

Arthur Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*
Chapter Three: The Liberal Arts: What and Why?

Introduction: Asking the wrong question

1. What will I ever do with all this stuff anyway: literature, history, philosophy, psychology, etc. What use does all this stuff have in real life, in particular for the Christian?

Asking the right question

2. The question is not what can I do with all this “stuff,” (also stated in this way: What will history and literature and philosophy contribute to my work as a business man, doctor, engineer, minister, etc?), but rather, what will all this stuff do with and for me? This question is basic to the concept of liberal education.

What sort of men and women will they become by wrestling with this material in the way I present it, and what sort of materials and methods can be developed to help students become more fully the people they are capable of becoming?

3. Never under estimate the importance of work, for its value in the economy of God is far greater than just earning a living for work is:
 - an offering to God (Eph. 6: 5-9)
 - a service to others
 - a means to one’s own personal growth and dignity
4. Yet, don’t limit education to vocational preparation, despite the importance of work in daily life. Why?
 - a career is larger than a job.
 - a calling is larger than a career.
 - a life is larger than a calling.
 - and liberal education ought to be for the sake of life, not just a calling, career, or a job!
5. This is rooted in a philosophical anthropology that refuses to reduce people to what they do. A person—despite our technological society that values productivity, not persons, and equates education with job training, and reduces people to *homo faber* (man the maker)—is more than a worker. Hence, more than job training must be demanded of education.

6. Education has to do (or should have to do) with the making of persons, Christian education with the making of Christian persons. God's creative and redemptive work has to do with the making, and then the remaking of persons, and education that helps make us more fully human and complete persons is especially important to Christians. THIS IS EXACTLY THE GOAL OF CHRISTIAN LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION!

Definitions

7. Extensional definition of liberal education: to what disciplines do the liberal arts extend?
 - Trivium: grammar, logic, rhetoric
 - Quadrivium: geometry, arithmetic, music, astronomy
 - Middle ages: law, medicine, theology
 - 18th and 19th centuries: Latin, Greek, Classical literature, natural philosophy (science), moral philosophy (ethics and political science), mental philosophy (logic and metaphysics)
 - 20th century: broad general education that includes natural and social sciences, humanities, religion, etc.

Yet, such a definition is insufficient because of the changing nature of the content of liberal education, and because it results in fragmentation, a smattering of subjects, but lacking a unifying understanding and perspective on life!

8. Intensional definition of liberal education: what is the unifying essence of the thing?
 - Cicero: the education of free men for the exercise of their freedom rather than of slaves.
 - Aristotle: education is for the wise use of one's leisure to exercise political and social leadership
 - American colleges: preparation for the leadership exercised by the professions, hence non-professional preparation for the professions through the development of one's rational powers (hence, education for citizenship).
 - Liberal education is appropriate for persons as persons, rather than as worker; liberal arts are appropriate for humanity, to feel life whole, to live it whole rather than piecemeal, to think for oneself rather than second hand. Liberal education is for the development of persons.
9. In application to Christianity, we are the image and likeness of God, and are called upon to image God and be like Him in all our creaturely activities and in every aspect of our humanity; this is our highest calling. A LIBERAL

EDUCATION THAT DEVELOPS ALL THAT WE ARE DEVELOPS AND IMPLEMENTS THIS CALLING.

10. We should preserve the distinction of John Henry Newman in his *The Idea of a University* between the liberal and useful arts, that is, between the intrinsic and instrumental value of an education.

Instrumental value: means to ends (like money to purchase various items)

Intrinsic value: ends in themselves (beauty, goodness, truth)

Liberal education is concerned with the intrinsic values of beauty, goodness, and truth, for their contribution to people as people, and not just as workers.

11. Consider these distinctions:

<u>Intrinsic</u>	<u>Instrumental</u>
• Literature	Journalism
• Natural science	Technology
• Political science	Propaganda
• Psychology	Counseling
• Theology	Evangelism
• Philosophy	Apologetics

What is a person?

One's vision of what it means to be a person (say, Marxists, Freudian, Existentialist, Pragmatist, Behaviorist, etc) will determine what education is for and how it is geared? What is a Christian view of persons?

12. A person is a reflective, thinking being. Hence, liberal education should develop the following qualities:

Inquisitiveness
Analytic skills
Synthetic, unifying skills
Reading and writing

13. A person is a valuing being. Hence, liberal education should develop the following axiological qualities:

Moral values and virtues
Aesthetic values and virtues

14. A person is a responsible agent. Hence, liberal education should develop the following stewardship qualities:

- Responsibility in friendship, marriage, family, work, recreation, politics, society, church,
- History makers with historical power (critical appreciation of the past, creative participation in the future).
- Physical (a necessary if insufficient condition for what we do in life) and social in avoiding the extremes of both individualism and collectivism.

15. We must be developed as thinking, reflective and valuing beings so that in all the responsibilities of life we may act as responsible agents, and it is the religious core of individuals is lived through these areas.