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Vision with a Passion



by Sung Soo Kim

Greetings to President Zylstra, faculty, staff and students of Dordt College. As the president of Kosin University, your sister university in Korea, it is my great honor to address Dordt College's 2008 Spring Convocation. It is through God's great blessing and grace that Dordt College and Kosin University can cooperate together as sister institutions. We share the same biblical vision of proclaiming the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ in every area of our lives, thus building and expanding God's kingdom. It is my prayer and desire that

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Dordt and Kosin have a vision with a passion to maintain their identity as a Reformed Christian College and a Reformed Christian university, and that they continue to effectively carry out the mission for Christian higher education.

I personally have a special connection to Sioux Center, home of Dordt College. Both my son and daughter studied at Sioux Center Christian School and Unity Christian High School. And my son graduated from Dordt College. Dordt is unique in comparison to other Christian colleges. When I read articles in *Pro Rege* written by professors of Dordt College, I find strong Reformed views that I do not find in other Christian colleges. I especially sense the pleasant aroma of the Reformed tradition when browsing through the books displayed at the campus bookstore. Every time I visit the campus bookstore, I feel as if I have discovered treasure.

I have been teaching at Kosin University for the past 31 years. During that period, I have visited many Christian colleges, learned many things, and applied those experiences towards developing Kosin University. However, I can say that out of all the sources, the best source came from my life in Sioux Center, from what I saw, felt, and experienced at Dordt College. I wish that I could take everything from Dordt to Kosin, including the beautiful landscape, KDCR, the recreation center, and so on. One could say that I serve as the Korean ambassador for Dordt College. I talk about Dordt with great pride and have sparked much interest in parents towards sending their children to Dordt. I have rarely been impressed as much as I have been

by Dordt College. Kosin University has many things to learn from Dordt College. Our Dean of Academic Affairs and the Dean of International Affairs are here today in order to benchmark your school.

Your college inherits the great Reformed tradition. It is run on the basis of the Reformational world view. It is a precious tradition that you inherited from Saint Augustine, John Calvin, and the Dutch Neo-Calvinist leaders Groen van Prinsterer, Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, D.H.T. Vollenhoven, and Herman Dooyeweerd. This Reformed tradition presents to us a unique biblical world view on human beings and the universe. This biblical worldview has been summarized by Herman Dooyeweerd in terms of the overarching ground-motive of belief in creation, fall, and redemption through Jesus Christ, in communion with the Holy Spirit. This view explains the cosmic scope of Christ's redemption and His coming kingdom, giving meaning to history. Because of this view, through which we see the world, we understand the meaning of creation, fall, and redemption cosmically, universally, and comprehensively. Just as Abraham Kuyper expressed, our worldview gives public expression to the sovereign lordship of Christ in all areas (spheres) of human society.

The Reformed biblical worldview is our *vision OF life* as well as our *vision for FOR life*. The reason for our emphasis on the cultural mandate (which Nicholas Wolterstorff understood as God's blessing and invitation to flourish) is the fact that the biblical worldview is the vision for our life.

Having received this blessing of the Reformed worldview, we must show a difference from secular scholars, Pietists, and Fundamentalists in the area of education and scholarship. We should strive to pursue an integral Reformed scholarship to proclaim the kingship of Jesus Christ over the universe.

The Reformed worldview does not accommodate the methodology of biblicism, which analyzes Bible verses as if they were from science textbooks. The Reformed worldview is not interested in the accommodation approach, known as "icing on the cake," which imposes religious value on the so-called "neutral fact." The Reformed worldview is, rather, interested in the inner reformation of the sciences. The reason, as Hendrik Hart emphasized,

is that conversion in Jesus is, in principle, total, radical, and integral. Nothing in the life of the convert can be left outside of the scope of allegiance to Jesus as Lord of creation. Just as the Psalmist confessed in Psalm 36 verse 9—"in your light, we see light"—we have to pursue the Reformed vision for scholarship that penetrates, with the biblical worldview, the presupposition, the process, and the outcome of all scholarship and higher education.

