



Disciplining Africa through Higher Education:

A proposal for an African Christian University



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The continent of Africa is the second largest and second most populous continent on Earth, after Asia, including 22.3% of the world's total land area.^{1,2} In terms of Africa's natural resources, it is the richest continent in the world, having 50 percent of the world's gold, most of the world's diamonds and chromium, 90 percent of the cobalt, 40 percent of the world's potential hydroelectric power, 65 percent of the manganese, and millions of acres of untilled farmland, as well as other natural resources.³

So, why does Africa remain the world's poorest and most broken continent in the world? Based on per capita gross domestic product, the world's 10 poorest countries are in Africa.⁴ The United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI) reveals that 21 of the 25 lowest developed countries are in Africa.⁵ As a rough estimate of the continent's educational standing, the latest measurements reveal that 14 of the 15 countries with the lowest literacy

rates are also in Africa.⁶ While it is difficult to measure a country's moral standing, the corruption perception index (CPI) attempts to statistically rank countries by their perceived levels of corruption as determined by expert assessments and opinion surveys. According to their 2010 results, 13 of the world's 25 most perceived corrupt nations are found in Africa.⁷

There has been extensive research and agreement that pouring financial aid into Africa as an approach to improve the impoverished nature of the continent is in fact having the opposite effect and is actually engendering a harmful, growth-stunting, state of dependence on international aid.^{8,9} So, what is the answer?

From the political perspective, the solution to Africa's development plight, corruption and poverty is believed to be through education, specifically higher education.¹⁰ The need here is great. According to The World Bank, "During the past decade, Africa has experienced the fastest increase in tertiary enrollment in the world, far outstripping economic growth and the capacity of government financing to keep pace."¹¹ Ex-president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, recently gave a speech calling for advances in higher education to address Africa's desperate need. He exclaimed, "The regenerated African university must be the principal driver of that intellectual awakening, which awakening will empower the peoples of Africa to remake our societies and our continent."¹²



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Recovering a Biblical Worldview

Formulating a holistic, transformative, Christian higher education that fully acknowledges the preeminent need for the Holy Spirit's work of redemption in Christ can be aided by an intimate understanding of the contextual worldviews in which such an educational environment will exist. As with any generalized worldview, the African worldview is exceedingly complex. It may encompass African traditional religious and colonial influences combined with Western, modern and postmodern influences. The African worldview also incorporates a variety of syncretistic "christian" influences that also require consideration.

Arthur Holmes uses the concept of gnostic dualism¹⁵ to describe what some African theologians have pointed out as a misconception in the way many Western missionaries have presented the Gospel in the African context. For example, in the words of Professor Stuart Fowler of Potchefstroom (now North-West) University in South Africa, "The most disastrous weakness of all the proclamation of the Gospel in Africa was the secularisation of public life and the parallel privatisation of religious faith.... That so many Christians have been persuaded to accept this dualism as natural, right and proper must be one of the greatest success stories in the never ending campaign of the father of lies to blunt the edge of the witness of the Gospel in this world."¹⁶ This destructive influence is echoed by Professor Bennie J. van der Walt, who states that,

While many African Christians still look for the enemy outside themselves in, for instance, witchcraft, demons and other religions, a secular worldview has infiltrated deep into their hearts and lives. Added to this is a second irony, namely that this secular worldview did not originate from outside Christianity. It slowly developed from inside Christianity itself, being the direct result of a dualistic Christian worldview in which the "natural" realm was separated from the influence of the "sacred" realm. Secularism's influence has become so pervasive on our continent that we don't even recognize it.¹⁷

This dualism is set in contrast to the traditional African religious perspective where, "Nature, man and the spirit world constitute one fluid coherent unit."¹⁸

African theologian Dr. Van der Poll summarizes well the result of this dualism:

Because the Gospel was not brought to the people as a new totally encompassing life view, which would take the place of an equally comprehensive traditional life view, the deepest core of the African culture remains untouched.... The convert in Africa did not see the Gospel as sufficient for his whole life and especially for the deepest issues of life. For that reason, we find the phenomenon across Africa today that Christians in time of existential needs and crises (such as danger, illness and death) fall back

on their traditional beliefs and life views. It is precisely an area where the Gospel should have most relevance, yet the Gospel does not mean much in practical terms for the African.¹⁹

Considering aspects of all of these influences, the collage of such an African worldview must be set in light of a Biblical worldview to inform and guide an approach to education which might confront false, depraved thinking with truth and divine thinking. If such worldview influences and Western secularized aid and involvement in conforming Africa's future direction are to be discerned, there must be a standard by which such influences can be interpreted. The attainment of such a standard is one valuable outcome of a higher education shaped by a Biblical worldview. African Christian University seeks to formulate such a presuppositional Christian education that fully embraces dependence on God's grace through Christ in the transformation of the African mind to the glory of the Creator with an indigenous sensitivity, maintaining African distinctives for the betterment of God's kingdom.

