

The Challenge of Change in a Christian University

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An institution may or may not choose a pattern of change it wishes, but the ingredients for change are always present. Facing the necessity of change in a Christian university is a real challenge. Change is sometimes dramatized as a disruptive force that could destroy an organization or even society. But this is unfair, because history has shown that societies have been threatened not by change but by old and familiar crises: failure of food supply, disease, hostility of neighboring societies, competition from superior technologies, inner decay. In such cases, innovation may increase the chances of survival of a threatened system.

Commitment

At the tenth conference of university presidents affiliated with the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia last June, 1970, the participants committed themselves to four imperatives: Involvement in Social Revolution, Positive Response to Student Action, Movement toward Cooperation, and Pursuit of Innovation. The presidents also explicitly emphasized their openness to change in approaching these imperatives.

Thus, on Involvement in Social Revolution, they said that to become instruments for academic excellence and national development, "our universities and colleges must emphasize, wherever applicable, in the

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curriculum of various disciplines, the concept and phenomenon of **change.**" Likewise, on the imperative of Positive Response to Student Action, commitment to change is reflected in the presidents' concern for helping the students in their search for "new meaning of life," and for providing "constructive channels for the outpouring of students' concern and power."¹ The change approach is also very alive in the two other imperatives—cooperation and innovation.

Models

It is one thing for an institution to declare an attitude of being open to change; the translation of this attitude into action may be another. Change as a phenomenon in institutions of higher education has been studied, especially in relation to how a school preserves or increases its vitality or effectiveness. From these studies, three ways of how change comes about in educational institutions have been identified. In some schools, change comes about after a crisis. As Burton Clark noted: "many schools, and colleges are unable to make a major change until confronted by a crisis," which comes in the form of "near bankruptcy or an exodus of staff or an explosive split among key personnel."² Yet, everyone knows that this process of periodic crisis followed by reform costs so much in human energy and dissipates so many resources.

In other schools, change comes about quite differently. There is continuous ferment and experimentation. Continuous institutional change may be as disruptive to faculty and students as occasional crisis. It is not surprising that oftentimes the reason given by faculty members for leaving their university is dissatisfaction with constant change in the curriculum, in faculty and student policies, or in administrative structure.

Change resulting from periodic crises and from continuous ferment are two extremes. Midway between them is another model: incremental change. In this type, an institution initiates adjustments when necessary in order to be in line with its objectives and to increase its effectiveness. Some refer to this as self-renewal; others call it planned change.

Ingredients

A Christian University, like any other type of educational institution,

¹ "Statement of Presidents at the Tenth Presidents' Conference." Sponsored by UBCHEA, Wingspread, Racine, Wisconsin, June 11-14, 1970 (mimeographed material).

² "A Study of Institutional Vitality," Institute of Higher Education, Teachers College, Columbia, 1967, pp. 2-4 (mimeographed material).

may or may not choose its model for change. But no institution will lack the ingredients for possible change because problems and questions are always present. It is how we tackle these problems and questions which allows or prevents the achievement of change. But we do not always have to wait for a problem to start a change activity. Even when there is no problem, man is supposed to be endowed with an inquisitive, exploring mind—always seeking new ideas and insights. Such innate capabilities are potent ingredients for change.

I have touched so far on three points:

1. That Christian universities in Asia have committed themselves to some imperatives and to approach these in the spirit of change;
2. That universities have a choice as to how they would allow change to happen; and
3. That the ingredients for change in a university are ever present.

Student Demand and Positive Response

Now, let me turn to a more-specific illustration that would allow further elaboration of these points. I am using an example that we are all familiar with. Silliman University is among those Christian universities committed to the imperatives of this decade. It has also declared an attitude of being open to change, rational change, I hope. Like other institutions, there are always questions and problems being raised. Among these problems is students' demands. One of these demands is that students should be required to attend only 80 per cent of the class sessions.

I am narrowing myself to one problem area and one specific demand. The number of examples is not as important as showing how problems and questions offer an institution a valuable chance to realize its commitment and increase its vitality and effectiveness. I also wish to show that a particular problem could have wide ramifications and implications if approached in a rational way.

Student activism has become a universal phenomenon. When confronted by this problem, our commitment obliges us to respond positively and rationally. To be able to do this, an institution must exert efforts to understand and analyze the characteristics of these activist groups and their demands. Are the ideas of the vocal and more articulate student

activists shared by more than a small minority? Are some of them Communist-inspired or dominated? Why do these people not go about their proper business of "getting an education" rather than encroach in affairs traditionally left to their elders? What are the sources of unrest which do exist and what can be done about them? These are some of the questions we should try to ask and answer because they are part of the rational process and of positive response.

