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“Regeneration of Christian Schools Today”

今泉 信宏

Nobu T. Imaizumi

Good afternoon, everyone, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak to you this afternoon, even though the request for me to deliver a speech rather came at the last minute. So I have no idea how the lecture will go. At any rate, my lecture this afternoon is in three parts: first, I will talk about the kind of world we live in today: description of the contemporary world in which we and Christian institutions are placed. Then I will refer to what constitutes so-called Christian institutions, their elements, ideals and actual management. And last but not least I will give you my ideas of how Christian institutions should and could be regenerated.

1. Today's World

During the cold war the world was divided between the East and the West. Today, however, a deep cleavage exists between the South and the North, the poverty-stricken South and the affluent North, which includes most of Western Europe, North America, Australia, Korea and Japan. The poor South encompasses large areas of Asia, Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe and the newly rising countries which used to belong to the Soviet Russia. Today's world has become, needless to say, and is secularized: there's nothing sacred about our world today. Anything goes! There is no definite value system people can follow any more, because the very value system has become deteriorated. Even though the world is the way it is, however, we should affirm it, because it is essentially God's creation and it was very good in the beginning. It's only that we humans have turned it into monstrous existence and it is in need of rejuvenation and regeneration. God's beautiful creation which was once good has now become corrupted because of human sin of self-centeredness.

In the States, Universities like Harvard, Princeton and Yale all started as theology schools to train students to become ministers of various Christian churches. Today all of them are secularized and there is no shadow of sacredness, even though there still are seminaries in those Universities. In fact, it is not too much to say that those Universities are now more secularized than many other non-Christian institutions, because it is largely due to the fact that in the process of pursuing academic excellence they have lost something very important: spiritual depth. They have dropped Christian values and ideals in order to become the cream of the crop in educational institutions. This is not just true in the States, but Christian institutions in other parts of the world find themselves in the same situation. In order to become 'highly competitive schools,' they may have sacrificed

their Christian ideals and exchanged them for more secular and profitable values. So secularization of Christian institutions is on a global scale, whether one is aware of its seriousness or not.

The other feature of the contemporary world is that the earth is not round but is lopsided : it is in an odd shape. As mentioned earlier, our world is divided between the South and the North today. Now I want to give you more detailed descriptions of the cleavage that exists between the South and the North. The affluent North has only one-fifth of the world population and yet monopolizes three-fourths of world resources, while the poor South is overpopulated with very little natural resources. Today's world is called that of information technology, but this only applies to the North and the South is way behind in securing minimum necessary information for mere survival. So this great divide, disparity is indeed injustice and this must be corrected in every possible manner and this is also the responsibility of Christians and Christian institutions, no matter where they may be located, because we all claim as Christians that love of self is equal to love of God and neighbor.

There is also a threat of thermonuclear warfare today. In some poor countries in Asia those who govern are wanting to have nuclear power and weapons at the expense of their citizens' welfare, survival and happiness. With the collapse of the old Soviet Russia many nuclear physicists have run off to newly rising or poor countries in Asia, Middle East and elsewhere to trade their nuclear resources for lots of money. Peoples' lives are devastated with poverty, and yet the governments want to be armed with nuclear weapons. Christians and Christian institutions in Asia-Pacific regions must address this critical issue.

The other issue is economy. We now have the global scale economic crisis. This crisis was created by the collapse of the North's gigantic financial institutions, mainly the Lehman Brothers. The entire world has been affected by this financial crisis and this crisis has created deadly disenchantment among the poor countries. And the North is responsible for this; therefore this must also be addressed by Christians and Christian institutions in the affluent North in a concrete manner so that the poor South can get back on its feet as quickly as possible, even though everyone is aware that it takes years and years before the South can recover.

Finally we keep having to struggle with terrorism on a global scale. The Obama Administration in America just got off to a good start a year ago but a year later they are plagued by an attempt to blow up a U.S. aircraft to give the U.S. another round of 9-11. This is a very complicated issue: it is not just between the U.S. and those who hate her for various reasons. The affluent society, Japan included, is also a target of international terrorism. Japan has been exposed to terrorist attacks from North Korea. As long as economic disparity exists between the South and the North, there will be no rest of international terrorism. This issue is also one that needs to be addressed by Christians and Christian institutions of the world. We also need to work on banning nuclear proliferation. Even though President Barack Obama received a Nobel Peace Prize somewhat prematurely, it is rather ironical that more troops have been deployed in Afghanistan and also in Iraq against Obama's campaign promise that he would withdraw his troops from Iraq as quickly as possible. The cold war is over now, but a different kind of global crisis is at hand today: environmental crises, lack of clean water, food and shelter. Only the few superrich rule our economic world today and therefore we need to tear down this kind of economic totem pole. The haves are going to have to share what they own with those who do not have enough or those who have none. Justice in this sense is equal economic distribution- equal sharing of world resources which belong to every earth person.

