

Philosophy of a Christian Liberal Arts Education – Dr. John Robert Schutt

Background to a Philosophy of Christian Education

The purpose of Christian Liberal Arts College education begins with the larger narrative of God's work in creation. All begins with the statement from Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." All creation was made to exalt God and to accomplish His purposes. Perhaps Colossians 1:16-18 say it best when it says about Jesus, "For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything."

God then created our father Adam and put him in the garden to work His creation. Genesis 2:15 says that God instructed Adam to "abad" (dress/work/cultivate) and to "shamar" (keep/take care of) the Garden of Eden. God then had him follow in his creative activity by naming all the animals (Gen 2:20.) We were made to work and to be good stewards of His creation.

God not only made the creation, but He made the laws by which it operates. These laws govern all relationships in the physical, biological, and cultural creation. Francis Schaeffer, in his book *Pollution and the Death of Man*, describes the five relationships that God has ordained as God's relationship to man, man's relationship to self, man's relationship to others, man's relationship to the creation, and the creation's relationship to itself. At the end of the creation account, God looked at all that He had made, including these relationships, and said that all was "very good" (Genesis 1:31.)

Adam and Eve choose disobedience to God. They violated his command and ate of the forbidden fruit (Gen 3.) As a result, man's relationships with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of God's creation were damaged. Man would now hide from God. His thinking would not be correct toward God, himself, others and toward God's creation. His focus would be inward and selfish instead of outward and servant-hearted.

But God, in His rich mercy, did not leave man to his own darkened understanding; He graciously started to reveal Himself in His written Word, the Bible which is to be a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Ps 119:105.) God not only gave His Word to man, but He also gave a vehicle by which man could teach the truths of Scripture to successive generations. We learn, for example, that God chose Abraham so that he would instruct His children in the ways of the Lord (Gen 18:19). This command was extended to the entire nation of Israel when God gave them His law (Deut. 6:6-12.) Spiritual education was to occur and the responsibility for that education was placed with parents. God also provided a mechanism whereby foreigners could learn of God's ways (Lev. 19:33-34.) That stranger was to be like a native to the Israelites, and was to be loved (Lev. 19:33-34) When God's people did not follow his plan, disaster resulted. For example, Moses carefully instructed Joshua (e.g., Josh. 1:7) and the result was that the people of both his and Joshua's day followed the Lord (Judges 2:7.) However, the leaders in Joshua's day failed to educate the next generation (Judges 2:10,) resulting in the dark days of Israel's history as recorded in the book of Judges. Most recently, God has spoken to us by His Son (Heb 1:1, 2.) Teaching truth to successive generations is part of God's plan.

The great news is that the Father sent His Son Jesus to reconcile us and all things to Himself. Col 1: 19,20 say, "For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven." From God's point of view outside time, this full reconciliation has been accomplished. However we are bound by space and time. From our viewpoint, this reconciliation started with Christ's resurrection and ascension, but it will be fully realized at His return.

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What do we do until Christ returns? We act as His agents of reconciliation restoring the five relationships that were mentioned above. 2 Cor. 5:18-19 "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation." The purpose of a Christian Liberal Arts education is to be an agent of the Holy Spirit in the transformation of student's lives and to equip them to be agents of transformation to culture and to the creation.

Man's renewal with God needs restoration. People need to know Christ. They need to hear His Word. (Romans 10:14-15 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!") Believers need to know and to love Christ better. (Matthew 22:37-38 "Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment.) We all long for the day when we will be with the Lord to know Him face to face. (1 Corinthians 13:12 "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.") We anticipate the time when "they shall not teach again each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying 'know the Lord,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." ... (Jer. 31:34.) Our desire stems from our present separation from our Lord. A Christian Liberal Arts education should prepare students to be agents of reconciliation between others and their Lord.

Scripture also speaks explicitly about the restoration of man's relationships with himself, and with others. We need to love self properly and to love others. (Matthew 22:39-40 "'And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'") A Christian Liberal Arts education should prepare students to be agents of reconciliation so that people understand why they think and act the way they do with themselves and with others.

God's Word also speaks to the restoration of man's relationship with the creation. The Fall affected not only man's relationship with creation (Gen. 2:15, cf. Gen. 3:16-19), but even the structure and function of the creation itself (Rom. 8:19-22.) A Christian Liberal Arts education should prepare students to be agents of reconciliation between God and His creation.

As a result of this Fall, man can only know truth about God as He has revealed it in His Word. Christians acknowledge that all truth is God's truth and that unbelievers may learn principles about the workings of the universe. Yet, in this, as in all other fields of learning, Scripture is the standard by which all knowledge should be judged. Where theories contradict Scripture, God's Word must take precedence and alternative explanations must be sought. This honest inquiry

into the working of the universe can most easily occur in a Christian college. I have taught in both a secular and in a Christian University. I cannot imagine going back to teaching in a setting where I could not read from God's word to my students.

Some may object that the work of reconciliation can and should be done at the level of the local church. Yes. The local church should be the primary agent for God's work. However, there is much to be said about a time of intensive training and preparation for that work. A Christian College is an assemblage of scholars. It is a place where students can get depth of knowledge. They learn from men and women, who have spent many years learning from God and learning about His works, and who have come together to educate students. It is also a place where students learn the breadth of knowledge. Our world is a complex place. Students need understanding of all disciplines so that they can integrate knowledge into a holistic view of God and His creation.

The logical result of a Christian college education is that one will be prepared to worship and serve the Creator. This is my goal as an educator in a Christian Liberal Arts College.

How My Philosophy of a Christian Liberal Arts Education Influences My Work

First, *I acknowledge that I was created to work.* This belief is rooted in creation. God made Adam, put him in the Garden, and assigned him to work (Gen 2:15.) Work is a blessing from God. Second, *I acknowledge that all that we do in word or deed should be done for the glory of Jesus Christ* (Col 3:17.) This means that I should display Christ-likeness in my work. My work should be characterized by words like integrity, honesty, loyalty, servant-leader, giving an honest day's work for a day's wages, etc. Third, *I acknowledge that my relationship with Jesus should affect my science teaching.* I want my students to know my relationship with the Lord. Each semester, I open class by giving my testimony to my students. I also want my students to know that when we study science, we are studying God's creation. My class devotions focus on God's relationship to His creation. There are many sub-aspects of this point, on which I can talk later. I also want to help my students think about becoming better stewards of God's creation. It's His, not ours.

Another way to think of how my philosophy of education should affect my work is to modify the four H's of the 4H organization – head, heart, hands, and health. My teaching is primarily about the "head." To state it badly, that's a no-brainer. But since 1988, I've tried to make my teaching about "heart" as well. At TUFW, one of our emphases has been spiritual formation. <http://fw.taylor.edu/> I have my students do Soul Projects in most of my classes. I want them to examine their lives in light of Jesus' Word. The "hands" part can be discussed from a number of perspectives. In my labs, I have moved from the traditional lab format to one where I have every student work on a semester-long research project. I decided that I wanted my students not only to know the facts of science, but also the process of science. However from a Kingdom perspective, the "hands" of biology would probably be addressed better at a department level. Another of our emphases at TUFW has been what we called "Applied Leadership Development. This initiative was introduced about three years ago. Several of us faculty attended a Christian Community Development Conference (CCDA) in Philadelphia in 2006. We were charged with the task of learning about Community Development and discussing how it may apply to TUFW as we intentionally decided to reach out to Fort Wayne. Adding these three components together, we come to the fourth H – health. In this case, they lead to a spiritually healthy person.