

A MAGAZINE FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS

# HUNTINGTON UNIVERSITY

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A  
**CHRIST-CENTERED  
UNIVERSITY?**

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Summer 2008

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# FOCUS ON THE 'MAIN THING'

by G. Blair Dowden, President

At the beginning of this school year, I spoke in chapel and made a rather remarkable assertion. I said, "Our main thing at Huntington University is our Christ-centeredness." I then invited the entire campus community to do some "main thing thinking" with me to explore what it means to be a Christ-centered university, and to reflect on how well we are fulfilling our Christ-centered promise to students.



Throughout the year, we have had a series of Bible studies, book discussions, chapels, and convocations to focus our attention on Huntington's defining character and purpose. The entire campus community engaged in reflection and renewal. A highlight was the Symposium on Christ-Centered Higher Education held March 5, featuring nationally recognized authors and speakers. (See cover story beginning on page 10.)

Why, you may ask, did we invest all this time and effort?

We undertook this initiative because the centrality of Christ is the source of Huntington University's distinctive academic strength as an institution of higher learning. As Colossians 1:15-17 describes, He is the Lord of all things. Everything we can study derives its value, purpose, and meaning from the

Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

I often say to prospective parents and students that the reason that they should seriously consider a Christ-centered institution is not for the chapel, or the Bible studies, or the opportunities to have Christian roommates and friends. All of these are important, but a student also can find these "Christian atmosphere" elements on a secular campus through Inter-Varsity or Campus Crusade.

Rather, the reason they should attend a Christ-centered institution is for what happens in the classroom: a Christian professor teaching his or her subject matter from a Christian viewpoint and helping students to begin the process of developing a Christian worldview.

This is why Christ-centered education is our "main thing." It sets us apart from other types of colleges and universities. A Huntington University education is not merely a secular education with a little Christianity added on, as one observer put it, "like shaking pepper on a steak." Instead, we strive to see all subject matter through the eyes of faith.

It is my prayer that our campus-wide conversation this year has helped students to understand that faith motivates learning and encouraged them to view their studies as an act of worship and honoring to Christ.

Christ-centeredness is a difficult intellectual and spiritual undertaking. It is a lifelong journey with both personal and corporate dimensions. I am grateful for the faculty, staff, administrators, and trustees who work hard to preserve and strengthen Huntington's distinctive Christ-centered approach to higher education. ■

## Huntington University Magazine

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# CHRIST@CENTER@HUNTINGTON

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*“What does it mean to be a Christ-centered university?”*

**This was the question posed by President Blair Dowden in September 2007.**

**He challenged the entire campus community to reflect on the far-reaching**

**implications of Huntington’s Christian mission in higher education.**



**Dr. Mark Noll addresses the Huntington University community during the symposium in March.**



“Our main thing at Huntington University is our Christ-centeredness,” said Dowden in his annual State of the University address. “That is who we say we are; that is our promise to students. This year we want to examine how we are doing in fulfilling that promise and to work to strengthen our Christ-centered core.”

So began a year long conversation between students, faculty, staff, trustees, and friends of the University.

Three goals were established for the initiative:

1. Promote a campus-wide dialogue on what it means to be a Christ-centered university and on how Christ-centeredness should be manifested among us.
2. Encourage each member of the campus community to reflect on what it means to be Christ-centered in his or her role and to take steps to change as necessary.
3. Evaluate how well we are fulfilling our promise of being a Christ-centered university and determine steps we can take together to improve.

Throughout the year, a variety of activities were planned to promote conversation and reflection. For example, each Friday, faculty members presented a Bible-study series on the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Additional chapel programs focused on the concept of Christ-centeredness. Book studies were sponsored by faculty and student groups. Discussions took place among nearly all departments, committees, campus organizations, and teams.

A focal point of the year was the Presidential Symposium on Christ-centered Higher Education, held on March 5. Classes were suspended, and offices were closed as the entire campus community gathered for a day of reflection and renewal. Well-respected visiting scholars presented plenary addresses throughout the day, while special workshops and breakout discussions were offered for students, staff, and faculty.

### “THE DEPTHLESS RESOURCES OF SCRIPTURE”

Dr. Mark Noll presented the first symposium lecture on “Developing a Christ-centered Mind.” After many years at Wheaton College, Noll was appointed the Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame. The author of many books,

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he is widely recognized for *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, which has contributed to a renaissance of evangelical scholarship over the past 20 years. *TIME Magazine* listed Noll among the 25 most influential evangelicals in America.

