

**A University for the People**  
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**Foreword**

The story that is told in these pages is an important one. The Institute for Christian Studies was birthed by the efforts of a post-World-War II immigrant community who had a vision for an academic institution that would bring something new to the North American environs that was now their home: a scholarly community guided by the kind of “reformational” understanding of reality that would provide guidance for those who desire to serve the Kingdom of Christ in all spheres of creaturely life.

Bob Vander Vennen’s chronicle provides clear and abundant evidence that this vision has become a reality. Today’s Institute can boast of an impressive roster of graduates, a superb record of published scholarship, and a profound impact on servants of the Kingdom around the world. And for all of that, its mission and influence continues to expand.

That the Institute for Christian Studies has not only survived, but has actually flourished, is not something that could have been taken for granted. For one thing, as anyone who understands the economics of higher education knows, it is difficult to support a graduate program – where individual mentoring is a necessity – without the income gained from large undergraduate classes. Nor was the Institute willing to compromise its original vision by moving in the direction of a more profitable “professional education” focus. And its life has also been complicated by many growing pains along the way, with the resultant controversies and shifting alliances that also are described – with the refreshing candor! – in these pages. That the Institute has not only survived, but has flourished in marvelous ways, is evidence of the Lord’s blessing on its unique mission for embodying and pursuing scholarship “pro rege.”

One of the special strengths of the Institute, as I view this history, is its possession of what is often referred to these days as convening power, the kind of magnetism that causes people to see your community as a strategic gathering place for important discussions. I am one of those persons who has benefited greatly from being “convened” by the Institute for Christian Studies. My own philosophical training was in the Anglo-American “analytic” variety, which did not permit me during my graduate studies to satisfy my desire to develop an approach to the intellectual life that was properly “reformational.” I joined the Philosophy faculty at Calvin College shortly after the Institute was founded, and I soon found myself traveling to Toronto for seminars, conferences and individual scholarly collaborations. Through the Institute’s programs I was initiated into an international network of Christian scholars who had a significant impact on my philosophical development.

This fine chronicle of the Institute’s four decades of service tells the exciting story of the flourishing of a unique academic community. For those of us who have been aligned with the Institute for some or all of this time, this chronicle also keeps the memories alive of a cloud of witnesses who have provided inspiration and nurture through their Kingdom service. And for some of us – and this is my testimony – it also makes it clear that our own journeys would have been much impoverished if we had not been frequently “convened” by this creative and engaging center of Christian scholarship.

Richard J. Mouw  
President and Professor of Christian Philosophy  
Fuller Theological Seminary