

CHRIST-CENTERED HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIES IN AFRICA

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Introduction: Christ-Centered Higher Education Strategies in Africa

African churches recognize the need for education ministries today. They are developing hundreds of primary and secondary schools, theological seminaries as well as colleges and universities.¹ In fact in the recent quarter of a century, dozens of Christian Universities have been founded in Africa and it is evident that there is need for strategies for our Christian educational institutions in Africa. However, these new communities of learning are operating in a pervasively secular academic environment.² Within this environment, Christian universities face an atmosphere of tremendous pressure for teaching and learning to be simply the transferring of knowledge and skills for the African workplace. And, this is within a context where funds are often scarce and there is great need for knowledgeable workers. Thus, in 2015 an edition of the *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* was committed to the improvement of education provided by churches and Christian educational institutions.³ Some of its articles looked at the negative influence of public universities on Christian educational institutions. Moreover, there is a fundamental concern for social justice to equip as many as possible of the people of Africa to prosper. However, the Bible's vision of prospering includes more than the workplace, the workforce and the creation of financial wealth. A Christ-centered strategy for higher education in Africa must be a holistic approach to higher education with a whole-life vision. Furthermore, a Christ-centered strategy for intuitions of higher education in Africa must impact the constituent African societies, shaping them better holistically through education that gives authoritative place to Jesus Christ as well as the biblical understanding of the world and the human condition. Thus, a Christ-centered strategy for higher education must consider a setting for the place and need for education "in" and "for" the Church today. This strategy must be one which is designed to minister "in" and "to" today's world. It is within this background and setting that this paper advocates some strategies for those higher education institutions in Africa that are dependent on the teaching-learning environment being Christ-centered.

A Strategy Giving Authoritative Place to Jesus Christ

Christ-centered education is not new to Africa as was pointed out by Mary Mwangi in her examination of Augustine's educational views and practices. In fact, the educational theories advocated by Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries continued to influence Christian education for many centuries, and much can still be applied today. As Mwangi points out, Christian discipleship necessitates members believing on and receiving Christ as well as

¹ Joel Carpenter, Perry L. Glanzer, Nicholas S. Lantinga, editors. *Christian Higher Education: A Global Reconnaissance*. (W. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2014), 20.

² *Ibid.*, 16-17.

³ Andrew G. Wildsmith, editor. "Improving Christian Education in Churches and Colleges" in *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 34.2.2015 (Nairobi: Scott Christian University, 2015), 89.

investing “the necessary time and training to help them break with their negative pasts”.⁴ Thus, Christian faithfulness to Christ is essential. Is it possible that the most fundamental threat facing the Christ-centered university is Christians losing their way and substituting other loves such as institutional survival, academic prestige, love for knowledge, or even love for humanity, for that which should be their first love: God, His truth, and His reign? Joseph Bangura’s observations suggest this may be the case when he cites the longing of the churches for programs “that train the minds/hearts, hands/feet and eyes/feelings...” to “radiate the love of Christ in a rapidly changing context plagued by numerous problems”.⁵ What does history teach about sustaining academic institutions designed to further the love of God with one’s mind, desires, and actions? When Nicholas Wolterstorff wrote on *Educating for Shalom*, he spoke of Christian learning as “faithful learning”:

Learning faithful to faith in the triune God,
Learning faithful to the Christian community and its tradition,
Learning faithful to the Christian scriptures.⁶

In addition Wolterstorff points out: “it’s the learning whereby one is formed by Christian faith, by the Christian community and its tradition, and by the Christian scriptures.”⁷ However, it seems to be difficult to maintain these priorities over the years. Like unfaithfulness in marriage, it is possible for academic unfaithfulness to become pervasive and ultimately fatal. To sustain Christ-centered priorities, it is necessary to think broadly about Christian education. And, this needs to be done in the light of the Christian Church’s story as well as how the Church’s realm of work has grown with it. God’s great encompassing grace is necessary for Christian educational institutions to persistently resist the threat of unfaithfulness. Communities of faithful believers are needed to uphold these institutions in prayer, supporting them with students and funds, as well as holding them accountable to their original Christ-centered aims and purposes. Sustaining the redemptive work of Christian institutions of higher education requires dynamic linking to Christian communities. This is because Christian scholars are first and foremost followers of Christ and servants of God. As Carpenter pointed out: “They are secondarily and contingently servants to their professions, nations, or any other masters.”⁸

Ultimately, the role of Christian higher education in Africa is to make Christ-like disciples in the nations. As Phillip Jenkins’ book, *The Next Christendom* argues, the global shift of the “center of gravity” of Christianity to the global south will be changed by immersion into the prevailing cultures of those host societies. He argues that while one may know what the numbers will look

⁴ Mary Mwangi. “Augustine’s Educational Theories and Practices and Church Education Today” in *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 34.2.2015 (Nairobi: Scott Christian University, 2015), 103.

