

The Idea of a Christian College: A Reexamination for Today's University

By Todd C. Ream & Perry L. Glanzer

Cascade Publications

Introduction:

In 1975, William B. Eerdmans published *The Idea of a Christian College* by Arthur F. Holmes, a noted philosophy professor at Wheaton College. Neither Arthur nor officials at Eerdmans could have guessed this book would be in print 35 years later and have enlisted such a large following. This work's thoughtful yet accessible style made it a long-standing choice for reading lists on Christian college and university campuses across the country and around the world. Countless numbers of first-year students have read and discussed this book as part of their introduction to the Christian college experience. Some faculty members still require this book in settings populated by these students such as orientation groups and first-year seminars.

In 1987, a revised edition of the book was offered as a way of introducing some needed material—chapters concerning the relationship the liberal arts share with career preparation and the marks or definitive qualities of an educated person. Otherwise, the version published 35 years ago remains in print unchanged. The insights Arthur initially offered are still received by an appreciative and eager audience. However, enough has changed in both the Church and academe to leave even some of the book's most faithful supporters eager to see a full-scale reexamination.

What we propose to do is to undertake a reexamination of the idea of the Christian College in the light of recent scholarly contributions which have transformed discussions currently taking place concerning Christian higher education. In this respect, we envision our book doing what Jaroslav Pelikan's *The Idea of a University: A Reexamination* (Yale University Press, 1992) did in relation to John Henry Newman's *The Idea of a University*.

Defining A Reexamination:

While a variety of scholarly contributions have transformed these conversations in recent years, we would like to focus on two—the increased importance placed upon ecclesiology and philosophical anthropology. Language such as “ecclesiology” and “philosophical anthropology” may not be mentioned in the actual book given our intention to continue to focus on an audience of first-year students. However, we plan to introduce the importance of these topics to the conversation Arthur initiated.

In simple terms, the new ecclesiastical emphasis has focused upon worship's rightful place in orienting our lives. Through particular worship practices such as baptism, communion, and the reading of God's Word, the Church introduces us to a definitive set of commitments that then help us to interpret and live the rest of our lives. As Stanley Hauerwas mentions in his memoir *Hannah's Child*, the Church teaches us that our lives depend “on learning to worship God” (William B. Eerdmans, 2010, p. 159). Everything else we do as Christians is an extension of our willingness to learn such lessons. What would the idea for a Christian college look like if it were an extension of these lessons?

Second, the new emphasis upon philosophical anthropology will reflect contributions made by scholars seeking to enlarge or, in some cases, simply de-throne the modernist impulse to reduce human beings to mere thinking selves or to selves divorced from our God-given identities. The Church is more than just a place where cognitive debates over doctrine occur or a place where we talk about values in general. The Church, as an expression of the Kingdom of God, exemplifies what it means for God to lay claim over all domains of our existence—our minds, our bodies, and our emotions, as well as what it means in specific divine and social relationships (e.g., to use our specific example, it involves learning what it means to be a good Christian, husband, American, son, man, neighbor, brother, professor, uncle, etc.).

In reality, learning to worship God makes demands upon what it means for us to be human in the largest and most all-encompassing terms possible. In *What is a Person?*, Christian Smith contends few of us would find theories of personhood in the social sciences to be reflective of “what we understand about ourselves as people. Something about them fails to capture our deep subjective experience as persons, crucial dimensions of the richness of our own lives, what thinkers in previous ages might have called our ‘hearts’ and ‘souls’” (The University of Chicago Press, 2010, pp. 2-3). What would the idea for a Christian college look like if it reflected an understanding of human personhood that considers every dimension of our personhood?

We now see works concerning Christian higher education such as Michael Budde and John Wright’s (eds.) *Conflicting Allegiances* (Brazos Press, 2004), Gavin D’Costa’s *Theology in the Public Square* (Blackwell, 2006), Stanley Hauerwas’ *The State of the University* (Blackwell, 2007), and James K. A. Smith’s *Desiring the Kingdom* (Baker Academic, 2009) beginning to shift the nature of the conversations taking place. Our reexamination of the Christian college will take into consideration these two contributions concerning ecclesiology and philosophical anthropology as key ways of introducing the next generation of students to the value of the educational experiences in which they are about to participate.

