LEVERAGING CULTURAL INSIGHT FOR ADAPTIVE CHANGE

...men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do

1 Chronicles 12:32
As we witness the descending cultural spiral so evident in our day, it is easy to recognize the pattern Paul describes in Romans 1:18-32. God-denial leads to moral delusion and moral delusion leads to metastasizing personal and societal degradation. In a January 2019 essay published in First Things, Yoram Hazony asserts:

There are prominent scholars and public figures who are convinced that “things are getting better” in almost every way. As for me, I find it difficult not to see the Western nations disintegrating before our eyes. The most significant institutions that have characterized [North] America and Britain for the last five centuries, giving these countries their internal coherence and stability—the Bible, public religion, the independent national state, and the traditional family—are not merely under assault. They have been, at least since World War II, in precipitous decline.

In the United States, for example, some 40 percent of children are today born outside of marriage. The overall fertility rate has fallen to 1.76 children per woman. American children for the most part receive twelve years of public schooling that is scrubbed clean of God and Scripture. And it is now possible to lose one’s livelihood or even to be prosecuted for maintaining traditional Christian or Jewish views on various subjects. [https://www.firstthings.com/article/2019/01/conservative-democracy]

In the wake of last year’s Supreme Court of Canada ruling that upheld several provincial denials of Trinity Western University’s law school recognition, many have observed that Christian belief and practice has been effectively banished from the public square and relegated to the realm of culturally benign private devotion. Our reaction and mood in light of cultural marginalization by a callous and condescending world can easily drift toward despair. I confess to occasional tendency toward despairing moments.

But that is not Paul’s outlook. His letter to the Roman believers begins with his exuberant reminder that they are a people of destiny. Take a look:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ …
For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.” (Rom. 1:1-6; 16)

You see the sickening spiral described in Romans 1:18-32 has a countervailing context we too easily forget. Far from cowering and capitulating to the culture’s decline, Paul exudes confidence rooted in the dramatic revelation of the power of the Gospel to transform those who will believe (v. 16). The present cultural moment notwithstanding, our overarching reality is that God’s redemptive work has blossomed and is inexorably unfolding toward the full flower of His redemptive purposes.

These realities underlie the work of biblical higher education and must undergird our faith and perseverance in what our Constitution’s purpose statement describes as, serious Bible learning that shapes a life of godly influence and service.

***

Membership Growth: Addition and Multiplication?

Decisions we courageously undertook at our 2018 meeting have positioned us for growth in a time when conventional wisdom might incline us toward retrenchment and retreat. ABHE-COA accreditation is no longer the exclusive basis for ABHE membership. Instead, ABHE membership is predicated upon missional compatibility or, as some would put it, brand affinity.

- We continue efforts to craft and to communicate a fresh, robust, and compelling biblical higher education brand that represents the unifying basis for association membership and to serve as the primary driver of brand equity on behalf of our members.

- We have elevated and accelerated our efforts to serve as an incubating agent and peer-to-peer catalyst, connecting our members to opportunities for successful innovation that leads to maturing, thriving and sustaining.

Under those terms, we have now welcomed Southeastern University (FL) to ABHE membership and we anticipate further enlarging our membership as similar institutions elect to join our ranks in the days to come. However, we not only have potential to add carefully vetted, accredited North American postsecondary institution members that share commitment to our brand in the days to come, we also have been discussing whether and how we might multiply our scope by partnering with other groups to forge an alliance that encompasses Christian educators of all kinds and at all levels globally. I anticipate those feasibility discussions to continue and, perhaps, to mature in 2019.
In the meantime, our Commission on Accreditation continues to occupy a central role in our work and it is currently the primary driver of ABHE’s new member growth. Over the past several years, the COA has been admitting record numbers of institutions to COA Applicant Status and the past year has been no exception. The brand equity of ABHE-COA accreditation is not diminishing, it is growing.