⁵ Joseph Bosco Bangura. “Tracking the Maze of Theological Education in Sierra Leone: An Evangelical Perspective” in *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 34.2.2015 (Nairobi: Scott Christian University, 2015), 123.

⁶ Nicholas Wolterstorff. *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Company, 2004), 256.

⁷ Ibid, 257.

⁸ Carpenter, Glanzer and Lantinga, Ibid, 303-305.

like, it is more difficult to know what kind of Christianity it will be. He cites the cultish, syncretistic, “prosperity gospel”, “signs and wonders” varieties of Christianity that are found in Africa and elsewhere as evidence of this.⁹ With these drifts in mind, among the purposes of Christ-centered higher education in Africa must be ensuring that the Christianity of Africa remains faithful to the Christ who brought it about. Christ-centered institutions must produce graduates who understand and are committed to evangelical Christianity.¹⁰

A Strategy Aiming for a Christ-centered Teaching-learning Environment

When churches enter into education ministries they are dependent on the teaching-learning environment being Christ-centered. Africa Nazarene University is an example of such a Christ-centered institution of higher education. A new door for Christ-centered education opened when the Kenyan government awarded the University Charter on the eighth of October 2002. The university was granted the opportunity to significantly impact this twenty-first century Africa. But, the awarding of this charter was a long procedure. At an Africa regional church conference in Mbabane, Swaziland in December 1983, Christ-centered university level education was merely a notion being discussed by members of an education committee. However, the members left the conference praying that God would bring about their dream of equipping African pastors and lay church leaders at the university level. At that time, African countries were not granting university charters to church related institutions. However, Zimbabwe and Kenya provided new direction. So, within the framework of the Kenyan Universities Act of 1985, educational leaders of the proposed new university spent numerous hours formulating the required official papers and syllabi to prepare the way for an Interim Letter of Authority. The Kenyan Commission of Higher Education granted this permission in 1993. Hundreds of local and international volunteers also contributed their resources and expertise to make it possible for classes to begin the following year. However, the Charter, full academic approval for this Christ-centered institution, was not granted for another nine years.¹¹

It is essential for institutions desiring a Christ-centered teaching-learning environment to clearly establish such in the functions elaborated in their charters. For example, the Africa Nazarene University Charter provides for the establishment of “seminaries”. It also notes the university will participate in “stimulating and encouraging continued ethical, intellectual and cultural development in Africa”. In addition, it will “train and produce teachers for various educational institutions and by life examples uplift the general quality of life of students and those whom

⁹ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6-8.

¹⁰ Joseph Kisoi and Daryll Stanton, “A Philosophy of Education for the Church of the Nazarene in the Africa Region,” *Didache: Faithful Teaching* 12:2 (Winter 2013 - web version), 2. <http://didache.nazarene.org>

¹¹ Daryll Stanton. “The Hope of Holiness Education” in *Africa Speaks: An Anthology of the Africa Nazarene Theology Conference 2003*, Linda Braaten, editor, (Church of the Nazarene: Africa Region, 2004), 203.

they will serve”. Furthermore, the university will “create and maintain an environment conducive to mental, spiritual, physical and social development”.¹²

Such values should also be outlined in the charter’s aims and objectives. Therefore, the two aims of the Africa Nazarene University Charter include:

- (1) teaching, challenging and inspiring students to seize the opportunities while in the University in preparation for effective Christian living; and
- (2) inculcating students with the value and dignity of human life and the need for providing an environment in which people can be redeemed and enriched spiritually, intellectually and physically.¹³

These aims are further elaborated in the Africa Nazarene University Charter’s objectives to:

- (1) develop students for effective Christian living;
- (2) develop a community of scholars;
- (3) develop students for leadership service;
- (4) develop in students an appreciation of African culture and heritage;
- (5) equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills required in addressing the contemporary issues of both the Christian faith and sound government; and
- (6) instill in the students values that will help them stand up against discrimination on the basis of race, denomination, gender or irrelevant handicaps.¹⁴

With the Christ-centered teaching-learning environment well-established in the charter, accountability measures can also be set up to further guide faculty, staff and students in remaining “wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil” because it is God’s desire for His people to be holy and blameless. For Christians who are “attached” to Christ and “detached” from the secular there is victorious living.

A Strategy for Overcoming Scarcity of Funds

Christian universities operate in a context where funds are often scarce and there is great need for knowledgeable workers. It is also imperative to understand that running a credible academic institution is extremely expensive and demanding in many other respects. Hence, there is the need for financial and other forms of support in order to maintain intellectual rigor.¹⁵ Benjamin Musyoka suggested five areas of focus to consider when institutions of Christian higher education strive for financial sustainability. His recommendations include:

¹² Government of Kenya. Legal Notice No. 166 “Charter for Africa Nazarene University” in the *Kenya Gazette* Supplement No. 99 (Legislative Supplement No. 64) 8th October 2002, p. 1289.

