



## Transcriptions

### The Way We Might Go

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**Annotation:** *A report to the 1998 Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges (AABC) Annual Meeting, Jackson, Mississippi, February 19-21, 1998 (AABC now known as Association for Biblical Higher Education). Used with permission. Ted Ward reports on his interviews with 93% of the presidents of AABC member colleges and his quantitative survey of 87 member institutions. The interviews show the range of choices confronting the Association as well as a willingness “to move further toward a conciliatory and cooperative relationship that can allow for reasonable diversity.”*



I don't come to you today to review the report for you—or to even try to interpret it for you. I believe that the report, itself, will stand on its own feet. I believe that there is so much there that you can grasp and will grasp. And as you read and re-read and reflect and mark within that report, you will find more and more clues as to how we can together make AABC a substantial organization for the future. The research is motivated by the notion that if you don't prepare yourselves for the future, the future will simply happen to you. And I don't suspect that any of us particularly want an AABC that is victimized by the inevitables of the impending future.

I think the sort of thing that we heard, even from Ralph this morning, suggests that, indeed, we do need some BHAGS. We need some big hairy audacious goals, thank you. I learned a new one this morning and I appreciate that. I think there's something to be said there for the audacious. Unless we are willing to break through that which we are already doing and already understanding and already comfortable with, we make it hard for God because God is in the business of renewal.

God is in the business of newness. God is in the business of freshness, and God is in the business of change. I challenge you. I encourage you to reflect on that piece of the nature of God. God is immutable. But he has created a universe that is exemplifying at every moment that God really expects and enjoys change. Nothing stands still in God's universe. We used to make a distinction between those things that are alive and changing and moving, and those things that were fixed like rocks. And then we came to terms with the fact that geology is one of the most dynamic studies of change in all of science. And that even the fixedness of the universe and the astronomical heavens is constantly a study of change process and what is going on. As we do research within education, we always have to remember that to simply look back and define the data tables that show us what our enrollments were is nothing but to run the risk of a backward look that presumes that everything is evermore about what it was.

The spirit in this study was much more focused on where is the cutting edge. What is the future as imagined in the minds of those who affect this organization? One of the assumptions that I make right from the word 'go' is that you do not do a backward look in order to understand the future. You understand where you are with backward looks, but you understand the future by examining the imagination of leaders. And that is why this study began, not with a backward look, not with even organizing previous research that had been done on this organization and its history. But we began with a systematic examination through interviews of the presidents and almost all the presidents were interviewed in interviews that were planned for 30 minutes and averaged 50 minutes. I was impressed from the word 'go' with the willingness of the leadership within this organization, especially those presidents that gave time and effort to this study. I was impressed with their dedication and I was impressed with their imagination. And I tell you in reporting these findings that, yes, there are some very serious problems. But those serious problems are easily eclipsed by the prospect that comes from that positive spirit; that unity in mission that is characteristic within this organization. I see this organization as an essentially healthy organization with a bad cold, and somehow we've got to either wait out this bad cold or find some sorts of remedy that will give us a little bit of a jumpstart so that we can find ourselves in the future ahead.

I want to divide this talk today into three parts. It will be, as you will detect, almost a Presbyterian sermon: three points and a poem. But I decided not to read the poem, therefore, it's going to end up as a Reformed Baptist sermon: three points and a punch. And many of you, knowing me, are familiar with the fact that I would probably be more comfortable with three punches and a point. I'm going to divide the talk in three parts: anxiety, searching, and hoping.

Anxiety. A funny place to start when you're arguing that an organization is in good shape and faces a promising future. I think there is a kind of anxiety or fretting within this organization with which we must come to terms. Organizations whether they're schools or accrediting associations are, in many respects, like people; and the more you understand about people, the easier it is to understand why organizations are the way they are. Organizations are people. Each of us needs to engage, I believe, in good old-fashioned Christian soul-searching because this organization largely reflects what we are as people. And the ails, ailments, and the ills of the association are an extension of the ailments and the ills of the institutions and, ultimately, of those human beings within those institutions that are reflected.

