

# The Promise and Promises of a Christian College

*Editorial: Paul R. House*

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During my ten years at Taylor University, located in Upland, Indiana, I came to realize that no other church-generated ministry has as much promise and makes as many diverse promises as a Christian college or university. Christian colleges have the potential to offer students the best possible education—one that integrates Christian faith and all forms of learning. They can thereby avoid the worst pitfall of secular education, which is the unwillingness, lack of opportunity, or inability to consider the Lord who created the heavens and earth as the major part of the educational equation. Supporting this promise is the fact that these institutions have made solemn promises to their constituencies. These promises are anchored in God's word, and they have been made by believers in the God of truth. Thus, when they are broken, the college's integrity as a specifically Christian entity is in question. When they are kept, however, the students and constituencies of that faithful institution receive the full benefits of loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

## **The Promise of a Christian College**

Christian colleges should be even more committed to academic excellence than the best-intentioned state university or secular liberal arts college, for they were founded to serve the God who created life, earth, persons, and outer space. The Scriptures teach that the Lord is, among other things, intelligent, creative, personal, and rational. Scripture's authors are them-

selves interested in art, literature, philosophy, theology, biology, zoology, and a variety of other academic subjects. A large amount of instructional material appears in the Old and New Testaments. Christians have every reason, then, to expend great time, effort, and resources upon attaining a quality, full-orbed education.

The full promise of a Christian college is not simply in the effective dissemination of relevant and helpful information. Rather, it lies in the integration of Christian truth into these disciplines. Integration of faith and learning means that in each academic discipline skilled Christian teachers are able to teach and lead students to assess information based on the truths of scripture. For instance, in Literature courses professors judge the validity of authorial worldviews based on a Christian worldview. In Business courses professors weigh the ethical integrity of transactions and the treatment of the poor based on ethical standards developed from the Bible. Science classes are marked by a critique of Naturalism and its attendant non-theism. Theological discussions do not become the sole object of these classes, but they are included as an important part of the learning process. Bible classes themselves move beyond content matters to embrace ways to apply the text to other disciplines. In every Bible course the effort is made to make biblical truth applicable to the various vocations represented in the curriculum. Biblical and theological courses supply the most im-

portant ingredient in all the above-mentioned discussions, which is an accurate understanding of God's inerrant word.

Of course, part of the promise of a Christian college is that its members worship together and address world concerns together. Chapel services ought to be spiritually vibrant and intellectually stimulating, and should provide models for the sort of church services the students will seek to replicate when they graduate. Such worship experiences must not devolve into pale imitations of weak junior-high youth meetings. They should reflect the most faithful preaching, teaching, singing, and praying the community can muster. From this base, the community will go out to minister to the rest of the world.

### **The Promises of a Christian College**

The quality of academic and spiritual environment described above can only occur when colleges make serious promises to their students, constituencies, and staff. A college that integrates faith and learning, worships effectively, and serves sacrificially will not happen by accident. Vigilance in a number of areas is needed.

First, the trustees of a Christian college must promise to understand its mission and unique nature. At times some trustees may neglect the learning aspect of the college, choosing to treat the institution as if it were a glorified Sunday School. These days, however, it is more likely that another error will be made. Too many trustees today see the Christian college as a smaller version of a state university. Thus, they consider the college a success when it raises money, gains national rankings in academic or (especially) athletic venues, has an influential alumni base, or has high enrollment. None of these accomplishments

is bad in and of itself, but each can only have meaning for a Christian college when they occur within the mission of integrating Christianity and learning in a manner that creates character-laden alumni. Trustees must require the college to stand for Christ. They must also keep the college anchored in its constituent roots.

Second, college administrators must promise to see their mission as facilitating the education of students who know how to live for Christ in their vocations. Programs exist to benefit students. Fundraising is undertaken to make education possible. Presidents have a special burden of making certain that the administrative team is more interested in people than in projects. They also have the responsibility to hire and develop persons who are committed to Christian higher education.

Third, it is essential that the college promise to recruit, employ, and develop a well-educated, well-published, well-compensated faculty. These faculty members must also be spiritually-mature teachers committed to building students' lives, though, or they will be worthless to a Christian college. Christian colleges must not fall into the trap of thinking that they can have *either* good teachers or good writers and researchers. Versatile and talented faculty members who teach well, write effectively, counsel students sagely, and serve the institution faithfully do exist. There are highly-qualified individuals who also are born again who will give their lives to the ministry of teaching. Therefore, presidents and deans must determine to hire *only* persons who are committed to Christ, students, scholarship, and the integration of faith and learning.

Of course, many potential faculty members will have gone to secular universities, or have attended colleges that

do not integrate faith and learning. These individuals will need special seminars and training before they will make the kind of faculty members needed for a distinctly Christian institution. They should be required to take faith and learning seminars taught by veteran professors as part of their first year or two of teaching. Their tenure should depend in part on their ability to bring a Christian worldview to their discipline.

Fourth, the student body must promise to accept life standards that reflect Christian teaching. Alcohol consumption, which has reached appalling levels on many campuses in this era of drinking to get drunk, must be banned. Smoking, a habit society has all but banned, must also be rejected. Racism, sexism, and sexual promiscuity, whether homosexual or heterosexual, must not be part of the scene. This lifestyle should be embraced on and off campus as a reasonable witness. Faculty and staff should voluntarily join together in this lifestyle as a responsible witness to the students. No double standard should exist. Non-Christians who attend Christian colleges are more likely to be impressed with the power of the gospel when they live with persons who have high moral standards, than by living amongst people who claim to be different than the world but are, in reality, much like the culture.

### **Keeping Promises**

No college is capable of keeping its promises without having a fixed standard of thinking, worshipping, living, and leading. The only standard worthy of consideration is the Bible, which is the inerrant word of God. Here the Lord has revealed ethical principles that can instruct students, faculty, staff, and trustees. Here one

finds examples of persons committed to the highest intellectual and moral standards, and here one discovers patterns for living in harmony with one another.

Serving at a faithful Christian college taught me that colleges that keep their promises will survive. While other private colleges may drift, forgetting their purpose for being, colleges that make faith and learning the heart of their mission will thrive. Enrollments will remain steady where the constituency knows that their college is telling them the truth and standing on the Truth. Sadly, some Christian colleges depart from their specifically-Christian mission. Many say they are doing so in order to stay afloat. If so, they have forgotten one important fact: it is better to cease to exist than to cease to matter. Those who continue to matter will continue to exist. They will fulfill their promise *and* keep their promises.