


Is Christian Education Worth Double Taxation?

by PRESIDENT CHARLES E. DIEHL
*Southwestern at Memphis and Moderator of the
General Assembly in 1941-42*



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At the outset I want to distinguish between "Christian Education" and "Religious Education." There is now a rather technical use of the words "Christian" and "Religious" in the field of education. The title of "Religious Education" now is applied to the work of the local church and Sunday Schools, vacation Bible schools, and week-day religious instruction of pupils in the public schools. There is a difference between Sunday School work and college work.

By Christian Education I mean that sort of education which enshrines the highest moral and intellectual ideals, which is based on the plain teachings of Jesus as found in the Bible, which is conducted entirely by those whose allegiance to Him is genuine, which is given in an atmosphere which is surcharged with His principles, and which definitely endeavors to inculcate in the students unswerving loyalty to Him. It is the sort of education that deals with the whole personality, which concerns itself with worthy living. This sort of education is fundamental to every cause of the Church, and to the very existence of the Church itself. Christian Education is, of course, not confined to the formal education of the school. The experiences of life are effective teachers, but the three outstanding institutions upon which we depend for Christian Education are the home, the church, and the school or college.

The Christian college may be described as an ideal college where knowledge shall be exact and

complete, character robust and gracious, and Christianity not only a welcome guest, but the ruling spirit within its walls. It is an agency of the Church for the promotion of the Kingdom of God through educational processes. It believes that the end of education is to produce men and women who, in individual character and social life, are like Jesus Christ. It feels with Sir Robert Peel that "secular education is only half education with the more important half left out."

As a college, it must do all that any standard college is expected to do in conforming to the recognized educational standards. We must not forget that it is an educational institution that we are talking about, that *education* is the noun and *Christian* is the adjective. The requirements for scholarship on the part of its teaching staff, the equipment for library and laboratories, the building for administration purposes, for lecture halls and for the housing of students, are the same for the Christian college as for any other college. The distinguishing feature of the Christian college is that it includes Christianity in its working program, not so much in the studies pursued as in its spirit and atmosphere. The Christian college which is really functioning as such will not turn over the religious interests of the institution to other agencies. The initiative for the religious life of the institution will be in the governing bodies—in the board of directors and in the faculty. The college will be Christian because Christianity is organically included in its working program. The Christian college is founded and maintained because of a profound conviction that education is not complete and cannot be complete without religion.

Historically the church college has had a large and an enviable place in the system of American

education. Everyone knows that the early American colleges were Christian in origin and aim. It is claimed that, of the first one hundred and eighteen colleges founded in this country, one hundred and four were founded under Christian auspices and with a distinct Christian purpose. They trained leaders, not only for the ministry, but for every form of worthy activity in church and state.

The Presbyterian Church has always believed in education. However, it has been noted that the Presbyterian Church has been prolific in organizing colleges, but irresponsible in their support. Dr. Donald G. Tewksbury lists twelve institutions now in existence which were founded by the Presbyterian Church before the War Between the States, but which are now conducted under other auspices. Five of these are now state or municipal institutions, three are Methodist institutions, two are independent institutions, one is a Baptist institution, and one is a Disciples of Christ institution. This list is as follows: University of Tennessee, University of Pittsburgh, University of Delaware, University of Buffalo, University of California; Dickinson College, Allegheny College, Adrian College; Washington and Lee University and New York University; Mississippi College and Transylvania College.

Great changes in higher education have occurred during the past half century. The state has entered the field of higher education since the passage of the Morrill Act of 1863, which granted each State in the Union thirty thousand acres of land for each senator or representative from that State in the Federal Congress. This and subsequent acts by which annual grants were made for institutions teaching mechanics and agriculture, com-

mitted the state finally and forever to the support of higher education. As a result, the United States has undertaken this colossal experiment, unique in the history of the world, that of giving to all of its citizens the privilege of training from the kindergarten all the way up through higher education at public expense.

Education was regarded as the panacea for every problem. This idea was due largely to the experience of men who saw the results of higher education in the early days of the church college when religion and education were joined together. Men did not seem to realize that education without religion is a very different matter, and may be positively disastrous. They attributed to the magic of education alone that which can be realized only when religion and education are combined. The secularization of education developed with amazing rapidity. The religious aim was supplanted by the modern gods of efficiency and practical utility. The emphasis came to be laid upon material rather than moral training, and a system of education has been developed which equips men for scientific, mechanical and agricultural pursuits, rather than for high moral ideals, and high moral character. President Robert M. Hutchins, of the University of Chicago, in writing about the defects of our present educational system, says that we are getting the sort of education that we deserve, that having set up the golden calf to worship and measuring everything by the dollar mark, it is natural that we should be satisfied to crowd out the enduring values of human life.

