

In response to requests from various educators about what the mission is of the Russian-American Institute and how Christianity is integrated into the school's academic program, we invited clergy from a wide range of Christian traditions to this presentation (Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants).

**Russian-American Institute
Spring 2010**

Dr. John A. Bernbaum

**THE MISSION AND STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE
OF CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Greetings, pastors, priests and friends!

The Beginning: My Life in Christian Education

“Every idea has a biography.” Let me tell you why I have committed my life to working in the field of Christian higher education.

Family roots:

- **Born and raised in Chicago**
- **From German and Italian families**
- **Yet raised in the Dutch Reformed community, which places a high value on Christian education**
- **Product of Christian schools – elementary, high school and university.**
- **My Christian teachers became the heroes of my life.**

Education:

- **When I started graduate school, it was my first experience on a secular state campus (University of Maryland) and I saw first-hand the hostility toward the Christian faith among my faculty members in the History Department.**
- **Despite this, I finished a doctorate in European and Russian history, and after four years in the diplomatic service, I decided I wanted to teach – I was a teacher at heart and I knew that God was calling me to invest my life in the lives of young people.**
- **I tell you all this because I want you to know from the start that I have very strong feelings about this topic of Christian higher education (CHE) and its strategic importance.**

My Professional Experience:

- **I worked for twenty years for an association of Christian colleges and universities in the United States.**
- **We built this coalition of colleges & universities from 13 member institutions to 75 schools by the time I left my work with this association.**

- Now the CCCU has 109 member colleges & universities in the United States and Canada, plus 37 affiliates in the US and Canada and 34 international members in 20 countries.
- The Russian-American Institute is an international member of the CCCU.

A Key Triad

Why Am I Such An Advocate of CHE?

- Our approach to CHE is grounded in God's Word
PROVERBS 2:1-11

PSALMS 1:1-3

PROVERBS 1:7a

- The key Biblical concept here is this:

CHURCH

FAMILY

SCHOOL

- Remember the phrase "a cord of three strands is not quickly broken"?
- I don't need to tell you about the importance of the CHURCH in a Believers' life.
- But let's talk about the importance of the FAMILY
DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9 & 20-25
EPHESIANS 6:1-4
- The family is the seedbed of:
Economic skills
Money habits
Attitudes toward work
Financial independence
- Families are important sources for strengthening society
Critically important social force
Defense against alienation and despair
Source of peace and security in society

The Role of the Christian School

The role of the Christian school is important because it is the critical third strand in the cord and it is important that there be harmony between all three parts.

Not discord – or conflict.

Not one set of values and teachings in two places (church and family), but another set of values and teachings in the school.

Joseph Bayly (Christian journalist) once said: Can you imagine the Israelites turning their children over to the Canaanites for their education?

The key is building a CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW into our children and young people.

- **Avoiding privatization of our faith**
- **Avoiding creating a dichotomy in our lives that separates our faith from our view of the world that we learn in school.**
- **It has to with epistemology (how we know)**
- **Christian education should teach a perspective on all of life, because “all truth is God’s truth.”**

So What Is a Christian Liberal Arts Education?

What does this mean? It’s a new concept here in Russia!

At its core, it means education for thinking, serving and being a Christian in church AND society.

It is an education in which five basic elements are informed and pursued in the light of Biblical revelation:

- 1. Breadth of learning – an education that reaches across all fields of study (natural sciences, social sciences, the humanities, and the arts). This includes studies in Bible and theology and the influence of Christianity in history, culture and all academic fields.**
- 2. Transferrable skills – an education that equips students with analytical thinking, verbal, mathematical, aesthetic and interpersonal skills that are useful in all aspects of life.**

- These skills must be a means of service to God in serving others.
 - Not a means to personal power.
3. A context for understanding all aspects of life by a study of history and philosophy and theology.
 4. Values – an education in which moral and social values are Biblically grounded and nurtured in a Christian community.
 5. Holistic personal development – an education that is concerned about the faith, morality, intellect and world view of its students, that sees students as whole people.
 - Grounded in a Biblical view of persons.
 - Not grounded in the popular concept of individualistic self-fulfillment.

Here's a way of stating the mission of Christian liberal arts educational institutions from one of my mentors, Dr. Arthur Holmes from Wheaton College:

“Christian liberal arts education provides the opportunity to steward life more effectively by becoming more fully a human person in the image of God, by seeing life whole rather than fragmented, by transcending the provincialism of our place in history, our geographic location, or our job. . . . It is an opportunity to find meaning for everything I am and do. Christian liberal arts education is concerned that we do this in the light of God’s self-revelation, so that we learn to think Christianly, to value as Christians should, and so to act responsibly. I think it worthwhile if a student, when asked what he learned in college, could reply: ‘I learned what it is to see and think and act like the human person God made me to be.’” (The Idea of a Christian College)

The practicality of a Christian liberal arts education is sometimes questioned.

Shouldn't our students/our children be trained to find a job, to make money, to be successful? That's the basic philosophy in Russian university education.

A Christian liberal arts university makes the case that a career is not a job – it's a lifetime of service in a changing world. Education is to equip our students for life, not just for employment!

Here's a graphic view of a Christian liberal arts curriculum:

Natural Sciences
(the study of God's creation)

humanities Christ the arts

Social Sciences
(the study of human behavior)

Theological Framework

The Russian-American Institute: Our Approach

This is basis upon which the Russian-American Institute is built.

The Institute offers three academic specializations:

- 1. Business & Economics**
- 2. Social Work**
- 3. Literature & Linguistics (Philology)**

The tag lines that go along with our name are:

- **COMPETENCE**
- **CHARACTER**
- **CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW**

Our commitment is to train young Russian Christians for leadership roles in their communities, their churches, the marketplace and in government and society (arts, law, journalism, etc.)

Distinctives of the Institute graduates:

- 1. Bilingual**
- 2. Career specialization**
- 3. Computer literacy/competence**
- 4. Democratic and free market values and institutions**
- 5. Grounded in Biblical moral and ethical values**

The Strategic Importance of Christian Higher Education

During the 70 years of Marxist-Leninist rule in the USSR, Christians did not have the opportunity to study to attend universities because of their Christian faith. But when Mikhail Gorbachev broke the link between Communism and atheism, it was now possible to develop Christian schools and Bible colleges.

Between 1988 and 2000, over 125 Bible colleges, institutes and seminaries were built in Russia - which is unprecedented in all of mission history, I am told. This was an important beginning.

But if you think of the Christian community in Russia as an army, this meant the chaplains and band directors were the only ones being trained.

Institutes and universities are strategically important in Russia at this time so that the rest of the army - the laity - gets educated and grounded in a Christian worldview. Schools like ours are designed to equip the other 98% of the Christian community who are not full-time church workers.

Our vision is to equip young Russian Christians to be the “salt and light” in Russian society and to empower the churches in Russia to be a powerful influence for justice, for freedom, and for peace in this country and this region of the world.

Our Challenge

We are asking you to send us your young people, your sons and daughters.

Let's work together to build the TRIAD between CHURCH, FAMILY and SCHOOL!

DISCUSSION