

**STATEMENT OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION
OF THE ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
AS ADOPTED BY THE GENERAL SYNOD, June 8, 1977 and June 7, 1978**

Introduction

Christian higher education for the service of God in church and society finds its roots in Biblical revelation. For over one hundred and forty years, Christian higher education has been an integral part of the mission of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. Truly, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, through its institutions of Christian higher education, has a history of distinguished service. The value of its mission is immeasurable, for this mission has been an influence for good in the lives of thousands of men and women who have attended Erskine College, Erskine Theological Seminary or Bryson College. Through many of these men and women, the Church itself has been blessed with strong Christian leadership and dedicated service.

The General Synod believes that there is a continuing need for the church to express its objectives, to reaffirm its purpose, and to restate its philosophy of Christian higher education, including goals and purposes of Erskine.

In the following statement, the General Synod desires to preserve and incorporate all of the redeeming elements of the Church's philosophy that have prevailed at the College and Seminary from their beginning. In this statement the terms "Erskine" and "Erskine College" refer to both the undergraduate school and the Seminary, unless the context indicates otherwise.

I. The Role of the Church in Christian Higher Education

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church should re-examine on a continuing basis its total program in the use of its resources and in all areas of its mission. To this end the Church should ask itself continually what it is doing and what it ought to be doing in the field of education. It is clear that every Christian denomination should involve itself deeply in Christian education. A parallel question which every Christian denomination should ask is whether it also should be involved in the field of higher education and, if so, at what level and in what way.

We believe in the importance of education, and we believe that education represents a vital part of the mission of the Church. Furthermore, we believe that our denomination has a definite role to play in Christian higher education.

We believe this is so because this area of service offers the Church a unique opportunity to present Christ and the Christian viewpoint and to demonstrate in a tangible way the value of a life which is lived in right relation to God and man. We believe that only such a life can realize its fullest potential in terms of usefulness to society and inner satisfaction to the individual.

We believe that the Church has a responsibility not only to initiate the organizational structure for such participation, but also a responsibility to continue to nurture that organization and to provide theological and philosophical guidance to it.

II. The Biblical Basis for Christian Higher Education

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church believes the Bible, the infallible Written Word of God, to be the rule of faith and life. The Bible reveals God as the source of all

truth. Reverence for Him and commitment to Him is the beginning of wisdom. Jesus Christ, God's Son, came to reveal this truth—truth which has the power to set people free from the bondage of sin. The Holy Spirit comes to make the truth of God's love in Christ real in our hearts. Therefore, for education to merit the term "Christian," it must be based on belief in God, the Source of truth; be centered in Jesus Christ, the Revealer of truth; and be guided by the Holy Spirit, the Inspirer of truth.

Taking their perspective from the Biblical view of God, man and the world, as expressed in *The Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church* (See Footnote 1), our institutions of Christian higher education have a responsibility to stress Christian doctrine as well as Christian ethics; Christian commitment as well as academic excellence. Our calling in Christian higher education is to create an environment that exposes the college community to the truth of God's redemptive love and equip its members for lives of useful service, whether in the full-time ministries of the Church, or in some other worthy calling.

III. Implementation

The carrying out of such a philosophy requires careful planning in several areas in accordance with *The Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church* (See Footnote 2) and under the guidance of the principles of this statement. Full development will be achieved as the task is approached with a sense of mission by everyone within the college community.

- a. **The Trustees of Erskine College.** The Board of Trustees of Erskine College is the authority of the Church at Erskine. Representing the Church's presence in its work of Christian higher education, the Trustees are an integral part of the college community. For service in such positions of responsibility, it is incumbent upon the General Synod to select individuals who have a perception of the Church and its work that coincides with that of the Synod and who are kept informed of the Church's policies and purposes. A Trustee is a servant of Christ and His Church in one of the greatest and most sacred endeavors. In this task the Church needs Godly men and women of knowledge, wisdom and dedication to this work.
- b. **The Administration.** In discharging its responsibility, the Board of Trustees should recognize that the administrators of the College have a different task in being stewards for the Church when, at the same time, they must meet the demands of academic standards and accreditation, build a strong faculty and present a program of studies which attracts students. Executive planning of this complexity requires great professional skill and dedication. It is imperative first, that the College have in these positions—as president, administrative and academic officers—individuals who have a deep personal commitment to Jesus Christ and are strong both in terms of their preparation and also in terms of their perception of administrative responsibility to the Board of Trustees and to the Church. These officers are charged with continuing commitment to the larger view of the College as a community of Christian scholars. Second, there must be kept open channels of regular communication between the Board of Trustees and the Synod in order for there to be on the campus the most effective implementation of our educational ideas.
- c. **The Faculty.** The Board of Trustees, through the Administration, must seek faculty members having professional competence, moral sensitivity and genuine Christian

commitment. Faculty members who believe in the enduring relevance of the Christian orientation, have a relation to their subject matter, and an involvement with the learner which are significantly different from those found in secular settings. Freedom of inquiry should prevail; however, faculty members must be chosen who are committed to the goals of the College and who are concerned with the quality of the day-to-day life of the campus. The instructional focus should be on insight and comprehension, as opposed to information only, and should place emphasis on flexible and innovative approaches to teaching.

