

10-1954

A Christian College

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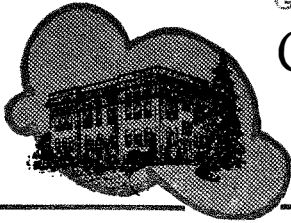
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George Fox College

JOURNAL

VOL. III

OCTOBER, 1954

NO. 3, 2

"I advised the setting up of a school—for instructing—in whatsoever things were civil and useful in the creation."

Journal, (Cambridge Edition), *George Fox*

A Christian College

BY MILO C. ROSS

PRESIDENT, GEORGE FOX COLLEGE

The Christian college is asserting itself in a resurgence of vigor and growth which is encouraging to the exponents of this important branch of American higher education. Its place in the American scene is not new. Harvard College was founded at Cambridge, in Massachusetts, only sixteen years after the first settlers arrived in New England. It was established to train the Christian ministry. For two hundred years before the public school took its place in our land, the church led the way in education at all levels. But with the western migration and the founding of land-grant public institutions, the public school and the state or tax-supported university have assumed much of the leadership in recent years.

Several types of Christian colleges have emerged. Loosely, all are called "Christian," but there are great differences in structure, control and aim. Originally, all were "church related," with boards of regents or trustees named by and for the parent denominations which sponsored the institutions, and in most instances the primary curricula were designed to train for the ministry, and only to a lesser degree for the other call-

ings, and the content of the courses themselves was characterized by its creedal values. Nearly all of the original colonial church-controlled colleges have ceased to be operated by churches and are now managed through self-perpetuating boards or the properties were turned to the public. Many others succumbed to poverty, doctrinal difficulties, or shifts in population.

Recently, groups of Christians without regard to denominational lines, or with the inspiration and leadership of a prominent church leader, have founded and are promoting colleges and universities, the growth and success of which have made a significant contribution to the spiritual and cultural life. Newer and smaller sects are traversing much the same path now as did the older and larger denominations in providing for their youth the advantages of a guarded education. And, from our view, an equally important trend is found in the assumption on the part of churches, long since having shown little concern for their colleges, of both control and responsibility. This development is especially apparent in the West, where both the increase of population and the growth of church membership, have brought new hope and life to erstwhile small and struggling colleges.

But what are the aims of a truly Christian college and what is its educational philosophy? College and university education in our Western culture began by placing the Divine Arts first, the Liberal Arts or the humanities second and the Useful Arts third. This was the order of precedence of chapel, library and hall—the divine, the human and that which concerned man's relation to nature. In the course of the nineteenth century, the Liberal Arts forged ahead of the Divine Arts, and now, in the twentieth century, the Useful Arts, the practical or applied sciences, appear to present the greatest attraction, both to college administrators and to the new generations of students. Bible courses, and for that matter, majors in religion were dropped from many religious institutions, or were so changed in content and emphasis as to destroy faith rather than to increase it. As Howard H. Brinton has so aptly written in his recent essay on "Education":

"It is a frightening fact that many of the most influential teachers today in American colleges and uni-

versities are scientific materialists. Those who teach religion and ethics and have religious or moral views of their own, seldom venture to express them fully. Our colleges and universities, especially those under state control, must take no small share of the blame for the prevailing materialistic philosophy in American life. This lays a great responsibility on all religiously-centered institutions."

According to the *Christian Herald* of April, 1954, only 11% of our colleges today boast any kind of a religious program. This trend must give way to a re-acceptance of that which is valid out of the past with the aim to make that a part of our present philosophy of Christian education. Sir Richard Livingstone should be heeded when he writes:

"Whatever we may think about it, religion is the most important of all subjects, both in history and itself, and to ignore it is to narrow the outlook and starve the mind."

In this connection, it may be necessary to state that there is a difference between religion and sectarian indoctrination. Religion must claim for itself the same excellence in approach and content as any other important intellectual discipline. It should produce in the minds of students a genuine growth of understanding, a deepening of convictions in regard to their own faiths and an intelligent tolerance of others. It must be education! But a Christian college, and one under the sponsorship of a church, has an added responsibility and perhaps a greater problem than one which is independent or controlled by the state. It is given to it to assign a most adequate role not only to religion, but to the Christian religion. It goes without saying that there should be a full major in Bible, with professors and instructors of the same calibre and academic qualifications, and with the major itself of the same value, as the other fields of preparation. It must assume its prerogative in giving the youth at its doors an adequate Christian education. It must stand against false philosophies of life, against sub-Christian thought and ideals, against error in every form, against mental laziness, against sophistication. But it must stand for the fact that a person is educated only insofar as that person knows God. It must stand for true

science and research and discovery. It must stand for wide horizons and brotherly love and citizenship. It must stand for all that is beautiful and lovely and fine; for culture and simplicity. It must stand ready to accept the best in contributions from the past with a sense of obligation for tomorrow. It must present truth in an attractive form. It cannot be tolerant of mediocrity.