Now what am I referring to in terms of anxiety and fretting? One of the first things we must understand is that fretting and anxiety and the kind of anxious behavior that seems uncomfortable and makes others uncomfortable is not in itself a very godly behavior. It is not a great credit to our

faith. But there are three threats that feed this anxiety and I find, in the interviews, that these three threats emerge very clearly. Some of them perceived from things said. Some of them perceived from attitudes presented. But I believe that one of these elements that feeds the anxiety in this organization is the threat of pride itself, especially that kind of pride that comes out of self-centeredness within institutions. There is a kind of one-ups-man-ship in holiness that affects this organization.

I find it very difficult to deal with the theme for this conference knowing what I do about our relationship to unity and our relationship to diversity. “Unity in Diversity” a wonderful theme for the conference and I would really like to end on that high note, but unity does not automatically lead to diversity. Diversity is much more apt to lead to unity, but we tend to it the other way around so we strive for the unity by suppressing diversity.

There is a kind of an intolerance that I find among many of the presidents—and forgive me for speaking plainly—an intolerance of people that are very different or going about Bible college education very differently from the way we go about it. There is a kind of almost ethnocentric presumption that God has uniquely given us, at this institution, the wisdom and the insight and the understanding to do it right. And we are so condescendingly gracious about those others that are trying so hard, and little by little they will become more like us. The only problem is we have about 96 people presuming that everybody’s going to become more like them. That is not going to produce the kind of unity that honors God. Our God the Creator created a whole menagerie out there of creatures that are different and he seems to like it that way.

There is more than one way to do effective Bible college education. There, that’s an opinion. I can’t prove that from my data. What I can prove from my data is that we are doing it a variety of different ways, and that many of those differences have their individual and unique strengths. And we acknowledge the wisdom of those various strengths, but we still have an uneasiness if people are too different from the way we see the way it ought to be. That kind of pride I name as Threat #1.

Threat #2 is the threat of misstep—the threat of stepping off the tightrope or falling over the edge. This has been, in the last 3-5 years within AABC, a time of extreme awareness that we are indeed on a kind of tightrope with reference to the idea of accreditation itself and the legitimacy of any accrediting association—not the least AABC—in being in the accrediting business when we see all sorts of efforts in high places, in particular in terms of expansionist government involvement, that would threaten to put us out of business with the stroke of a pen. The missteps that would allow a trigger to be pulled to write us off certainly has added to this anxiety.

I believe that in the future partly because of the way we’ve handled the past, but more especially because, on a difference in orientation of the future, we can be much more assertive and forthcoming. I don’t think we’ve yet seen what can happen if the power of AABC is truly marshaled. This is a significant group of institutions with a significant history. And, Ralph, may I throw you a challenge: find ways to marshal this resource because it is much more powerful than we have let it out to be. We tend, I think, possibly because as Christians sometimes we are defensive in a society that doesn’t particularly know what to do with us. We tend almost to be, you know, folded hands and wringing our hands and anxious when we ought to be more forthcoming and assertive. But my task here is not to describe *remedy* at this point, but to describe *problem*. We are not just prideful people but, unfortunately, we are amateur political strategists. And we have fallen into a kind of a trap set by the devil in which we presume a kind of technological political kind of argument and

posturing for AABC rather than falling back on the essential strength that comes from being the people of God, doing the work of God, in a godly manner. There is strength there, there is power there, and it can be marshaled.

Third, irrelevancy. Now this isn't quite so easy to deal with, frankly. Irrelevancy is what happens when you're just plain out of tune with what's going on. I wonder, really, about the evidences of irrelevancy in terms of the shrinkages that Ralph was reporting this morning. Have we really become an organization that is meeting the needs of the agencies that make it up—of the institutions of the schools?

As I examine the data and I encourage you to do this. The data are there in your study. Take a look. Several people that I've talked with in some detail about the study have said things like, Ted, I really appreciate all the data you gave us, I just don't like your opinions. Well, alright. Don't get hung up on it. Stick with the data. See what the data is saying to *your* opinions. It'll likely help shape your opinions and maybe even give you some new ones, but the data are very strong.

There is a very clear function for this Association to be doing much more of what is described in those four statements of purpose, especially in terms of the nurturing and the helping of institutions to grow and the building of a kind of community voice among institutions. And therein, I believe, lies much of the strength of the future. We will become far more relevant when we become more focused on the shared ministries within our institutions and put away the conferencing that simply comes together to try to resolve our verbal arguments. We will never resolve our verbal arguments with more verbal arguments. We will never be able to define Bible college education into a perfect verbal statement. We've got a good one. Go with it. Quit fretting about it. Get on with making it relevant.

