

What Constitutes a Christian College?

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*Can a College be Christian? What is Such a College?
What should be its relations to its Trustees or Directors,
Instructors, Bible, Students? What is its Future?*

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A COLLEGE is a college, wherever you find it. We may differ among ourselves as to the main purpose of the institution, some accenting its service to learning and some its service to character. The prevailing notion is that its chief purpose is to teach the students something they did not know before. So there has been a lessening of the classics and humanities, which teach a student very little that he can turn into cash or food, and a magnifying of the branches which deal with palpable and calculable facts, the practical sciences. Our sympathies may lie with the recent reaction in many colleges in favor of the character purpose of the institution, feeling, as Dean Briggs of Harvard does, that the college is a place where a youth is trained into such a being that he can later be instructed. But whether we accent the facts-giving element in the work of the college or the character-forming element, we come to the same general ground. A college, whether state or Christian, is just a college, and no adjective can change the great purpose of it, with reference to its students.

Can a College be Christian? Our special business now is to discover the content of the adjective. Can a college be, in proper sense, Christian? It has not been long since the question was raised whether there could be such a

science as Christian sociology. It was pointed out that the adjective is exactly as appropriate as though we said a Christian chemistry, or a Christian physiology. A sociologist or a physiologist might be a Christian, but he could not make either the laws or the facts with which he deals Christian. It has been suggested that while professors and students may be Christian, a college as such can no more be Christian than in the cases cited. One of my friends thinks that a college is an institution comparable to a department store, which may be run by Christian men, but can hardly be described as Christian in itself.

Now, of course, an institution cannot be a Christian in just the same sense as a person, but equally of course we are dealing in colleges, not with facts and things primarily, as in all the cases cited. We are dealing with lives, with wills, with persons. Whatever deals with them can be Christian, and must be if it deals with them at their neediest and best. There can be a Christian sociology, therefore, though there may not be a Christian chemistry, and there may be a Christian college, though there may not be a Christian department store.

A Christian College Defined Let us come to the point by putting into one sentence the distinguishing characteristic of the Christian college. It must have, you will remember, all the traits which a college anywhere has.

Without defining its college content let us define its peculiarity in this way: A Christian college is a college whose avowed purpose is the advancement of the Kingdom of God as conceived by Jesus Christ. It is certain that any college directly or indirectly serves that kingdom as everything does. A non-Christian college may have no antipathy to it, may even do much in its favor, but with the

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Christian college the advancement of the kingdom is the reason for its existence. It may serve the kingdom well or ill, it may accomplish its purpose fully or partially, but it purposes the advancement of that kingdom as the chief end of its being. Under such a definition, there may be degrees of the force of the adjective. Just as any man is a Christian who has accepted the mastery of Christ in his life, with all that involves, and yet one man may yield to His mastery more completely than another, and so be more Christian than another while he is no more certainly a Christian than the other, so any college which takes for its avowed purpose the advancement of the Kingdom of God as conceived by Jesus Christ is a Christian college, though one college may keep that purpose in view with a clearer vision than another, and so be more Christian. The defects of the Christian college may need to be overruled in the interest of the Kingdom of God, but its ideal will not need to be overruled nor supplemented. It does not count the education of youth an end, but a means to the advancement of the kingdom. It does not seek merely to develop character in the students, but such character as goes to make strength for that kingdom. It is not merely a home for learning, nor a place of scholarly abode and service, but a place where learning and scholarship are put at the service of the Kingdom of God.

The State University

In this country at least, no state institution can be in this sense a Christian college. A state university may be officered by Christians, it may have many Christian influences within it, it may be admirable in many ways, but it cannot be a Christian institution. It cannot have for its avowed purpose the advancement of the Kingdom of God. The President of a State University told me recently that he was not sure but the time might come when such institutions might have theological departments, but he did not mean by that such departments as would make men preachers of the gospel. He meant only such departments as will tell men the history of theological thought, and will appeal to their mental life, but not to their religious life. That is, there may come a time when theology, or church history, will become an objective science as well as chemistry. That is matter of opinion. When I asked what would probably be the tests of instructors for this department, he replied that they would be exactly the same as in other departments, fitness for the position—which does not seem to me, as I contemplate it, a perfectly illuminating reply. There may come to be theological departments in state institutions, but they will be no more Christian than any other department which may serve the Kingdom of God but does not exist for that purpose. This is not saying the slightest thing against state education nor its ideals. It is simply recognizing what those ideals are not, and they are not the ideals of the Kingdom of God. They may be capable of use by the kingdom, and education honestly given does serve that kingdom well, but education as the end, or the service of the state, the service of the present life—those are the ideals of the state institution, and must be.