**Accreditation training.** As new institutions seek to join us and begin the journey toward accreditation (accreditation is, after all, a journey and not a destination, is it not?) our fall Accreditation Journey leadership development event has been increasingly well attended. This year, we plan to add a spring/summer COA training event (May 20-21, 2019) targeted for accreditation liaisons and institutional teams representing institutions beginning the accreditation process and those preparing for accreditation reaffirmation.

**Scope expansion.** Following careful internal feasibility discussions and consultation with USDE staff, the Commission on Accreditation is committed to move forward in submitting a long-delayed and long-anticipated USDE Expansion of Scope petition in 2019. We anticipate the petition will be reviewed by USDE’s National Advisory Council for Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) at its “winter 2019” meeting (likely early 2020, if recent NACIQI scheduling patterns continue). As a reminder, USDE graduate-level “recognition” does not constitute “permission” to accredit at the graduate level. In order to achieve recognition, an agency has to demonstrate it is conducting accreditation at the desired level and that its accreditation is acknowledged by peers and stakeholders. ABHE has conducted accreditation at the graduate level since 2006 and was granted professional peer recognition as a graduate-level accreditor by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in 2007. USDE scope expansion pertains only to participation by ABHE member colleges’ graduate students in USDE Title IV federally-subsidized student loan programs.

**COA staffing.** We have also enlarged and augmented the COA staff this past year. Heritage Christian University’s (AL) Director of Institutional Effectiveness, Dr. Michael Jackson, now serves as ABHE-COA Research Associate. In that capacity Dr. Jackson works to resolve discrepancies in data submitted by institutions where accuracy is critical for accreditation decisions, to assist institutions in understanding how to calculate and report required information, and to develop and maintain an accurate, up-to-date accreditation profile for each institution (a project CHEA expects us to report on in our 2021 recognition renewal petition). Additional staff expansion and reconfiguration is anticipated to support the COA’s scope expansion effort and to enhance our operational efficiency, COA decision-making data support, and member client institution “user support” effectiveness.

* * *
RESOURCING OUR VISION

Three Pillars. ABHE’s Board of Directors has authorized focused pursuit of substantial funding for three initiatives we deem of central importance to ABHE and its member colleges: (a) Identifying associational and institutional Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s) and securing means and methods for systematic data collection and analysis that increases ABHE’s strategic intelligence capacity; (b) Executive Leadership Certification including curriculum design and training opportunities for institutional chief suite leaders, especially toward their increasingly effective use of KPI’s for institutional thriving; and (c) Board Governance Certification, including design and implementation of a comprehensive training program for institutional governing boards, yielding for each participating institution a mentor-led strategic board development plan. With respect to the latter, in early January 2019, we submitted a major grant proposal that would exponentially increase our capacity to offer board governance training and certification.

Financial support. We continue under the indefatigable leadership of Executive Vice President, David Medders, to achieve unprecedented financial resource support. Our astonishing 2018 annual Leadership Development Offering gift total of $112,000 eclipsed the $55,000 previous year record. LD funds not only allow us to provide scholarship grants to members who most need but can least afford training but also have allowed us to accelerate and proliferate delivery of training and leadership development events for presidents, academic officers, enrollment officers, advancement officers, assessment and accreditation leaders, and faculty members.

Partnerships. Like our annual Leadership Development offering, our sponsor/exhibitor program continues to break previous records. Total sponsor/partner revenue exceeded $118,000 in FY17-18, contributing to total FY17-18 resource development revenues of $234,000.

Leadership development. The participation levels and quality of training and professional networking/development events continues to gain momentum, breaking all previous records. Aggregate enrollment in all 2018 Leadership Development events exceeded 180. Once again, participant accolades regarding program content, faculty, efficiency, and exemplary hospitality continue to register in the superlative range. Our 2019 leadership development menu of more than a dozen training and peer development events promises to be our most ambitious ever.
Dues restructure. As promised in connection with membership criteria changes adopted by the February 2018 Delegate Assembly, CFO Matt Kelly has been working with a select representative member task force to consider modification of our dues structure. Consensus proposals for revision of the dues structure have been developed for membership review at our February 2019 membership meetings.