The principle of the separation of church and state, in which we believe and for which our fathers fought, does not in the minds of many admit of any organized religious teachings at the colleges

and universities which are supported by public funds. This is perhaps a debatable question, since it was not in the minds of our constitution makers, when they excluded religion from the field of government, that this should be an irreligious people, or that religion was socially unimportant, or that it was one of those luxuries which could easily be spared. It was not the intention to diminish activity in religion, but rather to furnish greater opportunity for its free exercise. However, the practical effect of the principle of the separation of church and state has been for the state institutions to accept little or no responsibility for laying a strong religious emphasis and for the production of a high type of Christian character. The development of the spiritual life has not been regarded as a fundamental part of the educational process in the publicly supported institutions, and yet the supreme need of the state is moral manhood and womanhood.

It would be a sad day if all the higher education of this country were in the hands of the state. We need to look no further than the situation in Germany today to realize the truth of that statement. No institutions of the world were as free from political domination and interference as were the German universities, but they were all supported by the state, and when Hitler came to power these supposedly free institutions were the first to be subjugated. There are some who say that this cannot happen here, and we reply. "Who said that it could not?"

The church college is not antagonistic to the state institution, but it is the complement of the state institution. The state institutions can and must do many things that the church colleges cannot do and should not try to do, but, on the

other hand, the church colleges can and should do some things of vital importance to the Church and to society which the state institutions cannot do. Generally speaking, the educational standards in this country are set and maintained not by the publicly supported institutions, but by the independent institutions and the better church colleges. It is these latter institutions also which maintain the spirit of freedom, without whose influence the freedom which now exists in publicly controlled institutions would be imperilled. Events which have occurred in recent years at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Mississippi and Louisiana State University, not to mention other institutions, are sufficient to illustrate the peril which publicly controlled institutions face.

We must be realists and face the fact that if we are to continue these church colleges it is necessary for us voluntarily to assume the burden of double taxation. We must pay our taxes for the support of publicly controlled institutions. We are not consulted about that. We are simply assessed, and we pay the assessment. It is not necessary for a church to continue to maintain its colleges. The church has relinquished to the state many causes and agencies in which the church was once vitally interested. The church has turned over its care for the poor to the Community Fund or the Family Welfare Agency. Its care for the sick has been transferred to the hospitals which are supported at public expense. The care for the orphans has likewise largely been taken over by agencies which depend upon public support. Shall the church withdraw from the field of higher education, as it has largely withdrawn from the field of secondary education? Is the church college worth making a sacrifice for? Is the church college

worth the necessary double taxation? The answer to these questions depends upon two things. First, it depends upon the particular institution under consideration, what sort of work it is doing, what sort of product it is turning out. A Christian college should somehow impress people with the genuineness and excellence of its ideals, its standards, its methods, and its product. Second, it depends upon the vitality of our religion, upon our ideals, our sense of values, and our attitude towards Christianity and the social order. The Great Commission is concerned not only with evangelism, but also with education, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The following special considerations emphasize the need of the church college:

1. The church college furnishes the leadership for the church and for society. The church must provide for a well-trained ministry, and the education furnished by the right sort of church college is the best preparation that our young ministers can secure for entrance to the theological seminary. The continuity of the church and its efficiency depend upon an adequate supply of capable, worthy and trained leaders. It is a basic problem of the church to provide for its spiritual leadership, and it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this work. However, it is not only ministers who are needed, but laymen who must be qualified to become intelligent officers of the church, business and professional men who are socially minded and unselfish—men who are prepared to serve, rather than to raid their neighbors and their fellow citizens. We need men of good will, who may be raised up for such leadership in the church, and for citizenship in the nation. Walter Lippmann, sometime ago

in a striking article, emphasized the need for a new type of business man.

Our colleges cannot educate all of the members of our Church, but they can educate the potential leaders of our Church, and they will do so, if the outstanding young people are sent to these colleges. In this exacting day, it is not enough for a man to be sincere and faithful, he must be capable and well equipped. Underlying all the problems of the day is the spiritual problem—the quality of the convictions and consciences in economists, statesmen, diplomats and in the public behind them. The Christian religion concerns itself with convictions and consciences, for in them are the all-important means to a more Christian society.

2. The church college inculcates the Christian philosophy of life. It is in these church colleges that the Christian motive and philosophy and conviction can be made central. Here the congenial environment may be established and sustained without question or limitation, and well-rounded characters are developed. Further, these church colleges furnish a breadth of training which we often sadly miss in those who have attended the larger, highly specialized institutions. Generally speaking, the state supported schools are utilitarian in tendency. If they do not over-emphasize the practical, they assuredly underestimate the cultural, and thus fail to serve in an efficient way the highest interests of the community.

The business of educating and the business of developing a student's spiritual nature are not separate and distinct enterprises. Some seem to think of an individual as composed of several distinct parts. They talk as if one part of a youth were sent to college to be educated, and another part sent to a religious foundation, or school of

religion, or church for the good of his spiritual nature, as if the college were responsible for one section of him and the church for another, but we cannot separate him into parts. He is not a body, plus a mind, plus a heart, plus a will. He is just a human being in the making, and whatever influences are brought to bear on him are brought to bear on the whole of him. The church college recognizes at once the unity of the individual and the unity of the educational process. It concerns itself not primarily with money-making, but with culture, character, and competence.

