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As we explore the future of Christian higher education at this conference, we do so in a global context. Many of our questions about the future are the same questions we pose for today regardless of our geographical location. These are practical matters. As an example, how do we develop a workable and sustainable financial model? No other sector is like higher education when it comes to value. We believe that a university education is of inestimable value, so much so that it is too significant to calculate, yet we live within the parameters of budgets and the realities of thinning financial margins. What we provide to students through our institutions is priceless, of greater value than what it costs to deliver, yet we charge less than what it costs to produce. The value of a can of Coca-Cola has very little nutritional value. It costs only pennies per liter to manufacture, but the average price in the UK is three pounds per can. Financial questions are paramount as we think about the future.

So are curricular questions. What we are to teach the students? Is it the best that has been thought and said in the world throughout history as Matthew Arnold noted regarding the process of learning. In our schools, should the focus be upon presenting a worldview informed by Christian principles and perspectives? Offering programs and majors that cultivate marketable skills that prepare students for the world of work?

Other tenacious questions present themselves: How will technology negatively influence or positively enhance learning? Matthew Arnold, John Henry Newman, and the founders of all our institutions were unable to envision the world of ChatGPT and AI affecting the classroom and a student's learning experience. How do we navigate our historic relationships with the church and our sponsoring ecclesial or denominational bodies? There are challenges posed by governmental regulations and accreditation requirements. The list expands as operational and tactical questions confront us daily.

As we consider the future, rowing every day furiously just to keep up, let's not overlook the big questions: Questions of identity. Who are we as institutions of higher education and

what is our abiding purpose? Questions of mission: What are we to do because of our purpose and the times in which we live? Questions of strategy and execution: How do we go about achieving our purpose and what are the initiatives that will move us forward? What are the objectives and goals that support those initiatives as well as the processes and procedures, KPIs and best practices? For the future, a compelling and increasingly consequential question relates to partnerships and collaboration. With whom do we do our work? We need wisdom beyond our own institutional memories and organizational cultures to do our work. The word “whom” grammatically completes the meaning of a preposition in a formal way and it also completes the value proposition as we look to the future. Partnerships and collaborations are a value that CGE provides.

The value of our institutions is under scrutiny and being called into question. In some countries, tuition is free for qualified students. In the United States, a college education is no longer viewed as the best path to the good life like it once was. Increasing emphasis is on credentials and certifications for which a baccalaureate degree is not a requirement. Our current student populations and their families are debt averse. For the first time since World War 2, fewer students in the United States relative to the general populations are going to college, and there has been a decline in total numbers of college-going students – the so-called enrollment cliff. In a time when the public perception about a college is changing, it is important to reaffirm the value of learning, the task of education, and graduating men and women to lead lives of meaning and purpose through leadership and service. Throughout the history of the church, when Christians show up, schools and hospitals soon follow. The earliest followers of Jesus called him Rabbi, which means teacher. He called his followers disciples, which means learners.

Christian higher education has a dual purpose: One is to form students in their personal development and maturity as persons. We assist in orienting their moral compass to true north. Character education is what we do. We believe in human transformation, so what we do is not merely transactional. The other purpose is to prepare them to be constructive members of society, to become salt and light through service and leadership. Our students learn to do something through developing skills, sharpening their capacities of mind, and cultivating competencies. Career readiness is a vital part of a college education. Whether our students earn a BA, BBA., MS, MD, JD, or PhD, their families are expecting them to get a J-O-B. Another way to state this is that through the process of education, our students learn to be somebody, not

just anybody. We challenge them to follow a calling, pursue a vocation, and walk down a path of discovery to grow into the persons God has created them to be. Our students also learn to do something and hopefully leave our institutions ready to work and to serve. Our universities are engines of opportunity. At Campbell University, people are accustomed to hearing me say we are an opportunity school. We give students an opportunity to make a life, to make a living, and to make a difference through service and leadership. At our conference, we have an opportunity to affirm the value of what we do, and we partner and support each other in this affirmation.