Governance and Ownership

Board of Directors. Christen Price, J.D. was elected in 2018 to a 4-year ABHE board term (2018-2022). Our Board of Directors now comprises 18 individuals: 10 elected from the ranks of member college executives; 7 “at large” members elected by the board to help build our association’s capacity and credibility; and 1 ex officio member: Christian Higher Education Canada Executive Director, Dr. Justin Cooper.

Senior Fellows. ABHE is blessed to be served by eleven Senior Fellows, individuals whose distinguished professional accomplishments, distinctively relevant expertise, and record of biblical higher education affinity and support merit strong commendation and deeper partnership in the service of ABHE and its member institutions. Our Senior Fellows actively partner with ABHE in work that promotes strategic association objectives intended to enhance among students, faculty, administration, and/or trustees the quality and credibility of biblical leadership education and ministry formation. Senior Fellows are frequently called upon to serve as faculty for Leadership Development conferences as well as Annual Meeting pre-convention training and workshops. ABHE encourages its members to avail themselves of our Senior Fellows’ expertise to support their personal and institutional professional development efforts.

In late 2018, Bob Hodge elected to retire and to relinquish his Senior Fellow designation, having served in that capacity for nearly a decade. At its October 2018 meeting, the ABHE Board acted to designate Dave Moja, CPA as ABHE’s newest Senior Fellow. With 29 years of accounting experience and CPA credentials in Florida, Georgia and Colorado, Dave has provided tax consulting services to more than 450 clients, many of whom are 501(c)(3) non-profits. His service to ABHE includes regular faculty/presenter appearances at Leadership Development conferences, generous financial sponsorship, and his popular Tax Tips for Christian Higher Education blog. He is an enthusiastic ambassador for ABHE and professional contributor to our member colleges.
Annual Report/Institutional Census Data Collection. This past year, we undertook a complete re-design of ABHE’s annual report content and platform. Our new two-phase annual report protocol involves an institutional directory information “census” followed by a vastly streamlined, simplified enrollment, curricular programs and modalities, human and instructional resources, and financial performance data collection tool aimed at procuring data essential to the strategic intelligence/KPI initiative outlined above in support of institutional flourishing. Further improvements to both the data collection platform and process are anticipated in the coming year.

Knowledge Center. In addition to collaborating with Caylor and Associates on a major website refresh, Communications Director Carol Dibble and communications associate Jennifer Johnfauno helped us launch a new ABHE Knowledge Center in 2018. Members can search the Knowledge Center in order to discover and download a wealth of free information and resources on topics such as board governance, academic leadership, assessment, presidential leadership, teaching & learning, and more. We anticipate further expansion and resource curation of this indexed, searchable, multi-topic online professional resource trove in the months and years to come.

Membership directory. This past year our communications team also launched a new ABHE website Membership Directory with substantially greater user-friendly features and functionality. The new directory is visually appealing, indexed, searchable, printable, even linked to maps for routing visitors to member campuses. Website visitors can search ABHE member institutions by membership category, accreditation status, geography, even degree levels and delivery modalities.

International Theological Education

Global networks. ABHE is one of nine global networks of evangelical theological institutions representing each region of the world:

- Asia Theological Association (ATA)
- Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE - North America)
- Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA)
- Association for Evangelical Theological Education in Latin America (AETAL)
- Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association (CETA)
- Euro-Asian Accrediting Association (E-AAA)
- European Council for Theological Education (ECTE)
- Middle Eastern – North African Association for Theological Education (MENATE)
- South Pacific Association of Evangelical Colleges (SPAEC)
Global leadership. These nine global networks comprise the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE). ABHE’s president participates in ICETE board governance along with executive leaders from each of the other networks. Although ICETE board leadership follows a rotating cycle, I have been pressed into service as acting ICETE Board Chair for 2018 and 2019 due to regional network leadership dynamics and ICETE’s executive leadership transition following International Director Riad Kassis’ (one of our ABHE annual meeting plenary speakers in 2013) decision to step aside after a 6-year tenure.