¹³ Government of Kenya, *Ibid*, 1288.

¹⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵ J. L. Van Der Walt. “The Challenges of Christian Higher Education on the African Continent in the Twenty-First Century” in *Christian Higher Education*, (2002, Vol. 1. Issue 2), 195-227.

aggressive student recruitment,
 attaining the lowest possible operational expenditures,
 emphasizing customer driven programs,
 employing professional fund developers, and
 strategic alliances which can allow numerous shared academic resources.¹⁶

Nevertheless, there is also an apparent need for churches and for financially stable families to reconsider the use of their funds. When Joe Kapolyo commented on the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-26:1), he emphasized the two-fold accountability of Christians at the final judgment:

- (1) belief and trust in Jesus, and
- (2) appropriate response to those Jesus referred to as “these brothers of mine”.¹⁷

By investing in Christ-centered education, Christians are contributing to both of these. Christ-centered institutions of higher education are good settings for youth to both respond to the Gospel and to be shaped into Christlike disciples. Then, as they share the love of Christ, they are able to recognize the needs of others who Jesus brings into their lives as “these brothers of mine”. Considering this, financially stable families need to (1) prioritize the value of the educational investment in their sons and daughters to enable them to study in Christian institutions as well as (2) view this also as part of their contribution to the sustainability of the same institutions. Also, today’s church leaders need to address the Church’s willingness and preparedness to invest in Christ-centered education ministries. Basic to this is the level of local church members’ commitment to tithing as a foundational giving plan.

However in addition, one must answer the question of how prepared is the Church in Africa to be God’s hands in developing both the hearts and minds of contemporary students in Christ-centered higher education institutions? Some examples of the levels of preparedness may be observed by examining the financial affairs of churches. For instance, is there a strong “compassionate” ministry element in the church budget? The word “compassion” has the Latin origin “compati” which carries the meaning “suffer with.”¹⁸ One especially needs to ask, do the churches endorse meeting the needs of their promising students who are financially less fortunate? As Henri Nouwen wrote: “Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish.”¹⁹ Of course, it must not be

¹⁶ Benjamin M. Musyoka. “Financial Sustainability in Christian Higher Education in Africa” in *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 34.2.2015 (Nairobi: Scott Christian University, 2015), 127.

¹⁷ Joe Kapolyo. “Commentary on Matthew” in *Africa Bible Commentary*, Tokunboh Adeyemo, General Editor. (Nairobi: HippoBooks, 2006), 1190.

¹⁸ “Compassion” in *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (Kindle Locations 166052-166053). Oxford University Press. Kindle Edition. (2010-04-01).

¹⁹ Henri Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill and Douglas A. Morrison. *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, (Image Books Doubleday: New York), 1982, 3-4.

simply assumed that Christian families and the churches they are part of will casually put their trust in any educational institution that labels itself as Christ-centered.

As Musyoka pointed out, the Christian institution must overcome the perceived disconnect with the mission of the Church. Prayer, Bible reading, chapel attendance and a generally shielding environment may not be enough. A true integration of faith and learning must be evidenced in the institution. Such integration requires the Christian institution to approach the curricula differently than non-Christian institutions.²⁰ In 2000 Lambert, Truesdale and Vail used the Church of the Nazarene educational system as their case study in a paper they presented on “The Future of Religious Colleges” at a conference sponsored by the Programme on Education Policy and Governance of Harvard University. Some of their comments are helpful here. They state:

Put simply, the colleges and universities of the Church of the Nazarene are part of the soul of the Church of the Nazarene. Just as they have been shaped by the denomination, they have in turn shaped it. The denomination and its educational institutions are actually unthinkable apart from each other. They have so extensively educated the lay and clergy leadership of the denomination that when thinking of himself or herself as a Nazarene, he or she usually includes his or her educational experience in the mix.²¹

Lambert, Truesdale and Vail also observed that in the mid-1990s Nazarene educators began to explore formally the benefits of collaboration. They voiced several suppositions that provide a foundation for collaborative efforts among their particular institutions. These include:

1. We share a theological tradition, core values, and a common mission.
2. To collaborate formally, institutions need not sacrifice autonomy or individuality.
3. We can learn from other collaborative efforts already in place (i.e., state university systems, Jesuit education, and health care alliances).
4. Theological education, and preparation for Christian ministry—both clergy and lay—is a responsibility of all Nazarene institutions of higher learning.
5. Current and developing technology makes it possible to network in new ways.
6. There are economies of scale that can be achieved only through collaboration.
7. The quality of various programmes can be enhanced through networking.²²

*A Strategy Resisting Pressure to Simply Help Students
Gain Knowledge and Workplace Skills*

On one hand Christian universities operate in an atmosphere of tremendous pressure to reduce education to be gaining knowledge and skills for the African workplace. While gaining knowledge is important, in addition to an intellectual function of knowing and transferring knowledge, Christ-centered education must be rooted in its biblical and theological commitments

²⁰ Musyoka, *Ibid*, 161.

