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First International Conference of Reformed Institutions for Higher Education

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—Is the translation in good style?

For a man who is dedicating about 12 years to translate the Bible into English, it is not surprising that he clings to a high view of Scripture: "I believe that the Bible is the infallible, inspired Word of God, not only in the central core, but in every detail." He stated that even though salvation does not depend on whether Joseph and Mary actually fled into Egypt in Matthew 2, the story is still true. "The New Testament never criticizes the Old Testament," he said. "The New Testament says, 'This must come to pass, because it was written.'"

But only the letters that the authors wrote with their own hand are inspired and infallible, Palmer explained. "Peter did not say that the NIV and the NIV translators are infallible.... The holy men of old, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit are the ones that were inspired." Verbal inspiration does not mean that the Bible was dictated, he said. "You read the Bible and you'll find the personalities all the way through. But what they wrote are actually God's words and are completely trustworthy." Palmer maintains, however, that "This view of verbal inspiration does not mean that the Bible is to be interpreted literally. Interpret the Bible in the way it was intended to be understood." He added that verbal inspiration does not mean that the order of events are necessarily to be taken in the order of events that they were found in the Bible. Sometimes the authors did not intend to

give a chronology but rather an account, for example, of Jesus' divinity, miracles and power. Verbal inspiration was for a redemptive purpose, he emphasized.

Palmer defined secularism as indifference to God in one or more areas of life, "neutralism" toward any or all areas of life, or autonomy from the Bible and God. He contrasted secularism to the Christian world-and-life view, which states that all of life is religion, rather than just Sunday worship services and Christian education; that either one is for God or against God—he cannot be neutral; and that Christianity pervades every area of life.

Palmer called the audience to work individually to control secularism, and also to form Christian organizations, such as Christian labor unions and Christian political action groups.

But he concluded, "We must learn to work together with non-Christians. This does not mean that we compromise our principles." He said that, working alongside of Jews and atheists, he and other Christians have won larger victories in the fight for government aid to independent schools and in the struggle against abortion. For four years he chaired the national Citizens for Educational Freedom, and he headed the New Jersey Right to Life Committee for several years.

"The Christian's obligation is not to become discouraged," he said, "but to go and do. Leave the results to God."

by Randall Palmer

First International Conference of Reformed Institutions for Higher Education

At the invitation of the Christian University of Potchefstroom, one hundred twenty-two delegates and some fifty observers from nineteen countries and sixty institutions of advanced education met for

four days to discuss educational principles, exchange information concerning scholarship, pass resolutions for institutional interrelationships; and make plans for the second conference.

Reflecting upon the nature and significance of this first conference, I would like to make a few observations. Since all the delegates were of the reformed persuasion, there was a common confessional stance, and, hence, a general agreement on the meaning of God's Kingdom, the role of the instituted church, the authority of Scripture, the central thrust and scope of the Gospel, and the structured character of reality. It was not necessary, therefore, to spend our energies opposing, for example, pre- and post-millennarianism, sectarianism, liberalism, moralism, or relativism. At the same time, the shared commitment induced the delegates to be engaged in genuine dialogue and to criticize each other's views openly.

Secondly, I think this conference was marked, and marred, by the absence of official delegates from the Free University of Amsterdam (the oldest and biggest Reformed University in the world), and also by the absence of representatives from the Reformed community in Hungary. There should have been more non-theological delegates at this conference, and also some female scholars and educators.

Thirdly, certain fundamental questions were raised by the thirty-four lectures and subsequent discussions. Noteworthy are especially the following seven: (1) What is the identity of Reformed education, and does it allow for local or national adaptation, without becoming syncretistic? (2) Does religious redirection require structural changes in society and education? In other words, does the status quo determine normativity, or does the reverse hold true? (3) Are the designations Christian and non-Christian, when used to describe the nature of certain countries and/or cultures, not too ecclesiastical in essence and, therefore, possibly misleading as far as the political, economic, social, and general cultural situations in those countries are concerned? (4) What is the relationship between structure and function of a Christian institution of advanced

education? Are both equally affected by the biblical meaning of the antithesis? (5) With respect to the question of quantity and quality in education, can an institution become too big, or remain too small, to provide true, Christian scholarship and education? (6) What is the relationship between theory and practice? Certain delegates had difficulty seeing the practical implications of some theoretically worked out principles. In the main, this problem appeared to stem from the classic misunderstanding concerning the relationship between the Bible and reality, and also, encyclopedically, between theology and philosophy. (7) What is the nature and scope of academic authority and academic freedom within our reformed educational institutions?

All the conference proceedings will be published as a book early in 1976. The next conference, scheduled to meet in 1978 at Calvin College, will have as its theme: "The Responsibility of Christian Higher Education in Relation to the Problems of Modern Society." Special attention will be given to such problems as, for example, the use of resources, ecology, technology, justice, wealth and poverty, war, and democracy.

I hope that at the next international meeting not just a few but all the delegates will participate in the discussions, that there will be fewer lectures and more discussions, that there will be a fairer, i.e. more proportionate, representation of the entire orbit of scholarship, and, finally, that also the Free University will be able to attend and participate in a direct manner. The best way we can prepare ourselves for the 1978-conference is to become familiar with the contents of the lectures and resolutions of this first conference, where the first feeble but significant steps have been taken in the direction of thinking and witnessing, also in the area of advanced Christian education, in a global manner.

by John C. Vander Stelt