

Introduction: A passion for Christ's glory

This is a book about students around the world and how God has used them. It gives just a tiny glimpse of their commitment to Christ, which for many has been at great cost. Above personal ambition has come their desire to see Christ glorified in their own lives, in their universities and in their nations. These students have taken to heart the Lord's words in the parable of the rich fool and have chosen to be 'rich towards God' (Luke 12:21); hundreds, perhaps thousands, have been faithful even to the point of death.¹

It is their passion for Christ's glory which has driven me to write; a passion which has often rebuked and deeply inspired me. If you are a student, let these stories of fellow students spur you on in your own witness on campus. You are part of a worldwide fellowship. For all of us, may we allow the lives of these students to awaken in us again that passion we once had for Christ if it has started to wane.

Jesus Christ and the university

There are many passages in Scripture to which student leaders and staff turn over and over again. One of them is Colossians 2:2–3

where Paul is writing of his prayer for the Laodicean Christians and for others whom he has not met personally:

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The one ‘in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ – what a description of the Lord Jesus! How can we not be jealous for his name in the world’s seats of learning? It is a scandal – and surely the deepest of ironies – that he should be ignored, scorned or held in derision in the very places where knowledge and wisdom are deemed to be sought and taught.

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The university is the seedbed of ideas and of relationships, the two critical axes of human development. It is the hothouse in which both are nurtured, for good and for ill, and, because of this, it is a critical battleground for ideologies. That is why we must work and pray tirelessly for Christ’s honour here. It is no surprise that Charles Malik, the Lebanese

Christian who served as President of the UN General Assembly, posed as a refrain through his masterly 1981 Pascal lectures the question, ‘What Does Jesus Christ Think of the University?’²

If we have a strong grasp of the Lord Jesus as the agent of creation and as the one ‘in whom all things hold together’,³ then we need have no fear of learning. For increasing in our knowledge and understanding of the world is a way of expanding our view of Christ.

In our discipling of students, the staff of IFES national movements encourage them to love God ‘with all their hearts, their souls their minds and their strength’.⁴ This full-blooded commitment is

calling for ever-greater courage, as will become clearer through the pages of this book.

We are all aware of sexual immorality on Western campuses and of the pressures on students to compromise in the area of sexuality. It is less widely known that women students in Latin America and Africa are often required to sleep with their lecturers to secure a pass grade in examinations. Given the high incidence of AIDS in these continents, the tragedy is deeply alarming, for the students, for their families and for the whole culture. You will read stories here from students who have had to make hard choices.

Sharing our faith: Muslims and Christians

In the West, Christian mission is the domain of the church or of voluntary organizations; in the Muslim world, where there is no separation of religion and state, Islamic mission (*da'wa*) plays a strategic role in foreign policy.

It is no secret that money from the Gulf has been used to endow chairs in Islamic studies in several major Western universities. The Arab states have also funded core facilities like libraries and dorms as well as business schools. These facilities have been greatly appreciated by students of all religions and ethnic groups. The Muslim world is investing shrewdly to bring influence in academia – and through academia to whole nations. Within Africa and Asia, the most able Muslim students are receiving scholarships to study outside their countries. The purpose is clear – to build a new generation of leading Muslim thinkers, east and west, north and south, who will influence their countries.

So how are we investing? We do not have the multi-million dollar funding available to the Islamic world for mission, and in some places our labours can seem very insignificant. We worship a humble Christ who entrusts the message of reconciliation on campus to his students. As Paul puts it so strikingly in 2 Corinthians 5:20, 'We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were

making his appeal through us.' Koichi Ohtawa, who served first with the Japanese movement KGK, and then with IFES in East Asia for many years, borrowed the metaphor of piling from construction engineering when he spoke of student ministry. It is gradual; it is energy-consuming and labour-intensive; it is unspectacular; and it is unseen. But it provides a vital and solid foundation for the building. Over my thirty years in student ministry I have been moved at how God has provided fine staff for this work of piling, gifted graduates who had the right perspective. You will read of several here.