²¹ Jerry D. Lambert., Al Truesdale and Michael W. Vail. Conference Presentation for “The Future of Religious Colleges” sponsored by Programme on Education Policy and Governance Harvard University, October 2000.

²² *Ibid*.

and accountable to each institution's stated mission. As Kisoi pointed out, "the purpose of knowledge is to give learners the opportunity to fulfill their God-given potential in the career of their choosing, and teachers the opportunity to practice their God-given ministry of teaching, thus, building up the church in wisdom and in faith." Furthermore, "this must involve equipping the learner with necessary skills, which enable him or her to serve God and the community, pursue truth, and experience transformation of the mind."²³

On the other hand Christ-centered higher education is confronted by "anti-intellectualism" in some churches today. Some leaders in African churches do not appreciate the need for higher education. As David W. Vikner observed: "Rather than seeing Christian colleges and universities as partners and settings where the Christian faith can be nurtured, these colleges and universities are considered to be uninvolved in proclaiming the faith and are often more likely considered to be antithetical to the faith."²⁴ Therefore, in addition to gaining knowledge and workplace skills, Christ-centered higher education needs to guide its students in developing a consistent and coherent Christian understanding of the social and individual life. Furthermore nurturing students must discover ways to express this in service to the Church and world.

A Strategy Promoting Concern for Social Justice

It is hard to over-emphasize the importance of education to Africans, since as Mugambi Nandi points, one of the three great challenges of this region is ignorance.²⁵ Today's Christian community must recognize the compassionate lifestyle that is demanded by God and that was exhibited in the life of Jesus Christ in Scripture. This lifestyle requires Christians to care for those who are less fortunate, and in doing so much suffering around Christian communities would be alleviated. Christ-centered education can play a vital role in overcoming the danger of neglecting this.²⁶ Even though Christian universities operate in a context where there is great need for knowledgeable workers, numerous faculty, staff and students in Christ-centered higher education institutions are also members of the community of believers, and must do more than merely come together in their centers of spiritual activity. Both Christian individuals and local congregations must follow Jesus' admonition to love others the way they love themselves. In order for Christians to be Christ's faithful witnesses, they need to also be His relief providers. As Matthew 9:35 reveals Jesus' ministry included going "through all the towns and villages teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease

²³ Kisoi and Stanton, Ibid, 2.

²⁴ David W. Vikner. "Challenges to Christian Higher Education in Asia" in *Christian Higher Education*, 2003 (Vol. 2, Issue 1), 1-13.

²⁵ Mugambi Nandi. "Fighting Ignorance, Disease and Poverty Fifty Years on" (27 October 2013) in the *Standard Digital* <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2000096316/fighting-ignorance-disease-and-poverty-fifty-years-on> (accessed 27 February 2017).

²⁶ Kisoi and Stanton, Ibid, 2.

and sickness.” When Jesus saw crowds of harassed and helpless people, He felt compassion for them.²⁷

When Christ-centered institutions offer common subjects as sociology, psychology and development of society in addition to Bible survey, Christian beliefs and Christian ethics, students are enabled to move out of the classrooms to reveal holiness in all the practices of their lives. Following Peter’s admonition, they are: “...on (their) guard so that (they) may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from (their) secure position, but, (growing) in grace and knowledge of (their) Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:17-18). Thomas Oden offered some good insights when he probed both the faith that becomes active in love, and the grace by which faith lives. These are inseparable. For Oden, good works are “born in grace” and live “breathing the air of grace”. A lifestyle of good works is a very practical application of the grace-filled life of Christians. Since the heart of the Gospel is God’s good work for us, a proper understanding of the Gospel elicits compassionate action of Christians.²⁸ H. Orton Wiley preferred a simple definition of regeneration, as “the communication of life by the Spirit, to a soul dead in trespasses and sins.” However, his expansion of this definition is significant to this study: “The change in regeneration consists in the recovery of the moral image of God upon the heart; that is to say, so as to love Him supremely and serve Him ultimately as our highest end, and to delight in Him superlatively as our chief good...”. As Wiley affirmed: “It is all effected by the word of truth, or the gospel of salvation, gaining an entrance into the mind, through divine teaching, so as to possess the understanding, subdue the will, and reign in the affections.”²⁹ As Wiley stressed, in keeping with Ephesians 3:10, “a holy heart is the fundamental condition for holy living”.³⁰ Thus, the new birth makes the way for believers to live holy lives. “The outward or ethical life of the Christian takes its character from the quality of the inner or spiritual life. The life of holiness is, therefore, simply the outreachings of a holy heart.”³¹