In terms of relevancy, I'm aware—and I suspect many of you are—watching what's going on in terms of institutional development around the country. In October '97, I was very surprised to see the forthrightness of the Southern Baptist press release on the development of the Boyce College of the Bible. Let me read it for you in its own words so that you hear the press release the way they put it out: “The first four-year Bachelor's Degree program in any of the denominations' six seminaries, the James P. Boyce College of the Bible” —100 to 150 students to begin. “Mohler predicts that most of the graduates will not seek graduate degrees. ‘It is intended only for those who are called to the ministry and intend to spend their lives in ministry’”.

Now the Southern Baptists are taking, then, a very narrow definition, but within the scope definition of the AABC definitions. Now let me tell you, when a denomination as strong as the Southern Baptists in their leading seminary add a four-year Bible college, the Bible college movement is not dead. The Bible college movement is stimulated by this behavior and the acceptance of Bible college education will be affected by this.

Now, as a matter of fact, I think this last remark of Mohler, the President at Louisville (this is a quote) “Intended only for those who are called to the ministry and intend to spend their lives in ministry,” is actually a political statement. It's my observation that Mohler here is really trying to attempt a reduction of anxiety within the Southern Baptist Convention because I think what's going to happen is that there will be some very serious cutting into the seminary enrollments by a more effective ministry-related four-year degree. You wait and see.

Now, then, many of us are moving toward graduate and theological seminary-level institutions, fine. It is in the nature of educational institutions to grow and broaden, as I've said in several places in the paper. Nothing wrong with that; nothing unexpected about that. But we ought to understand within AABC that that kind of growth pattern is normal and ordinary, and we should get out of the business of being critical of those that are growing, changing, and expanding. One of the things that I found most ironic in the data is that some of the newer and smaller colleges are the most resentful of the more diversified colleges within the Association. It's as if many of the newcomers are saying to the older institutions, many of whom are really paying the bills, we really don't think you're doing it right. We'd rather have you be like us. Now let me tell you, that's almost suicidal.

Ironically, what happens to almost every institution, over time, is that it tends to grow. It tends to find new areas of service and it tends to minister to those new areas of service. And it becomes expanded and extended. But interesting again here in the data, even those institutions—for the most part—within AABC still want to be called classical. Expansionist, expanded, extended: these are not popular terms because every one of us feels we have, within our institution and its tradition, a right to the term classical. We are the model toward which all others are moving.

But let me get into something more positive. Let's get into the searching problem. I made three discoveries that suggest to me that there is a great deal about which we can do some effective searching. In the research, we've tried to start this process and, as I suggest, the data in there are calculated primarily to give you a reflection back of what the presidents are saying and how we're responding to this thing. But they are they are, in effect, statistically analyzed in such a way that you can see how ideas relate to other ideas, and you can see clusters, and you can see personality within the sectors of the Association.

One of the most important discoveries that I made is not terribly surprising; but when you are a researcher you tend not to take your own hunches too seriously until you really see the evidence. There is an intensity of conviction, an intensity of determination within this organization that showed up at every turn in the research. In the first place, I have never conducted so many interviews with such willing participants who were also high-level and busy. It was just amazing the level of cooperation and the willingness to keep talking as long as the issues were important and pressing.

When we when we did the questionnaire study later, the survey—I've never had such a high response from any group anywhere. It was almost storybook to get back literally everybody's response in a timely manner and be able to process it. We had very few blanks. We had very few people skipping items because they didn't want to have to stop and think enough about it. We had some Canadian blanks because some items just didn't ring in the Canadian vocabulary and in the Canadian frame of reference. We expected that. And most of the places you'll find missing data in the analysis are missing Canadian data where the Canadians, for one reason or another, did not feel close enough kinship to the item itself to be able to make a response.

