



## The Idea of a Christian College

*Arthur F. Holmes*

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This revised edition of a classic text provides a concise case for the role of the Christian college and its distinctive mission and contribution. Holmes has extensively revised several chapters and included two new chapters: Liberal Arts as Career Preparation and The Marks of an Educated Person.

## **The Idea of a Christian College Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Idea of a Christian College for online ebook**

### **Timothy Darling says**

This is a book from a clearly conservative perspective. The author sees college in its primary educational role and does not much address the social or personal maturation role of college. This is ok, because it seems to me that most of what a college should do is develop the education and not the social or emotional person, though these cannot be neglected. The author knows he is writing for a limited audience, but he does not kowtow to the prejudices of that readership. He, for example, strongly emphasizes that the college is not the church and does not serve the "defense of the faith" function of the Church.

I like Holmes' insistence that the college needs academic freedom both to teach and to learn, to explore the world and report on what it finds, not so much to judge as to evaluate. In this regard, he is typically idealistic as an academic. Since so many of our children are expanding the borders of their families to attend college in the first place, we cannot expect their non-college educated parents to understand the nuance of the difference between a class in theology and their own church-based theological experience. This seems to me to be a constant tension the Christian College will face.

His insistence on a liberal education, a generalist approach to learning is very good in that it does have as its aim to develop in a humanist way, but not in a secular way. Rather, he constantly revisits the moral, ethical, spiritual and biblical responsibility of the Christian educator to nurture an intellectual framework that accepts not just empirical but revelatory knowledge, an epistemology that is difficult to maintain with a consistent integrity.

Read it if you are a Christian educator or aspire to be one, even if you are not in a Christian institution. I could only wish that a book that introduced the student to the idea of liberal and Christian education as a value the way this one does for educators.

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### **Matt says**

Most of the chapters are great. The first four are home runs. You can read the final, six-page chapter by itself for a concentrated shot of Holmes' exciting vision of a good education.

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### **Paul says**

Great argument for what a Christian college should be--why it exists, why it is necessary, how it should relate to things like academic freedom.

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### **Jim says**

This is a very helpful book in thinking through Christian education and its purpose. The chapter on academic freedom was worth the price of the book itself.

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### **Zack says**

It was enlightening to read this and see so much of my own college education down on the page. That was encouraging, as I really think that Holmes has narrowed in on a philosophy of Christian education in this work that is edifying and beneficial and absolutely right in its foundations and where it sees those foundations as leading. This is overall an encouraging, challenging, and useful look at what it is to be involved in Christian education from both student and faculty perspectives. Implementing Holmes's recommendations is not easy--my own educational experience can attest to that--but I believe it is absolutely necessary, and so even though this book does not provide step by step instructions for how to work to change the lives of students, educators, and institutions, the ideas presented here offer glimpses into just how that process might work. Throughout the book Holmes argues that the mark of an educated person is their ability to think creatively for themselves, and the book sets you up well to do just that.

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### **Chuck Bonadies says**

A classic book on how Christian education ought to be. Holmes does a great job balancing philosophy with application. This book is a must read for both students who attend a Christian College and the professors who teach them.

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### **Steve says**

This is a superb, well-argued case for a Christian liberal arts education. Recommended.

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### **Jonathan says**

None

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### **Claire Slavovsky says**

I'm teaching Christain Mind this fall :)

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### **Steph says**

I had to read this my Freshman year at UMHB. I didn't necessarily agree with everything in it, and it seemed to slant history toward backing its arguments. That's all I remember about it, though.

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## **Amy says**

A really helpful book for understanding the purpose of the Christian liberal arts education.

Not a super-enjoyable read, though. A little dry. I took issue with a few of his claims, which came across as too absolute or elitist... Or maybe just western-centric.

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## **Stephen Case says**

I'm still not convinced there is such a thing as "Christian scholarship." A weak version of the definition of such a thing might be that it is simply the recognition that all scholars carry presuppositions and assumptions into their work. The Christian's will be Christian and should have the same bearing as a materialist's, as long as such presuppositions are acknowledged. A stronger version of the definition of Christian scholarship would be that because all truth is God's truth, all real scholarship is Christian scholarship. Both of these seem to me so wide as to be non-definitions. At the end of the day, Christian scholarship is simply that which is produced by Christian scholars. Much of it cannot be (and should not be) distinguished from the scholarly work of a secular scholar. The only real difference is the life of the person creating it.

In this respect, to me it seems that more important than the question of what is Christian scholarship are questions of what a Christian scholar looks like, what the role of scholarship in the life of the Christian is, and what sort of environment can best cultivate and articulate answers to these questions. It is the last of these questions that Arthur Holmes, a philosopher who spent the majority of his career at Wheaton College, sets out to explore in his book on the nature of Christian education at Christian colleges. (The cover of my edition says that this is a "Philosophy of Chr. Ed for Laymen," but the cover also looks like it was designed by a seven-year-old, so I'm not sure how seriously to take that designation.)