The graduates of Christ-centered institutions must move out of the classrooms and live more effectively as God’s light and salt in reaching and in a well-rounded way ministering to those around them. When Dean Flemming wrote about the boundaries between the church and the world as well as the Church’s missional involvement in the world, he observed of the Gospel of John: “To Christians who are under pressure from the surrounding culture, it sends out the strongest call in the Gospels for separation from the dark world.”³² John identifies the Holy Spirit as the “Paraclete”, and reveals Him as the Church’s “Teacher” (14:26) and “Guide” (16:12-13), enabling Christians to carry out their mission. As Parsons advised the one who chooses to guard his/ her heart from the fallen world, he/ she “will determine the road” of life. Thus Parsons

²⁷ Bible; all quotes from the *New International Version of the Bible* unless otherwise indicated.

²⁸ Oden, Thomas C. *The Good Works Reader*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 6.

²⁹ H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, Volume 2. Beacon Hill Press, Kindle Edition, 2011-01-01), Kindle Locations 7226-7242.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, Kindle Location 27.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Kindle Locations 63-64.

³² Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 262-264.

concluded: “If you do not care to keep your heart soft, you will become cynical, weary, and more and more selfish. Your way will be lonely, suspicious, and dangerous.” In contrast “if, however, you keep yourself from the hardness of unbelief, you will experience compassion, encouragement, and the joy of loving others.”³³

A Strategy Equipping the People of Africa to Prosper

A Christ-centered institution also needs to reflect the features of an education that will help Africa. Africa needs a population that is as highly educated as possible, meaning that the drive to educate the multitudes cannot be ignored. Quality is vital and cannot be overlooked in one’s haste to educate as many as possible and as quickly as possible.³⁴ Christian universities operate in a context where there is great need to equip the people of Africa to prosper. In fact, today’s needs require the Christian community to persistently push for the elimination of the indignity of human suffering. A Christ-centered teaching and learning environment must challenge learners to determine contextual solutions in order to respond to the human suffering around them.

When Wesley D. Tracy wrote about “Finding My Places of Service” he drew on the story in Matthew 25:14-30 where he gleaned “that whatever resources we have received from God cannot be hidden but must be used to accomplish the Master’s purpose.” Thus, he affirms: “We are partners with Christ to promote His righteousness and justice throughout creation.” With this mindset, the global Christian mission is threefold:

1. Witnessing the Gospel: We are called to preach and model the good news to all people.
2. Charity: We are called to offer relief to the needy and oppressed.
3. Social Action: We are called to hold social structures accountable to Kingdom principles.³⁵

Regarding this mindset, Philip Thuo argues from the perspective of church leader and university lecturer in community development. He points out that a broad redemption of the world is required. This required Christians’ involvement in relief, rehabilitation and development. He has noticed that community developers are interested in the significance “empowerment”. This is particularly true when it is compared to “relief”. Relief is not adequate. Empowerment is necessary for society’s poor to share in societal benefits and responsibilities. When the poor are empowered, they are liberated and gain autonomy. They no longer find it necessary to depend on

³³ John J. Parsons, “Keep Thy Heart”
http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Meditations/Keep_thy_heart.html
 (Accessed 29 November 2015).

³⁴ Kiso and Stanton, *Ibid*, 1.

³⁵ Wesley D. Tracy, et al. *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and the Holy Life*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 233.

the charity and relief of donors. Furthermore, through empowerment the poor gain a sense of self-management.³⁶

This is comparable to what Jesus did in Luke 5:17-24 where He helped a suffering person to be empowered. In this healing event a paralytic was carried on a mat by his friends and laid before Jesus. When they could not enter the house in the normal way because of the crowd, they chose to lower their lame friend through the ceiling and among the crowd in front of Jesus. In Thuo's eyes, human suffering is scandalous in countries like Kenya. There are large groups of Christian believers in Kenya who should be expected to obey the biblical demands in scriptures like John 13:34 (love one another) and Galatians 6:10 (do good to all, especially believers). Christlike love for others and intention for helping the poor can be put fully into action and alleviate human suffering in places like Kenya.³⁷ Thus Thuo advocates, helping poor people build sustainable incomes. This can be done through churches and other Christian organizations when they identify with the poor around them, and thereafter help them to establish income generating opportunities, such as small business entrepreneurs. Perhaps arrangements could also be made to provide them credit and financial training. Some might raise objections that many churches in Kenya are themselves poor. However, this is only partially accurate because some Kenyan denominations are already working with commercial microfinances to alleviate poverty. Examples include the Presbyterian Jitegemea Microfinance Institution as well as the Ufanisi Na Ukristo of the Anglican Church in Kenya.³⁸ Likewise when churches partner with Christ-centered educational institutions by providing scholarships for worthy but financially impoverished students, this becomes an avenue of ministry which helps to fulfill this strategy.