Similarities and Differences between the Proposed Reexamination and the Previous Editions:

First and foremost amongst the qualities we hope to retain from the previous editions is the thoughtful and accessible writing style Arthur accomplished. A number of colleagues in Christian higher education have mentioned that part of the reason they use *The Idea of a Christian College* is Arthur’s ability to take complex matters and introduce them to students who possess little to no previous philosophical or theological training.

Second, we hope to retain Arthur’s effort to introduce students to some key dimensions of the college experience. Our reexamination will open with a chapter entitled “Why a Christian College or University?” and conclude with a chapter entitled “The Marks of an Educated Christian Person.” Themes such as the integration of faith and learning, academic freedom, and community will also be present.

However, two key differences will also define this reexamination. First, the scholarly contributions made in terms of philosophical anthropology and ecclesiology will not only inform the material included in the chapters but also will shape some new chapters. For example,

chapter two will examine the relationship the Christian college or university shares with the Church, as well as why the Christian college or university participates in the practice of chapel or common worship. Chapter three will explore how a richer understanding of what it means to be human can and should shape curriculum infused with the liberal arts. Moreover, as a result of contributions made in philosophical anthropology, chapter four will discuss the ideas shaping co-curricular learning in the residence hall, the student center, and the wellness center.

Second, new aspects of higher education as a whole also necessitate serious theological consideration. Today, most Christian colleges and universities are striving to increase the ethnic and gender diversity found amongst their communities. Despite the importance of such efforts, too often they are guided by underdeveloped or merely sentimentalized understandings of their significance. As a result, chapter seven will seek to introduce students to an understanding of diversity and identity consistent with the previously mentioned contributions in ecclesiology and philosophical anthropology.

In addition, today there is a renewed emphasis upon globalization and the global growth of both Christianity and Christian higher education in settings outside North America. Consequently, we will include a chapter (nine) that discusses how the universal nature of the Church provides a theological rationale and a clear communal connection for Christian colleges and universities in their quest to engage in global forms of higher education.

Outline:

Introduction, “Why a Christian College or University?” – Too many students attend a Christian college or university for reasons that fail to capture the full depth of the experience they will encounter in the coming years. Our purpose in this chapter is not only to help them understand how Christian colleges and universities differ from their secular counterparts but also to help students see how they should go about getting the most out of their education. The majority of students will come to campus with a relatively robust understanding of how the Christian faith makes a difference in terms of how they presently live. However, too few have a robust appreciation for how the Christian faith makes a difference in how they think about every dimension of human life and culture. The even bigger challenge for the Christian college or university, and for these students, is to then see the inextricable relationship between how we are called to live and how we are called to think.

Chapter One, “Learning to Love God” – For students at a Christian college or university, the process of learning to integrate their faith, thinking, and lives begins with the practice of common worship. The Church is the institution charged with initiating this practice on behalf of individuals who gather together as members of Christ’s body. As communities that inherit their identity from the Church, Christian colleges and universities are called to be places that practice common worship. While such a practice takes many forms, it proves to be the one experience that then grants meaning to and integrates all of the experiences students will have on campus. For example, theology becomes not merely an academic exercise in analyzing concepts about God but a quest to discover how a personal God has revealed himself to us. In the light of this context, what purpose should guide our lives in the classroom or in the residence hall? In addition, what relationship should our lives in the classroom and the residence hall share? This

chapter seeks to answer these questions by addressing the central role that the Church and common worship play in unifying the Christian college experience.

Chapter Two, “Learning to Be Human” – One of the distinctives of Christian colleges and universities is that they seek to do more than provide vocational training or education. While these institutions seek to prepare students for particular professions, they also share an interest in helping students become better friends, sons and daughters, parents, stewards of the world, citizens, neighbors, men and women, and more. In short, they seek to help students become fully human. This chapter sets forth a curricular vision for how faculty and students can connect the liberal arts to their identities and loves in ways that will make them more fully human. We will also discuss the importance of connecting this understanding of human flourishing with a global understanding of Christianity.

Chapter Three, “Learning to Facebook with the Church” – In this chapter we will offer a tribute not only to Arthur’s efforts as found in the first two editions of *The Idea of a Christian College* but also to efforts made by scholars such as Stanley Hauerwas, Mark Noll, George Marsden, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. We believe students need to understand that their Christian college or university experience should offer them the opportunity to find their place in this larger contemporary conversation. However, this introduction will not be simply limited to contributions made by the current generation of leading Christian scholars but also include references to seminal contributions made by Christian thinkers such as Athanasius, Augustine, Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, John Calvin, John Henry Newman, Abraham Kuyper, Karl Barth, and Henri De Lubac.