2. What are Christian Institutions all about?

Perhaps a better question would be: What are Christian institutions like? Can anyone rightly answer this question? In many so-called Christian schools it is a matter of fact and one does not even have to ask that question: it is taken for granted that one operates one's school based on Christian principles. In Japan, however, one would not dare call their schools Christian schools, but Christian-related schools. Christian-related schools are based on biblical principles and one tries to raise students in such manners so that they may serve God and his creation. So in this sense Christian schools and Christian-related schools are one and the same: they both are supposed to be based on the biblical mandate of serving God and his creation. Christian institutions are founded upon the ideals of loving one's neighbor as oneself and this leads them to further serving God and humans in a concrete manner. Is this clearly understood by all Christian institutions? Do you feel that your own school fits into this category of Christian institutions in which to serve God and his entire creation? But the fact of the matter is that in so many Christian institutions there is so much competition, bickering, power struggle, in-fight, bureaucratization of offices, professors only engaged in research and not much in teaching and learning there is nothing Christian about so-called Christian institutions. This is what is happening in many Christian institutions in Japan. So many so-called Christian institutions in Japan are renowned schools and are highly competitive: they all try to take in the best students ever. There is nothing wrong with that, except that it is not that difficult to teach those students who are capable of learning already, but what about students who are not that capable? Isn't it Christian responsibility to take in students who are not so able scholastically and otherwise and raise them in such a way that by the time they graduate they are as capable as others scholastically and spiritually? The other factor about Japanese Christian institutions is that they are academically competitive and it is quite expensive. So only relatively well-to-do families can send their children to those Christian institutions. It is ironic that these Christian institutions cater to those who are financially able neighbors: so many Christian institutions are affluent schools.

I don't know about you, but I believe that we do not need four years in university education: three years are enough. So many students have nothing much to do, except writing graduation theses and pick up a few more credits at most. It is pure waste, because so many of them spend their time in part-time jobs. So students should spend one year inside their own country or go overseas to be engaged in volunteer services. After a year of volunteer work students may come out refreshed and may be ready to embark on venturing into the actual world. My students, for instance, have been engaged in Habitat for Humanity International in the last fifteen years. We created the very first campus chapter in our university and I have taken students to the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Bangladesh and elsewhere in the last fifteen years. Several graduates decided to go back to the Philippines to work with children and adults in literacy program at a very minimal pay, but they have found the work meaningful and worthwhile. If we can raise students such as these, then we may be doing a good job of operating a Christian institution, even though it may be one of the affluent institutions.

Many Christian institutions in Japan are faced with a threat of becoming non-Christian institutions today. Ninety-nine percent of students and faculty in so-called Christian institutions in Japan are non-Christian. We have chapel services every week; we hold special Christian-emphasis week chapels, lectures and the like. We encourage students and faculty to attend chapel and other Christian activities but very few participate in them. Some are even openly opposed to having to attend chapel or Christian lectures. In some Asian countries such as Korea and the Philippines where there is a large Christian population this may pose no problem, but in Japan it is a serious issue. So

instead of forcing students and faculty to attend chapel and other Christian activities, I have encouraged students and faculty to go with me to the Philippines and elsewhere to be engaged in work with Habitat. That way they learn Christian service without realizing it. It is an encounter with the unknown and this helps them grow as human persons. So instead of 'teaching' Christianity to my students I would rather have them exposed to something new and encounter a new set of values they have not known before. Thus by getting their feet wet with the new experience of working with slum dwellers with no decent clothes or shoes, they come to a new sense of evaluating what it means to be affluent and also what it means to be poverty-stricken. They come home grown with a new sense of manhood and womanhood and what it means to serve humankind by giving of themselves. To me this is truly Christian and to house them in a university setting is a Christian endeavor.