A Proposed Vehicle through Christian Higher Education

The holistic nature of African culture, especially at this time of declared African Renaissance,²² much like the European Renaissance of the 15th-16th centuries, offers fertile ground for the inauguration of an African Christian Reformation as described by Professor B. J. van der Walt, "We cannot ignore the fact that perhaps the dominant type of Christianity on our continent is of an escapist and pietist nature. ... without any relevance to the burning issues of Africa. However, *if we want a new Africa, we need a new type of Christianity*.... Our eyes have to be opened, our vision broadened, we have to know how to serve God in every part of our existence." [emphasis by B. J. van der Walt]²³

Based on these objectives, the presuppositional, African Christian University will include the following:

- (1) In a preparatory year, students, church and unchurched, interact with the full narrative of God's plan for man's redemption in Christ from the whole Scripture. The Gospel message is reinforced through preparatory work in communications and critical thinking to assure student preparation for the rigors of undergraduate-level coursework. Discipleship begins through a student labor program where existing worldviews are routinely confronted through practical application of God's Word to daily living in relationships, hardships and successes, thoroughly exposing students to a Biblical worldview.
- (2) Undergraduate courses are composed to aid maturation in the understanding and handling of the word of right-



teousness nurtured through biblical studies and theological preparation. Biblical discernment is constantly practiced through the study and critique of classical through contemporary literature across all disciplines of the humanities and sciences to sharpen the student's discernment between good and evil, while developing their skills in the classical trivium of grammar, logic and rhetoric.

(3) A student labor program incorporating all aspects of industrial arts, trades, crafts, businesses, technology and agriculture not only develops a self-sufficient, financially viable institute while training students in multiple life-skills, but more importantly, is the vehicle through which discipleship and mentoring can most effectively occur. It is here that renewal of the mind and moral transformation to Biblical standards is practiced. The discipler demonstrates living out faith for the student in practical application to one's whole life through God-glorifying labor.

(4) All aspects of education will focus on benevolent application to address existing challenges in Africa. From service programs to student-team thesis projects, every student applies their talents and learning to group projects that facilitate the demonstration of Christ's love in concern for the needs of others—eternal, firstly, and temporal, correspondingly. Such projects afford opportunity for an honor's degree awarded to student-team benevolence projects considered worthy to seed through incorporation of necessary outside support structures, allowing students to initiate new approaches to meeting existing challenges in the African context.

The entire purpose of ACU is securing the Gospel as the foundation of every aspect of student learning and development. The re-uniting of intellectual labor along with the moral impact of experiencing the dig-

nity and beauty of "intelligent labor,"²⁴ into a higher education environment is anticipated to uniquely address African challenges through the outreaching, benevolent love of our heavenly Father working through Christ in His ambassadors.

Conclusions

This represents the purpose and vision of African Christian University in Lusaka, Zambia. The securing authority and reliance upon the guiding Word of God by the Reformed Baptist Church Association of Zambia is tasked to assure that the university maintains the intended course in serving Christ through the church in expanding the kingdom with servants dedicated to glorifying God with their whole lives offered to Him as living sacrifices. We trust that God may utilize such an institute to prepare ambassadors of Christ that can serve in their local churches and occupy positions at all levels throughout Africa for the proclamation of the gospel through their lives in both word and deed. African Christian University seeks to impart the life-transforming wisdom proclaimed by John Calvin in the opening page of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "True and sound wisdom consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves." May such knowledge reveal our desperate need for redemption, and exalt God's gracious response in His provision through His Son, Jesus Christ. May such understanding provide the basis for a true transformation of Africa to the glory of God alone. ¶

References and the entirety of this article can be found online at www.missionfrontiers.org. For more information on this project go to www.acu-zambia.com



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