Global gathering: C-18 Panama. ICETE hosts a triennial Global Consultation on Evangelical Theological Education. More than 500 evangelical theological educators from around the world gathered at ICETE’s C-18 triennial consultation which occurred October 29–November 2, 2018 in Panama City, Panama. The conference theme, The Sacred/Secular Divide and Theological Education, was explored throughout the week in plenary and breakout workshop sessions. ABHE was strongly represented at the event. Music and worship times were led by Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies President, Jim Hart, and colleagues. I and COA Director, Ron Kroll and COA Associate Director, Shane Wood were joined by representatives from a number of ABHE member colleges: Ambrose University College & Seminary [President Gordon T. Smith delivered a stirring plenary address], BH Carroll Theological Institute, Columbia International University, Indian Bible College, Moody Bible Institute, Pacific Rim Christian University, Tyndale University College & Seminary, Veritas College International.

Transition and Momentum

I have informed the ABHE Board that I intend to retire at the August 2020 expiration of my current 5-year contract. After 43 years of Christian higher education service the time is coming for me to pass the baton and embark upon a new season of leadership influence apart from positional power. Although this decision is news to ABHE members and to the public, I am grateful to assure you that the ABHE Board of Directors has been thoughtfully and proactively engaged with me for many months in contemplating and planning for executive succession. The board has developed a search and transition timetable that anticipates identification of a presidential successor in time for ratification at our February 2020 annual meeting. During the first half of 2019, ABHE members’ engagement will be solicited regarding our association’s current status and projected priorities in order to complete development and dissemination of an executive leadership and organizational opportunity profile. Meanwhile, I am grateful to report that our association is enjoying a remarkable season of the Lord’s favor and provision. I am working energetically with the amazing team the Lord has assembled for us in order to ensure that the anticipated transition involves no loss of momentum. There is every reason to believe we can experience transition and momentum. After all, we are a people of …
You would not likely predict that one of my most inspirational 2018 moments was a visit to Trinity Bible College in Ellendale, ND. It would be an understatement to say that Trinity (founded 1948) was on the brink of extinction when Drs. Paul and Carol Alexander accepted the call to serve as President and Provost in 2013. Campus morale was the only thing more dismal than the institution’s ABHE accreditation probationary status, its flaming red financial balance sheet, and its dilapidated campus facilities. What could possibly possess internationally experienced and fruitful educators like the Alexanders to take up the apparently forlorn hope of reversing Trinity’s trajectory? Only someone deeply dialed into redemptive destiny could see what Paul and Carol saw. In his own words, here is what convinced Paul the rescue effort was not only worthwhile, it was redemptively urgent:

In my opinion, there has never been a missionary mobilization to compare with the size and reach of the efforts made by the evangelical church of North America during the 20th century. To some extent my salvation was a fruit of faithful American missionaries to South Africa.

As a result of the incredible mobilization that took place after people like Hudson Taylor and subsequently the Cambridge Seven visited the US there was the dramatic rise of the Student Volunteer movement. To a large extent most evangelical denominations had foreign missionary sending central to their formation. The 300 pioneers of the Assemblies of God for example, started their commitment to become a fellowship of churches by stating that their primary goal was to become “the greatest force for evangelism the world has ever seen.” By the late sixties and seventies remarkable missionary movements like Operation Mobilization, Wycliffe Bible Translators, YWAM and dozens more were circling the globe with brave missionaries.

Part of our sense of calling back to the US was not only the rapid secularization of the nation but the erosion of the support base for the US missionary force. I believe I am correct in saying that there has been a decline in missionary mobilization and sending from the US for very nearly 20 consecutive years now. A large part of this is the loss of many rural churches which have been the bedrock of missionary giving for most of the 20th Century. (Hence, we have started the “Center of Missionary Mobilization and Retention” at Trinity).