I also take a different group of students who are engaged in research on American racism to the States for a month during summer recess and have them stay with Africa-American families for two weeks. They learn a great deal by living and talking with them about what it means to live as ethnic minority people in America. They learn that these people have lived through hardships of racial segregation and discrimination of the 50s and 60s. They also learn that racism is not a thing of the past: it still exists in America in many areas of living. My students learn that not only African-Americans but also other ethnic minority people in America live in the vast ocean of affluence basically controlled by WASP: they only are given a small portion of the big American pie, politically, socially and culturally. This American pie has been promised to each American, but only a privileged few enjoy a large portion of the American pie. Upon returning to Japan my students begin to look at Japanese society in a different perspective. Most of them were born and raised in Japan and have lived as part of the majority. But having experienced living with ethnic minority people in America they have begun to look at Japanese society entirely differently. They become more aware and conscious of ethnic minority people in Japan and they even try to figure out if there is anything they can do to ease the pains of ethnic minority people and how they can work toward social reform. So the perception of looking at one's society from ethnic minority perspective is also Christian endeavor. Therefore, raising students of this sort is imperative for Christian institutions. Students also come to develop a sense of tolerance and openness toward different religions. This also is an important component of Christian institutions. Christians and Christian institutions should not adamantly stick to their own religious values but become open so that they may begin to have dialogue between different religious thoughts and values. And they may be able to work together to come up with concrete ideas of impacting society so that each person will be treated as precious creation of God Almighty.

In many societies today people feel a sense of estrangement and entrapment. They feel they are incarcerated on an island in their own society and see no way out. The other thing is that in many social situations they also feel a sense of loneliness and meaninglessness, because they are powerless. They do not feel they belong anywhere: they feel they cannot make any dent in the social structure because they are highly bureaucratized and rigidly framed. The thing that bothers these people is the feeling of powerlessness. They see no way in which to make any impact upon their own society. They feel they are not even human but mere cogs in social mechanism. So many societies have become so highly bureaucratized that they feel they are incapable of making any dent in them. This, in turn, creates a sense of hopelessness and powerlessness. So the responsibility of Christians and Christian institutions is to speak to this issue strongly and make efforts to help people see that there is a possibility of making change in social and governmental bureaucracy. The other pertinent issue here is the question of nepotism. We somehow must learn to break away from this sense of nepotism in which we only cater to and care for our own families,

relatives, similar groups and close friends. Monopoly on resources which are supposed to belong to every person creates estrangement, loneliness, hopelessness and powerlessness. Accepting heterogeneity and diversity is the order of the day and this is precisely what Christians and Christian institutions must address themselves to.

3. Regeneration of Christian Institutions

So finally this relates to the question of regeneration of Christian institutions. So many Christian institutions are like sleeping lions and they need to be shaken up a little so that they may truly wake up and start doing their job. They seem to be happy with their status quo and dare not venture into something new. They feel they have accomplished a lot in the past and are quite happy with where they are today. But as I mentioned earlier, it is high time that all of us should ask ourselves once again where we are and where we are supposed to be headed. So many Christian institutions are endowed richly in terms of resourcefulness, finance and otherwise so much so that they are unwilling to risk themselves to start something new to meet challenges God requires us to pursue: challenges that will thrust us into new dimensions of Christian experiences. Almighty God is showing us the way, the way to the promised land where every child is treated as a precious child of God, no matter who s/he may be. We should never be content with where we are, but we need to move ahead to where God is inviting us. The promised land for Christian institutions is where every single individual is treated on an equal basis and every person has their own share of resources. Our work never ends until every person who is God's creation finds himself/herself in the promised land where they can enjoy the equal share of God-created resources. The Garden of Eden to the promised land is our path of trials and errors, but the path is full of divine intercession and forgiveness. Our Christian institutions should realize that we have erred in so many aware and unaware ways and are in need of divine forgiveness. We have not treated every child as a God's created precious child: we have not shared our rich resources with those who are in need of them. If Christians and Christian institutions come to this realization, then Christian institutions can be regenerated and revitalized, because then they can venture into something they have never tried before. They can be given a chance to be rejuvenated and even reborn into new institutions. Finally I want to point out something else. So many Christian institutions, if not all, have become so bureaucratized and Pharisee-like: they are self-centered, willing to forgive themselves but unwilling to forgive others. They think they are the best institutions ever, compared to other religious affiliations. If they feel that way, they should recall what went on between Jesus and the Pharisees. To become regenerated, Christian institutions must reflect upon their own values and practice those values, without enforcing them upon others. If Christian institutions are quick to realize their own sins of slothfulness in doing God's will and dare to have willingness to correct their own errors, then Christian institutions are well on their way to be regenerated with God's renewing spirit. More power to all of our Christian institutions in Asia-Pacific Federation of Christian Schools. I thank you very much.

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