A Strategy Utilizing the Bible's Vision of Prospering

Christians today need to be reminded that God works through human limitations and that Christians must practice empathy with those who suffer. Christ-centered institutions must foster a biblical view of prosperity that promotes the spiritual and material well-being of others, especially fellow believers in Christ. The Bible's vision of prospering includes more than the workplace, the workforce or the creation of wealth. Christ-centered educational institutions join hands with local churches in guiding people to explore ways for the Bible to form and transform them into faithful disciples. This might take place in formal Bible oriented classes or in informal Bible study groups. Nevertheless, faithful readers need to come together to struggle over the meaning of biblical texts with an openness:

³⁶ Philip Thuo and Daryll Stanton. "Strengthening Christian Responses to Human Suffering" a paper presented at the 2015 Africa Society of Evangelical Theology Conference on Christianity and Suffering held at the International Leadership University in Nairobi, Kenya, p. 6.

³⁷ Ibid, 8.

³⁸ Ibid, 10.

to hear from the Holy Spirit,
to receive contemporary understanding of Scripture,
to respond to it,
and to serve.³⁹

Dick Towner wrote about the importance of church leaders and pastors in preaching and teaching a biblical perspective on Christians' relationship to money, underscoring several explanations:

- First, money is a spiritual issue... Money is, for many *the* rival god.
- Second, money is powerful... if we don't control it, it will control us, and Money-rather than discernment of God's leading-will make the important decisions in our lives...
- Third, money is hard to teach... many pastors and church leaders are challenged and conflicted when it comes to teaching and preaching about it.
- Fourth, money is a spiritual battlefield... being waged between God and the rival god of materialism—money.
- Fifth, the Church offers clarity about money... The financial and spiritual well-being of many people is at stake.⁴⁰

Therefore today's leaders need to address the Church's preparedness. How prepared is the Church in Africa to be God's hands? Some examples of the levels of preparedness may be observed by examining the financial affairs of churches. Are the churches committed to tithing as a foundational giving plan? Also, how do the churches promote meeting the needs of others who are less fortunate? Is there a strong "compassionate" ministry element in the church budget? Do the local churches contribute to Christ-centered educational institutions as part of their strategy of enabling graduates to pursue a biblical view of prosperity? Christians helping those facing human suffering affirms Jesus' promise in John 14:12 "I tell you the truth anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." Christians are to pattern themselves after Jesus. As He identified himself with the "least", can Christians today also voluntarily become childlike, powerless, dependent, obedient to leadership and to the law? Further, how are today's Christians dealing with the suffering, hungering, thirsting, human limitations, and even death around them? Christian love requires one to reach out through works of mercy and with a gentle touch, often to the smallest, the least, the lowliest of persons, especially those least able to protect themselves.

A Strategy with a Holistic Approach to Higher Education with a Whole-life Vision

While it may be true that African Christian Universities face numerous challenges, it is also true that they have unique scenarios when providing well-rounded approaches in higher education. Christian education is that ministry of the Church by which it seeks to communicate its faith and

³⁹Mark A. Maddix and Richard P. Thompson, "Scripture as Formation: The Role of Scripture in Christian Formation," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 46, no.12 (Fall 2012): 145.

⁴⁰Dick Towner. "Talk About Money in Your Church: Why and How to Bring up This Important Topic." <http://www.buildingchurchleaders.com/multimedia/articles/070322.html>, (accessed 28 December 2013).

nurture Christlike disciples. For example in the Church of the Nazarene, the ministry of Christian education is expressed through local church education and higher education, including clergy education. The International Board of Education (IBOE) serves the Church of the Nazarene system of higher education in advocacy, support, evaluation and networking. This system of educational institutions includes more than 50 colleges, universities, and seminaries; and it is resolute in shaping Christlike disciples and servant-leaders for lifelong service and worldwide impact. These institutions are found in 35 countries on six continents and serve richly diverse student bodies by offering significant prospects for more than 51,000 students who select Nazarene institutions as their preferred choice.⁴¹ The International Board of Education and the institutions under its authority are dedicated to education of the whole person. This requires a holistic approach to the teaching-learning process which includes: content, competency, character and context. These 4-Cs provide the critical areas of outcomes to evaluate teaching and learning. Faculty labor within their contexts to accomplish three well-known educational objectives in education, to produce learning transformation in the areas of:

1. Knowledge, what one knows - the cognitive domain,
2. Attitude, what one feels - the affective domain, and
3. Behavior, what one does - the psychomotor domain.⁴²

Frequently these are reduced to the three words: “know”, “be”, and “do”, to indicate what the learner should **know**, the kind of person the learner should **be**, and what the learner should be able to **do**. Such Christ-centered education guides learners into practical and communal holiness. This education needs to also focus on transforming culture to create a more just society. Christian counselors and educators nurture and help shape the worldviews that appropriately frame the temperament and practice of fellow believers’ lives. For example, Christ-centered education desires students to **know** more about the God of the Bible. It wants them to **appreciate** the Christ-like lifestyle. And, it desires them to **respond** behaviorally by applying Christian principles in their life situations. Therefore, Christ-centered educators create a climate for change by:

- Loving their students,
- Presenting the plan of salvation to their students,
- Making the Bible the (main) textbook for the class,
- Praying a lot for themselves and their students,
- Leading the “evangelized” to become evangelists, and
- Challenging their students with stewardship.⁴³

Likewise, concern for empowering the poor stands within the evangelical tradition and should lead to efforts to ensure that education is available to even the poorest in society. Courses should

⁴¹ International Board of Education. “2016 Enrollment Statistics”
<http://www.nazarene.org/resource/statistics> (accessed 23 February 2017).

⁴² Stanton, Daryll Gordon. *Alternative Models of Theological Education IODL Study Manual*, (Nairobi: Africa Nazarene University, 2010), 25-26.

⁴³ Stanton, *Alternative Models*, 26-27.

not only explore how Christian faith affects a particular profession, but also how practicing that profession can promote Christian values and help to bring about societal transformation.

A Strategy Impacting Constituent African Societies

Christ-centered universities in Africa must impact their constituent societies. As they endeavor to educate students to love God in a holistic way, they provide a vibrant witness. Requiring a common general education as core curriculum, they are able to focus on educating students to be fully human. According to Carpenter, this would mean that the moral education provided in such classes should go beyond providing technical knowledge of ethical theory. In fact it must also go beyond basic moral proficiencies in ethical thinking. It should “set forth and seek to incarnate a holistic vision of human flourishing grounded in Christian values.”⁴⁴

Rev. Ezekiel Kigathi visited Africa Nazarene University and spoke in the chapel, encouraging the faculty and students to maintain hope in spite of desperate situations in today’s society, it is possible. As John 10:10 shows, the devil came to steal, kill, and destroy; but Jesus came to give life. He offers to give it abundantly. Nevertheless, He expects the participation of His followers. Kigathi proposed five areas where Christ-centered institutions need to assist African youth to guide them to become all that God desires of them. These include:

- (1) helping motivate our youth to lives of success, believing in themselves - in their hearts - that they can excel through God’s grace;
- (2) helping our youth change their outlooks from that of their secular peers, and get them ready for God’s best possibilities for their lives;
- (3) helping them change their language, getting rid of negative words, envisioning that things can be better;
- (4) challenging our youth to be willing to begin where they are since things don't simply work out automatically; and,
- (5) helping our youth to see that blessings also come by age.⁴⁵

Thus, time is required. Although this may be hard, it can be done. They will have to exercise patience. Christ-centered universities usually offer majors that meet particular needs in society. Often the majors are professional degree programs that incorporate broader perspectives, including the Christian faith. But, student life goes beyond the classroom. Much of the integration of students’ undergraduate learning happens outside the classroom and in students’ co-curricular experiences.

A Strategy Providing a Biblical Understanding of the World and the Human Condition

Ultimately, the role of Christ-centered higher education in Africa is to make Christ-like disciples in the nations. As Kisoi pointed out, the “Africanization” of Christianity must result in appropriate contextualization and not a heretical perversion of biblical faith.⁴⁶ A Christ-centered

⁴⁴ Carpenter, Glanzer, Lantinga, Ibid, 299.

⁴⁵ Stanton, *Alternative Models*, 13-14.