Paul and Carol Alexander understand the extent to which our movement is an expression of redemptive destiny. You have heard me say it before and I repeat it here: ABHE member colleges’ DNA derives from the fact that we are products of and catalysts for spiritual movements. Of course, the majority of our graduates do not become career cross cultural missionaries. This was never the goal and has never been the case. But missional formation and mobilization are absolutely central to our calling. In his chapter on Christian higher education’s biblical/theological foundations in the 2018 book, *Christian Higher Education: Faith, Teaching and Learning in the Evangelical Tradition*, Nathan A. Finn correctly asserts:

Our institutions should be missional institutions in the truest sense of that term. We are not simply inducting students into a discipline or training them for a career—we are forming them for mission (David S. Dockery and Christopher W. Morgan, eds., Wheaton, IL: Crossway, p. 55).
And in mission we are empowered and commissioned by the God who declares: *He won’t be satisfied until truth and righteousness prevail throughout the earth, nor until even distant lands beyond the seas have put their trust in him.* [The Living Bible]

Brothers and sisters, let us not be known as the people of *despair* but rather as the people who boldly *declare* that God can indeed make wicked people righteous by faith—even in these darkening days.

***

ABHE By The Numbers

Membership

- **151** Membership Total
- **107** COA Accredited
- **6** COA Programatically Accredited
- **2** Accredited-Other
- **12** COA Candidate
- **24** COA Applicant

Enrollment

- **52,419** Total 2017-18 Unduplicated Headcount for all terms
- **7,211** Total traditional new undergraduate students enrolled for Fall 2018 - headcount
- **6,800** Total traditional new undergraduate students enrolled for Fall 2017 - headcount
- **6%** Percentage increase Fall 2018 over Fall 2017

Finances

- **$406,663,642** Gross Tuition Revenue from all students
- **$274,595,951** Total of all contributions, restricted and unrestricted
- **$681,259,593** Total tuition & contribution income
- **$762,004,871** Total expenses
- **$661,373,141** Total Education & General Expenses - Excludes auxiliary enterprises
- **$274,167,697** Total permanently restricted net assets
- **$2,041,663,773** Total assets
- **$377,193,722** Long Term Debt
- **$35,878,850** Total Annual Debt Service
- **$1,115** Debt Service per FTE student

* 148 institutions reporting
* Canadian institutions reported in Canadian dollars
As you have read this report, I fully anticipate you will agree with me that ABHE is enjoying a season of our Lord’s good favor. I am not denying that some of our member institutions are struggling with sagging enrollment and scarce finances. After all, predictions of accelerating institutional distress in most sectors of North American postsecondary education have been largely coming true year by year. We are not immune from contributing economic and demographic forces—not to mention various manifestations of spiritual malaise and cultural headwinds.

Nevertheless, there is much to celebrate in our Association and among our member colleges. I will not be satisfied until all are experiencing the highest degree of flourishing possible and we are buoyed by a new awakening and mobilizing wave of the Spirit. On behalf of our entire ABHE team, thank you for the privilege of serving as …

Your partner in serious Bible learning that shapes a life of godly influence and service,

Ralph E. Enlow, Jr.
President
Akademie für Weltmission (Columbia International University—Germany Branch) — I absolutely love teaching but rarely have the chance to do it. Thanks to the generous affirmation of the ABHE Board and the operational efficiency of our ABHE staff team, I had the joy and privilege once again in March 2018 to teach a 1-week doctoral intensive course, *Biblical Leadership and Ethics*, at CIU’s partner campus near Stuttgart, Germany.

Appalachian Bible College (WV) — We took to the road in order to hold our 2018 annual team leaders staff retreat on a member college campus. Appalachian Bible College President, Dan Anderson, rolled out the red carpet for us to meet at the college’s *Alpine Ministries Lodge*, their state-of-the-art camping, outdoor adventure, and teamwork training facility. We also had the privilege to re-enact presentation to Dr. Anderson of ABHE’s *Biblical Higher Education Award* before the ABC faculty and students during their annual Bible Conference.