The Denominational

College

Because the Kingdom of God exists in the world today and is propagated under present conditions in denominations or particular churches, the Christian college is almost inevitably a denominational college, bearing the stamp of some Church from which it has received

its life and to which it owes its allegiance and its direct service. Its relation to the denomination may be loose or close, and it will not be narrowly indifferent to other Churches nor restricted in the service it renders, but as a particular church does not often render its largest service independent of some large body of churches, so few agencies which are not allied with the Church render their best service. It is not the time to discuss the denominational feature in the life of the Christian college, but it is appropriate to say that almost any college is in peril of a kind of liberality which is weakness. It sounds generous for an institution to assert its indifference to the ecclesiastical fellowship of its students or its instructors, and to insist that it will never interfere with their religious lives, to say that it is not sectarian, but simply Christian; but the words either mean what everybody agrees on, or they mean a dangerous relaxing of church bonds. A church need not be bigoted and exclusive in claiming to be Presbyterian or Methodist. It does not thereby reflect on other churches. It is simply frank and honest. And a college takes safer position when it calls itself frankly that which it is, a college of the Church which has made it and sustains it. I asked an educator this week if the Church college would survive. He replied, "Every one of them will survive that does the thing for which it was founded, and serves its Church." He meant nothing narrow by that. He meant simply a protest against a breadth which amounts to surrender.

I. The Trustees or Directors

This purpose of the college will guide in the choice of its governing body—trustees or directors. They may be chosen by a church body or not, and there will enter into their selection the same questions of sagacity and well-founded interest in educational matters that will guide in the choice of men for any institution; but there will always be kept in mind that they are to make the institution serve the Kingdom of God. They must, therefore, be those who love that kingdom. There will be room on the Board for men who are not in accord with the main purpose of the college because they may be well adapted to serve that purpose in various ways, but no college continues to be safely Christian while it is governed by those who do not seek first the Kingdom of God, however they may love the college itself. Every college needs money and may sometimes seek to get it by wise elections of trustees, but some of us would testify that often when that plan is adopted you get neither money nor trustees that amount to very much. It is not necessary that ministers have prominent place on such boards. They can ordinarily find enough to do in other lines. It is insisted simply that a Christian college must have for its controlling body men who love the kingdom which it intends to serve.

II. The Instructors

The same principle will control its choice of instructors. All that any institution may seek of intellect and personal character, of scholarly ability and power to instruct, it must seek. The Christian college is the last place for a dullard who happens to be pious. It is not necessary that incapacitated ministers become professors in Christian colleges. If anywhere scholarship ought to be at a premium, it surely is where the interest of the Kingdom of God is foremost. But in addition to all those familiar requirements and tests, the Christian college

may have no one on its staff of instruction who is not committed to the Kingdom of God and pledged to its advancement. One can imagine special and very peculiar conditions wherein an instructor might not be a church member, and it may well be that various Churches be represented on the staff; but that instructor will be a dangerous and illogical element in a Christian college who is not a Christian and committed to the Kingdom of God. There is no department where the attitude of an instructor is not important. He may not talk religion in the classroom. Ordinarily he will do damage if he does. He is a poor instructor who teaches theology in a Latin classroom or spends the mathematics hour talking religion. But he is quite as poor an instructor who does not take the Christian point of view in teaching Latin or mathematics, that point of view which makes him see the truth he is teaching as part of the wisdom of God, which helps him to feel that a man who knows Latin and mathematics is thereby a better force in the Kingdom of God. Take one illustration. Certainly if the aim of a college anywhere is the making of character, the study of ethics is central, even though it comes latest in the course. But an ethics which omits the will of God as its ground, or which founds all its laws in the habits of men or in their evolved constitution, will not fit men for the work of the Kingdom of God. The departments may be taken one by one and the necessity for the Christian point of view will appear. The president of a Christian college which I visited recently told me with great pride of the excellent man who was at the head of the science department. The only disqualification, he added, was that the man is not a Christian, and counts himself rather an agnostic than anything else. The president assured me, however, that he was sure this man was too much of a gentleman to teach his unbelief in the classroom. That is, the young sons of the Father are to be led through the wonderfully beautiful house of the Father and shown its rules of procedure, by a leader who is not sure there is any Father and is not concerned with the thing that is dearest to the Father's heart! It is familiar history that a president of another Christian college secured for his philosophy chair a man whose scholarly antecedents he looked up with some care, taking it for granted that he must be all right religiously, only to find after he was well under way that he was denying the deity of Christ and the fact of the atonement. Some of us followed the struggle of the eminently wise president in his effort to rid the college of the teacher, and its inevitable heroizing of the man by the students. The best comment I heard on the case was that of an unbelieving teacher of the same branch, who said that the man ought to have been banished for stupidity in getting into such a position when he should have known the demands of the institution, or for dishonesty in accepting the position when he knew he could not advance the purpose of the college. When such things get into the papers, there is room for large talk about narrowness and hidebound churches and restriction of intellectual freedom and all that. It does not take much thought to see that nothing of the sort is involved. Only common honesty and clear adherence to the purpose for which the college exists are involved.

This added requirement makes the selection of instructors a much more delicate task than outsiders suppose. The president of a Christian college wrote me during the summer about candidates for a position. It was late, and the list he had had been picked over. He said, "The two which are otherwise most prom-

ising are a Universalist and a Methodist who was graduated from a Unitarian college. I would not have the first, and if the second's college amounted to anything and left any impress on him, I don't want him; I would rather close the department than put such men in charge." Those of you who have had to do with such matters know how delicately they must be approached. The difficulty does not at all destroy the necessity for seeing to it that every instructor is committed to the Kingdom of God and its advancement.

Such instructors are not to be compassed about with harassing doctrinal or theological requirements. Most of them will not be theologians, and will not be trained for opinion on mooted points. It is to be hoped that they will be educated to the point of seeing their own ignorance, which would be a great advance for some instructors in my knowledge, who count it their right to be authoritative on all points. They must be left free handed and open minded in their search for truth. But each must have Christ fixed as a pivotal point for truth. He must be sure that anything that is true somehow harmonizes and synchronizes with Him. We would be imbeciles in an irrational world, and if there be any two truths which will not in the last analysis harmonize with absolute exactness, then the universe is not rational and our reason goes with its fall. If therefore truth appears which collides with the truth of Christ, it is subject to further investigation. It is not the part of the instructor to make it harmonize. It is his part to find the harmony. He may not warp or twist it to make it fit. He may only patiently turn it here and there until it falls into its place. The thing of which he must be sure is that its truth does not require him to free himself from the pivotal point. If he cannot feel free in the assurance of any pivotal point, and if his ideal life involves getting up each morning with all the assurance of yesterday obliterated, beginning with a blank mind, then he may be a good investigator of facts for the uses of other stronger minds, but he does not belong in a classroom in any Christian college, nor for that matter in any college. A while ago a young man called on me about going into life work. He told me he had meant to preach, but his course in philosophy had left him so unsettled that he had nothing to preach. He explained that his instructor was a Christian man, but he was so afraid of biasing his pupils that he left the various speculations in philosophy side by side, with no re-enforcing critique which showed the relation of any of them to the Christian faith. Only a little while before that a young man called on me to talk over the unsettling which had come from his science work in a Christian college. His instructor was a Christian also, but refused to answer any questions of his students in classroom or out of it, which involved religious matters. The young man accused him in the talk of being insincere in his profession of faith, because of innuendoes in the classroom. I am mentioning them only to point the remark that the instructor in a Christian college needs to be honestly committed to the advancement of the Kingdom of God. He must know that no lie will advance that kingdom, but he must not be ready to yield the kingdom because he has found that a leaf opens in a certain way, or a race develops in another way. His attitude toward his students is not that of one who wants them to learn the facts that come in his line, but of one who seeks to make those facts enter their lives to advance the Kingdom of God. He may not talk of the kingdom; he will not forget that he has the future kingdom before him and is shaping it by the truth he is teaching.

III. The Bible

Here, naturally, comes the consideration of the place of the Bible in the Christian college. In many catalogues and circulars it is spoken of as "the" text book. Of course that is to be taken with understanding. Ordinarily it means that the Bible is studied in more courses and more constantly throughout the course than any other text book. It is given chief reverence and largest attention. It is of large importance that it be so. Such courses are necessary that the great facts of revelation and their human setting may be clear to students. But it is no mere play on words to add that the Bible is not meant chiefly for a text book but more for a life book. It is to be studied not chiefly for the discovery of facts, but for the guidance of life. Its likeness to other books will bear much stress; its uniqueness among books will bear more. Whatever else it does, the Christian college will set The Book on high, as that by which it and its students must live. It is to be handled frankly and fearlessly, but with reverent assertion of its unique position as the Book of life.

IV. The Students

The attitude of the Christian college toward its students is determined by its ruling purpose. It seeks to bring them into right relation with the Kingdom of God and to train them for it. That says nothing about their life work. It does not blame the college if they graduate without becoming Christians. Spite of all that God can do, men die without confessing Him. Spite of all that a college may do, men graduate from it without becoming Christians. But so far as the college may effect it by means that are the means of Christ, its students come out grounded in the faith of Christ for practical living. They may not be Christians, but if they are not they will know that they have stood in opposition to the spirit and purpose of the college, they have failed to get the thing the college most wanted to give them. The students are to be as fully imbued with the Christian spirit as with the scientific spirit, or the historical spirit. A student may get that spirit in a secular college, but he cannot get it from the college itself. Any college cares for him as a mind; the Christian college cares for him as an immortal being with relation to the Kingdom of God. I trust it is not necessary to stay long in saying that the method of caring for his relation to that kingdom must be the method of Christ. There is to be no forcing of opinions, nothing to cultivate insincerity, no hot-house method which makes abnormal religiosity. The natural methods involve the whole life of the college. The relation of the professors to the students will be Christian; there will be a practical and constant interest in the student life quite apart from the classroom. The supposed necessary antagonism of students to teachers is doubly disgraceful in a Christian college and fortunately very rare. The indifference of teachers to student interests is inexcusable. The tendency to be concerned about everything except their religious lives is to be strongly resisted. It is difficult to find the argument whereby a Christian college sets apart ten minutes in a day for religious service, making it so formal that a student knows weeks ahead that it will cover the same round, and even at that leaves it entirely with himself whether he will be present. If the college feels that its students are there because they need training, and feels that their training is for the Kingdom of God, whether they feel it so or not, it would seem only natural that it say to them, We place this

first, and from it we allow least divergence. That might be the very awful thing, "required chapel," "forcing religion," but it would be common sense. It is the fault of the responsible authorities if the daily service has to be cut to ten minutes to keep it from being irksome to students. It will be so sometimes at the very best, but so is family worship irksome to our children—which leads some people to omit it. Of course what is wanted is a free, sane, healthy religious life, such as the scholarly life, but that life is matter of concern to the college itself, and it does not well manifest its concern when it pretends to regard the religious life as so much more sacred and personal than the scholarly life that it can lay no requirements on it.

This is, I know, a matter of detail in the interest of the Christian college in the life of its students. The influences which will go to train them for the Kingdom of God will be many and varied. The student organizations are part, not peculiar to the Christian college, and so not calling for discussion. So are other items of influence with which the college is concerned but which are not peculiar to it. There is a general abandonment of the *in loco parentis* idea in our day. It is commonly thought that a college may lay no requirements on students which do not affect his classwork. There is a marked reaction against the minute supervision which was once exercised over the student life. We usually word it that it is better to have a few rules and have them kept than many rules which are violated without penalty. It is thought, too, that a college must justify its rules at the bar of careful student opinion, letting them take part in the control of the college. If the use of tobacco is prohibited, the rule includes only the campus or the students' rooms. If card playing is forbidden, it is only for money or in certain places.

