

Arthur Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*
Chapter One: Why a Christian College

1. Like the existentialists who lack an understanding of the meaning of life, so also many lack a genuine understanding of the meaning of Christian higher education. They have no deep and abiding understanding of the IDEA of the Christian college.

The fact is that too many young people attend college or university. . . without any gripping sense of what college is all about beyond tentative vocational goals or questionable social aspirations. Many attend Christian colleges for reasons that are so secondary, if not altogether inadequate, that they will end up frustrated unless they can find other meaning to their education, a meaning that is large enough to carry the weight of all that college involves (3).

2. Holmes surveys first of all what the Christian college is not, and then goes on to specify exactly what he believes to be the IDEA of a Christian College. The Christian college is not just:

- The defender of the faith, and to protect students against sin and heresy in other institutions.
- A good education plus biblical studies in a pious atmosphere (via campus ministry program).
- Just designed to prepare ministers for church related vocations.
- Not simply for the social or extracurricular activities.

3. Rather, the IDEA of a Christian college is this:

College is for education, the liberal arts college for liberal education, and the Christian college for Christian liberal arts education.

4. By this Holmes means how the educational enterprise, how liberal arts education is affected by Christian faith. The idea of the Christian college is that it should establish a program of education that cultivates the creative and active integration of faith and learning. He bemoans the fact that the reality is more like the *interaction* of faith and learning, rather than a complete *integration*. Yet, the ideal is the following:

The complete and consistent application of Christian principles and doctrines to every branch of study and learning.

It has to do with what the Christian faith and theology means for the study of the various fields of knowledge.

The educational distinctive:

5. The Christian college is different from other Christian involvements in education. Other Christian involvements in education include:

- The Christian college is different from the sheer witnessing presence of Christian students and professors at state universities where the emphasis is the conjunction of faith with secular education rather than integration of faith and learning as the basis of the university.
- The Christian college is different from the Bible institute or Bible college as undergraduate training schools for Christian workers, with an emphasis obviously on biblical and theological knowledge. The idea and mission of the Christian college goes beyond such parameters.
- The Christian College is different from programs of biblical studies and the campus ministry set up adjacent to campus to serve the needs of students (UTA Cornerstone, College Life).
- The theological seminary devotes itself to the professional preparation of college graduates for church ministry.

6. Rather, the Christian college with its task of integrating faith and learning across the disciplines, esp. the liberal arts disciplines, remains the distinctive task of the Christian liberal arts college.

- While some Christian colleges devoted to preparation of professionals, the heart beat, the core, the center of the Christian college is concerned with the qualities of the liberally educated person and with the development of Christian perspectives in all areas of life and thought.
- A Christian liberal arts education underlies everything else a person is and does, far bigger than any vocation or profession or ministry and consequently of primary importance.

“Men are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or manufacturers; and if you make them capable and sensible men, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers or physicians [or merchants or manufacturers]. What professional men should carry away with them from a University is not professional knowledge, but that which should direct the use of professional knowledge, and bring the light of general culture to illuminate the

technicalities of a special pursuit.. Men may be competent lawyers without general education, but it depends on general education to make them philosophic lawyers—who demand, and are capable of apprehending principles, instead of just cramming their memory with details.”

—John Stuart Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions*, vol. IV, 388.

The Religious Distinctive

7. The Christian college is different from its secular counterpart which compartmentalizes religion and treats as peripheral or irrelevant to large areas of thought and life. Education today is rootless and at best governed by PRAGMATISM, VOCATIONALISM and a heterogeneity of viewpoints resulting in a multiversity without any unifying theme or integrative vision of life and reality.
8. The Christian college refuses to compartmentalize religion, and is rooted in the unifying and integrating perspective of the biblical worldview which is brought to bear on all academic aspects of the university as well as its entire community life.
 - It was this perspective that grounded the medieval universities and the numerous Christian institutions in the USA (Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, and Geneva, Calvin, Wheaton, Taylor, Gordon, etc.)
 - Yet many of the original evangelical and protestant schools have abandoned their religious heritage for secularism and multiversity status (see George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Unbelief*, Oxford UP, 1994).
 - There are critics of the Christian university, nay sayers predicting its educational and financial viability yet this is not the real problem.
 - The real problem is that with only a couple of exceptions (St. Olaf and Calvin), the idea of the Christian college has never really been tried.
 - The Christian college has never sufficiently articulated its educational philosophy and has never been able to explain for itself or for its own professors, students and parents what it is really trying to do, what is truly the idea of a Christian college!
 - By and large we have not dreamed large enough dreams or are confused about the values of liberal education or have forgotten the impact of faith on culture.

- Have we dreamed large enough dreams?
- Are we confused about the values of liberal education (vis a vis professional education)?
- Have we forgotten the relationship of faith to culture and its redemptive impact in the whole of life based on Christian world view that encompasses the whole of life in which Christ is the transformer of culture?