God is using students in some of the most extreme situations to bring peace and hope to their nations. They have no money, but the riches of Christ; they have no human power, but the power of the Holy Spirit. They have the life of Christ in them and a gospel of hope to offer.

These students are the new generation of IFES. In 1947 when the Fellowship was formed, its ten founding members covenanted to work and pray to see a clear evangelical witness established in every university in the world. That covenant has been shared by each new national movement; it is a commitment to Christ and to one another.

Postscript

God's work in the world's universities did not start with IFES! He is the sovereign God of time and eternity, and he has guarded a witness to himself through every generation. It keeps us humble to recall our own debt of gratitude to those who kept the faith and passed it down to us. So we start the story a little nearer its beginning.

1 : Never underestimate what students can do

There is nothing so short as the Christian's memory.
(Martin Luther)

Why history matters

Martin Luther could see even in the sixteenth century just how little regard Christians had for history. We can imagine how he would respond to Henry Ford's comment that 'history is bunk', so loved and quoted today. History is full of lessons for all of us. Fashions and trends will always come and go; these are ephemeral. But nothing has changed in human nature since Genesis 3.

I remember once visiting the student movement in Israel. I was being shown around a museum with a student who was obviously not interested in history. I asked him if he had visited the museum before. 'No,' he said, 'I think history is pointless. We should only be concerned about the present and the future.' I was surprised, as we were visiting the museum of the Holocaust!

Many Christian students and graduates around the world might agree with that student, yet I believe all Christians should be

interested in history. After all, the Bible is an historical book. Many times over in the Old Testament, the Jews were told to *remember* God's acts. In the book of Hebrews we have a long roll call of great men and women of faith in past history who were an example. Perhaps one of the most striking passages in the Old Testament touching on the importance of history is Joshua 4:1-7 (my italics):

When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the LORD said to Joshua, 'Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan from right where the priests stood and to carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight.'

So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, 'Go over before the ark of the LORD your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, "What do these stones mean?" tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. *These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.*'

History was important in Jewish tradition. Peter shows this when he says, 'I think it is right to refresh your memory' (2 Peter 1:13). What is the value of historical perspective? Let me suggest three important lessons.

First, history reminds us of what God has done in the past – of significant answers to prayer, evidences of his supernatural power, and the way he has intervened. This always leads to a spirit of praise. In the Psalms, time and time again the exhortation to praise the Lord came after a reminder of God's acts in history. The psalmist constantly refrains, '*Remember* how God led us out of Egypt, *remember* how he led us through the wilderness, *remember* how he led us across the Jordan, *remember* how he led us into the

promised land. Therefore praise the Lord.’ An historical awareness is central to a spirit of praise. The phrase ‘Praise the Lord’ comes 550 times in the Bible. It is the most common command and almost always an exhortation rather than an exclamation. So if you want to cultivate the spirit of praise in your church or your student group, remind people of God’s acts in history. Without historical perspective, our worship will be shallow and less than fully biblical.

Second, history reminds us of who we are – our identity and our roots. Seeing ourselves as God’s servants in a long line of history keeps us humble. Christian leaders who are proud often have little sense of those who have gone before, of having the baton handed down the generations to them. Humble Christian leaders see themselves in a line of saints from time past.

One of the best marks of a work of God is that it continues to grow after the leader is taken out of the way. To grasp that fact, you need to know some Christian history. If you don’t read of God’s work and the people he has used, you will have an insufficiently clear sense of your own heritage.

Third, we need history as we formulate a vision for the future. When we are reminded of the great things God has done, the daring attempts people have made to serve him and audacious acts of testimony, it gives us fresh determination. We see that if God has used fragile, broken and dysfunctional people, he can use us. This can give us a solid foundation from which to dream.

