

## WHAT CAN THE ACADEMY DO FOR THE CHURCH?

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The challenge of mission demands the full utilization of the gifts and resources the Lord has given to the church. That challenge calls for the careful exploration of the ways in which the academy of the church and the church at large might work together in a cooperative venture to strengthen the church and enhance its mission around the world.

### 1. Evaluation

While generalizations are hazardous at best, it seems to the writer that the academy is sometimes marginalized by the church. That is, its resources are not fully utilized in the work of the church. The reason for this probably moves in two directions. The church may look at the academy with a measure of suspicion, while the academy may look at the church with an attitude of condescension. The purpose here is to explore ways in which the academy and the church might rise above these attitudinal limitations and approach their work in a cooperative way.

### 2. Context

Any attempt at an integrated effort must keep in focus several contextual factors:

#### 2.1 Denominational Concerns

Across the spectrum of leadership within the Assemblies of God is a frequently articulated concern that the academy might be party to compromise on doctrines held as inviolable by the church. Historical evidence (as witnessed in other denominations) is sometimes cited. If our

work together is to be constructive and significant, this concern, whether rooted in fact or fancy, dare not go unaddressed.

## 2.2 Revival Priorities

The church of which we are a part is the result of revival forces which are traceable to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the turn of the century. Spiritual encounter is essential to a revival movement. Matters of the heart press for a place of priority. Reflection is easily set aside in such a context. Here is another factor that the academy must keep in clear focus as it sets out to do its work.

## 2.3 Theological Perspectives

While the church rightly insists that the foundation of all doctrine is the objective revelation of God in the scripture, it also considers experience as a kind of “validating hermeneutic” to anchor its beliefs. We are a people of experience, and to ignore that reality impairs the cooperative work of the academy and the church.

## 2.4 Servant Orientation

Respectfully, the academy must be servant to the church. Its task, then, is rooted in its commitment to support and undergird the work of the church. This becomes its reason for being. The academy has its identity in its relationship to and in its cooperation with the church. Personal agendas must be subservient to this devotion. The question before the academy is persistently this: How will this work strengthen the church?

## 2.5 Freedom and Inquiry

The work of the academy must be guided by theological and ecclesiological parameters already set in place by church dogma and tradition. How is the academy to do creative and significant work within these rather tight parameters? This question never goes away and becomes the subject of persistent challenge. Interestingly, presupposition is a vital part of any serious and productive inquiry. Even so-called “free thinkers” are guided by a set of presuppositions, no matter how much they may protest. In fact, intellectual respectability is most honored when it takes seriously contextual parameters. The academy can exercise

remarkable latitude within the parameters defined for her by the church -- of which she is a vital and essential part.

## 2.6 Indoctrinational Considerations

What follows here is but an extension of the point just made. The academy is entrusted by the church to take a leading role in the faithful transmission of its belief system to the generations that follow. Again, the academy is called to perform a task with prescribed definition. The challenge is to carry out this enterprise without slipping into a mind-set characterized by rigidity and dogmatism. The academy and the church, in a relationship of mutual trust, must accept this challenge.

## 3. Suggestions

It may be fitting now to ask the question again: In what ways can the academy serve the church? The response here is tempered by the contextual considerations which have gone before.

### 3.1 By Helping the Church to Articulate Its Belief System with Accuracy, Faithfulness, Passion, and Conviction.

A case in point might be helpful the doctrine of initial evidence is sometimes held with suspicion in both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal groups. The question for the academy is not whether or not we embrace this doctrine, for that has been established by our mutual confession. It is rather how might this doctrine be set forth in the most convincing and definable way. The academy is positioned well to do this work. It understands Biblical history, denominational concerns, exegetical requirements, and the nomenclature necessary to make the case with clarity and persuasiveness. The academy serves the church well when it functions in this role. It is to the academy that the church must be able to turn with confidence for this important work.

### 3.2 By Helping the Church to Support and Appropriate the Unique and Essential Work Done by the Academy.

This is like saying, "Convince the church of your value." As unfair as that may seem, it is just this that must happen. In its servant role, the academy must demonstrate to the church its unwavering commitment to

enhance the work of the church. The academy, by its resolution of purpose in this regard, will gain the support of the church as it goes about its essential work. It is time for a spirit of trust and reciprocity to so grip both the academy and the church that their work together will both please the Lord and build His kingdom. God-given gifts are needlessly squandered when the church distrusts the academy and the academy fails to rise to the task of serving the church. Imagine the influence created by a solid partnership of mutual trust and service between the academy and the church. Its creation must be priority.

### 3.3 By Helping the Church to See the Intrinsic Value of Theological Reflection and Scholarly Dialogue

Revival movements tend to focus on encounter. Pragmatics matter most. Experience is held as vital. To this there is no protest. However, experience ultimately makes an evidential demand. "I must understand just what it is that has happened to me." It is the academy that can help the church right here. Theological reflection, rightly focused, will provide an essential safeguard for the church. It is this work that puts an understanding foundation beneath the experiential building. The academy must assist the church in comprehending the essential nature of this work. A revival movement will falter if it does not find a resting place on sound doctrine. The academy serves the church well when it leads the way in recognizing the "substance" of faith.

### 3.4 By Helping the Church Develop a Strategy of Evangelism

The academy should stand on the cutting edge of evangelistic endeavor. Strategies, methodology, and motivation should flow out from the academy to guide and help the church in its worldwide mission. The appeal here is that the academy resist the temptation to "internalize" its focus. The world and its needs must be held as priority. If the academy can be viewed by the church as instilling passion and burden to reach the lost, it will attract to it a high level of support from the church.

### 3.5 By Helping the Church to Grasp the Ways in Which a Spirit of Revival Might Be Fostered in the Ongoing Life of the Church

The academy can be a depository of information on revival happenings and history. It can communicate to the church the passion and power as demonstrated by those whom God has used as instruments

of revival. The church must experience continual revival, and the academy must lead the way.

We may be close to that time when the academy and the church will enter into a partnership which will catapult the church forward on every front. A time when trust will abound, mutual efforts will be well-focused, gifts will be fully utilized, and the academy of the church and the church at large will know that they are indeed one.

For this the Lord will be pleased.

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