But the database was extremely strong and, therefore, the inferences could be drawn with a great deal of precision which is one reason why we had such a staggering number of items come up with significances better than the .01 level that is commonly regarded as the "tough test" that you use statistically. And we had a harvest of these with evidences stronger than that that was just overwhelming. That intensity, however, has—within the Association—has almost the mark of Eric

Hoffer's, *True Believer*, intensity. The intensity stretches to almost everything we're seeing and everything we're doing and the way we're currently thinking about anything. And there is there is there is a real worry that we may be taking ourselves too seriously and we may, thus, be making it too hard to truly come eyeball-to-eyeball and negotiate and accept difference. This worries me a lot.

And it leads to my second discovery which is the discovery of conflict at the tension level particularly over curricular translations of the Bible college images. Now I'm not just talking about the hours of the Bible requirement. I'm talking about much beyond that in terms of the subtleties of curriculum emphasis; the very fact that we really don't have a common understanding of what is Christian ministry. We really don't have a common use of the term 'service' as it relates to service during a Bible college experience. We don't mean by those words exactly the same things. Let me warn you, you never will. Some of that comes out of our own traditions in theology and in church history. Leave it alone. Just agree to disagree that we've got different ways to fulfill this image that we do believe in.

You take a hard look at the statement in A. 2. (1) Definition—Criteria for Accreditation: The Institution and its Objectives:

A Bible college is an institution of higher education in which the Bible is central and the development of Christian life in ministry is essential. A Bible college education requires of all students a substantial core of biblical studies, general studies, and Christian service experiences and integrates a biblical worldview with life and learning. It offers curricula that fulfill its overriding purpose to equip all students for ministry in and for the church and the world.

You're not going to get any better than that. Don't waste time. Let's get on with fulfilling it. Let's get on with recognizing that there are several ways to fulfill it. And let's get along with the idea that God has burdened us, in different institutional histories and traditions, with different avenues of service in such a ministry. Be thankful that we can come together around that clearer statement. I think it's perfectly clear, but the definition is not nearly as limited, narrow, and restrictive as the mental image defended by so many of the AABC institutions. Many of us, frankly, are trapped in our own narrow minds. And then we tend to turn around and manipulate, even through this Association, and try to force conformity. And that is *killing* this organization.

The third observation that I make is that difference is very live among us. Difference is very real and difference has a positive characteristic. But difference also has a negative characteristic because, for some of us, difference is not tolerable. We need, somehow, to learn to tolerate. We need to be especially careful, for example, if we're a newer institution—newer member on one end and an established member on the other end—we're going to have some differences. And if we bring those to a sharp focus and start coming at each other tooth and nail, we will have disharmony. We will have disunity. We need to understand that those differences are sometimes a function of the place in history for the institution. They are, other times, a function of the tradition and the theological background of the institution. And, in some cases, they are a function of the difference that has been chosen by a board, a faculty, and an administration to focus on a particular manifestation of Bible college education. And we haven't all been called by God to do exactly the same thing.

I may sound like I'm thumping that message, but that is my main burden, folks. As I came away with these data I thought, my goodness, we've got so much to gain from respecting one another, and so much to lose if we disrespect one another.

The kind of informed background we really need to be honestly searching, with discovery in mind, is to really be focusing on the frontiers of educational change and opportunity. And that's why I put so much emphasis in the last part of the paper on models that not simply ask, how do we re-sort things? How do we re-arrange the furniture on this proverbial Titanic's deck? But, how do we actually re-think what all we are here for? I am impressed in virtually emotional ways by Blanche Glimps' article in the September '97 AABC newsletter. I'm going to read a couple of paragraphs out it. If you haven't read that article by Blanche, for heaven's sake do it. It's inspirational to the point of being prophetic:

The Coalition for Christian Colleges and Universities reports that, among member schools, less than 15% of the student enrollments include traditionally under-represented ethnic groups with a number of faculty forming such groups representing an even smaller percentage. A similar situation exists among member colleges of the Accrediting Association of Bible Colleges with a lower minority representation overall than the national statistics. The ethnic composition of many evangelical ministries continues this pattern of ethnic under-representation.

You've heard it before but, folks, it's not getting better, and I keep asking, "What is AABC doing to really get hold of that issue?" She further states: "While the United States is becoming increasingly ethnically polarized, the church and church-related organizations, in many instances, reflect the conditions of society rather than unity, love, and justice in relationships as well as the biblical mandate of the Great Commission." We need to pay attention, especially when there are voices like that even available within the organization.