Chapter Four, “Learning to Fulfill God’s Calling” – Too often students view liberal arts courses as something to be tolerated until they can get to the courses perceived to directly prepare them for their chosen profession. However, Christian colleges and universities still retain the understanding that these students do not simply take such courses for the purpose of gathering information. In contrast, these courses prepare students for a vocation. Consequently, we intend to add the insights from the burgeoning scholarship on Christian vocation to this chapter. We will also describe how integrating courses in the liberal arts and the professions can help students be more thoughtful and thus, hopefully, more faithful in their vocation.

Chapter Five, “Learning to Live” – Most students spend approximately fifteen hours a week participating in formal curricular instruction. If students spend three hours per week preparing for each one of these hours of instruction, that brings the total number of hours they spend on their studies per week to sixty. The first challenge we immediately face then is what students do with the rest of their time. The second challenge we face is students’ assumption that these hours of curricular instruction and preparation stand in isolation to how they spend the rest of their time. Yet, a life of worship means considering how to be a steward of one’s time and overall life. As a result, the lessons and experiences introduced in curricular venues should then be extended into co-curricular venues (or venues orchestrated by student life professionals) such as the residence hall, the student center, and the wellness center. When left in isolation from one another, curricular venues become venues for mere work. Co-curricular venues become mere venues for play. When all life is subjected to the Lordship of Christ, those forms of distinction

do not exist. This chapter explores the role that these co-curricular venues necessarily play in this larger web of relationships.

Chapter Six, “Integrating Faith, Learning, and Living” – The understanding of integration described above not only includes faith and learning but also how each student leads his or her life. This understanding of integration becomes synonymous with the most robust form of Christian discipleship. As a result, this chapter will not only demonstrate how the relationship shared by these venues forges such an understanding of discipleship but also how such an understanding challenges notions of discipleship that too often exclude the full integration of the mind.

Chapter Seven, “The End of Academic Freedom” – In the larger context of the higher education community, academic freedom has come to be understood as the absence of any form of authority that might hinder scholars from conducting their work. While Christian colleges and universities need to share an awareness of these hindrances, they should understand academic freedom as the freedom to pursue their work as an attempt to offer praise and worship of God. This chapter will not only introduce students to the understanding of academic freedom in place in the higher education community as a whole but also this unique understanding in place at Christian colleges and universities.

Chapter Eight, “Diversity is Not Enough: Living as Christ’s Body” – Today, diversity has come to be the major mantra in higher education. Colleges and universities have sought to apply a variety of understandings to how they shape their communities, including their populations of administrators, faculty members and, of course, students. However, part of the challenge that these communities face is that the celebration of diversity emerged as a practice prior to the cultivation of corresponding theories. Without a guiding metanarrative, appeals to promote diversity degenerate into mere tolerance at worst, or a boutique-level of interest in ethnic or gender differences at best. However, Christians are called to embrace the diversity of God’s created order and Christ’s body while also distinguishing between created diversity and fallen disorder. This chapter will unpack what this task means for Christian colleges and universities.

Chapter Nine, “The Global Christian College” – The early university or *studium generale* was given its name because of its internationality; it attracted students from all nations and was not bound by national boundaries or identity. Its universality was established by its association with the larger Catholic Church. After the nationalization of many colleges and universities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, many institutions of higher education lost this focus. In an age of increasing globalization, Christian colleges and universities should recover the theological rationale and the connections with the worldwide Church to once again cultivate institutions of higher education rooted in a global identity that stems from the universality of the Church. This chapter will discuss what that would mean.

Chapter Ten, “The Marks of an Educated, Christian Person” – Development remains an ambiguous term in higher education. Part of the problem concerns the fact that we do not agree upon what marks a developed person. In contrast, we believe the Christian narrative helps us identify the marks of a developed Christian person in more specific ways. This conclusion

will discuss the marks of a fully educated human person as wise Christian living. For too long, higher education has focused on knowledge acquisition. While such a process is essential, A well-cultivated Christian life allows for knowledge to then be utilized in a larger process of wisdom.

Length:

The introduction will contain approximately 2,000 words. Each one of the ten chapters will contain approximately 6,000 words. As a result, the estimated word count for this volume is 62,000 words.