⁴⁶ Kisoi and Stanton, Ibid, 2.

education must first help graduates understand the impact of the new birth on the hearts of believers. When Deuteronomy 6:5 commands God’s people to love Him with their whole heart (*lev*), it is not speaking of an emotional love. It is instructing God’s people to keep their minds and thoughts working for him.⁴⁷ Joseph Henry Thayer noted that the Greek word καρδία (*kardia*) was used to translate the Hebrew לֵב (*lev*). *Kardia* also has several meanings similar to *lev*. Not only does *kardia* refer to the “heart” as an organ in animal bodies, it also denotes “the seat and center of all physical and spiritual life”. Thus, it may refer to “the vigor and sense of physical life” as in Psalm 101:2 and Luke 21:34 as well as to “the soul or mind, as it is the fountain and seat of the thoughts, passion, desires, appetites, affections, purposes, endeavors” (the inner person) as utilized in numerous New Testament passages. It may also be used for “the middle, central or inmost part of any thing, even the inanimate” as in Jonah 2:3.⁴⁸

Skip Moen translated Psalm 84:5 as “Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, Your highways are in their heart.” Graduates of Christ-centered institutions must have captured the significance of this impact. Thus, as Moen has asked, Christ-centered education must guide learners to ask: “Where do I find the map to tell me what elevated and exalted road to take?” This must not be simply seen as a “spiritual” path. But, it is a path that affects all of the Christian, everything about how he/ she now lives. Learners must come to know that the new birth impacts “me”, and it does so to the extent that “I” do not go along the same path.⁴⁹

Thereafter the Christ-centered institution of higher education can aim to make a positive impact on the constituent African societies. This will help shape the societies in better ways through education that gives authoritative place to Jesus Christ and is built on the biblical understanding of the world and the human condition. The goal of Christi-centered education is to give authoritative place to Jesus Christ and to the Bible in its understanding of the world and the human condition. Thus, Christ-centered education must be committed to glorifying God and accomplishing His purposes throughout the world. Such education must also recognize and embrace the view that human knowledge, culture, and experience all live, move, and have their being in God, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and all that is in it.

In many parts of Africa today Christian educational entrepreneurs and sponsoring churches are taking this opportunity to establish Christian institutions. Perhaps many more should join them before the window of opportunity is closed by public sentiment and policies not sympathetic to the idea of Christ-centered higher education. As Carpenter, Glanzer and Lantinga point out, most of the Christian universities in Kenya have strong historic, and in several cases, ongoing ties to Western churches and mission-sending agencies. Whether originally founded as Bible

⁴⁷ Jeff A. Benner, “Heart” in Hebrew Word Definitions at http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/vocabulary_definitions.html#heart (accessed 9 December 2015).

⁴⁸ Note the Greek Septuagint (LXX) utilizes καρδία (*kardia*) to translate לֵב (*lev*). See Joseph Henry Thayer, “Kardia” in *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., 1889).

⁴⁹ Skip Moen, “Highway 60 from Be’er Sheva to Jerusalem” at <http://skipmoen.com/2013/06/29/highway-60-from-beer-sheva-to-jerusalem/> (Posted on June 29, 2013).

colleges or seminaries, or training institutes in practical trades, or in some recent cases as more comprehensive universities, they have enjoyed external funding support and the services of expatriate, “missionary” teachers and administrators.⁵⁰ The meaning of a “Christian university” is focused on its dependence on the teaching-learning environment being Christ-centered. Even Christian universities with more open admissions policies hope to influence and structure campus life in Christian directions by requiring that students sign codes of conduct, and requiring attendance at chapel sessions regardless of religious affiliation.

With the majority of Christian universities in Kenya being privately funded, they have begun academic programs that are not capital intensive enough to produce graduates who can address all of their constituencies’ needs. However, they are producing individuals with skills to serve as teachers, pastors, youth workers, community development professionals, attorneys, journalists, and business entrepreneurs in various fields. This trend is likely to continue for some years. The hope is that in the future there will be a better critical alignment between the type of curricula and skill developments of graduates from Christ-centered universities with the needs of the nations of Africa. Curricula in Kenya and across Africa should further address African realities, such as chronic problems in health, income, employment, leadership, urbanization, international exploitation, basic education, basic literacy, war, violence, ethnicity, gender, and family integrity. Neither should the creative arts and recreational opportunities be ignored.⁵¹

Conclusion: Christ-Centered Higher Education Strategies in Africa

So what strategies can the leaders of Christ-centered higher educational institutions in Africa employ to thrive in today’s context? They need to continue to focus, first, on a strategy that gives authoritative place to Jesus Christ. This must, secondly, include a strategy that provides a Christ-centered teaching-learning environment. Third, a strategy for overcoming scarcity of funds is needed. Fourth, there must be a strategy for resisting pressure to simply help students gain knowledge and workplace skills. There must, fifthly, be a strategy for promoting concern for social justice. Sixth, a strategy for equipping the people of Africa to prosper is needed. However, seventh, this strategy must utilize the Bible’s vision of prospering. Eighth, the strategy must be a holistic approach to higher education with a whole-life vision. Ninth, there must be a strategy for impacting the constituent African societies. Finally, there must be a strategy for providing a Biblical understanding of the world and the human condition while setting forth and seeking to incarnate a holistic vision of human flourishing grounded in Christ.

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⁵⁰ Carpenter, Glanzer and Lantinga, *Ibid*, 43-49.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 55-66.

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