The third part of my talk is, as I suggested earlier: hoping. There are three foci here, as well. I want to focus on reconciliation, on valuing differences, and recapturing the joy of becoming a helping organization. I believe that we will find reconciliation and we will find more unity more quickly to the extent and if the organization truly fully recognizes difference among our institutions; and, in my own personal opinion does this with some acknowledgment at a structural level within the Association. I have already suggested what has turned out to be a relatively unpopular idea—doesn't surprise me a lot—but I think sectoring is definitely one way to go.

Another possibility is programmatic accreditation as one of the several types of accreditation within the Association. And, by the way, I don't think an Association like this has to decide that it is only a programmatic accreditation organization. It could be, as it is now, a general institutional accreditation organization *and* a programmatic organization. That is quite possible, just like it is in many institutions in some of the other professional fields. But if we can make some kind of accommodation that actually puts a sort of 'please, don't scrap with me God has asked me to be different' fence around one another and do that organizationally and structurally, I think the Association is going to get a lot stronger in a hurry.

Right now, we tend to fall back and say, well, really we're all really committed to this one central definition. We don't have to protect. Let me tell you, just like the Constitution of the United States has to be concerned in its Bill of Rights about protecting the weak and the different, even so

within AABC, we have got to throw up some kinds of protections around those who are the most different. And if I were imagining a really positive future for AABC, it would have institutions and organizations in it that are far from what we would think of today as, the strong Bible colleges. More of that in the in the document that you have in front of you. I'm not going to get into that in great detail.

The second part of the hoping is—I would personally hope that this organization would even go beyond reconciliation toward a valuing of difference that embraces diversity. I'm inspired by the apostle Paul on things of this sort. The apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 9, especially in verses 19 and following—we're so familiar with them; and we apply them to some kinds of things in terms of spiritual identity with God. But I wonder if we really understand them as a kind of a life philosophy? "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself slave to all." That is not simply a spiritual statement, folks. That has to do with a kind of lifestyle, a kind of organizational posture, a kind of institutional posture that says we are not here to tyrannize. We are here to serve that I might win the more for Christ. [Roughly quoted] To the Jews I became as a Jew . . . To those under the law . . . To those who are without the Law, to the weak. I have become all things to all men that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the Gospel.

If there is to be something made of this theme "Unity and Diversity," I believe that this would be a sort of bottom-line Scriptural proposition: *All* things for the sake of the gospel, with an emphasis on the *all* and the embrace of this notion of *all things*. Remember that that statement—which we love to take out of its whole context here so readily, All things for the sake of the gospel. Remember that the *all* here is in the context of diversity.

In AABC, we need to understand that we should be people representing varieties, variations on the Bible college theme and comprehend that there are varying ways to fulfill the ideals. In AABC, we also have to hope for a multicultural organization rather than one that has so very few among us who are truly representing other sectors of even the American society which is, for all understandings in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, certainly one of the world's most diverse cultures.

We need an organizational development and this would be, I believe, another of the great hopes: that a developmental organization would be looking toward encouraging its institutions and its members to become different. I tell you, many of our members are becoming universities. There is nothing that I can find within the AABC structure of things to truly encourage an institution to become an effective university. There's nothing in there that inhibits them a whole lot except that virtually all the standards deal with collegiate concerns. But a university is going to have multiple responsibilities and it's going to have to have multiple accountabilities. And unless we can get with that, we're really going to be losing those institutions and, as is true of the past, we have graduated a number of institutions. Usually when you bring the names of these institutions onto the floor, there's some degree of disdain. These people kind of lost their vision. They kind of fell by the wayside. They are kind of no longer are with us. But I tell you, that there are some glorious things being done by God the Holy Spirit at Biola, at Tyndale, at Summit, at Nyack, at Azusa, at Messiah, at Malone, at Pacific University, and I could keep going. What do these institutions have in common? They are AABC alumni. We should not disdain them. If we have no way to truly embrace them within the scope of Bible college education imagery, then at least be thankful that God has caused them, through their diversification and through their enlargements, to take on responsibilities that are larger than those—I didn't say, more important than those they had within AABC, but they are larger than they had within AABC.

