



*Inaugural Reflections*  
ON HOW WE ARE REALIZING OUR MISSION

By PRESIDENT JON S. KULAGA, PH.D.  
April 2018





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# *Mission Statement*

Ohio Christian University  
prepares students to serve effectively  
in the church and society by  
providing a holistic, Christ-centered,  
biblically integrated education  
in the Wesleyan tradition.

# *University Core Values*

Christ-centered  
Biblically-based  
Student-oriented  
Ministry-motivated  
Leadership-focused  
Academically-excellent

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# A Christ-centered Education

Ohio Christian University has adopted a list of what it declares are its “Core Values”. These values succinctly describe who we are—at a glance. On campus, they appear above our guest parking signs, on banners hanging from light poles, even over some of our drinking fountains. The list is not long and includes such values as Bible-based, Ministry-motivated, Student-oriented, and so on. While all these values are important, none is more important than Christ-centered.

What does it mean to offer a Christ-centered education?

In the 17th Century, a shift occurred, or, perhaps more accurately, a separation occurred. In preceding centuries, both biblical and humanist thinkers took for granted that theology and science were threads belonging to the same tapestry. During the Enlightenment, however, faith and reason were uncoupled. Faith was relegated to private experience. Reason was to guide the affairs of public life. This led, in turn, to a secularized public square. Until this point in Western Civilization, faith and reason were always integrated. This is what St. Augustine wrote about almost two millennia ago, when he called for a “thinking faith”. Many other great thinkers—who were also Christian believers—saw no reason to believe that an

intellectual or spiritual barrier existed between theology and physics, or between the study of God and of the stars He created, between literature and the Word made flesh.

Throughout 17th Century Europe, however, the *Bible* had to justify itself more and more at the bar of reason, and what started as a shift grew into a separation. In 21st Century America many of our institutions of higher learning have replaced the concept of “revealed truth” for the more “enlightened” concept of “observed truth”. They have replaced a worldview shaped by the Bible, for a worldview shaped by the assumptions and beliefs of emotion and personal preference. The result is a dualistic approach to learning and separation of heart knowledge from head knowledge, of wisdom from information, of calling from career, faith from learning, and God from His creation.

## "What does it mean to offer a Christ-centered education?"

This loss of the Christian worldview from most of our country's colleges and universities has resulted in the creation of a curriculum in which faith is not only disconnected from virtually every academic discipline, but is actually seen as being incongruent with serious scholarship, research, and teaching. Today, the situation has emerged where the concepts of revealed truth and objective truth are dismissed as irrelevant, and the belief in relative truth (true for you, but not true for me) reigns supreme, having impact on all spheres of higher learning.

# Truth Separated from Reality

The implications of the separation of reason from faith in the university curriculum has not been lost on the students on whom it is practiced. Today, we see a generation of young people who are no longer capable of articulating a biblical worldview. The average college student, even those who come from evangelical Christian homes and churches, hold to many distorted and discordant beliefs about God, truth, and reality.

In his research project, *Third Millennium Teens*, researcher George Barna states that over 75 percent of today's church youth believe that God created the universe, Jesus was a real person, and that he was born of a virgin. However, within that same group, over 50 percent also believe that Christians and Buddhists pray to the same God, that Jesus did not rise from the dead, and all major religions believe the same thing. To today's postmodern generations, God is whatever a person believes him, or her, to be.

Is it any wonder that 59% of all 18-29 year olds raised in the church drop out of church after leaving high school? While many of this demographic will say they are still attracted to Jesus—they have little-to-no-use for the church. What they mean when they say this is that their church is not answering their most pressing questions about life. Consequently, they turn to the internet, social



media, pop culture, and peer groups for the answers. Ironically, they turn to the very people asking the same questions.

Today's culture of religious and moral relativity has taught whole generations to "pick and choose" what works best for them. What happens when what they pick-and-choose is a fatal combination of truth and error? What happens when what passes for "truth" is whatever the student subjectively determines to work best? For the 21st Century postmodern student, any system or statement of belief that claims to be objectively true, as Christianity does, is judged to be either arrogant at the one end or utterly naïve at the other. The only moral absolute our culture allows for determining what is "right" is "what works for me, right now." This is the reality taught to thousands of students on university campuses across the United States.

**"...the need to demonstrate the vitality of God's Truth in all areas of academic endeavor—remains paramount."**

However, the mature Christian knows that trying to fashion a philosophy of life founded on subjectively determined beliefs and concepts of reality, leaves God outside of the person's planning—and the person outside of God's plan. Because we believe a person's beliefs shape their values, and their values, in turn, affect their behavior, and their behavior influences their destiny—the need to demonstrate the vitality of God's Truth in all areas of academic endeavor—remains paramount. Christian universities must educate the scientist as well as the pastor, the medical doctor and the missionary, the journalist and the business leader on how to be salt and light to the secularized public square of ideas in our country.