Dr. Carl Zylstra proclaimed his vision in his inaugural address at Dordt College: "This is not a college where we combine biblical scholarship and academic study... or combine faith and learning." I was truly amazed at his vision. The moment we start talking about "combining faith and learning," we are artificially trying to synthesize faith and learning as two different realities. Such a manner would indicate that we accept the idea that they are two essentially separated realities. That is why Dr. Zylstra emphasized that our academic activities should go beyond the level of "faith-shaped" or "faith-informed" learning. That is why he said, "Our faith must be not only biblically shaped and formed but also permeated by God's Word so that it really can provide the ground work for fully developed scholarship."

Dordt is recognized as a college that has been successfully carrying out the task and precious calling of pursuing Reformed scholarship. It is God's great blessing that you have been distinguished as a most successful college in your academic pursuit, without kneeling before the idol of human autonomy in the area of education and scholarship. This is something all of you should be thankful for.

You have many treasures with you, but I have mentioned only two: reformational worldview and reformational scholarship. Back in 1981, I had a chance to go abroad to study at Potchefstroom University in South Africa. Many students at the campus asked me why I came to study at Potchefstroom University. When I answered them, "it is because of your school's motto, 'in u Lig' (in your Light)," they looked puzzled. Some even asked me if it is quite that important.

When I came to do research at Dordt College in 1992, many students asked me why I came to the Iowa corn fields, a place with a unique smell that you won't find elsewhere. When I answered,

“I came here because of the unique perspective of your college,” those students showed a response like that of the Potchefstroom University students.

Maybe you are so used to the Reformed world view and Reformed scholarship that you take it for granted, just as you take water and air for granted. You must be thankful to God for these treasures. This precious inheritance must be taken care of with passion and passed on to future generations.

It is quite possible for graduates from Christian colleges to merely talk about Christian thoughts and at the same time follow the spirit of the secular world in their lives.

College is like a battlefield. College is where fierce battles occur between the kingdom of darkness, symbolized by Babylon, and the kingdom of light, symbolized by Jerusalem. On one side are stationed those who believe that all human knowledge has to be judged ultimately by human reason or from the relativistic point of view. We, on the other side, are the people of God who believe that all human knowledge has to be judged ultimately by God’s Word.

Considering our social and cultural context, it is no easy task to maintain the identity of the Reformed Christian college. Simply possessing the Reformed worldview and the idea of reformational scholarship is not enough. As Nicholas Wolterstorff rightly pointed out, although Christian thinking is necessary in the life of disciples, it does not automatically result in a life of faithful discipleship. It is quite possible for graduates from Christian colleges to merely talk about Christian thoughts and at the same time follow the spirit of the secular world in their lives.

We must delve, through a biblical worldview, into the contours and significance of the creation,

fall, redemption, and consummation. We must also have a strong passion to obediently live such a vision. It is through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, seeking God’s help through daily prayers, that makes it possible for us to follow through this vision. We cannot do it alone. A Reformed Christian must have a passion for studying God’s Word and a passion for life led in prayer.

Christian colleges with a Reformed tradition have stressed mentioning that their Bible reading, chapel, and prayer—the so-called pietistic activities—do not guarantee genuine and true identity of a Christian college. Although this point cannot be argued with, we should be careful that this lofty point of view is not used as a poor excuse for a lack of love and passion towards our Lord. We emphasize the truth that human life is in essence totally religious. Not only are prayer, worship, Bible reading, and evangelism religious activities, but also fellowship, dating, recreation, sports activities, etc., are religious activities. This high-level truth should not be a justification for a lack of passion in pietistic activities. There is no doubt that not only Sunday is a holy day, but each day from Monday through Saturday is as holy and significant as Sunday before God. This being so, we must ask ourselves if we truly desire to live from Monday to Saturday in as holy way as we live on Sundays. It would be understandable, as a Reformed Christian, to miss Sunday evening service to watch the national play-off basketball game. But if we habitually misses Sunday services, then we may want to reflect on our life to see if we truly have a passion to do God’s will and to love Him with all our heart.