“My task this morning is explore how the depthless resources of Scripture, as summarized in the great Christian creeds, provide an ideal orientation to the kind of higher education that Christian believers can and should practice,” Noll began. He then plunged into a sweeping summary of the Christian faith as presented in the Old and New Testaments and the creeds of the early church.

Focusing particularly on Colossians 1:13 through 2:3, Noll sketched out the implications of the claims of Christ upon all areas of human study.



Christ is not only the firstborn in creation, but He is also the source and energy of all things, for everything was created in Him and for Him....The Apostle says, in effect, that if we study anything in the realms of nature or the realms of the spirit, we study what came into existence through Jesus Christ. Likewise, if we study human interactions or spiritual-human interactions (thrones, dominions, rulers, powers), we are studying realms brought into existence by Jesus Christ. If our study concerns predictability, uniformity, regularity, we are working in the domains of the one who “is before all things, in whom all things hold together.” If our study concerns beauty, power, or agency, it is the same, “for in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” And if we succeed to any degree, we are only following after Jesus Christ, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

But there is still more to say. Because for a Christian the tasks of scholarship are tied so closely to the unearned gift of salvation, there can be no genuine Christian learning that is arrogant, self-justifying, imperious, or callous to the human needs of colleagues, students, and the broader public. The tight conjunction

of assertions in Colossians underscores the fact that all humans, including academics, are needy sinners who require God. All humans, including academics, remain in need of divine grace even as they work at exploring the depths of “wisdom and knowledge” hidden in Jesus Christ.

Noll then unpacked the historic creeds of the early church—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed (381 AD) and the Definition of Christ’s Person from the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD)—placing particular emphasis on the implications of Christian doctrine for academic scholarship.

The Christian traditions that embrace the creeds, and the biblical bases on which they build, possess the scope and the depth that are needed to practice a Christian scholarship worthy of the name. They offer believers the stuff we need if we are to engage our minds for Christ. The greatest hope for Christian learning in our age, or in any age, lies, not primarily in heightened activity, in better funding, or in strategizing for the tasks at hand—though all of these have an important part to play. Rather, the great hope for Christian learning is to delve deeper into the Christian faith itself. And going deeper into the Christian faith means, in the end, learning more of Jesus Christ.

Noll concluded his remarks by suggesting several possible applications of the Christian faith to various disciplines of study. For example, Noll said, in the social sciences, “theories must be incomplete if they view the solution to human problems as arising only from a manipulation of environment.”

The solution to genuine human problems must involve attention to the moral state of humanity as well as to human circumstances. Since humans are moral creatures defined in substantial part by the coloration of sin, good social science will always factor in intrinsic moral nature as well as extrinsic material influence. Visions of humanity that begin with human innocence—whether from Rousseau, or from Marx, or from rational choice capitalism—will never be adequate for full and faithful accounts of social reality.

The reality of Christ’s atonement for our sin shapes the way we view literature and the arts, Noll said.

The best narratives will not be simplistic (like movies where resolution comes through a car chase or gun fight). Neither will the best narratives be Manichean (where the good guys are all good and the bad guys are all bad). Nor will they be simply heroic (where protagonists triumph over obstacles through reliance on their own inner resources) or simply nihilistic (where the point is to enact the futility of human existence). Rather, the best narratives will be morally complex, as in fact the enduring tragedies, comedies, and novels regularly are—like *Oedipus Rex*, *King Lear*,

*Paradise Lost*, or *Crime and Punishment*. Such morally complex narratives are most satisfying because, in terms of atonement theology, they are most true to life.

“Finally,” Noll concluded, “since humanity is not morally self-sufficient, theories, narratives, artistic creations, and scholarship that stress the presence of grace as a major element in human existence will be truer to reality than forms that do not.”

Noll’s remarks became the springboard for a question-and-answer session with the HU faculty in the late morning. Noll later responded to questions submitted by the entire campus community.

### THE CHRIST-CENTERED CAMPUS

The symposium’s afternoon plenary session was presented by Dr. Duane Litfin, president of Wheaton College and author of *Conceiving the Christian College*. Litfin’s address was titled, “Becoming a Christ-Centered Community.” In his talk, Litfin challenged his audience with three questions.

