

Methodist General Conference Banquet

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The Methodist Church is the pre-eminent Protestant denomination in the field of education. No other Protestant church can even begin to match its record. Now related to the Methodist Church in the United States there are 135 educational institutions of which 120 are institutions of higher education. This does not count any of the missionary schools and colleges found in scores of countries in every part of the globe. The Methodist schools within the United States serve 250,000 students with almost 12,000 faculty members. Their libraries hold more than 12 _ million books. They have physical plants worth more than 900 million dollars backed by endowments totaling close to _ billion dollars. Their current expenditures exceed one-third of a billion dollars each year. Methodist-related higher education is a major factor in our nation's life.

John Wesley charged his preachers to "preach expressly on education." Then he added, "Gift or no gift you are to do it else you are not called to be a Methodist preacher." This instruction was conveyed to American Methodism at the Christmas Conference in 1784. During the 180 years since then American Methodists have had some official connection with more than 1,000 educational institutions, most of whom called themselves colleges. The high infant mortality rate of Methodist-related schools and colleges was due mostly to fiscal undernourishment in a frontier society. Not always, but in the main, the educational institutions that died were limited to a single building and had little or no endowment. Some years ago a national weekly described the Methodists as "short on theology and long on good works." With respect to education we have been "long on enthusiasm and short on dollars." Nevertheless we have created an admirable company of 120 institutions, and in the process of natural selection those that have survived are indeed fit.

Behind this education record lies the deep conviction of both John and Charles Wesley. Methodism was born in a university and it was just one year after the heartwarming experience of 1738 that John Wesley founded the now justly famous Kingswood School. For its dedication Charles Wesley summed up the moving Methodist conviction as he did all the significant doctrines of Methodism, in a hymn which we sang together at the beginning of our dinner tonight:

"Unite the pair so long disjoin'd,
Knowledge and vital piety;

Learning and holiness combined,
And truth and love let all men see."

John Wesley always coupled with his evangelical message a well formulated educational program. He had a passion for the growth competence that led him to become one of the world's truly outstanding educators. It was the practical religion of the Wesleys that laid the foundation in Great Britain for the emergence of popular education a century later.

We should here acknowledge the contribution of John O. Gross to the maintenance of this tradition. His zeal and insight, grounded in precise historical knowledge of Methodism's role in education, has delivered to us a system broad in its geographical spread, strong in its purpose, and loyal in its ties to the Methodist Church. I believe historians will note his contribution as unparalleled since the days of John Wesley himself.

As long ago as 1885 Lyon Playfair, in the Presidential Address to the British Association, declared, "The competition of the world has become a competition of the intellect." Today's concern in Great Britain over what is called "the brain drain," the flight of their best scholars to America, only illustrates the importance of brain power as a nation's most precious natural resource. Most of us did not recognize the importance of the intellectual explosion that began as a chain reaction not too many years ago. We did not recognize it until the scientific fall-out began to produce social mutations all over the earth. Food supplies, health, population, transportation, communications and consequently all of man's economic, social, and political aspirations have been altered. We live now amid the consequences, the tensions, the multiplying uncertainties, and magnificent hopes poised on the brink of extinction which this intellectual explosion has created. In this enormous cultural revolution the institutions of higher education have become the vital instruments for rational control, the source of personal and national fulfillment. Higher education is no longer an optional luxury. It is the sine qua non of survival and human progress.

Fifty years ago high school enrollments in this country barely exceeded one million students. Only two per cent went on to college. They received a preponderantly classical education. Today high school enrollments exceed twelve million and a constantly increasing percentage, now about 35%, go on to college. They go to a vastly diversified collection of over 2,000 institutions offering study in every imaginable subject. Enrollments in higher education have leaped from 200,000 to 4 _ million in fifty years. Every statistical projection indicates that the 4 _ million will reach 7 million in the early 1970's.

If there has been a vast increase in college enrollments it is modest in rate of growth compared to graduate study. There has been a ten fold growth since World War II. In 1940 the nation produced about 3,000 Ph.D.'s per

year. This June the number will exceed 12,000. Another 90,000 will achieve the Master's degree. Yet the demand is such that forces are at work to double this rate within a decade.