Ideally, then, the Christian college is bound to keep its program in balance in such a way that the relevance of Christian doctrine, practice and experience is realized by all concerned. The majority of the constituency and Board should be in agreement with the policies of the administration, with the emphases being advanced, and the spirit of the institution. Students need to experience Christianity in all of life. They need to see these expressions on the part of the president and professors, with the trustees, the cooks, matrons, janitors,—and seven days a week. The Bible and Christian doctrine should find themselves at the center of curriculum building because they give direction and vitality to all other areas of learning instead of being tacked on as appendages of minor importance. The position accorded this hard core is of as great significance as the actual content of what is taught.

If there is a responsibility to a denominational constituency in the form of courses in sectarian belief, discipline or history, that responsibility can be met either by electives in upper-division years or by requirements for those pursuing their training for appointment in that church.

The commitment, then, is to God and the Christian faith as a whole, and not primarily to institutions. Such a commitment cannot be realized by any degree, via the "silent treatment" route afforded religion by so many schools today. And looking at the matter from another view: Can education which excludes religion be truly liberal?

It was left to George Fox and the early Quakers, perhaps influenced by the writings of Jacob Boehme and Paracelsus, to affirm the "unity of the whole creation." There is no absolute distinction between the sacred and the secular. Secular education believes that life is secular. Christian education believes that life is sacred. There is all the difference in the world! Education has real meaning when Christ is

the center. History becomes "His story." Mathematics reveals the God of perfect order. Geography becomes a study of a world that God made. In psychology, we look at ourselves and learn to measure up to the Perfect Man. In economics, we provide for ourselves and others, as His stewards. The natural sciences teach us that this universe was created and is being directed by His laws. In fact, everything reveals God. This is the heart of the Christian philosophy of education. To quote from Henry P. Van Duzen:

"But if truth is an organic whole, how does it come to be so? Whence springs its interrelatedness and coherence? What do these imply regarding the nature of reality? We are driven hard up against the question of God. By the same token religion, a true knowledge of God, far from being a peripheral or incidental subject in the scheme of education—one stone located here or there haphazard in the educational arch—is the Queen of the Sciences, not because the Church says so, or because superstition or tradition have so imposed it upon human credulity, or because it was so recognized in one great age of learning, but because of the nature of Reality—because if there be a God at all, He must be the ultimate and controlling Reality through which all else derives its being, and the truth concerning Him, as best man can apprehend it, must be the keystone of the ever-incomplete arch of human knowledge."

We must not lag behind either in the humanities or in science, but perhaps it is given to us in a peculiar way to demonstrate that it is still possible to put the Divine Arts first.

There are only two ways of changing men—one is by violence, which method we eschew. The other is a cooperative endeavor of divine grace and Christian education of the spirit, mind, and body. St. Paul said:

"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the Plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands and moves toward the goal of true maturity."

He claims that adaptation and conformity to this age

are not the great ends of learning and of life, but rather man's progressive realization of the divine will. These ends can never be reached without a renewal of the mind and the transformation of the nature. The Christian viewpoint is diametrically opposed to some popular aims in education. According to Dr. Leslie R. Marston:

"The prevailing education emphasizes adjustment of the child and youth to this age, denying the need of the child's transformation. This education is based on the philosophy of naturalism which holds that nature is right, that man needs no saviour, and that the universe needs no sovereign. It is grounded, not in regeneration with growth in Christian character its goal, but in adjustment to environment and conformity to the world its goal."

Although man is an animal sharing in the processes of nature, he is also a spiritual being akin to God and capable of responding to a transcendent moral law. To put it another way, he is capable of discriminating between values.

Much has been written, and much more could be, on the problem of the Christian college and academic freedom. He who administers or teaches in a college should demonstrate the personal integrity of sufficient unity of purpose to advance the aims of that college. Over against this, the college should welcome a wholesome spirit of inquiry and even non-conformity in order that it will not maintain a status quo of being a repository of ancient lore exclusively, but also that it might be, as Woodrow Wilson has said: "—the lighthouse of civilization." If the Christian college has a contribution in the field of freedom which is unique to itself, I would say that it is in *supplying the dimension of responsibility*.

The complexities of modern society and the impact of pagan ideologies make it imperative that the Christian colleges do not fail, but rather continue to take their place beside wisdom crying in the streets that the great influx of new students may learn in spirit, mind, and body.

Published bi-monthly by George Fox College at Newberg, Oregon, by the Public Relations Office in cooperation with the Office of the Dean.