Looking from Yesterday (1970)

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LOOKING FROM YESTERDAY

American higher education was from the beginning Christian, or at least church-related and oriented. The creation of state universities and wide departures from the Christian position on the part of other institutions greatly changed the American scene. As the number of institutions multiplied, a rapidly decreasing percentage maintained a Christian philosophy and position.

In spite of this, some universities gained reputations far out of proportion to their true quality so far as whole-person education is concerned. They are now often referred to as "the more prestigious and elite" institutions. I challenge the criteria by which these colleges and universities are so easily and glibly thus denoted. Perhaps my point is further made by the ACE special committee on campus tensions in its recent report when it says that these so-designated institutions "experience the most campus unrest." If, as they claim, this is because they have the "smartest kids" as measured alone by I.Q.'s and C.E.E.B. scores, they may also have to admit that they also have the kids who lack most in some other aspects of whole-person development, and who are therefore without values, without direction, without purpose, without commitment.

It seems to me that this is where we have been: we have run a course which has come full circle. We started with religious purpose and a commitment to a meaningful value pattern, including moral anchor-points and the demands of self-discipline. As we became powerful and affluent, we minimized the anchor-
points and gave way to an intellectual secularism, until now the world is crying out again for light and love and leadership. To whatever extent this is true, our role, yours and mine, the role of the Christian college, is exceedingly important, and is faced with the challenge to be contemporary with the very qualities that make us Christian.

The current situation generally across the education board is not good; in fact, it's terrible. The August 31 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education presents a frightening front page. The headlines are:

Presidents Prepare for Disorders, Seek Ways to Keep Campuses Open.

Some Students Will Take Up Guns, Panel on Campus Unrest Is Told.

Financial Crisis Worsens for Colleges; Some Close, Many Show Deficits.

Small Colleges Face Shortage of Students.

There are pictures of the out-going and the in-coming presidents of N.S.A., and the new one says, "Violence will occur sooner on the campuses this fall and will be more extreme."

In view of this potentially explosive situation - doubly tense and precarious because it sits in the middle of a potentially explosive world situation - our kind of college stands in sharp contrast. This is not to say we are better than others or that we are immune from trouble. But it does enhance the values and the commitments represented by our goals and our programs, and the challenge today - and the opportunity - is to and for Christian higher education.

William Arrowsmith wrote, "The liberal arts do not humanize unless learning finds integration in action and conduct. Our greatest educational need is a context
in which such integration might occur." The college must, he says, have something, create something, to give to a society "now threatened by syndicated greed, organized mis-education, and a general vacuum of value and vision."

You, like I, have heard many statements from the experts describing the deplorable conditions of our time, and often they have listed reasons for the same. I have listened to these analyzers until I agree with the fellow who said, "We are suffering from the paralysis of analysis." I've heard no one give any very clear guidance as to a course of action that might correct the situation. Is this because no one has the courage to stand up and say God - and morality - and discipline - and work? You see, the people for whom God is dead are the people who have no vital and dynamic faith. James said, "Faith that does not lead to action is in itself a dead thing." So, for people whose faith has gone dead there is no living God. And isn't this what has happened in American education?

The Christian college may hold the key to the future. Last spring I spent several days here while you were reviewing the Spring Arbor concept and its implementation in your program. We all struggled to identify the difference this concept made, especially as it is applied to the curriculum. We weren't sure that you had always been successful in realizing the goals implied in the concept, but we knew we were dealing with something, even though somewhat intangible and even illusive, very genuine and very important.

Taylor University also operates around a basic concept. Pardon me if I use my own experience and my own institution as an example. The Taylor concept is symbolized by, and expressed in, a logo made up simply of a combination of
the first letters of our name. The T stands within, and rises out of the U. By choice of the appropriate type-style of letters in print, the U suggests the Old Testament pot of oil used for lighting, and the T suggests the New Testament Christian cross. In a day of world darkness, the symbol of light is not inappropriate, and when the world is crying out for love, the cross of Jesus Christ is a hopeful sign. I, for one, am willing to stand up and say that this is expressive of the Taylor concept, and that it represents the goals toward which we strive.

I didn’t come today to tell you how to carry out the implications of the Spring Arbor concept. I came to say, acknowledge it, examine it rationally, seek to understand it, make it your uniqueness, guard it carefully, and implement it unapologetically through the lives of students, faculty and administrators until you generate a climate that is intellectually and spiritually stimulating - a climate in which students can explore the same facts as on any other campus, but can grow into a different personal product - the product with the plus - the person with the Christian plus.

When I look around me in education, I am discouraged; when I look ahead from yesterday, under God, I am optimistic. The Christian college might just be the key to the future. Nobody else has any better word or hope. The summary paragraph of the conclusions of our nation’s top educational agency is:

Taken all in all, the educational system, which is the crucial single institution for the development of our citizenry so that they can live happily, shape our system wisely, and contribute to both the direction and rate of its growth, is in a state of severe stress. The educational system is having its own “growth” problems which, if not solved, will have a profound impact on the growth of the Nation as a whole.

Accordingly, I repeat that the Christian college may well be the size and the shape of the future.
There was this man who had been hired by a university president, and who failed to perform satisfactorily. The president decided to let him go, and made this announcement concerning his going, "He leaves the university just as he came; fired with great enthusiasm." So, I guess something nice can be said about almost anyone or any institution. But what of our institutions of higher education in America today? Very few nice things are being said about them. Let’s take a look from yesterday.

Beginning