Amid this expansion of numbers and extension to higher levels there is also a diversification of subjects studied. The wholly new mathematics of Von Neumann which lies behind the computers did not exist when we in this room were in school. We turn on a pocket radio equipped with transistors without knowing a thing about solid state physics and engineering which have come on the scene in the past fifteen years. We take for granted that emerging nations will take their place in the councils of the United Nations and engage in world trade without much thought of the basic linguistic tools, the structures of law outside the tradition of Blackstone, and the body of literate and loyal civil servants running everything from the sewage system to the legislative printing office that must be created. We hear that automation is eliminating up to 40,000 jobs per week and Micawber-like assume "that something will turn up." Half of the freshmen entering college next fall will graduate into kinds of jobs that did not exist when they were born.

Remarkable as the changes thus far may seem, bear in mind that the rate of change is itself accelerating. In our kind of civilization progress is closely related to the rate at which people can be trained and educated. Upon the shoulders of a tiny fraction of the world's population rests the main burden of human progress. It is the college graduates who will do the research, treat and heal the sick, design the buildings and machinery, and will train others how to do these things. Most of the important work of the world today is within the competence only of the person who is highly educated.

This is a meeting under the aegis of the Board of Education and we are concerned primarily about the schools, colleges and universities of the United States. But is it not clear that if this were a Board of Missions dinner the place, the role of education would be the same.

This emergence of higher education as the crucial element in modern society has not wholly penetrated our collective consciousness. Nor has it penetrated the consciousness of the church. For too many persons it is only a matter of college admission for their youngsters. "When you are ready for college, will college be ready for you." What we need to see more clearly is the realignment of roles among the basic institutions of our society that is now underway. Among the basic institutions of our western culture are the family, the state, the units of economic life, the church, and education. And education is assuming a greater and greater role.

Freedom is maximized when there is balance and equity in the interplay of these institutions of society; that is, when one does not invade or usurp the rights of another; or, when by its possession of power one does not distort the self-determination of another. This notion of balanced powers, a system of checks and balances, is familiar to every American. It is built into our Constitution.

In the Renaissance, which brought an end to the Dark Ages, the universities emerged. They were all Christian. They were all influenced by the church. Normally each had a theological faculty. But they were surprisingly free. They became great centers of learning in conflict on the one hand with the rigid orthodoxy of medieval religion and on the other with the despotism of hereditary monarchy. They constitute a truly bright spot in the somber pattern of medieval culture. The university took its place with the family, state, corporation, and church as a significant institution of western culture. It contributed enormously to freedom by its interplay with the other kinds of institutions.

The great independent university born in the Renaissance disappeared from Europe 150 years ago. In its stead there emerged in the Nineteenth Century in Western Europe a new type of institution. The idea came from Napoleon's Universite de France in 1806 with all faculties appointed by the State and with the university as an agency of the State. It was the Germans, however, who appropriated the idea and achieved the greatest success with it. Berlin, Breslau and Bonn, the three great Prussian universities, became prototypes for the universities of western civilization that spread around the world.

With the affluence brought by state support these institutions achieved real grandeur. Every college graduate is aware of the very significant research carried on by their faculties prior to World War II. It was their pre-eminence that caused German and French to become the standard language skills requisite for an American Ph.D. degree.

There were three propositions behind the German or Western Europe university: one, the university is properly subordinate to the state; two, the university serves properly as the voice of the national spirit or mind of the nation; and three, the university is properly dedicated to the increase of knowledge as its principal task and not merely the perpetuation of knowledge.

In the course of their development the universities of Western Europe lost all prescriptive right to independence. Ultimately their degrees became a kind of government license and the sole legal access to the professions. They developed into bulwarks of orthodoxy and nationalism. They were training grounds for the

schoolmaster, the civil service bureaucrat, and the army officer. So when World War II was in the making it was the German university, that purported stronghold of freedom, that first knuckled under and became propagandistic for Hitler.

In the process of importation to America the German university system was not taken over lock, stock, and barrel. It was modified and related to the scattered colleges which found their roots in England if not the pattern of grouping. Through the Nineteenth Century and to about 1950 the private and church-related institutions of higher education dominated America in terms of percentage of the students enrolled, the distinction of their faculties, and the investment of dollars. Our autonomous institutions contributed immensely to the enhancement of freedom.

The past fifteen years have seen striking changes. There has been a vast expansion of state-supported higher education all over the nation. This is fine insofar as it has provided a maximum breadth of opportunity for our young people. Over 4 _ million of our youngsters are in college in contrast to the 100,000 enrolled in Great Britain's colleges. Educational opportunity is important to democracy as well as to human progress. In addition to our 700 community and junior colleges, we have a total of 1,225 degree-granting institutions (more than fifty times the number in the United Kingdom). But the German influence has been greater than we commonly think. In the relation of public colleges to the State, the German concept is becoming the American view.

It may be a surprise to some of you to learn that in the eyes of the law many tax-supported institutions of higher education have no legal existence or entity. The courts of Iowa, Kansas, North Dakota, and West Virginia have expressed this point of view. As long ago as 1876 the State University of Iowa was held to be "merely an agency of the state and not a separate corporate entity." In most states they are recognized as corporate entities, but they are also regarded as corporate creatures of the legislature, subject to their control and even abolition.

In just three cases a high degree of autonomy exists by virtue of establishment under the state constitution. In these instances the college or university possesses an autonomy coordinate with the legislative, judicial, and executive branches of government. These are Michigan, Michigan State and Minnesota. In three others the courts have granted freedom from legislative control—California, Idaho, and Oklahoma. However, in most cases the tax-supported institutions are clearly agencies of the several states and subject to the often less than beneficent influence of the legislatures.

Wherever there is a failure to grant or recognize the autonomy of the university there is a grave danger that in critical times it may become merely the voice of national spirit, a stronghold of orthodoxy, a servant of

government, and not an instrument of freedom. I remind you that the meaning of “totalitarianism” is “all things in the service of the State.” We simply cannot leave higher education exclusively to the State. The church, like all lovers of freedom, must have a deep concern.

A few moments ago I spoke of the institutions of our western culture as the family, the state, the units of economic life, the church, and education. I said that freedom is maximized when there is diffusion of power in the interplay of these institutions. The university is the pinnacle form of education. It must be the citadel of free inquiry if it is to serve its purposes at all. Its interest is in inquiry, not orthodoxy. It is committed to the pursuit of truth whatever that truth might turn out to be. Error must come into its courts of inquiry to be known as error. Except ideas be put forward and challenged, we can know neither truth nor error. The pursuit of truth requires both courage and faith. It can never be found amid fear and suppression. Surely no Christian can doubt the pre-eminent importance of truth. We know the familiar words from John’s Gospel, “For ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

What then is the relationship of higher education and the church? The problem is to assure freedom without casting our colleges adrift, or so dominating them as to destroy their special role in the search for truth.

There are three bases for church-related institutions of higher education to be regarded as autonomous institutions. So regarded they may engage in equitable interplay with the Church. The first basis is pragmatic. The university stands in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, from the prophets on, as a transmitter of the cultural heritage which sees learning as a weapon against ignorance, evil and error. The second is theological, or even Christological. Christ is Truth, and the knowledge of Truth is part of His work. The university is committed to Truth and so in its own right and its own work it is a servant of Christ and doing part of His work. There is also a basis in social philosophy which lies behind much of what I said about freedom. The university, in the interest of truth and in its own freedom, exercises critical judgment both explicitly and implicitly upon the Church and the State. In this connection we should never forget that it was a university professor exercising his right as such who precipitated the Protestant Reformation.

Thus viewed the church-related institutions of higher education are collateral institutions in the service of God’s purposes, not subject instruments of the church. The University serves the Church not just by preparing pre-ministerial students and directors of religious education. It serves the church not at all if it is simply an advanced institute of catechetics. The church needs men and women delivered from obscurantism, anti-intellectualism, and

the distrust of knowledge and reason. It needs men and women who combine knowledge and vital piety. The whole purpose of the university ultimately serves the church. An epigram from Epictetus touches the point, "The sheep eat grass, but it is wool that grows on their backs." More than any other institution it is given to education to shape and lead the nation's culture, to see beyond the constant changes that come with accelerating pace, and to equip the generations with carefully honed minds, imaginative sensitivities, and noble and venturesome spirits who will "call the future from its cradle."

How then, you may well ask, does the church-related institution differ from the secular or tax-supported institution? Admittedly there are confusing similarities with the secular and the public institutions just as some aspects of the church may be confused with the Rotary Club or the P.T.A. Nor would I claim that the church-related identity has been adequately achieved.

There is, however, a world of difference between a tax-supported or a wholly independent college and the church-related institution where three conditions are met.

And the first is the Christian commitment of the President. More than he cares to admit he determines not only the academic press of the college but the religious press as well. He sets both its academic and its religious tone. He determines almost single-handed the degree and quality of its religious influence, the loyalty or lack of it to its religious purpose.

He can take the institution completely out of the church. Indeed many have and others will. He can also take a college or university with loose and forgotten ties and give them new vitality and strength. As a rule he cannot, in our day, make his institution narrowly denominational or sectarian. And as the college grows in national and international strength it must adjust itself to religious pluralism. Nonetheless, he can have his institution clearly and vigorously support every positive value his church stands for. Among the great ethical religions these are not normally in conflict. This is a part of his trusteeship. He is not elected to persuade the institution to turn its back on its heritage.

The second condition is an effective pulpit in the midst of the campus community. No amount of student religious work through local churches; no religious foundation attached at the periphery, and no compulsory chapel marked by mediocrity can do the job. What is needed is a most gifted preacher who is able to communicate the Gospel both to groping students and self-assured scholars. He must stand at the center of the campus community as a symbol of its concern for vital piety so that "truth and love all men may see." By his eloquence, his wisdom, his

winsomeness, and his life in the midst of the community he will commend the Gospel to it. This is the world's most significant pulpit. It speaks in the midst of the making of men's minds, and it call for their hearts.

The third condition is a Department of Religion manned by distinguished scholars whose gifts of learning will commend them to all their colleagues, and whose power as teachers will leave no student uncertain about the worthfulness of religion as a matter for serious study. A Theological School can be no substitute. No matter how able, they are a professional faculty, as Law and Medicine, an outer ring from the center of the institution's community of learning. A Theological School alone without a major Department in the College may indeed weaken the situation for non-professionals. Nor can the professors of religion be linked with those of philosophy without serious effects on the scholarship of both philosophy and religion. They are as academically separate as history and political science, as painting and music. Further, a clear distinction should be visible between the professor of religion, as a serious scholar following the canons of excellence set down by his colleagues in other academic fields, and the gifted preacher in the campus pulpit declaring the Word of God. In the dynamics of their roles well played the atmosphere will be charged with religious concern. It might then be reasonable to expect that scholars of the first rank who choose their posts in the light of the total community, might, as men committed to Christian values, come to accept significant appointments in other departments of the institution. But the first canon, academic competence, can never be biased by issue of faith in the selection of men for these other posts.

Where these three conditions are met the church-related colleges make a major contribution to moral and spiritual values. To cement, however, the relationship between church and college I propose that the colleges appoint a member of the faculty or an administrative officer other than the President to develop a continuing significant relationship. We have an alumni office to cultivate the alumni and develop their loyalty and support. Let us also have someone on our staff who really works at church relationships. He can be useful in admissions, scholarships and loans, counseling, human and public relations problems, and financial promotion.

Having suggested some conditions for the colleges, let me also propose a program for the church. I suggest first a program of information services as effective as we can develop to give the church a new attitude, a new posture toward education. As a church we need to understand what we have and what we ought to do. And the first step is to acquaint the church with the resources and magnificent strength of our 135 institutions. We need greater familiarity with our preparatory schools, our theological schools, our junior colleges and our four-year colleges. We need to remind the church that our eight universities are the last major group of denominationally sponsored

universities other than Roman Catholic in the United States. These eight institutions have one-half the faculty, students, books, plant values and endowments. More important, they bear responsibility for almost all the graduate and professional work. They are indeed resource for faculty and staff for the colleges and preparatory schools. By their size, international significance, research, federal relations and prestige they constitute in fact the church's major instrument of educational influence. It is true also that they have the greatest self-sufficiency and autonomy. It would be a crippling tragedy for the church to lose them. Therefore, they should have the attention of the entire church in order to maintain and strengthen the allegiance that exists.