Now, back to our example. After many months of demanding, the leaders of the active student groups finally succeeded in getting the administration to change the policy on three unexcused absences from class and the implementation of the 80 per cent attendance policy allowed by the Bureau of Private Schools. This issue involves a basic academic policy of the university. It affects directly every student and faculty. To respond positively to this demand, it is not sufficient to say: "Yes, from now on we will allow every student to attend only 80 per cent of the scheduled classes." Positive and rational response should result from a search of answers to certain questions. For example, is it true that a school cannot adopt a policy requiring the students to be absent less than 20 per cent of the scheduled class hours? Is the demand shared by more than the small active minority groups? Are these students saying that they would prefer to use 20 per cent of their school hours to do their own learning outside the classroom in any way they wish? Are they saying that they should be required only 80 per cent attendance but be responsible 100 per cent for the course requirements? Why are these students making this demand? Do they find much of their classroom education irrelevant? Is what Dr. Edilberto K. Tiempo calls "faculty passion for terminal facts" happening?³

I think the answers to these questions are not difficult to get. Even if they are, we must try to get them as promptly as we can. There is no other alternative if we have to respond positively, especially if positive response means rational response. Positive response does not necessarily mean saying "yes" to every demand. It could be a "no," given promptly and supported by accurate facts and strong reasons. It doesn't matter that a demand is initiated by a small or big minority; by a registered or unregistered campus organization. The fact is: they are our students and they are entitled to raise questions on issues affecting their education. The "take-it-or-leave-it" attitude as regards University service is a less desirable approach than to be armed with facts and reasons.

³ Edilberto K. Tiempo, "The Graduate School and the University," Inaugural Address, Silliman University, Dec. 9, 1970.

Implications for Faculty and Administrators

The process of meeting students' demands positively provides potentials for needed change in other aspects of our educational program. Let me return to the example I have used to show these potentials. Suppose that in our data-gathering we find that the 80 per cent attendance demand is shared by a sizable number of our students; that they have good reasons for labelling their class sessions unchallenging, boring, irrelevant; that they find many teachers' methods of teaching ineffective in making them learn. The implications of such findings are serious, especially for faculty accountability and the broader question of what constitute relevant education.

One of the latest innovations in the field of education is the emphasis of the principle of teacher accountability. The most popular use of this principle is in the area called performance contracting. In the United States this school year, a nation-wide trend has been started whereby private companies like McGraw-Hill, Educational Turnkey Systems, Inc., and Dorsett Educational Systems sign contracts with school systems.⁴ A company guarantees rapid improvement in pupil achievement or learning. After a stipulated time, an independent group conducts an evaluation. If the guaranteed achievement or learning did not occur among the pupils, the company does not get the fee promised in the contract. Thus, only after doing the job will the company know whether it was a financial winner or loser. In effect, it is like saying that the teacher should not get paid unless he has proven that he has succeeded in making his students learn.

I am not saying that we should adopt performance contracting as practiced in America. But the principle of accountability behind performance contracting is something we must seriously consider. Many teachers have been staying too long with the tradition that their job is to teach, bothering little or none at all whether or not their students learn. No wonder such innovative idea as performance contracting threatens this kind of teachers. But perhaps Sir Eric Ashby was right when he said: "The infallible recipe for stirring up a university (including its faculty) is to set up a rival."⁵ The point I am stressing is that it is important for us to maintain an attitude of being open to

⁴ Stanley Elam, "The Age of Accountability Dawns in Texarkana," *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 1970, pp. 509-514.

⁵ "A Study of Institutional Vitality," *op. cit.*, p. 2.

innovation in the teaching-learning process and try to carry out some change.

I think that it is every teacher's responsibility to worry how to help his students learn, rather than be concerned only with the job of teaching. If it is expected that students are responsible 100 per cent of the course requirements, shouldn't it be the teacher's responsibility to spell out in black and white what knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes he expects to teach and expects the student to learn in a course? Some students feel that teachers hide certain trade secrets. It is up to the students to find out or guess what the teacher is trying to teach or untangle the lectures. In other cases, the teacher may really need some help to do a better job of teaching and making his students learn. Like the teacher-student relation in the teaching-learning process, faculty-administrator relationship for the improvement of instruction should not be a one-way affair. The administrator, whether vice president for academic affairs, dean, or chairman, should not consider the improvement of instruction the sole responsibility of the teacher. The leadership role of an administrator includes an active concern and participation in the improvement of instruction. Failure of the students to learn should be viewed in part at least as failure of the teacher to teach as well as failure of the administrator to lead.

Implications for Campus Climate

The 80 per cent attendance demand of the students relates not only to the issue between learning in the classroom and learning outside the classroom, but also between learning from the broad extra-curriculum and learning from the academic curriculum. This highlights the role of the campus climate in the general education of the student. Explaining what constitutes this climate and its significance to the student's education, Ralph Tyler writes:

"The education of the student cannot be understood adequately just in terms of the courses he takes or the professors with whom he comes in contact. A student learns and develops in a complex environment, being influenced by and influencing the student groups of which he is a member, the friendships he forms, and the roles he plays in college affairs. He is also influenced by his teachers, advisors, and other intangibles of a college.⁶

⁶ Ralph W. Tyler, in *Personality Factors on the College Campus: Review of a Symposium*, The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, University of Texas, Austin, Texas, 1962.