- d. **The Student.** The student attending Erskine College becomes part of a meaningful tradition of Christian leadership, of education for a life of service and witness. At a Christian college, the uniqueness of each individual is a basic premise, but the universality of our human dependence on Jesus Christ as the ultimate Word is equally fundamental, the point of reference for all knowledge and all experience being Biblical revelation and authority. From these truths it follows that both the individual comprising the student body and the ethos of a college campus which is truly Christian should manifest qualities differentiated from the secular norm. At Erskine College, students are privileged to belong to a community of genuine concern and conviction which it is their responsibility to foster and to maintain as they relate its values to their own time. Under the supervision of the Board of Trustees, the Administration and the Faculty, the student is expected to cooperate in creating and maintaining an environment that will honor God, promote the Christian goals of the Church and support the moral standards of the College. In the educational process, the student is expected to study and evaluate all knowledge objectively, seeking God's guidance in matters of faith, vocational calling and educational preparation.
- e. **The Curriculum.** The curriculum for Erskine College at the undergraduate level should be broadly based, with the Christian perspective as the positive integrating factor for all of the disciplines. Emphasis should be placed on the arts, sciences, vocations and our cultural heritage. Significant emphasis should be placed on the study of Bible and Christian ethics as a requirement for graduation. Along with providing strong majors in different fields, the curriculum should address the development of the whole student. An exposure to specialized areas of social and community service is an appropriate part of the total educational experience. Erskine Theological Seminary, being the professional school of Erskine College, in preparing students for the gospel ministry, has a special mission in Christian higher education. Its curriculum must be in harmony with *The Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church*, and designed so that its graduates will be fully prepared to be effective ministers of the Word.

IV. Inter-relationship of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and Erskine College

Erskine College represents the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in higher education. The relationship between the College and the Church is organic; that is, Erskine College is related to the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church as the arm of the Church in Christian higher education in carrying out the Biblical mandate to redeem all of life, especially man's moral and intellectual life, under the authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ.

- a. **Responsibility of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church to Erskine College.** Inasmuch as Erskine College is a church-owned Christian institution, the Church has ultimate responsibility for the administrative, academic and moral life of the College. This responsibility is established and maintained through the Board of Trustees. The Trustees oversee the total administration of the College as a trust of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.

The Church also has a responsibility to support the College financially and to render encouragement and affirmation to the College as it implements the goals and purposes of the Church.

- b. **Responsibility of Erskine College to the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church.** In order for the goals and purposes of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in Christian higher education to be realized, Erskine College, through its Board of Trustees, administration and faculty, must be in harmony with the principles and goals of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. Within this context, the College has a responsibility to bring its theological reflections to bear upon the life of the Church.

V. Erskine's Purpose

The purpose of Erskine College should be to provide sound training in a campus environment where evangelical Christian influence is supreme and pervasive. The role of the church-sponsored college is the distinctive one of relating academic disciplines to the Christian realities of faith and responsible selfhood.

At the same time, there must be intellectual stimulation and open dialogue; and creative individualism should be fostered. The basic premise of education ought to be that the goals of education are to open the mind and the heart to truth, to teach one to think Biblically and objectively and to give direction to daily life. "In Thy light shall we see light."

As an arm of the Church, Erskine College exists to enlarge and help sustain the mission of the Church. It exists, primarily, for the benefit of its students. Their interests must be paramount and their individual and collective needs a matter of continuing concern. Erskine's goal must be to afford them the opportunity and encouragement to integrate knowledge and moral values in the development of the highest and best use of their abilities. A primary objective of the College should be to guide the student into the development of a mature faith within a Christian system of values which defines contemporary pressures in their true light and which is staunchly resistant to the impersonality and relativism of our time. Erskine's ultimate objective for every student must be the gaining of an understanding of the truth that "man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

Footnotes:

1. See especially the *Confession of Faith*, *The Larger Catechism*, and the *Shorter Catechism*. See also *Manual of Authorities and Duties*, "Boards," for definition of evangelical.
2. *Form of Government*, Chapter XIV,A,4: "Any newly appointed employee of any board, as administrator or teacher, shall give satisfactory evidence of his belief in and adherence to the basic doctrines of evangelical Christianity."

Evangelical Christian Defined

The following is the definition of an Evangelical Christian adopted by the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (originally adopted June 1976, updated June 2008).

The following definition of evangelical was adopted by the 1976 General Synod: “The word ‘evangelical’ comes from a Greek root meaning ‘good news’ and it refers to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In a broad sense, evangelicals are people who believe that the Bible is God’s inspired Word and that an individual can become a Christian only by accepting Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. Evangelicals believe:

1. The Bible alone, being God-breathed, is the Word of God, infallible in all that it teaches, and inerrant in the original manuscripts.
2. That there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
3. In the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, in His Virgin Birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through the shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.
4. That for the salvation of lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
5. In the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.
6. In the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; that they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.
7. In the spiritual unity of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.