

# CHAPTER 1

## The Church College in God's Playhouse

*All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players:  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages.*  
—Shakespeare

The church college is a rehearsal hall in God's great playhouse, the world. Throughout this hall, small groups of aspiring student actors gather with experienced faculty directors to explore the purpose and meaning of the life-drama to be played on the world's stage, the roles through which the drama is realized, the details of time and place which give shape to the drama, and the particular skills which will have to be learned to enact the chosen roles.

The Spirit of the drama's Creator fills the hall. The Spirit helps the directors and actors discover the "super-objective" of the drama, toward which every thought, feeling, and action of the actors must be directed if the performance is to be successful. That "super-objective" is the will of the Creator.

The roles in the drama are many. And choosing a particular role is not always easy. But some roles the Creator challenges all to play. The church college is particularly committed to teach these in fulfilling its own unique role as servant of the Creator and the Creator's church.

## Steward

*God calls all on the world's stage to live the role of steward.  
Therefore, church college faculty directors will teach  
aspiring student actors this important role.*

God's call to stewardship begins with that sweeping and majestic Genesis declaration of creation: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Into the inaugural garden of this amazing creation, God placed man and woman to care for it. As earth's first gardeners, Adam and Eve were given authority to manage—to name and rule over fish, bird, and animal; to till the soil; to harvest the fruit—and in so doing to participate in God's ongoing creative activity. Though this idyllic garden scene was soon marred by sin, God did not disown what had been created or relieve Adam and Eve of their authority to rule. True, the coolness of the garden was replaced by the sweat of the brow and the moist clean earth by the dry weedy field, but man and woman remained the stewards of God's creation.

So God continues to entrust the creation to us humans as stewards of the earth. Fish, bird, animals, soil, water, air, minerals, and man and woman themselves—all of the resources and life the earth has to offer—are ours to care for.

God calls us to be stewards not only of the world but also of God's Word (1 Corinthians 4:11). Through that Word, we understand that not only did God create the universe, but also God judged it to be good, and that even now, God views the creation as good (1 Timothy 4:4). We further understand that God loves the creation and yearns to restore it to its original perfection and that through the ages, God has progressively

revealed himself to humankind, climaxing that revelation in the “Word become flesh” personified by Jesus, who declared his mission

to announce good news to the poor,  
to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight  
for the blind,  
to let the broken victims go free, and  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18–19).

Furthermore, we understand that God offers to restore all to the perfection of the image in which we were originally created and which we now understand to be the perfection modeled by Jesus. Of this Word, we are to be stewards.

The world and the Word are both God’s creations! Evangelicals, including the Mennonite Brethren, quickly support God’s call to be stewards of the Word, but our ears often hear only distantly and uncertainly his call to be stewards of the world as well. Yet the Word is clear about the world:

*The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof;  
the world, and they that dwell therein.*  
(Psalm 24:1, 1 Corinthians 10:26)

The mission of the church college is to prepare stewards of both the Word and the world. In comparison, other institutions of higher education have a much more limited mission. The mission of the Bible institute is to prepare stewards of the Word. The mission of the secular college-university is to prepare people for life in the world, but without the Word. God has no official role in the secular college-university, so students suffer by not encountering a commonly shared witness among faculty regarding the essential life questions of purpose and meaning. Though “resource rich,” the secular college-university is “direction poor.” So the mission of the church college is the most comprehensive and complete. God calls us to be stewards of both the Word and the world.

The church college then will echo for its students God's call to play the role of steward on the world's stage. This stewardship will include care for the earth and its resources, as taught through the school subjects of biology, chemistry, physics, geology, and other sciences; care for human growth and relationships, as taught through psychology, sociology, economics, government, social work, business, and other social sciences; care for the spirit and quality of human life, as taught through music, art, literature, history, and other humanities; and care for God's Word itself, in which the meaning and purpose of life is ultimately rooted, as taught through courses in Bible, church history, and theology.

The teaching and study of any subject will be more than technical. Indeed, church college teachers will imitate the farmers of our tradition. For our farmers, at their best, have not only taught their children the technique of steering a straight furrow but also, through word and example, taught them how to care for the earth and its life, to depend on God for the crops, and to return to God the first fruits of the field. All learning has a technical component, but wise stewards know that technical skill must be coupled with the values and purposes of God if it is not to be misdirected and irresponsible. Teaching which neglects this fusion of the technical with values will only further produce youth already characterized by a national youth panel in America as "information rich" but "responsibility poor." So the church college, in all areas of study, will fuse technical learning with value learning.

A Bible department alone then will not make a college Christian, nor will a single course in stewardship be adequate to train stewards of God's Word and the world. Rather, stewardship will be a thread which will run through the entire college curriculum and program. Faculty, whether in history or science, will teach and model it. Students will learn it. For stewardship will permeate the entire life and style of the church college.

## Servant

*God calls all on the world's stage to live the role of servant.  
Therefore, church college faculty directors will teach  
aspiring student actors the role of servant.*

Jesus set the example. He came as a servant in order to serve (Philippians 2:7). He served through preaching, teaching, and healing (Matthew 9:35). And then he gave even his life for those he had come to serve, reconciling heaven and earth as he hung in the sky between.

Jesus passed the servant role on to his disciples, declaring that “the greatest among you must be your servant” (Matthew 23:11). But in bequeathing this role to his disciples, he was simply affirming the intent of God’s original creation, which had become obscured by humankind’s sinful effort to dominate rather than serve. For God has woven interdependence, and therefore service, into the very fabric of the creation. One portion of the created order stands in a servant relationship to another. The sun helps the plants to grow, the tree cradles the bird’s nest, the cow’s milk sustains her offspring—each serves the other. And so also among humans. One person grows another’s food, another sews still another’s clothes, still another writes another’s reading—each serves the other.

When performed by humans, we most often call this service “work.” What Jesus did is sometimes referred to as “his work.” And “his work” was, indeed, service. For the servant, work is transformed into service. A servant’s work is first service and then a livelihood. Work which is first a means to personal gain is not a servant’s work.

Work then is a human activity designed to meet some real or imagined human need. We plant, water, and harvest; we cook, sew, and clean; we plan, finance, and build; we mine, process, and manufacture; we study, organize, and teach—all to meet real or imagined needs. If paid for this work, we call it “making a living.” But if we think of it first as service, we will view work as meeting a need of our neighbor. And if we think of it first in this way, we will discover that our work has meaning beyond personal gain, and we will understand that the quality