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Dordt and God's People

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Convocation Address

by B. J. Haan
President



Rev. Haan received his Th.D. degree from Calvin Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Prior to coming to Dordt in 1959 as its first College President, he served as pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Sioux Center for many years.

Dordt and God's People

It would seem to me to be self-evident that the main object of each convocation address should be to stimulate us to a greater realization of our central calling and purpose by presenting fresh challenges. These need not necessarily be entirely new challenges, yet due to different circumstances and current developments, these challenges hopefully could take on new meaning, significance, and urgency.

At last year's convocation, I called upon all of us to concentrate on defining and implementing a life-style which should characterize our college, agreeable to its distinctive Christian world and life concept. A good beginning on this proposal has been made. I urge that we continue this very important study and that the results be published early. Then the entire campus

can and should be involved in the process of achieving a better understanding and exercise of the kind of life-style which befits our college community.

At the commencement of the 1976-77 academic year I would like to hold out another challenge. Let me tell you how I hit upon it. Last spring I was invited to speak to a large gathering of ministers, elders and deacons on the topic what contribution our churches could make to the nation's bicentennial. The central thrust of my message was that we could do our nation no greater service than to bring to bear upon that nation in a more effective way those biblical principles which God in His providence brought to this nation in the coming of our fathers, which principles were very dear to these fathers. In plain words, we should be more vigorous in

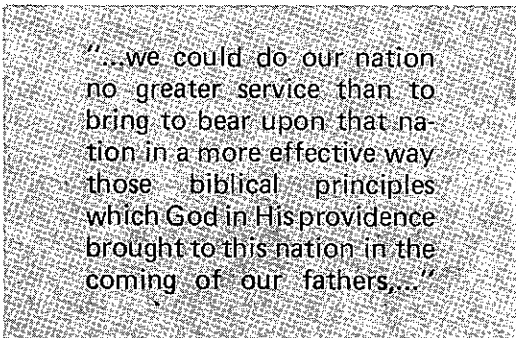
knowing and promoting our Calvinistic, Reformed, biblical faith. I suggested that sermons be preached, books promoted, and special studies carried on to revive interest in and zeal for the spread of that world and life faith commitment.

Later I found other occasions to hammer away on the same idea. However, as I continued to charge the church with its duty to bring about the renaissance of Calvinism, I could not help but ask again and again what the role of Dordt College should be in this and whether Dordt was sufficiently conscious of and active in the fulfillment of its key responsibility. True, the church has the solemn obligation to preach the reformed, biblical principles and to goad its membership into action. Unless the pulpits speak forth clearly and boldly there is little hope for the revival of our biblical world and life concept. Yet when we stop to realize the necessity for the fundamental study of our faith in its deeper meaning and its application to the entire spectrum of life, which is the main concern of Christian higher education, then we know too that without the steady input from the colleges, our pulpits would soon become weak and ineffective and the hope of a lasting resurgence of Calvinism would be truly dim.

Although I am well aware of the influence of Dordt College in the awakening of interest in and the promotion of the reformed, biblical world and life view, I also feel that a great deal more must be and can be accomplished in this area. And that really is the burden of my message. What specifically should we do? How are we to do it?

Speaking of the revival of Calvinism among our people, Dordt College should provide the leadership. Dordt College has always been very closely associated with the people. It is the people's college in a very real sense. A society of the people originated and operates this institution. The constituents feel at home on this campus. They attend many functions. More importantly they expect us to educate their covenant youth according to

their convictions and to lead them, the constituents, in the battle for the faith in today's world. Furthermore, we have stated repeatedly that one of the major goals of the college is to train students for leadership roles in the kingdom. Our purpose is to serve God's people in the



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realization of their calling. So you see how intimately we want our life at the college to be tied up with, intertwined with, our constituency. This is a matter of principle with us.

But we desire this with one idea always in mind. We seek the coming of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. We want God's will to be honored on all fronts, in every domain. We aim at the defeat of Satan, the overthrow of the kingdom of darkness. In the achievement of this high responsibility, we maintain that our reformed, biblical world and life perspective is crucial. We press hard for the greater understanding and application of our Calvinistic principles.

Precisely here lies the challenge. We know that the faith of our fathers has to a large extent and for all practical purposes lost its effectiveness in our times. This must change. And we at Dordt College should be more vigorously involved in bringing this about. Our eye should be toward the people of God. They must come through our efforts to a better grasp of, dedication to, zeal for, and the propagation of the reformed faith.

It means that we on this campus ought to busy ourselves with thorough research into the past writings and labors of our fathers. In each department, in every field of study, a special point should be made of digging out materials pertinent in the development and application of our Calvinistic faith historically. These materials must be brought together and made available to the people in a form suitable to their needs and on their level. If such an endeavor is rightly organized and executed, we at the college would be the greatest beneficiaries. It would force us to examine our heritage more carefully and critically. We would become more consciously biblical. And we would be pressed hard to see and explain its relevancy for our times.

But it is imperative that we reach the people. How are we to do this? For one thing there is KDCR. What a natural for this purpose. We have only scratched the surface in our use of this medium of communication. It is time that we wake up to the opportunity. Another means is that of special publications throughout the year in which we bring special materials to our people. Faculty and students should engage in research projects with this in mind. Why not direct some of our independent studies programs to this end? Could not a part of our student publications also be concerned with this? Our constituents do read these publications. Why not discuss issues vital to their lives?

I am also thinking of public meetings with our people. We hold many academic conferences among ourselves, bringing in scholars of renown. Why not arrange conferences on timely issues for the general public? Such meetings could be highly productive in getting at the heart of matters rather than engaging in theoretical debates which often become painful harangues. Indeed, bring town and gown together. Gown stands to profit fully as much as town in the process.

I shall try to initiate the necessary machinery to carry out such a program effectively.

Recently I read the book The Constructive Revolutionary by W. Fred Graham. Published in 1970, it deals with John Calvin and his socio-economic impact. The author disagrees with the notion, "that Calvin's more strictly theological thought was his major contribution to human understanding." His book is an argument supporting his disagreement. It is a work worth our study. This fresh inquiry into Calvin's broad labors in Geneva serves again to point up the comprehensive sweep of his principles. He did see very clearly the lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life. Calvin's understanding of God's law as it applies to all of life under Christ led him into the affairs of this world rather than to withdrawal from them. This is his unique contribution as a reformer. Calvinism as a world and life system stems from this peculiar stance of Calvin. Reading again how successful his labors were in Geneva, in circumstances similar to every generation, inspires one to renewed efforts.

It serves to bring us back to the Scriptures as Calvin was informed and motivated by them. What an amazingly rich insight into God's Word was his! But what a deeply personal and spiritual relationship with the Lord characterized this insight. The triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ, elevating Him to the exalted position of reign at God's right hand, gave to Calvin the impetus to carry on persistently and valiantly.

Let that be our inspiration also as we enter another year of study. Seeing as Paul did in that beautiful fifteenth chapter of first Corinthians the tremendous implications of Christ's resurrection, let us, as was true of Calvin, remain undaunted in our efforts. May Paul's classic climax and charge at the conclusion of his treatise on the resurrection ring in our hearts.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. I Corinthians 15:58