There is reason in all this. It would not be difficult to find men who are more tempted to do a wrong by being told not to do it, than if they were left free. Close restrictions in college often result in men's going to excesses after college. Two or three of the most violent tobacco users I know are graduates of a college which prohibits all use of it—and I hope may always forbid it with equal severity. It is true that spying on the student's personal life is unendurable and unnecessary. But some of us who know the present situation feel that the reaction has gone much too far. It is of a piece with the general movement of the times. Children do not obey their parents in the Lord or in any other way. Parents obey their children instead, without reference to the Lord. At a university the other day I was introduced to a lad fresh from the country who was so near his last pair of knee trousers that he was still uncomfortable without them, and was told, "Here is one of our new men," and he looked swagger at the word. "There are no more college 'boys,' except some of us in the faculty," an old instructor said to me, "the students are all 'men.'" Well, if that must be so, then let us face the fact that there are some men of the present day who need much the same treatment that was accorded to boys in college a while ago. If we have pushed the manhood of a boy back a few years, we may need to push the boy treatment of the man up a few years.

And this, not for the mere sake of keeping the control of the college where it belongs, but because that is the only way in which the college can take raw material and turn it out ready for the service of the Kingdom of God. Just because it is Christian, it can require some things which would be impossible

for an unchristian college to require. They will be things that look squarely at the student body as part of the coming Kingdom of God, and which are designed to shape it for that kingdom.

V. The Future Three things seem to me to assure the future of the truly Christian college, spite of all supposed tendency to the contrary.

First, there appears to be a broader line of cleavage between the academy and the college than between the primary school and the academy. Not only can the Christian college give a student better care in his personal life than can a state institution, but his entrance upon college marks a longer step in his advance than any before and is more critical. Ordinarily he must leave home, and wise parents are not much attracted by the nonsense about letting him run into temptation, when they know there will be enough coming to him without his going out after it. The Christian college will always be smaller than the state college, and it will always care more for quality of work than for quantity. An enormous university is like an enormous church—it has a lot of rubbish in it, and seldom has the courage to admit it and rid itself of it. And a rubbish heap is not always the best place for college work. It will be the best place for some youth, and the state institutions will continue to be large and prosperous, but there will continue to be a large class who want what the Christian college can give and the state college cannot give.

Then, the Church has no reason to hope for the supply of its needs by state institutions. Spite of all the fine Christian influences and movements in one great state university, and I found them many and strong, the leading Christian workers there know of only one man who is thinking of entering the ministry of any Church, and he is a missionary volunteer. Workers in other fields are coming on, but in absurd disproportion to the numbers enrolled even in the undergraduate department. Whatever the Church may receive from state institutions for the advancement of the Kingdom will be but a small part of the youth it contributes, many of whom it will lose. But the Church has a future and a demanding one. No beneficent non-Christian agency is apt to step in to provide training for the ministry or for practical Christian work. The Kingdom of God is a negligible factor in any state institution in the land. It is not opposed, or it need not be; it is simply left out of the account. Business is not left out, professions are not left out, diplomacy, statecraft, public policy—these are not left out, but the Kingdom of God is left out, and there is not one influence inherent to a state institution which would ever turn a young man toward the distinctive work of the Church of God. Moreover, the traits which distinguish the most efficient worker in that kingdom are not the care of such institutions. This is not condemning them. It means no hostility to them. The Church may wisely reckon with the necessary limitations of such schools and seek to supplement their work by special influences upon the students. But such effort may not blind it to the necessity for institutions which will have its own aim and help it toward its great end.

But, thirdly, it will gain little from attempts to imitate the state institutions in its schools. They must be frankly and confessedly Christian. There must be no hedging as though it were somehow a weakness to be strongly, sanely

religious. In things of scholarship and equipment for the work which they are intended to do, the Church must see to it that its colleges are as well provided and as strong as state money permits state colleges to be. They must be the more truly colleges for being Christian colleges, but they must be peculiar in that they are Christian. Unless we can go before our people with the assurance that the colleges are actually doing a work which the state cannot do and something which must be done for the safety, the strength, the future of the Kingdom of God, we shall go with weak argument. But we have the strong argument that the Church and the state need the work of the Christian college, and that the need which it meets is a lasting need which must be supplied now and will later be supplied by no other agency.