We must have a passion as well to share our Reformed heritage with God’s people in the world. God chose the people of Israel not because they would exclusively enjoy a set of privileges but because they would play the vital role of being a nation of priests toward all nations in the world. God blessed us in a similar way by equipping us with the Reformed view of the world and scholarship. We must have a passion to share our vision with the global village by having a comprehensive and an all-inclusive view. The world is big, and there is a lot of work to be done for Christ. Today, people are waiting for workers to sow and harvest in countries like the Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand, Mongolia,

China, Vietnam, Kenya, and so on. God is urgently calling workers equipped with the Reformed world view for His kingdom.

The purpose of our Reformed vision and passion is to bring about justice and shalom. The King in “our story” is the King of justice and peace, according to Isaiah 11: 1-11. Our King is interested in the dignity of human beings and in the justice of recognizing our God-given rights. The essence of justice that the Bible teaches is to protect man and woman from false and unjust violation of the God-given rights that they should enjoy as those created in God’s image. That is why Jesus, as well as the prophets in the Old Testament, had a deep interest in orphans, widows, children, strangers, the sick, and the poor.

Understandably Nicholas Wolterstorff approaches the issue of poverty from the perspective of justice. Justice is a precondition for peace. True peace means not only the absence of war or hatred but also an enjoyment of a four-fold relationship: a harmonious relationship with God, with fellow human beings, with non-human world, and with ourselves.

All of us who have studied or worked at this Reformed Christian college must have a deep interest and passion in promoting justice and peace in this world through our lives. Our Reformed vision and passion will be truly meaningful, dynamic, and practical within the beautiful intricacies of the biblical meaning of justice and shalom.

We have to reflect upon our lives and examine if we are living too comfortably. We have to consider what Ronald J. Sider pointed out: that we are living as rich Christians in the age of poverty and hunger. As I speak now, there are children searching for food under piles of trash. There are young girls who cry out as they are sexually abused daily. There are children who kill themselves out of hopelessness due to poverty. If we feel that what they go through is not relevant to us because they live far away from us, then we cannot talk about global thinking in a Christian college.

Now I would like to conclude my address. We all possess unique glasses through which we see the world. The glasses that we see through have been passed down to us from our Reformed forefathers. Thus we desire to participate in education

and scholarship through a unique Christian approach. However, having a Reformed vision alone is not sufficient. We must keep our passion alive and pass down this valuable Reformed vision to the next generation. One step further: We must have a passion to share this vision with God’s people in different parts of the world. I hope that Dordt College and Kosin University can cooperate constructively to touch the lives of God’s people in the Philippines, Cambodia, Mongolia, China, and other countries by building Christian kindergartens, by building Christian elementary, secondary, and tertiary schools. It is my sincere hope and prayer that we carry out this glorious task together to train future leaders for God’s kingdom through the education based on the Reformed worldview.

I hope that we can carry out this task, not out of mere compassion for the poor but out of vision and passion for God’s justice and shalom. God will bless us through providing for us everything we need (Matthew 6:33). If we continue to endeavor with such vision and passion, God will help both Dordt College and Kosin University progress as true Reformed Christian colleges. In spite of the current secular academic climate, we will be blessed in maintaining Christian identity and academic excellence while keeping our ground in opposition to a worldly spirit. It is my fervent hope and prayer that we will be able to carry out this amazing and glorious task, not as individuals but as a community of God’s people, and not by our power but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

You are attending an excellent college. It is a truly wonderful thing that Dordt College and Kosin University have a sister relationship with each other. Once again, I would like to say “Thank-you” for inviting me to deliver this Convocation address.

Finally, I would like to offer a toast in a unique way. As soldiers of the light and in a kindred spirit, I would like to offer a toast in a way that is done by Kosin University faculty, staff, and students: Imagine a wine glass in your hand. When I say “Pro,” lift your wine glasses high and shout, “Rege!” When I say, “For Whom?” respond by shouting, “the King!”

To God alone be the glory. Thank-you!