

Why a University in YWAM? by Tom Bloomer

Many YWAMers asked this question when the University of the Nations was getting started in the 1980s. Some who had been converted during the Jesus Revolution felt they had been saved out of sin, drugs, and university, in that order. In other words, for many people “university” is either a negative idea, or at best something that’s irrelevant to missions.

But the question is a good one: why would the Lord want a mission to start a university? After thinking about this question for some years, and doing some reading about the origins of universities, I have come to the conclusion that universities were a strategy given by God to train the leaders of the Church and of the nations. They grew out of the cathedral schools, which began around the year 1000 AD in Europe. Their first origins were the monasteries and monastery schools, and I believe the monasteries are the true root of what God has called us to do (except for the rule against marriage!).

Without knowing it at first, YWAM in the early years was led by God into several of the elements of the monastery schools: community living in one building or cluster of buildings; the mutual accountability of community bringing a focus on the life and character of the learner, and not just development of the mind; learning as part of a daily schedule of prayer, worship and work; every act, word and thought submitted to God as part of learning to know Him; desire that everything we do be grounded on Biblical principles; listening to His voice and obedience to Him as keys to wisdom; commitment to making Him known through word and deed; and a tendency toward action and not just writing or talking.

When we add our international makeup and the opportunity to study and work on different continents, we have a training system that is not just historically grounded, but Biblical, spiritual and educationally powerful. I have studied missionary education in two evangelical universities, and I believe that YWAM’s schools are some of the most effective missionary training structures in existence. It’s not that we are any smarter than others, it’s that we were led into certain strategies of training that were in God’s heart.

God has always had a vision of how people should be trained. After all, education was His idea, and it goes back to the times He spent with Adam and Eve in the garden. We see His heart for training in the very fact that He inspired the Book which is to be our written guide, and in it we read of His intensive, ongoing educational effort concerning His people.

In the Book of the Revelation of John, we are given a vision of God’s purposes for us, the final goal of all ministry, whether of evangelism, mercy ministries, frontier missions, pastoral care, or whatever: the goal of all of it is the nations transformed and worshipping before the throne of the Ancient of Days, the Lamb in the midst of the throne, and the creatures of heaven all around.



One of the principal ministries of the transformation of God’s people is training. The kind of training God has given us is not just intellectual, but transformational. We don’t want to just educate people’s minds, or teach them skills. Our desire for the UofN is that it be, in the words of Bruce Thompson, “a platform for the revelation of God.” Dean Sherman’s challenge to us is that it be a “university of revelation.” Howard Malmstadt, co-founder of the UofN, has always seen it as a “multiplier for missions.”

In the measure that we remain faithful to the ways the Lord has shown us to train, in community, prayer, worship, the Word, and obedience to do the will of God in the nations, we will continue to be used as a force for the Kingdom.

Tom Bloomer is the International Provost, University of the Nations.

Reprinted with permission from the International YWAMer, February 2001 edition, published in Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA.