

Arthur Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*
Chapter Two: Theological Foundations

Introduction:

Believers ought to be committed to thinking and acting (esp. when it comes to education) as a Christian in conformity with their beliefs about God and his purposes for them and the world. Hence, we will do this and thereby unfold a biblical and theological foundation for Christian involvement in higher education in general, and liberal arts education in particular. Four themes are the focus:

- Creation
- The human person
- Truth
- Cultural mandate

Creation

1. Gnosticism has beleaguered the Church perpetually with its claims that there are two worlds of mind and matter, that matter is the source of life's evils, while mind or spirit is the source of what is rational and good. Matter and mind are locked in an eternal conflict.
2. Hence, Paul, on the basis of the eight "goods" of Genesis 1, responds to gnosticism in 1 Timothy 4: 1-5.

1 Tim. 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 1 Tim. 4:2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, 1 Tim. 4:3 {men} who forbid marriage {and advocate} abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. 1 Tim. 4:4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; 1 Tim. 4:5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. 1 Tim. 4:6 ¶ In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, {constantly} nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.

3. A contemporary form of gnosticism that divides life up into the natural and spiritual, the sacred and secular, the world and the church in which the former

category in each pair of terms indicates the sources of life's evils. Hence, Christians within this framework are inhibited from cultural involvement, produces a defensive attitude, creates disdain for education, and produces outright anti-intellectualism.

4. Christians must remember that the problem is not culture per se, or the world, or the body, etc., but sin which has perverted it all, the very thing Christ came to forgive and do away with so the creation could be recovered, discovered, cultivated, and enjoyed.
5. What is the biblical doctrine of creation? It imparts a sanctity to all that exists, and all that exists is the subject of a wondrous study via the educational process. See page 15.

The Human Person

6. Of course, human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, crowned with glory and honor. Hence, they possess rationality, morality, creativity, imagination, etc. We are sinners, yes. But we retain a God-given, God-preserved, God-restorable potential to be developed, disciplined, and invested in response to God.
7. Hence, there must be the goal of the education of the whole person, to encourage disciplined learning, and a quest for excellence as a sacred trust.
8. Since human beings are at root religious beings, all activity, whether of a Christian or non-christian, flows from the heart. All activity is animated by a faith. Hence, religion can't be compartmentalized. All activities, including the cultural and the educational are religiously motivated as Luther and Keller pointed out (p. 16).

Whatever is human is religious. The religious in us is as natural and as real as the biological and psychological, as the social and the historical. This religious in us, I say, is a part of our being a creature; it is, I say, natural to us. And this continues so in spite of the pervasive presence of sin. Just as we continue to be human beings now that sin has invaded us, so we continue to be religious beings. We say sometimes that man has become a beast because of the presence of sin, but that is only a way of speaking. Man cannot escape being human; if he could, his approaching the bestial would not be a disgrace to him. And so he continues to be religious, though to be sure, except for the intervening grace of God, the religion will be false The fact is that wherever there is a man, there a God is worshipped. All men require a God for the vindication of themselves, the justification of their thoughts and actions, the justifications, too, of their cultural activity.

To be human is to be scientific, yes, and practical, and rational, and moral, and social, and artistic, but to be human further is to be religious also. [Indeed, it is the religious aspect that gives direction and form to the preceding]. And this religious in man is not just another facet of himself, just another side of his nature, and just another part of the whole. It is the condition of all the rest and the justification of all the rest. This is inevitable and inescapably so for all men. No man is religiously neutral in his knowledge of and his appropriation of reality.

—Henry Zylstra, *Testament of Vision*, p. 145.

Truth

9. The first point is that all truth (physical, natural, social, historical, human, etc) is God's truth. All the disciplines in this light become the Christian's rightful domain (also on the basis of common grace).

10. Also, a second principle is the unity of truth based on Colossians 2: 3.

Col. 2:1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, Col. 2:2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and {attaining} to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, {resulting} in a true knowledge of God's mystery, {that is,} Christ {Himself}, Col. 2:3 **in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**

Truth about nature, persons, society, art, science, etc must be seen in reference to God as the One who unites all truth into a coherent whole.

11. What are the moral and spiritual qualifications to be a seeker of truth? the willingness and determination to learn, intellectual honesty, self discipline, a dependence upon the Holy Spirit, yet still with the necessary intellectual virtues and work. The life of the mind is both "gift" and "task."

12. God has revealed himself in two books, the book of Scripture and the book of nature, and the two do not contradict each other (reason and revelation go together). Scripture is primary, but not exhaustive source of truth. While we are bound by it insofar as it commands and teaches, we must press beyond it to discover other truths about life and the world.

13. Reason, revelation, and faith, and the latter, faith, is an openness and wholehearted response to God's revelation wherever it is found. Faith does not cancel human activity and learning, but instead motivates it. Faith fires and inspires purposeful learning and is no restriction.

14. Goodness (including social justice) and beauty are also of God and the object of the Christian's concern, pursuit, and enjoyment.

The Cultural Mandate

15. The original Genesis mandate is that we steward our own and nature's resources creatively and wisely (see page 20 for great quote).

16. We are cultural beings by divine design, an expression of being God's image and likeness. Culture too was ordained by God not only in Genesis 1, but also affirmed this task after sin in Psalm 8 and in its NT quotations.

17. God's redeeming as well as common grace affects culture, in enabling believers to transform the cultural landscape, and in giving gifts to all men and women for cultural expression and benefits.

The task given to man to rule over creation as it was in former times and as it is down to the present day: This is the commission to establish civilization. It applies to all men, and it embraces every age. There is no human activity which is not covered by it. The man who found himself with his family on a plain exposed to ice-cold wind and first laid a few stones one upon another and invented the wall, the basis of all architecture, was fulfilling this command. The woman who first pierced a hole in a hard thorn or fishbone and threaded a piece of animal sinew through it in order to be able to join together a few shreds of skin, and so invented the needle, sewing, the beginning of all the art of clothing, was also fulfilling this command. Down to the present day, all the instructing of children, every kind of school, every script, every book, all our technology, research, science and teaching, with their methods and instruments and institutions, are nothing other than the fulfillment of this command. The whole of history, all human endeavor, comes under this sign, this biblical phrase. —Ludwig Kohler, *Der Hebraische Mensch*, p. 112, quoted in H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 164.