# Community: The Context for Reunification

T. S. Eliot, in his *Christianity and Culture*, claimed that “no religion can survive the judgment of history unless the best minds of its time have collaborated in its construction . . . the purpose of Christian education is to teach people to think in Christian categories.” It is not about the number of Bible classes or chapel services – although those are important. It is about training every student, in every discipline, how to think from a Christian perspective. This is the task of each faculty member.

The task of each student is to answer the call to the vocation of “studentship.” Going to the desk as an altar, the Christian student studies with his whole heart and a single mind because God has called him or her to that vocation. Therefore, the first business of the student within the academic community is to study and think, thereby bringing glory to the Creator with his or her intellect. It follows then, that the first business of the Christian university is to assist the student toward thinking in Christian ways and to lift up every academic discipline to the light of truth and the glory of God.

The first step in assisting students to think in “Christian categories” is to invite them into a community of learners who hold to what Christianity has believed to be true for over two millennia. For the student, learning to think within a community that believes in

objective, revealed truth begins the process of cultivating a coherent faith and an accurate concept of reality. Through genuine personal interaction with Christian faculty, students in the university community develop a set of lenses to view the world that do not require “adjusting” when addressing the critical issues of the day. We should also note that within this Christian community, the learning relationship is not a one-way street. For while mentoring of students by faculty is vital to the learning and thinking process, Christian community provides more than role models, it also provides for fellowship of equals.

**"A key component to a student's successful development is the delicate balance involving challenge and support."**

In his *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah writes about the urgent need individuals have for making meaningful commitments with other persons. He states, “We find ourselves not independently of other people . . . but through them . . . we discover who we are face-to-face and side-by-side with others in work, love, and learning.” The values and beliefs a person chooses to act upon are influenced more by the persons around them than by what the person reads or claims to believe. A key component to a student's successful development is the delicate balance involving challenge and support. With too much challenge, faith is abandoned—as can be sadly documented on the majority of campuses across America. With too much support, faith becomes dull and disconnected from personal experience. The balance between challenge and support needs to be developed, and it can be worked out only within the context of community—one that challenges growth while simultaneously supporting Christian spiritual formation. The context is as important to the college experience as the content.

# Truth United with Reality

Consider how belonging to a community that believes in objective revealed truth is meaningless if it remains disconnected from the student's personal experience. We need a concept of truth that is simultaneously objective in its authority, its origin, but is experiential and personal, in its reality.

In 18th Century England, there was no lack of instruction and writing on the objective truth and reality of God and Scripture. The *Bible* was available in the common language, as were the teachings of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Arminius. The problem was that the Church of England had disconnected truth from the personal experience of the average citizen. Truth was viewed simultaneously as reverent and irrelevant. Likewise, there was no lack of "original thinking" among the general population when it came to religious matters. The time was the Age of Enlightenment, and belief and confidence in man's ability, human reason, and scientific discovery were on the rise. The problem was not this new form of knowledge, but that it was now, for the first time, disconnected from Scripture and a Christian worldview.

Into this cultural malaise stepped John Wesley. In response to the problem described above, Wesley developed a system of discerning truth that was rooted in the objective reality of Scripture and

ecclesiastical tradition and sensitive to subjective personal experience and intellectual reasoning. This fourfold approach for discerning truth, called *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral*, involves the intersection of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. As we face the opportunity of preparing 21st Century Christian students to have an impact the culture for Christ, one of the greatest challenges is getting them to think in T.S. Eliot's "Christian categories" or, as Christian philosopher, Dallas Willard says, to "think straight."

For just as Wesley sought to unite the objective realities of Scripture and tradition with the subjective realities of experience and reason, so too we find in the person and work of Jesus Christ the perfect unity of reality and truth. In the person of Jesus Christ, we have one who is "full of grace and truth." We find one who not only knows the truth but also *is* the Truth. Thus, armed with the Spirit of Truth and Wesley's approach to discerning truth, the Christian student can now approach any academic discipline with confidence, knowing that each discovery of truth made there, is also a discovering of God, for all truth is God's Truth. As former Netherlands Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper declares, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry 'Mine!'"

George Marsden has observed that "contemporary university culture is hollow at its core, not only does it lack a spiritual center, but it is without any real alternative. . . . It is time that scholars and institutions who take the intellectual dimensions of their faith seriously become active participants in the highest level of academic discourse." If the graduates from Christian universities are going to influence our secular, post-truth culture effectively, they must believe there is objective truth to be found and divine Truth to be revealed. Only then will our graduates enter the world as the "salt and light" they are intended to be.

# The Integration of Faith and Learning

The context for learning that combines a Christian community of learners and a balanced approach to truth—both revealed and discovered—enables the student to enter into a discipline of study seeking the integration of faith and learning. Where, in other educational contexts, revealed and discovered truth remain fragmented entities, either by having no biblical coursework at all, or by the accumulation of *Bible* credit hours to the detriment of an academically rigorous major, the Christian university student learns to unite genuine intellectual scholarship with authentic Christian piety. The result is that what is developed within young scholars are the qualities of vocational competence and Christ-centered character. Both are essential, neither is sufficient. For while the Christian university, like any other institution of higher learning, subordinates all other endeavors to the improvement of the mind in pursuit of truth, it also recognizes that truth, rightly understood, is not solely a cognitive commodity, but carries within it varying degrees of moral, spiritual, and social significance.

