human when allowed to love God first and foremost. Of course, this outlook may prove threatening to state governments that do not understand universities that seek to educate the whole person and prioritize different identities besides a national identity.

 This is also why Christian universities can have a balanced view of their professional or civic self. I was talking to a student at a faith-based institution of higher education about his purpose. He said, “I guess I want an identity aside from work—there’s a famous quote—one military officer says to another, ‘At the end of the day I want to know that when I take this uniform off, there is something left of me and not just the uniform.’” When we take off the uniform of citizenship formation in higher education, there must be other more holistic purposes.

 I was reminded of this quote while watching the Korean film, *Ode to My Father*, in preparation for my visit. Near the opening the film contains a scene from the Korean War when the Chinese have invaded and the U.N. forces were evacuating Hungnam. On December 21, Captain Leonard LaRue of the SS Meredith Victory makes the decision to unload virtually all the weapons and supplies from his ship in order to evacuate as many refugees as possible. In a ship built to accommodate 12 passengers, he took aboard 14,000 Korean refugees and sailed 450 miles to Pusan with “no mine detection equipment, no doctor, no interpreter, no lighting in the holds, no heat, no sanitation facilities. The ship's only gun was the pistol in the captain's pocket.”[[52]](#endnote-52) It has been called “one of the greatest marine rescues in the history of the world.”[[53]](#endnote-53) Larue himself recalled, “I think of how such a small vessel was able to hold so many persons and surmount endless perils without harm to a soul…The clear, unmistakable message comes to me that on that Christmastide, in the bleak and bitter waters off the shores of Korea, God's own hand was at the helm of my ship."[[54]](#endnote-54) Certainly, LaRue thought about more than losing his equipment. When taking off his uniform, there was something there—a man made in God’s image who demonstrated Christ, even in war time, by sacrificing for others.

**Concluding Implications for the University**

 In sum then, Christian universities, despite secularizing pressures, continue to grow and expand around the world. One major challenge they face though is the political one. Christian universities currently only grow and thrive within liberal democracies as secular entities that are privately funded. Yet, the national system of education that sustains secular education also faces its own limitations. It cannot effectively answer the question of who we are. As a result, they approach students as simply treated as bundles of capacities, future professionals or citizens of earthly kingdoms. Christian universities have an opportunity to offer students good news. Although they are citizens, professionals and students with capacities, what holds these things together and helps us understand them even more is that we are made in God’s image, which is reflected most fully in Christ. When we teach, we do not simply teach students. As one Christian professor said, “My Christian tradition leads me to view my students as ‘divine image bearers’ who are worthy of my best efforts, patience, and faith in their ability to grasp and employ effectively what I am teaching them ‘for Christ and his kingdom.’”

 A few years ago I visited a relatively new Christian university in Europe and found them doing an amazing job of setting forth this vision by being creatively redemptive in how they sought to restore human dignity in society. The view that we are made in God’s image led them to teach students how to start ministries to those in prison, the homeless, and the handicapped. They gave institutional support to The Emmaus Center, a Branch of L’Arche that ministers to the mentally handicapped with various students often volunteering. Their understanding of Christ’s redemption and sacrificial love led students and graduates to start a military chaplaincy, a student chaplaincy, a prison chaplaincy, and orphanages. The contributed in incredible ways to civil society. Student creativity and initiative had been unleashed for redemptive purposes.[[55]](#endnote-55) They served their university, disciplines, communities and country not merely because it was a professional or civic expectation. They served because they had discovered an answer to the question of what it means to be a whole person. They knew that through the triune God. I hope that you will meet our current challenges by seeking to educate the whole person—students who are made in God’s image—an image we see most clearly in Jesus Christ.