“First of all,” he asked, “should an academic institution in the first place aspire to be Christ-centered?”

The answer, said Litfin, is “it depends.”

“It depends on what kind of institution you want to be.”

He went on to explain that it would be nonsense for anyone to expect

a secular university to be Christ-centered. But even among religious institutions, Litfin said, much depends on the sort of university being considered.

Litfin distinguished between two types of Christian colleges and universities. On the one hand, there are “umbrella institutions,” which may have greater or lesser degrees of religious affiliation. Within an umbrella institution, a particular religious viewpoint may have the dominant or privileged voice, but not the exclusive voice. Many diverse perspectives—including non-Christian views—may be held and shared under the umbrella of the sponsoring religious tradition.

On the other hand, Litfin said, there are what he termed the “systemic institutions.” In these colleges and universities, the entire academic community shares a common Christian commitment. Huntington University and Wheaton College are examples of systemic schools.

“A systemic institution can aspire to Christ-centered higher education, because at the center of that institution—and what marks it root, trunk, branch, and leaf—is a commitment to the Lord Jesus . . . We are a living, learning community of people who have come together to try to think through what it means to live out our commitment to Christ.”

Litfin then asked, “What does it take to be a Christ-centered institution?” This first step, he said, is to understand what is meant by the phrase.

“I’m not into empty slogans just because they sound good or impress the constituency, or donors like to hear them,” Litfin said. “If we are going

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Dr. Duane Litfin

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to have a phrase called 'Christ-centered education,' then let's be sure we know what we're talking about."

"If we are going to have a clear vision of what we mean by Christ-centeredness, we have to have a very thick, a very high Christology. We have to have a fulsome understanding of who the Word of God tells us the Lord Jesus Christ really is; who the Church has been looking to and worshiping for these 2000 years."

Too many people, Litfin said, have a limited view of Jesus and a simplistic understanding of salvation. Their Christ is too small. The reality is far grander and all-encompassing.

"The truth of the matter is if we really understand who Jesus is, there is nothing conceivable that is irrelevant to Him, or to which He is irrelevant. There's nothing you can think about in your personal life, in your academic work, in what you study, what you are going after, or the decisions you make—there's nothing that Jesus Christ, the risen, exalted Christ of Heaven, doesn't look at and say, 'That matters to me.' There's nothing that you can look at that He would say 'I don't care about that. That's a matter of indifference to me. I have no relevance to that.' Nothing can be irrelevant to Him. If we have a full, thick, strong Christology, it will bear the weight of an entire liberal arts curriculum and all your learning and living experiences in a community like this. He is the One who can be the center of that."

Litfin said that this depth of understanding would impact teaching and learning. "Every course deserves the question, 'What difference does it make that Jesus Christ is Lord?' We are constantly trying to ask that question. That is what makes an institution like Huntington University Christ-centered."

Litfin then posed his third, and perhaps most difficult, question to the audience: "What does it look like in practice?"

He immediately dismissed the notion that Christ-centered education was nothing more than opening class with prayer or a devotional, then proceeding to teach or learn as one would in a secular university. To the contrary, Litfin stressed that Christ-centered education required thorough scholarship and hard intellectual work. The entire curriculum should be pervaded by a commitment to think Christianly about subject matter.

Litfin also emphasized that Christ-centeredness would make a profound difference outside the classroom. He spoke particularly of interpersonal relationships infused by Christian grace. On the Christ-centered campus, relationships between administrators, faculty, staff and students would be healthier as each member of the campus community sought to submit themselves fully to Jesus.

Personal decision-making would also be marked by this commitment to Christ. Individuals would make wise decisions about how to use their time, talent, and resources.

Such a community would be visibly different from secular campuses, Litfin said. The difference would be noticed by auditors, vendors, contractors, visiting athletic teams, and others. The Christ-centered campus would be a witness for Christ.

## MOTIVATED BY GRATITUDE

The commitment to be Christ-centered is no small undertaking. Recognizing our own fallibility and failings can lead to discouragement.

## ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

HU's yearlong exploration of Christ-centered higher education was led by a special task force appointed by President Dowden. Members included:

**Tom Bergler** (chair)  
Associate Professor of Ministry & Missions

**Norris Friesen** (chair)  
Vice President & Dean of the University

**Mark Fairchild**  
Professor of Bible and Religion



Jeff Berggren (above), vice president for enrollment and marketing, asks a question in a session led by Stan Gaede (right) of Gordon College.