Barclay College (KS) — In the absence of President Royce Frazier (accompanying his wife to a medical check-up that happily yielded a positive prognosis), I was hosted by academic leaders Derek Brown and Tim Hawkins. I had not visited Barclay for over a decade and the growth and transformation of this 100+ year old small campus gem in the Kansas cornfields was thrilling. *The Ross-Ellis Center for Fine Arts and Ministry* is the finest facility of its kind in the region. I attended an excellent symposium on the subject of how to avoid ministry burnout. Subsequent to my visit, I received word that Barclay achieved regional accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission effective November 2018.

BH Carroll Theological Institute (TX) — President Gene Wilkes and his team graciously hosted an ABHE *Town Hall* meeting in January 2018. The institute’s attractive facility not only serves regional commuter students and global student cohorts, it also functions as an income-producing facility for corporate tenants in a highly desirable suburban Dallas metroplex crossroads area. This is a model worth studying and emulating.
Lancaster Bible College (PA) — ABHE Executive VP, David Medders, and I joined representatives of 9 institutions (3 others expressed interest but were unable to send delegates to this meeting) gathered to explore potential and possibilities for collaboration. CREDO executives Tim Fuller (ABHE Senior Fellow) and Joretta Nelson provided superb facilitation of our discussions which were predicated on the collective conviction that this is a moment when collaborative opportunity meets institutional realities.

Manhattan Christian College (KS) — MCC President Kevin Ingram graciously and generously hosted the annual Midwest Presidents Fellowship gathering at MCC’s impressive campus whose location literally right across the street from Kansas State University affords rich symbiotic educational program opportunities. A pre-event golf outing at Colbert Hills Golf Course—which richly deserves its rating as one of America’s very best public golf courses—was a relational and recreational highlight of the trip. In addition to high-value peer-to-peer idea and information exchange, the group was treated to excellent professional development presentations from retired Hesston College President, Howard Keim, and Kansas Independent College Association President, Matt Lindsey.

Nazarene Bible College (KS) — NBC President and ABHE Board Member Harold Graves welcomed ABHE members to a Town Hall meeting at the international headquarters of The Church of the Nazarene. The college—which serves the entire denomination’s global pastoral leadership training and development needs primarily via distance education—recently relocated its central administrative offices and services to the denomination’s superb and spacious international headquarters facility in Kansas City, KS.

Pacific Rim Christian University (HI) — At the invitation of the institution’s Provost and ABHE Board member Steve Hostetter, I enjoyed the privilege of leading an ABHE Faculty LIFE [Leadership Institute for Faculty Excellence] workshop at PRCU with my incredibly capable and congenial co-facilitator Dr. Wendy Guthrie of Johnson University-FL. Approximately 30 full time and adjunct faculty members from PRCC and nearby Kawai Bible College deeply and enthusiastically engaged the two and a half-days of training on biblical higher education distinctives, biblical worldview formation, adult teaching and learning, and leadership development.
Trinity Bible College (ND) — Husband-wife team, President Paul Alexander and Provost Carol Alexander hosted an immersive 3-day visit to this amazing little college that has undergone nothing short of a resurrection over the past 5 years. Vision and vitality are palpable in every conversation. I spoke in chapel, offered board briefings on strategic challenges and opportunities and governance excellence, provided professional development to assembled faculty and staff, and witnessed commencement and offered an address entitled, Are You Ready for the Real World?

Vanguard College (AB) — President Eric Dirksen invited me to engage the Vanguard Board of Directors in a retreat setting. Over the course of a day and a half, I had the privilege working with board members who represent the college and its sponsoring denomination (PAOC) in stimulating discussion of the following topics: Biblical Higher Education’s Context: Historical & Contemporary; Principles and Practices of Good Governance; and Board Strategy Formation and Follow Through. I also enjoyed interacting with members of Vanguard’s enrollment management, academic, and registrar/student records teams.

Welch College (TN) — President Matt Pinson and his exceptional educational leadership team hosted an ABHE Town Hall meeting on their spectacular new suburban Nashville (Gallatin) campus. After many years of praying and many disappointments and detours, the college sold its aging, land-locked West End campus and has now occupied an entirely new set of state-of-the-art facilities on a 100+ acre campus with plenty of growing room in a dynamic and welcoming community.

* * *