This integration of faith and learning has been demonstrated in virtually every academic discipline down through ages—from Galileo to Louis Pasteur and from Sir Isaac Newton to Blaise Pascal. C. S. Lewis encouraged young Christians to study philosophy, if only

because bad philosophy would certainly exist and, therefore, needed to be answered. Robert Andrews Millikan, winner of the Nobel Prize for physics in 1923, the first scientist to isolate and measure the electron also articulated this view. In his 1924 *Science and Life*, he writes, “the scientific and the religious sides of life often come into contact and mutually support each other. Science without religion obviously may become a curse, rather than a blessing to mankind . . . On the other hand, history has shown that religion without science breeds dogmatism, bigotry, and persecution.” Expounding further on the proper role of science Millikan concludes, “Science, then, not only teaches that God is good, but it furnishes man with the most powerful of motives— to fit in with the scheme of goodness which God has provided.”

Belief in God as Creator provides students with a place to stand in evaluating the culture and their chosen academic disciplines. There is no doubt that with God in the picture, the Christian student will become a dissenter from many theories taken for granted in current secular academia. It will make them critical, in the appropriate sense of the word, of viewpoints that emphasize human freedom and creativity as supreme values divorced from any sense of limitation or obligation to community, created order, or, ultimately, to God. The effectual integration of faith and learning places God at the center of reality, rather than the individual, and gives to the Christian student a different set of lenses with which to view the world. This ability to “see” things from a different perspective is an opportunity for the Christian scholar in every field of study and an obligation.

Students who recognize that those who take the intellectual dimensions of their faith seriously will discover they can be responsible and creative participants at the highest levels of their chosen vocational calling, whether in the marketplace or the mission field.

# The Result of a Christian Education: Engage the Culture

Finally, we need to consider the result of a Christian liberal arts education—the graduate:

*What distinguishes a Christian education from a secular one? What distinguishes the Christian graduate from one with no spiritual moorings or direction? Should we expect more from the graduate of a Christian university than “learning to think in Christian categories?” Is there more to learning than thinking? More to thinking than studying?*

As Christians, we are commanded to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (*Duet. 6:4-6; Matthew 22:36-40*). This full-orbed love for God requires devotion at every level of our person—emotional, intellectual, volitional, and physical. Christian students are not called simply to ‘know’ something, but to ‘be’ something, and to ‘do’ something. They will find that thinking with the *mind of Christ* will result in loving with the *heart of Christ* and acting as the *hands of Christ*. With their minds renewed, emotions purified, consciences cleared and wills surrendered, Christian students enter the world as critical participants applying the Great Commandment to every facet of their lives.



John Wesley provides the model. For, though he was first and foremost a preacher, no sooner would he begin work in a community than he began to consider ways to help the disinherited and disenfranchised. He set up schools for children of the poor and shops where their mothers could card and spin cotton to sell in order to provide an income. He set up the first free medical dispensary in England. While teaching his flock to use their money wisely, in 1746 he established one of the first philanthropic loan funds to help those in need of temporary assistance. His primary mission was to help everyone he could find the way to heaven. However, no man kept his feet more firmly planted upon the earth and showed greater wisdom in dealing with every-day, practical problems of his contemporary society than did John Wesley.

**"The entire object of our mission... is to develop Christian servant leaders who will penetrate every area of society with Christ's command to be salt firmly in mind."**

Today, the need is no different. We need Christians who are competent professionals in their field. Yet we need more than that. We need competent Christian professionals who know how to care for their neighbors (*Luke* 10:27) and contend for the truth. We need what business professional and author Bob Briner referred to as "roaring lambs." Christians who do not "run from the culture but rush into it; believers who are not content to hang around the fringes of our culture, but rather work to be right smack dab in the middle of it." We need what H. Reinhold

Niebuhr called “transformers of culture.” Christians who are not antagonistically opposed to culture or passively conformed to it, but rather ones who believe that redemption cannot be limited to *individuals*, but must extend to the *totality of human culture*.

For the Christian liberal arts graduate then, higher education is not merely the means to a higher paying job, a higher standard living, and a higher mortgage payment. It is a means by which to gain strategic entrance and involvement in the overall moral and cultural discourse of our nation.

The entire object of our mission – to serve the Church and society—is to develop Christian servant leaders who will penetrate every area of society with Christ’s command to be salt firmly in mind. It is our task to educate each successive generation of business, education, medical, media, scientific, and church leaders who not only do the right things, but enjoy doing them, who not only find a calling, but love being called and know the Caller; who are not merely learned, but love learning; who are not merely just, but who hunger and thirst after justice.

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