Beware of people who say, ‘You talk too much about the past.’ We should not dwell on the past, but we must start from a reminder of what God has done. May faith and hope arise in your heart as you read of his acts among students around the world.

Students in a tough arena

The earliest recorded student fellowship was made up of four international students in the country of one of the world’s great

powers. Daniel and his three friends were forcibly displaced from Israel and taken captive in what was the most powerful nation on earth, ancient Babylon, in today's Iraq, in the fifth century BC.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure-house of his god.

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility – young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego (Daniel 1:1–8).

They faced a double humiliation. Not only were they taken away from their home country, but they were forced to study the language and literature of the Babylonians, their conquerors. Despite immense cultural pressure to conform, they stayed true to the beliefs which had formed their early lives; that was radical discipleship.

The story of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego was repeated in the early 1990s in Sudan, when the Muslim government in the north forcibly closed the main university in Juba, the southern capital, and relocated all its students north to Khartoum, in the Islamic heartland. Among those displaced were evangelical

students who took the gospel with them. They courageously shared their faith with students in Khartoum and this led to an explosion of growth in the evangelical student movement. Just like Daniel they were forced to live under an alien law, the Islamic law of *Sharia*, and compelled to learn a foreign language, Arabic. It was a double humiliation for them, as it had been for him.

Like Daniel and his friends, they did not ask, 'Why has God allowed this to happen to us?' but posed the more radical question, 'How does God want me to live and speak in my new situation so that the gospel of Christ can be advanced?' That is always the question the mature Christian asks in times of trial. Just as we learn from the story of Daniel, we can learn from these humble students scattering the seed of the gospel in their own new and alien land.

They formed Bible study groups to which they invited Sudanese friends. Large numbers began to turn to the Lord. By the late 1990s over 1,300 students and graduates were coming to their annual Easter conferences. They had wider influence, too, outside the student world. At one conference, an army general from the south, the national director of an oil company and students' parents were also present. Many came to faith.

In 2001 Sudanese Christian students held a conference on world mission, hoping for six hundred participants. The venue was an Islamic youth centre in Khartoum. Did six hundred come? No. More than twice that number poured in! From the first meal, two students had to share each bowl of food. By the last day, it was three students to a bowl! Around a hundred students at that conference resolved to serve Christ cross-culturally when they graduated. This was wonderful in itself. But a further one hundred students professed faith in him over those few days! The Holy Spirit had drawn students to a conference on world mission even though they were not yet Christians – and this in a country where risks are high for those engaged in evangelism or who turn to Christ. Such news was 'more than we could ask or imagine'.¹

The influence of students through the centuries

There is a strong case for arguing that the Reformation, one of the greatest periods in church history, grew out of a work of the Holy Spirit amongst students in Europe – that it was essentially a university movement.

Martin Luther, who had such a transforming impact in Europe and subsequently on the Western world, was converted in 1517 as a young professor of theology in the University of Wittenberg, Germany, through discovering the great doctrine of justification by faith. His first disciples were his students. Many historians argue that the Reformation took root and flourished in Germany because of the support of the German princes, but in reality the ideas put forward by Luther in his ninety-five theses were spread across Europe by students who heard and were captivated by this great message in key university centres.

The Reformation was essentially a university movement.

On the eve of the English Reformation, Thomas Ridley gathered a group of men from Cambridge University in the White Horse Inn to read from the New Testament and the works of Luther in secret. Some of this group were later burnt at the stake, including Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley in Oxford in 1555–56. Latimer's extraordinary words of courage have travelled down the centuries, 'Play the man, Master Ridley. We shall this day light such a torch as shall never be put out.' This testimony in the midst of flames has echoes of the testimony of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

We know very little of the testimony of the Reformer, John Calvin (1509–64), but in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* we learn that he was converted as a student in Orleans University, France.

Student groups appeared sporadically in different countries across Europe in this era. The first traceable instance in which students had a part in promoting world outreach was found in