**Bill Fisher**

Dean of Christian Faith & Life  
Campus Pastor

**Karen Jones**

Associate Professor of Ministry & Missions

**Trent Lloyd**

Biblical Studies student

**John Paff**

Executive Assistant to the President  
Executive Director of Communication

**Martha Smith**

Associate Dean of Student Development  
Director of Career Development & Counseling

**Cindy Steury**

Associate Professor of Education  
Assistant Dean for Faculty Development



What motivates us to continue to make the effort, said Dr. Stan Gaede, is an overwhelming sense of gratitude for the love and grace of Christ.

Gaede is the former president of Westmont College and currently serves as scholar-in-residence at Gordon College. A sociologist by training, he is the newly elected president of the Christian College Consortium. When Gaede presented “Living the Christ-centered Life” at the March 5 symposium, he shared his own personal journey of faith.

“Two other things you need to know about me,” said Gaede. “First, I was a Christian and, second, I was a slug.”

That is, as a young boy, I had accepted Christ as my Savior and it was real. I really did give my life to Christ at the age of 6 or 7. But it did not grab hold of me the way that it should. Or to use the language of the day, Jesus became my Savior but not my Lord, not the pivot point of my life around which I oriented a great many of my activities.

And so I was a slug. What I pursued in earnest were athletics, music and the opposite sex, pretty much in that order... What I didn't spend a great deal of time working on was being a student, even though I knew that that too was important. My teachers, parents and coaches, all told me, on a regular basis, that I had a lot of potential, which was their way of telling me that I was a slug—not applying myself.

Now, why was that? Well, if you'd asked me at the time, I would've said that it was because I had too much to do: sports, music, and the opposite sex. But that wasn't the real reason. The real reason was that I didn't think of it as deeply valuable. I was a student for one reason and one reason only. That was to get good enough grades to go to college and get a good job.

In other words, Gaede explained, he was motivated only by a desire for “the good life” and a reasonable level of affluence for himself.

Gaede's self-oriented world ended abruptly during the summer of his sophomore year in college when he was involved in a tragic head-on collision.

In a few seconds, everything that I had come to rely on as valuable and important was gone. My car, for one thing, was totaled. But much more important, when I woke the next morning in a hospital, after about six hours of surgery, everything else in my life had been totaled as well. My leg and ankle, on which I relied for football and tennis, were shattered. They said I might not walk again. Half of my face, on which I relied for appearance, was crushed. They said I would not look the same again. But worst of all, my passenger, my cousin, my friend, Paul, was gone. The accident had taken his life.

Between the pain and the medication and the surgery, I was in pretty bad shape. But it was nothing, nothing, compared to the deep pain in my soul regarding Paul's death. As the driver, I felt guilty, responsible. I was responsible, and absolutely alone. I have never felt so alone in my whole life. Nothing that anyone said made any difference at all.

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Dr. Don Opitz

As he recovered in the hospital, Gaede struggled with both physical and emotional pain. But then, he said, something remarkable happened.

I was told that my aunt and uncle, Paul's parents, wanted to see me. Uncle Waldo and Aunt Esther were two people whom I had known all my life but now very much did not want to see. What could they possibly want to talk to me about? Why would they even want to look at me, much less talk to me? I took their son for a ride, and now he was gone. My mind ran wild with possibilities, and none of them were good.

But there wasn't anything I could do about it. My leg was in traction. My mouth was wired shut. I couldn't move, much less talk. The only thing I could do was watch as they walked into my hospital room, through the door. I can still see them walking around to the edge of my bed and to my side.

They were smiling. That's the first thing I remember. Then they did something that I will remember for the rest of my life. They reached out to me, grabbed my hand and whispered in my ear, "Stan, we love you. You're our son now too, you know."

Gaede said those five simple words transformed his life. "What I heard that day were words of forgiveness, grace, and adoption. When I heard them, I knew instantly, absolutely, without a doubt, what it was that I believed."

That realization changed his entire outlook. In the grace and forgiveness of Christ, expressed through his aunt and uncle, Gaede found new motivation for living. It even changed his attitude toward college.

I was grateful, because I understood for the first time in my life what God had given me in Christ, his grace and mercy and love. And as a result, I became immensely grateful, thankful beyond words. And, that, that is what turned me into a student—or better yet, a learner.