I am pleased to note that under the leadership of Dr. Gross this relationship has been made Dr. Myron Wicke's special concern. Dr. Wicke has done an outstanding piece of work as Dr. Ralph Decker has with the schools and colleges. The foreseeable future calls for more attention. Indeed, a number of our institutions, now classified by the Senate as colleges, should be reason of location, aspiration, capability, and external community factors become true universities, in the graduate and professional sense.

Ten years from now we can and should have 16 Methodist universities instead of 8. We should not be afraid to launch new colleges. We should not be timid or faint hearted about the future. This is still a young country. Our schools and colleges are still young. Most of them are less than a century old. They are even younger than Bishop Welch.

We need the posture of a church with the whole future before it, a bright and shining future. American Methodists, ten million strong, have the resources. The problem is how to change their attitude and posture.

My second proposal is that while we are trying to change the posture of the Church toward its responsibilities in the field of education we dramatically lift the goals of our annual support program to five dollars a member. The present level is a confession of weakness and indifference. It is an indictment of all of us, our educators, our lay leadership, our clergy, even our Board of Bishops. Don't say it can't be done. It can and it will if we agree on the need.

My third proposal is the formation of a National Methodist Education Foundation. Dr. Gross reports that with just a million dollars for capital money we have significantly upgraded our Negro colleges. The success of this is prompting the Council on World Service to raise this to two million dollars for the next quadrennial. This is illustrative of what can be done with capital funds.

For the Methodist Church there is little reason for satisfaction, though much for gratitude that the stimulus to excellence through the Great Plan at Oklahoma City University, through the magnificent matching gift to the University of Denver, and the Youth Development Center at Syracuse – is the Ford Foundation. Foundations and the Federal Government are setting the direction of American education. Methodism too should play this kind of determinative role. There are Methodists of wealth and generous spirit who need a challenging opportunity in the Church as a substitute for creating their own private foundations for education. And we need a Church-wide capital funds campaign for higher education.

Is it unreasonable for a Church with ten million members to build a Methodist Education Foundation under the Division of Higher Education of the Board of Education with resources of from fifty to one hundred million? Cannot such a foundation be the kind of creative and germinative force for excellence that Ford, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Sloan and Danforth now are? Moreover, would not a Methodist Education Foundation arrest the drift of our strongest and best-endowed institutions out of the arms of the Church?

I am mindful of the fact that in 1952 a resolution for the creation of a general purpose Methodist Foundation was voted down by the General Conference. At the time there was a feeling that it would compete with the existing churches, institutions and the Boards. A foundation designed to promote Methodist education is not open to the same criticism. It would not, in my judgment, compete with the existing Methodist colleges and universities. To the contrary, it would in time be a source of immense strength to them. Moreover, if it is under the aegis of the Division of Higher Education it would not be a rival to the work of that important Board. Until and unless such a Methodist agency is created our church-related institutions will continue to reflect and react to the decisions made either among the secular foundations or the federal agencies. Such countervailing force as a Methodist Education Foundation is imperative in the balanced operation of higher education, in the maintenance of church influence through higher education, and for effective freedom in our society.

John Wesley was loyal to his Master's commandment, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations," when he united learning and vital piety. The Methodist people must be loyal to that vision too. This issues of education are not merely those of buildings, teachers, and dollars. They are also issues about the nature of the good society, about the role of knowledge and experience in a changing world, about the place of human values, about personal and social goals, and about religious faith. The issues are, at bottom, spiritual. Higher education has the critical and difficult mission of helping men and women to learn to think for themselves, to reach out with responsibility and

concern for the world in which their times are set, and to dare courageously for their dreams. This is the point made by the ancient scriptural Proverb, “Where there is no vision the people perish.” What we began two quadrenniums ago as an emphasis on higher education has grown now by insight and shared experiences into a new vision of what the Methodist Church can and must do today. Let the church’s voice be heard through the central institution of our cultural revolution—higher education.