As we consider how to work together, I offer a few insights for global collaboration. The first insight comes from three voices who were important missiologists and global leaders over the last one hundred years. The first is from Stephen Neill whose global ministry occurred at the height of a Western colonial approach to missions. Neill served as an Anglican Bishop in India and Professor of Theology at the University of Nairobi. He was native to neither one of those places, and as a white man leading people of color, he was as British as English afternoon tea. His key insight, however, provided a different way of seeing which planted a seed for the growth of collaboration. In his landmark book, *A History of Christian Missions*, Neill asserted that of all world religions, three are missionary religions: Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity. Only Christianity, however, has made itself a truly missionary and universal religion. It now spans the globe and finds adherents among almost all people everywhere. The central focus of his book is how a Middle Eastern religion became the dominant religion of Europe and is changing again to become a truly global religion “increasingly free from the bounds of geography and Western civilization.”¹

Another voice is from Scotland whose insight marked a shift away from a colonial mindset. Lesslie Newbigin, like Stephen Neill, served as a Bishop in India. When he returned to Britain after decades of service, he viewed Western culture like the culture of India he had encountered decades earlier – now a non-Christian culture, resistant to the Gospel. Two of his seminal works, *Foolishness to the Greeks* and *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, probe this theme.² Newbigin challenged his fellow Western Christians to a missionary encounter with their

¹ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Mission*. (New York: Viking Penguin, 1964), 15.

² Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989).

own culture and in so doing offered insights cultivated through spending decades of service in a non-Western culture and by working collaboratively with Indian Christian leaders.

The third voice is post-colonial. Lamin Sanneh was from The Gambia, studied in the UK, and spent significant time in Ghana. Our host school for this conference, Liverpool Hope University, bestowed upon him an honorary doctorate. Sanneh was a convert to Christianity from Islam. His book *Whose Religion is Christianity?* makes the claim that Christianity is culturally malleable. Its flexibility is its strength. The Gospel takes root and blooms in all cultures. An example of this is translation of the Bible into the vernacular and local idioms in ways that don't happen with the sacred Scriptures of other religions. There is not in Christianity an imperative to learn a sacred language as there is in Islam to learn classical Arabic. People are transformed in their own cultures and by hearing the Gospel proclaimed in their own languages. Sanneh succinctly stated, "Christianity helps Africans become renewed Africans, not remade Europeans."³

There are certainly other voices to reference. Andrew Walls has a special relationship with our host university because his books and papers, along with many other resources for the study of Global Christianity, are in a center here that bears his name. Walls' contributions and the insights of Neill, Newbigin, Sanneh, and others are worth pondering about collaboration. They remind us that the center of Christianity has shifted and is always shifting. One hundred years ago, the continent of Africa was 9% Christian. Today, some estimates have it at 65% Christian and still growing. The center of the church through history has shifted from Jerusalem to Rome to Constantinople to London to New York, and now is perhaps finding its locus in Lagos or Nairobi. One hundred years from now, it may be Beijing or some other megalopolis. It is always moving. For Christianity, there is no Mecca or Ganges River. No one culture can lay claim to express the true and authentic form of Christianity. It is always intercultural, polyglot, and at its best, collaborative.

Scripture provides additional insights for global collaboration. In the Christian year, this is the season after Pentecost. At Pentecost, God created a new community whose differences add to their unity. The miracle was not only one of speaking but also of hearing. To hear, one must listen to what the other is saying and what God is saying through the other. Many languages

³ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity: The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 43.

were spoken on the Day of Pentecost. The Jews of the Diaspora heard the Galilean followers of Jesus tell the Good News in their own language. The various language regions represented are listed specifically in five versus in the second chapter of Acts. The common understanding of the gathered believers catalyzed a missionary collaboration. Scripture says they were “amazed and perplexed,” asking, “What does this mean?” Their joy was so effusive, onlookers and bystanders accused them of being drunk.

Collaboration became possible not because of a new language, like a codified holy Esperanto, or by the imposition of a *lingua franca*, or a single commercial or royal language that would obscure their histories, gloss over their differences, and thereby dilute the richness of their association. Jerusalem was not the center. Christ was the center. Their common language was a collaborative community, not a manner of speaking, whose dissimilarities and diverse ways of seeing enhanced their value proposition.

There are many ways CGE can foster collaboration and facilitate a common commitment to higher education. It can do so through conferences like this one, faculty exchange programs, study abroad courses for students, internships, and research programs. CGE is a convening place where together we explore and address human problems and social issues that we face in our own countries but that are also truly global issues. There is a long list: public health; poverty and hunger; violence and warfare; the environment, natural resources, and climate change; the city and the village, to name a few.

In a world where dehumanization occurs, our universities can address the deepest human needs of meaning, purpose, and belonging that politics and materialism cannot. We have a different story to tell that people around the globe, including many of our students, need to hear. Their identities, who they are as persons, are not constructed, conscripted, or compelled, but are received as gifts of grace. This is the truth of the Gospel. What we are doing as educators is of infinite value. As we face our future, we recommit ourselves to our distinctive mission and purpose in higher education. As partners and collaborators, we discover new ways of seeing and hearing, finding anew the truth in ancient wisdom about the work we share together.