I didn't just become grateful in feelings. I became grateful in fact, grateful for all His gifts in my life and most especially grateful for the privilege of being able to learn, to learn about His creation, His world and His Word. For the first time in my life, I became absolutely thirsty for understanding. I wanted to drink in everything I could out of gratitude to God and desire to be a good steward of what He had given to me, which meant that finally, finally, I became a student, finally understood my calling, finally understood why I was in college.

The importance of gratitude was reiterated in chapel by Dr. Don Opitz, associate professor of higher education and sociology at Geneva College and co-author of *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, a book for Christian college students. Opitz spoke in chapel on March 4 and 6, and presented a special workshop for students during the symposium on March 5.

In his first chapel presentation, Opitz related the fictional story of Richard Lovat Somers, the lead character in D.H. Lawrence's novel *Kangaroo*.

"Lovat is a newspaper man and a minor intellectual, like most of us. He lived at the time of the rise of the brownshirts in Nazi Germany. He was a person in a position where he could have leaned in and made a difference. He could have contended. He could have used his newspaper and gone to battle. But instead of leaning in, he backpedals.

We come to learn something about Lovat—and I think something about Lawrence as well—about the inability to commit, the inability to care. Lovat backpedals out of Germany, and he backpedals his way down across Europe and down the boot into Italy. And here, again, he lived in times and in circumstances where he could have made a difference. He could have stood up against the fascists. And so the story goes. You keep rooting for him to live a life of consequence, a life in which love pours out. But instead, Lovat backpedals.

You see him backpedaling in his relationship with his wife as well. He could lean in, in deeper commitment, in love for his wife. Instead, he leans back. He leans back onto a boat that takes him to the shores of Australia. Again, there are too many opportunities in Sydney to make a difference. He ends up in the outback backpedaling to the end of the world. And there he dies in despair, the despair of never finding the treasure, never finding a story worth living. That's a tragedy.

In stark contrast, Opitz said, is the life motivated by gratitude. Drawing his next chapel sermon from the story of the 10 lepers healed by Jesus, he challenged students to be like the one in that group who returned

to offer thanks and praise to the Savior. Observing that 90 percent of college students are largely disengaged, he challenged his audience to greater commitment.

You may recognize in yourself the need to discover grace and gratitude, and the need to link that grace and gratitude to studying and learning. It begins by throwing yourself, heart and mind and soul and strength, at the feet of Jesus.

It begins by committing your heart in gratitude. Being prayerful about courses and about learning. Leaning in a little bit. Asking critical questions, not letting faculty off the hook so easily. Using a little bit more of their time in curious questioning. Forming the team of friends to read together, to discuss together. Taking assignments just a little bit more seriously. Working to think Christianly, to think out of a Christian perspective in your field. That may require a little bit of extra reading on the side. Great! Dig in! Get involved.

I hope from this whole event that we begin to consider wisdom to be more precious than gold. To lean in. To find strength among friends. To celebrate multi-faceted faithfulness. To discern your pitch. To join the drama of God's redemptive love. And to lavish Jesus, the Lord of All, with gratitude.

This challenge is fitting for all Christian learners, from undergraduate freshmen to seasoned Ph.Ds. Alumni, friends, and all members of University community are invited to continue to reflect on what it means to be Christ-centered at [www.huntington.edu/christcentered](http://www.huntington.edu/christcentered). ■

#### MORE RESOURCES ONLINE

Audio recordings from the Symposium on Christ-centered Higher Education are available on our Web site at [www.huntington.edu/christcentered](http://www.huntington.edu/christcentered). This site also includes recordings from our 2007–2008 Bible study series and essays submitted by faculty, staff, trustees, and friends of the University.

### WHY ARE WE STUDENTS?

We study in order to  
Understand god's good creation  
And the ways sin has distorted it  
So that, in christ's power, we may  
Bring healing to persons and the created order  
And, as god's image-bearers,  
Exercise responsible authority  
In our task of cultivating the creation  
To the end that all people and all things may  
Joyfully acknowledge and serve  
Their creator and true king.

Motto of the web community, *AcademicFaithfulness.com*, moderated by Don Opitz and Derek Melleby.





**Huntington Family**

Sandra Rufener earned a master's degree in counseling ministries, while her daughter Mary earned a bachelor's degree in educational ministries. They're from Lima, Ohio.



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