3. The church college requires a knowledge of the Bible. There are many thoughtful people who believe that one cannot properly be described as a liberally educated person who is ignorant of that Book on which our civilization is founded. Wm. Lyon Phelps, of Yale, says that if a man knows the Bible and has no opportunity to go to college, he is better educated and more cultured than the man who has spent four years in college and does not know the Bible. Of course, Professor Phelps was talking about a sound knowledge of the Bible, and not the sort of knowledge that is gained by an unintelligent interpretation. There is much so-called Bible study which has no more practical religious value than the memorizing of a page of the telephone directory. Such teaching of the Bible is in my judgment positively hurtful. This method of Bible teaching proceeds on an unsound basis, misinterprets the message of the Bible, and has a divisive effect on the church. The Bible is a book of inner illumination, a book for intelligent use. It is intended to be a moral and spiritual guide, and it is a book of final values for all who would live nobly, but it is not a book of science or an encyclopedia of universal knowledge. As our

Catechism states, "The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of him." In a sense, each Protestant Christian makes his own Bible—the particular passages which grip him and reproduce their experiences in him. Of course, there is much in the Prophecies and in the Apocalyptic Books which we do not fully understand, but, as Mark Twain once said, "My trouble is not with that part of the Bible which I do not understand, but with that part which I do understand." We need to study it intelligently, to assimilate and to apply its teachings, for in a real sense a Bible belongs to no man who does not know it, who has not mastered its contents.

4. The church college keeps the church abreast of modern scholarship. Christianity is not a static religion. It is the religion of a Person, the religion of the Spirit, and, as such it is dynamic. It is geared to the needs of a changing world, and to our enlarging conception of the implications of the Gospel message. It is of the utmost importance that the church be kept in touch with modern thought and life. The church college makes the important and now timely assertion of the compatibility of Christianity and enlightenment. The truly Christian college is not afraid of the scientific method or of the proved results of scholarship. Such a college lays claim, in the name of Christ, to all the realms of culture—literature, art, history, philosophy, religion, science—and exacts tribute from them all for the extension of His reign of righteousness and good will. Such a college, too, stimulates interest in education within the denomination, and draws students from homes which might not otherwise send their sons and daughters. It raises the educational average of the denomination,

and inculcates in the membership of the church an appreciation of the values of a liberal education.

5. The church college is the bulwark of freedom and democracy. The basis of democracy is found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with its message of the infinite value of the human soul. The church colleges are essential champions of free thought. They stand for the freedom of those intellectual and moral forces which make for civilization. Fascism always proceeds by gaining control of the institutions of free thought. Totalitarianism takes over the control of the courts, the press, the schools and colleges, and finally the church. The story is told of Professor Einstein that he met on the campus of Princeton University a distinguished Swiss theologian, that he stopped and lifting his hat, said to him, "I never thought the day would come when I, a Jew, would lift my hat to a Christian minister, but that day has come. The Christian church is the only organization in my country that has dared to defy the political despotism as a result of which all of my people are suffering."

Protestantism is on trial in the matter of Christian Education. The Presbyterian Church is on trial, a church which formerly led in the matter of higher education in the South, but which leads no longer. There is probably no denomination that would deliberately vote to scrap its colleges, but that which would not be done deliberately may be accomplished quite as effectively by indifference or neglect. The Presbyterian Church has never given to this fundamental cause of Christian Education the support which it merits. I am not in the least hostile to foreign missions when I say that if the Presbyterian Church had during the past fifty years given one-half as much to Christian Education as it has to foreign missions, our Church

would be in a far different position, and we would today be giving twice as much money to foreign missions. Nor do Presbyterians patronize their own excellent institutions. The government is today re-distributing the wealth of the nation. It is almost impossible for a man today to build a great material estate, but he can build a great spiritual estate, one that is enduring, by aiding in the great cause of Christian Education. Certainly we cannot take it with us, and it is worth while to perpetuate the influence of an honored name and a noble life. I am not at all hopeless about the future. I believe that the institutions which should be maintained will be maintained, and I believe that the Christian college is vital to the welfare of our country. However, these colleges will be maintained by a multitude of smaller gifts, rather than by a few large gifts.

There are some who point to failure here and there in the product of the Christian college, and it is true that not every student who matriculates at the Christian college is responsive to the influences that surround him. But this is true also of the Christian home and the Christian church. It was true even in the little group of twelve Disciples by which our Master was surrounded. The Christian college is not a reform school, and it cannot be held responsible for not doing in four years what the Christian home and the Christian church have failed to do in the previous seventeen or more years. However, when the Christian home and the Christian church have succeeded, the probability is that the Christian college will carry on the good work to a successful conclusion. It is the responsibility of the pastors and leaders of our Church that they should know, and see that the people know, of the superior advantages offered

by our colleges, and that together they should cooperate for the welfare of these institutions.

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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES
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