Where do we stand on this? Do we want to simply say, those that fall off, we want to be able to think evil of them; think badly of them, or to refer to them as having fallen off the edge after having stepped onto the slippery slope? I wish I had a record—I thought of it too late—to log the number of times in my presidential interviews that the phrase slippery slope came up voluntarily on the other end of the telephone. That image, that whole idea, that nobody else is doing God’s business in education like we are is part of our problem.

We need, instead, to be recapturing the joy of helping upcoming institutions. As we think of fifty years’ tradition within AABC, one of the happiest reflections is on the number of institutions that have been substantially helped into significant gains in quality and significant gains in contribution to the ministry of Jesus Christ in this world through affiliation with AABC. That is enviable, that is wonderful, but that has not come to an end. I’m enough of a historian to be able to determine that there’s a pattern at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that really gave rise to the Bible college movement and, ultimately, became the necessity into which AABC emerged.

The end of the last century, there were dozens and dozens and some have estimated hundreds and hundreds of church-based small operation Bible institutes; little clusters here and there doing educational ministry within and for the cause of Christ in a different way. It is in that arena that the Bible college movement became significant for the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As I spend time in cities today, not just in my own nearby city of Chicago, but particularly in New York, also in Los Angeles and San Francisco, I am struck by the number of emergent institutions that look very much like what I read about the institutions at the end of the last century. It’s as if history is repeating itself, but with this time the great difference being most of those institutions are multiracial, multicultural, and it is so easy, so easy for the White-dominated sectors to ignore them to the point of not even paying any attention. It’s very hard to get data on this sector. I tried, as I thought that would be a wonderful contribution through this research if I could really come up with some hard numbers. Like chasing butterflies in the meadow, I tell you, you just can’t be sure what you’re hearing, but I am impressed.

In February 9, *Christianity Today* virtually current issue regarding the resurrection of the King’s College—they use the language in *Christianity Today*, by the way: “Resurrection of King’s College. Under the Campus Crusade, Christian University of the Bible, King’s College is re-emerging as a sort of Bible Institute and Evangelism Training Center.”

Well, how about them apples! First clear-cut case of a Christian liberal arts college becoming a . . . Bible college. Very interesting thought, but it’s doing it in a model that would scare the willies out of many of us because it just doesn’t sound right. It’s not our kind. “Bible Institute and Evangelism Training Center with a commitment to urban ministry and a headquarters in the Empire State Building.”

Something wrong there! Tony Cairns in that article in *Christianity Today* said, “The renewal of King’s rides on an increased demand for education by the renewed New York church. Suburban Nyack College,” Oh! One of our alumni, “Suburban Nyack College also has branched into the city. New York has 70 Bible institutes training more than 3,000 students.”

Cairns' informant on this puts the estimate at about 50% of what some of my informants put it. I've heard numbers more like 150 and 10,000 students in greater New York City, alone. But this is concrete. This is happening. This is what's going on. Now where are we in all this sort of movement? "The New York City church is also probably the most ethnically mixed in the world reflecting the fact that 34% of New Yorkers are recent immigrants." That is staggering. Thirty-four percent of the people in New York City are recent immigrants to the United States. Tamil, Pakistani, Indonesian, Korean, Chinese, Filipino, Hispanic Christian congregations have started recently in the city.

And did you hear that list well enough to recognize how many of those people are not Christian in their background? God the Holy Spirit is doing something in the world-class cities. Where is the Bible college movement? It is not in the world-class cities, with a few exceptions.

President Friedhelm Radandt, of King's, criticizing his own years at King's, said, "We didn't equip people in the city. We didn't pay enough attention to the city churches at King's College. That was a failure. God had to bring us to a point of humbleness before we could recognize it." I wonder if that's not a good place to raise a question: is Radandt's self-criticism one that we have to raise about AABC?

You might not like where I go with the latter part of the report and the projections that I make, but let me tell you, it's going to take some very serious difficult changing to strengthen this organization to make it anything near worthy of what it could be in the hand of God. And we have to really ask ourselves, are we willing to pay that kind of price?

Do not love the world, the things that are the most comfortable; the things that we have gotten most familiar with. Do not love the world nor the things in the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.

May it be said of AABC, they did the will of God.

Amen.