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2. George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges, Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982), 287. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Walter Rüegg, “Themes,” in *A History of the University in Europe: Vol. III. Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1840-1945)*, ed. Walter Rüegg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
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5. Joel Carpenter, “Christian Universities and the Global Expansion of Higher Education” in Joel C. Carpenter, Perry L. Glanzer and Nick Lantinga, eds., *Christian Higher Education: A Global Reconnaissance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 16-17. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
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20. Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 381. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 67-81. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
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32. Genesis 1:27-28; Genesis 9:6; Romans 8:29; 2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15. Of course, theologians and Biblical scholars often note the paucity of references to this concept. Yet, the paucity of references do not undermine the Biblical point that in order to know God, you need to know the whole Biblical story. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. John Frederic Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 227. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Jon Amos Comenius, *Comenius’s Pampaedia or Universal Education*, trans. A.M.O. Dobbie (Dover: Buckland Publications, 1986), 19. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Perry L. Glanzer “Resurrecting Universities with Soul: Christian Higher Education in Post-Communist Europe,” in *Christian Higher Education: A Global Reconnaissance* (163-90), eds. Joel Carpenter, Perry L. Glanzer and Nick Lantinga. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Dierdre N. McCloskey, *Bourgeois Equality: How Ideas, Not Capital or Institutions, Enriched the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016) as quoted in Wall Street Journal, 21 May 2016, p. c1. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Brad Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 381. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. As Stanley Grenz observes, what it means to be understood in the image of God has been interpreted in three broad ways throughout Christian history: 1. Structurally, 2. Relationally, and as 3. Goal or Telos. Historically the Structural understanding of the *imago* *dei* as reflecting certain God-like qualities or capacities has focused on two in particular—reason and will. As will be seen from my discussion, I found this focus too narrow. In the Relational view, “image” is more of a verb than a noun. Humans have the ability to image God whenever they follow God’s will. As will be seen from my discussion, I think this approach can easily be combined with the structural view. In other words, it is only when humans properly image God using the capacities I identify do they bear God’s image. The third view sees the image as the goal to which humans are ultimately directed in the future. Again, I think this view can be combined with the other two. In other words, humans, using the capacities I described can image God at times, but they will never fully image God until the future eschaton. Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 141-82. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. The following three points are reworked from my chapter 2, “Learning to Be Human,” in Todd C. Ream & Perry L. Glanzer. *The Idea of a Christian College: Expanded for the Contemporary University* (Portland: Cascade, 2013). [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
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45. C.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (Redford, VA Wilder, 2008), 116. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. For more about this emphasis, see John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972). [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. The ability to demonstrate virtue that is God-imitating should not be reduced to the idea of moral agency (e.g., see Malcolm Jeeves, “The Emergence of Human Distinctiveness: The Story from Neuropsychology and Evolutionary Psychology” in *Rethinking Human Nature: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Malcolm Jeeves (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 196-98. While moral agency is certainly a part of this ability, what is discussed in this section is the ability to use one’s will to demonstrate to some degree a particular virtue in the way God would demonstrate it. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Perry L. Glanzer and Andrew J. Milson, “Legislating the Good: A Survey and Evaluation of Contemporary Character Education Legislation,” *Educational Policy* 20, 3 (2006): 525-50. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Perry L. Glanzer, *The Quest for Russia’s Soul:* *Evangelicals and Moral Education in Post-Communist Russia*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2002. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Gatesnotes, The Blog of Bill Gates, <https://www.gatesnotes.com/Big-History> [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Ng et al., “A Holistic Model of Student Development.” [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Myrna Oliver, “Leonard LaRue, 87; His Small Ship Rescued 14,000 Refugees,” *Los Angeles Times*, [October 22, 2001](http://articles.latimes.com/2001/oct/22). http://articles.latimes.com/2001/oct/22/local/me-60282 [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
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http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/11/nyregion/a-tale-of-salvation.html?pagewanted=1&\_r=0 [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
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55. Perry L. Glanzer, “The First Ukrainian Christian University: The Rewards and Challenges of Being an Eastern Anomaly,” *Christian Higher Education 11*, 5 (2012): 320-30. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)