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Fant's "The Liberal Arts: A Student's Guide" (Book Review)

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The Liberal Arts: A Student's Guide,

by Gene C. Fant, Jr. Wheaton: Crossway, 2012. 128 pp. \$11.99.

ISBN 9781433531231

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Anyone who has spent much time in Christian higher education is aware that there is no shortage of books on the liberal arts. This book, however, is notable for its brevity and accessible introduction to the liberal arts, recognizing their place in Christian tradition and arguing for their contemporary presence in the curricula of Christian institutions of higher education. It is part of the series, *Re-claiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition* from Crossway, all of which are similar in length, scope, and depth to the *Very Short Introductions* series from Oxford University Press.

Fant, the provost at Palm Beach Atlantic University, weaves in simple stories and analogies to illustrate how the liberal arts are supposed to function. The fact that he writes a work about the liberal arts that is easy to understand for college freshman, parents of prospective students, or even non-academic college administrators, is compliment enough. Many books on the liberal arts have difficulty writing to an audience that does not already understand the liberal arts.

At times, this work seems like an introduction to the liberal arts with Christian perspective as a garnish. Discussions of “Christian Worldview” seem heavy handed, as do the occasional application of Christian apologetics as a way into the liberal arts. This is a very short text on the topic, but for what is likely to be a reader’s introduction to the idea of the liberal arts, one would hope for a more careful marriage of Christianity and the liberal arts.

Nevertheless, there are other sections that are particularly strong, specifically, the chapters on mathematics and the sciences and their role within the quadrivium and, thus, a contemporary liberal arts education. This is often where other books on the liberal arts are anemic, giving short shrift to the sciences or not adequately integrating them into the larger vision of the liberal arts.

While the primary audience of this book seems to be for adoption as a college first-year experience course text, this primer would be a good addition to a library that collects works on the liberal arts or Christian higher education.