

“A Case for Higher Education that is Christian”

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Baylor University’s effort to reassert its Christian identity as part of its aggressive 2012 Vision has created controversy among its constituency. A TCU philosophy professor in a recent institutional publication suggested that “Christian” be removed from the university’s name because it is misleading and a liability. There is considerable public misunderstanding about Christian universities as well. These circumstances call for a defense of higher education that is Christian.

Educational theories and practices are not value-free, but philosophically supercharged. Modern educational thinking is based largely on naturalism. Christian higher education is derived from a biblical outlook that is more substantial in content and generous in spirit than its critics have imagined.

First, Christian higher education includes God in its picture of reality. This God is Trinitarian in being, loving and just in character, the creator, judge, and redeemer of the world. He is the explanatory principle of the universe. He is the crucial reference point for knowledge. “Admit a God,” said Cardinal Newman in *The Idea of a University*, “and you introduce among the subjects of your knowledge, a fact encompassing, closing in upon, absorbing, every other fact conceivable.” As Paul said, “In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2: 3). If God exists, then no academic discipline is truly comprehensible without Him. If God exists, then excluding Him from educational consciousness is the most colossal reductionism. The question of God’s existence is superlative for the academy. A failure to address it or answer it truthfully is utterly consequential.

Second, Christian higher education promotes a coherent biblical worldview that answers big questions and makes sense of life. Where am I? Who am I? Why am I here? What has gone wrong? What is the remedy? Christian universities encourage students to wrestle with questions of meaning like these. It proposes that the themes of creation, fall, and redemption answer them best. Despite their importance, many institutions banish such value-laden inquiries to the periphery, regarding them with characteristic skepticism. Instead, they focus on cultivating marketable skills. Education is a passport to privilege. Christian universities repudiate this impoverishment of the classical mission of the collegiate experience by teaching students not just how to make a living, but how to make a life.

Third, Christian higher education asserts that truth exists and can be known. If God exists and the universe is His creation, then multifaceted truth exists. Human beings as God’s image are endowed with reason and other cognitive abilities and can know it. Though sin has intellectual effects, Scripture serves as clarifying “lenses” enabling those who wear them to “see” the truth about God, the world, and themselves. Truth is available in the “books” of nature

and Scripture, both divinely authored. Christian universities declare that all truth is God's truth wherever found. They encourage students to pursue it vigorously, very often in sources outside their own tradition in a spirit of academic freedom found rarely in public universities where relativism reigns and the quest for religious truth is forbidden.

Fourth, Christian higher education stresses the objective existence of goodness and beauty. God's holiness is the foundation for the moral order and the aesthetic qualities of the universe. There are divinely ordained "green and red lights" governing human life. There are objective rights and wrongs that have human well-being in view. A whole host of enriching virtues ought to be cultivated. Disfiguring vices ought to be shunned. The goal is to shape an exemplary and productive life in both public and private spheres. Additionally, the beauty found throughout creation and in all the arts is a reflection of God who is the source of all brilliance and splendor. As God's image, human beings have the capacity to create something beautiful and to delight in it (A. Kuyper). In advancing these perspectives, Christian universities provide necessary educational alternatives in a society that has lost its moral bearings and is awash in artistic perversities and schlock.

Finally, Christian higher education aims all its efforts at love. Human activity, Christ says, is only fulfilled in loving God supremely and our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12: 28-34). Christian universities are established upon this vision of rightly-ordered love, and its corollary of service, as their very *raison d'être*. Do other institutions have more noble goals?

Why, in light of these factors, is there such controversy or embarrassment over higher education that is Christian?