For Holmes, Christian scholarship depends on the integration of faith and learning. This can happen in many different contexts, but Holmes is writing specifically for one context: that of a Christian liberal arts college. The distinction between a liberal arts college and vocational schools—seminaries or Bible colleges, for instance, in the Christian tradition—is a very important one. A liberal arts education, Holmes explains, is specially suited for the cultivation of Christian scholarship, because it is here that careful philosophical thought is nurtured and Christians develop the tools for a critical examination of both their own assumptions and those of others. A Christian liberal arts college needs to be a place where the virtue-forming aspects of education are emphasized: not "what can this education do for me?" but "what will this education do *to* me?"

This is a slender, highly accessible volume, similar in size and scope to the more recent "reexamination" of the topic (with the same title) by Reams and Glazer that I reviewed not long ago. Perhaps because I read the Reams/Glazer work first, there was much of the Holmes volume that did not seem new (though Holmes' prose is sharper, and his philosophical training shows through to good effect in comparison to the latter volume). The primary point of departure between Reams/Glazer and Holmes is that Holmes focuses on a very specific type of institution, while Reams/Glazer attempt to update and expand this to the "Christian research university."

Holmes' book, though originally written in the 70s, remains a very relevant challenge and warning to Christian higher education today. This is encapsulated in a quote that Reams and Glanzer re-use as an epigram for one of their own chapters:

*A community that argues ideas only in the classroom,  
a teacher whose work seems a chore,  
a student who never reads a thing beyond what is assigned,  
a campus that empties itself of life and thought all weekend,  
an attitude that devalues disciplined study in comparison with rival claimants on time and energy,  
a dominant concern for job-preparation  
—these can never produce a climate of learning.*

At least from my experience, these warnings ring very true.

I found his articulation of the purpose of a liberal arts education most compelling:

*The question to ask about education, then, is not, “What can I do with all this stuff anyway?” because both I and my world are changing, but rather “What will all this stuff do to me?” This question is basic to the concept of liberal arts education.*

I want my students to understand this. The goal of education is not to present certain bodies of information by the most entertaining, engaging, and effective means possible. There's nothing wrong with doing this, but that's vocational training. A liberal arts education is about beginning a conversation—with scholars and texts and ideas—that will continue for life. Not with the goal of getting a certain type of job or certification but with the goal of becoming a certain kind of person.

Holmes also has vital things to say about academic freedom at Christian colleges and the balance between remaining a community of faith and yet not existing to indoctrinate students into a particular school of thought: *A college is Christian in that it does its work in a Christian way, not by encouraging an unthinking faith to counterbalance faithless thought.* Students and faculty must have the freedom to question and explore with diligence, reason, and humility. In a Christian college this ideal takes place in the context of community. *Liberty without loyalty is not Christian, but loyalty without the liberty to think for oneself is not education.*

I'd like to think most Christian college administrators and faculty are familiar with this book. I'd really, really like to think that. In the meantime, I'll be asking my honors students to read portions of it in the fall.

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### **Jon Cheek says**

Interesting read. Holmes makes some helpful points. I wish I had read this before I had begun my liberal arts education.

“The educated Christian should approach life as a reformer, not just standing around wringing her hands in dismay, nor marching out in disgust to set up a separate Christian enclave, but working within the structure of things to change it for the better. She has learned that justice and compassion, the makings of social righteousness, belong in the work place where she stands as a representative of God's kingdom.” (p. 41)

“The Christian scholar is likely to be a better scholar for being a Christian than one would be otherwise. The comparison is . . . between the one individual as Christian and the same person as non-Christian. The reason, says Trueblood, is motivation, for the Christian faith is the sworn enemy of all intellectual dishonesty and

shoddiness.” (p. 48)

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## **TK421 says**

If you are looking for a book that infuses the idea of what Christian thought/living and scholarship should look like, look no further. This defining piece of work will stretch, challenge, and change the way the Christian scholar had previously gone about their business. At only 104 pages, it is a slim book. However, that is not to say that it is light. This is a heavy read that requires reflection, introspection, and foresight for one's own scholarly journey.

Some of the main themes explored are: the value of a liberal arts education; the value of combining a liberal arts education with Christian thought; the idea of community; the importance of academic freedom (not indoctrination and not strictly empirical data); the importance of not making decisions on experience alone; the importance of a worldview; and, what an educated person looks like after they have combined a liberal arts education with Christian thought.

If you are an educator, I challenge you to read this book. Even if you teach at a secular college, this slim work is valuable if you keep an open-mind.

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**

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