Social scientists today are giving increasing attention to the subtle, more intangible, and informal factors in student learning. Researches in this area have so far come up with the following generalizations:

1. An educational institution does have its own distinctive climate or atmosphere. This climate attracts with startling consistency the same kinds of students and has the same kind of impact on them.⁷

2. Many of the activities that go on outside the classroom—the advising program, the extra class program, counselling services, a dormitory system and residence program, and a campus program of cultural events—enhance the motivation to learn and increase the perceived relevance of learning. They not only encourage but also facilitate the mastery of specific subject matter.

3. Peer-group interaction and faculty-student interaction outside the classroom have a stronger and more significant impact on student attitudes and values than the things that go on in the classroom.

Special claims of Christian institutions to uniqueness or quality are mostly in the area of campus climate. If it is recognized that the elements constituting campus climate are as essential as the formal academic program in the learning and development of the students, their implications for planning and allotment of resources are obvious. For example, if student friendship and influences on each other are important parts of learning, what kinds of campus residential, recreational, and food service arrangements should the university provide to promote healthy influences? Would not more allotment of financial resources on segments to feed, to beautify and to house, including the hiring of better trained dormitory managers, be worthwhile educational investments? If formal faculty advising has real educational value to the student, shouldn't this be made a necessary part of faculty responsibility instead of giving it up?

Another unique feature in the campus climate of a Christian University like Silliman is the presence of foreign personnel. For about seven decades now, we have been assuming that missionaries, most of whom are now called fraternal workers, have been making a valuable contribution not only to the academic education of Filipino students but also in the promotion of brotherhood among men. Now, the university

⁷ James G. Rice, "The Campus Climate: A Reminder," in Samuel Baskin, ed., *Higher Education: Some Newer Developments* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), pp. 306-307.

and these foreign personnel are being labelled by some as the remaining bulwark of western imperialism in this country. Shouldn't we put our heads together to discover ways of weeding out nationalistic sloganeering based on emotionalism, encouraging authentic yearning of the Filipino to discover a common national spirit, and using the available and needed foreign personnel to promote the ideals of global brotherhood?

Still another clearly prominent quality of a Christian campus is its concern for the moral education of the student. At Silliman, we have both academic and non-academic programs to emphasize our commitment to the moral dimension of education. It seems to me that the eroding tendency against this particular aspect of our program is the growing divergence of opinion among the faculty on how to teach morals and virtue. Whether in religion courses for general education or in the mission of the campus church, questions such as the following are raised: Should we teach **about** virtue and morals, or should we aim directly to bring about a commitment to virtuous and moral conduct? To teach **about** virtue and morals means to teach them intellectually factual materials such as history, economics, or political science.⁸ To bring about a commitment to virtuous and moral conduct means to mold the student's values, to form his moral habits. The proponents of the view that the task of the Christian university is to teach about virtue and morals argue that the classroom or campus church "can provide conceptualization of the right" and not develop the habit of right conduct. Furthermore, this group claims, conduct involves behavior and behavior requires example and practice. Practice takes time, more time than the student's stay in college. Therefore, the molding of the student's values and morals should be left to the home, the neighborhood, and the church outside the campus.⁹

Despite this argument in favor of the more intellectual approach to the teaching of virtues and morals in a university, many among us find it difficult to side with this viewpoint. Among Silliman alumni, many proud testimonies cite the unique and significant moral impact of this institution on their private and professional life. These testimonies further point to the fact that this important moral impact is both taught and caught through close interaction with and the example of the faculty, other students, and direct exposure to the church's evangelistic program. Should we now carry out our responsibility on the moral aspect of educa-

⁸ John S. Brubacher, *Bases for Policy in Higher Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1965), p. 34.

⁹ Robert Hutchins and John Smith in Brubacher, *Ibid.*, p. 37.

tion in a more intellectual way, or should the whole climate of the university—its curricular as well as extra-curricular climate—be so permeated with that moral conviction which is the basis of the founding of this university, so that this conviction becomes a vital influence in the forming of our students' values and moral habits? How can we justify our choice?

Summary

Now, to summarize what I have been saying. I have recalled the determination of Christian universities in Asia to be relevant and dynamic to the challenges of this decade and to approach these in an attitude of openness to change. I have also indicated that an institution may or may not choose a pattern of change it wishes, but that the ingredients for change are always present. As an example, I have used the existing problem of student demands on our campus as opportunities for possible change in faculty and administrator attitudes and in reviewing and developing the quality of campus climate. This latter aspect of our educational program is especially unique and significant to a Christian university.

Reassurance

Facing the importance or necessity of change in a Christian university is a real challenge. Change is sometimes dramatized as a disruptive force that could destroy an organization or even society. And yet, it is not fair to put too much emphasis on the disruptive character of change. Let me share with you the reassuring thoughts of John W. Gardner. History he says, has shown that primitive and civilized societies have been threatened not by change or innovation but by old and familiar crises: failure of food supply, disease, hostility of neighboring societies, competition from superior technologies, inner decay. In such cases, innovation may increase the chances of survival of a threatened system. But it may not be acceptable to those who love the *status quo*. Like children, those who love the *status quo* may fear the doctor more than the disease.¹⁰

¹⁰ John W. Gardner, *Self-Renewal, The Individual and the Innovative Society* (New York: Harper and Row, Publisher, 1963), p. 28.