Audience / Possible Marketing Venues:

This book will be designed to meet the curricular needs of at least three different groups—the first two groups being comprised of students and the third group being comprised of faculty members. The two groups of students are the same groups that have historically used the previous editions of Arthur’s book. First, student development professionals leading orientation groups have often asked entering students to read *The Idea of a Christian College* prior to their arrival on campus in the fall. A model used at one Christian college includes faculty presentations during orientation addressing certain chapters. These presentations are then followed by small group discussions with peer leaders. Some campuses have used blogs and online discussions to help get these conversations started prior to campus orientation. Even campuses that have not historically used Arthur’s book as part of their orientation program have likely adopted some form of common reading required of all entering students.

Second, first-year seminars have found their way into the curriculum of a considerable number of Christian colleges and universities. Students are offered the opportunity to engage in readings and exercises designed not only to introduce them to the college experience as a whole but also to practices designed to help them succeed. Quite often, these classes will have a common set of readings that all students will cover. However, students are also given the option to register for a seminar with a particular focus that draws on a number of disciplines such as creation care, human dignity, or peacemaking. This version of *The Idea of a Christian College* could continue to be used as one of those common readings.

A third audience includes first-year faculty members. Too often, faculty members at Christian colleges and universities arrive on their campuses unprepared to fully appreciate the institutions they are called to serve and the vocations they are called to fulfill. Terminal degree programs at research universities are oriented toward providing these faculty members with an excellent foundation in their fields. However, unless they were students at a Christian college or university they likely do not fully understand the differences that define these institutions in relation to the research universities they most recently called home. In addition, while they are often quite committed to the Christian faith, their level of theological knowledge is usually considerably lower than their knowledge in their field. As a result, many Christian colleges and universities have established various routes ranging from informal reading groups to semester or year-long seminars to help their newest colleagues appreciate why the calling to serve at a

Christian college or university is truly unique. This book could be used as a textbook in one of those settings.

Given these audiences, conferences hosted by organizations such as the Association for Christians in Student Development, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education, the Lilly Fellows Network, the National Orientation Directors Association, and the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition would prove to be valuable marketing venues for this book. Potential publications for advertisements for this volume would include *Books and Culture*, *Christian Higher Education*, *Christian Scholar's Review*, *First Things*, the *Journal of College Orientation and Transition*, and the *Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*.

Qualifications of the Authors:

As previously stated, Arthur emerged as one of the leaders, if not the leader, in initiating discussions concerning the unique qualities defining Christian colleges and universities. His books have proven to be essential reading for countless numbers of students. His efforts subsequently cleared a path for the next generation of Christian scholars to follow. As higher education scholars, we view ourselves as the grateful beneficiaries of the labors of scholars such as Arthur. Beyond *The Idea of a Christian College*, works such as *Building the Christian Academy* (Eerdmans, 2001), *All Truth is God's Truth* (InterVarsity, 1993), and *Shaping Character* (Eerdmans, 1990) proved to be formative in our own education. By the time we emerged as scholars in this field, conversations concerning the unique qualities of Christian higher education were well underway. Thanks to Arthur and his colleagues, our calling is thus not to initiate such conversations but to refine and extend them for the next generation.

In each one of our successive books we have sought to find ways to share these unique qualities with new audiences. In *Christian Faith and Scholarship: An Exploration of Recent Developments* (Jossey-Bass, 2007), we sought to share the lessons learned from the practice of integrating faith and learning with higher education scholars as a whole. In *Christianity and Moral Identity in Higher Education* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), we sought to introduce both higher education scholars as well as student development professionals to an understanding of the critical role that the Christian faith can play in the moral formation of college students. Our experiences as the book review editors for both *Christian Higher Education* and *Christian Scholar's Review* have also helped us to stay current in the literature emerging not only in higher education but also in a number of related disciplines. In an attempt to extend the benefits of a legacy Arthur initiated, we would now like to introduce the next generation of Christian college and university students to the unique qualities of their own institutions.

Completion Schedule:

Work on the initial draft of this volume will begin in May 2011, and conclude in May 2012. We will then send that draft to at least three leading scholars concerning Christian higher education and ask for their feedback. Initial thoughts concerning proposed readers include Stanley Hauerwas at Duke University, Stanton Jones at Wheaton College, Christian Smith at the

University of Notre Dame, Amos Yong at Regent University, and James K. A. Smith at Calvin College. These readers will return their proposed edits to us in August 2012. We will then incorporate these proposed edits into a draft to be completed in October 2012.