

# Faith Matters

## *The Value of a Christian Liberal Arts Education*

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## ***Loving God with Heart, Soul, and Mind***



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“Hear, O Israel: ‘The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might’” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5, ESV). Standing on the edge of the Promised Land, Moses delivers his final speech to the Israelites, and his words would represent the Jewish confession of faith for millennia to come. Moses could have—and did—say many things to those about to cross the Jordan River and take possession of God’s promises. But his most important words, the words now written on the fronts of synagogues around the world, comprise this command to love God with heart, soul, and might.

We readily understand the terms “soul” and “might,” but “heart” can cause some confusion in our context. When Moses

said “heart,” he meant something more than our twenty-first-century English concept of the word. The Hebrew term translated “heart” in our English Bibles includes the concept of feeling, emotion, and courage that English speakers associate with the heart, but it also includes the “mind, thinking, intention, as responsible for or identified with thought, reason, knowledge, counsel.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, then, it should come as little surprise that when Jesus cites Deuteronomy 6:5 as the greatest commandment, he uses updated language that more fully communicates its meaning to his audience. Asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus responds: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38, ESV). Let that sink in: the “great and first commandment” is to love God with heart, soul, and mind.

Most people do not take offense at the idea of loving God with heart and soul. After all, that’s the essence of religion in our cultural milieu, right? Religion is the domain of the emotional (the heart) and the spiritual (the soul), but be sure to check your mind at the door. And yet Jesus, and Moses before him, made clear the most important thing in life is to love God with *all* of us, our whole being, everything that makes us human. The great commandment therefore calls us to be countercultural by loving God not only with our hearts and souls but also with our minds.

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<sup>1</sup> D. J. A. Clines (ed.), *The Concise Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 109.

As Western Christians we usually think of this command in terms of the individual, and that is not entirely wrongheaded for we are individual people living in relationship with God. Yet we often miss the point that in Deuteronomy Moses was speaking to God's people gathered together just before they entered the promised land. The people of God, as a *people of God*, were commanded to love God with their minds. This was no individualistic affair in which a person retreated to love God alone; no, this was a corporate command to all of God's people to love him fully.

This corporate context of the great commandment has important implications for the Christian institution of higher learning. A college is neither Israel nor the church, and we must keep that important distinction clearly at the forefront of this discussion. Yet, the institution of Christian higher education *is* a group of believers united for the explicit purpose of educating students in a distinctively Christian context. The command to love God with the mind therefore has significant implications for the Christian college. One may even say that the *Christian* aspect of a Christian college is fulfilled only inasmuch as the great commandment is fulfilled. While we cannot fully explore every implication here—and they are many—I offer two for reflection and conclude with a third, more comprehensive consideration as it relates to the very existence of institutions of Christian higher education.

First, the great commandment *at least* means that Christian colleges must take seriously the task of education. It will not work to offer our students warmed-over

lectures and stale research. Instead, we must pursue our vocation with rigor, perseverance, and sincere love for what we teach. We must put aside the temptation to drink only from the wells we dug during our own education. Instead, we must be lifelong learners, seeking always to know more, to understand more. Likewise, we must continually hone the craft of teaching and enlarge our understanding of what teaching entails. We cannot be content with simply presenting information to our students in whatever way is easiest. No, the great commandment in our context means that we must always be learning how better to teach, how better to communicate, how better to reach our students' minds and hearts. This leads directly to the second distinctive the great commandment demands from the Christian college.

Second, the great commandment means the Christian college must always remember that we teach *students*. Loving God with the mind entails the mastering content and content delivery. However, it will not do simply to be experts in our fields and excellent in the classroom. No, we must also be faithful to love those in our classrooms, for loving God with heart, soul, and mind will necessarily result in loving the crowning achievement of his creative work: humans. In fact, Jesus made this very point after explaining the first and great commandment: "And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39, ESV). For this reason we must realize that teaching encompasses far more than the transfer of knowledge in a classroom. We must not retreat to our offices after class, but instead we must initiate relationships

with our students outside of the classroom. This of course will look different for each of us, but the point is that the great commandment means we cannot be content with teaching only during the time allotted for a particular class, for much of education happens when class is over.

In sum, the most important thing Moses could say to Israel—what in Deuteronomy 6:1 he called *the* commandment—is that Israel should love God with their whole being: heart (again, this includes what English speakers would call the mind), soul, and might. And when asked some centuries later about the essence of faithfulness to God, Jesus responds by telling his listeners (and us today) that the greatest command is to love God with heart, soul, and mind. As we consider what it means to love God in the context of Christian higher education, let us remember that at its most fundamental, basic core, the greatest and most important thing we do in all of life—including, and perhaps most especially, teaching and learning—is to love God with heart, soul, and mind. This command—nay calling—is what distinguishes the Christian liberal arts education from other educational endeavors. Any institution of higher learning can teach students how to conjugate verbs, explore the diversity of life forms, diagram sentences, compose essays, sequence genes, and any other number of things that are fine and good and necessary. But only a distinctly *Christian* liberal arts education will in so doing teach students that the very acts of composing music, penning essays, and manipulating the metamorphosis of

amphibians can be an act of worship, a fulfillment of the “first and great command,” as Jesus says, or “the” command, as Moses says, to love God with heart, mind, and soul.

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### ***Preparation for a Calling***



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In our current culture, where the demand for various skills and knowledge in the marketplace is rapidly changing and our Christian faith is being challenged in all areas of society, the vision of Louisiana College to prepare graduates and transform lives has never been more relevant. That vision becomes reality when we integrate faith and learning in all aspects of the student’s experience in a way that encourages development of a deeper understanding of God as the source of truth and creator of all things, an awareness of the Fall of humankind and its manifestations so obvious in our world today, and a life-changing appreciation for God’s redemptive process through Christ.

Shaping students' Christian worldview through effective integration of faith and learning allows them to view their chosen career as more than just a job requiring a specific skill set and knowledge base, but a vocation or "call from God, a holy thing" that leads to personal fulfillment, positively impacts the lives of others, and brings glory to God (Dockery, 2008).

A study conducted by the Barnum Group, Millennials (those born in the early 1980s through the early 2000s) were asked to describe their "dream job," and feeling passion for it was the most common response even above the financial benefits the job may provide (Barna Group, 2016). Fortunately, this may indicate that many among our next generation of leaders recognize, as King Solomon acknowledges throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, that laboring without purpose is meaningless. Christian higher education has a unique responsibility and privilege, unlike secular universities, to provide an environment in and out of the class-room that encourages students to find their identity in Christ -- the one who brings clarity and depth of purpose to their work and enables them to appreciate its usefulness to the kingdom of God.

A Christian worldview shaped by successful integration of faith and learning not only prepares graduates to pursue their vocation with passion, but has the potential to change the lives of others they encounter throughout their career. When Christians demonstrate excellence both in competence and character, in all areas of life including our careers, "the merits of the gospel

naturally emerge" and "people begin to ask the questions to which the Gospel is the answer" (Ostrander, 2012).

Christian liberal arts education prepares graduates for excellence within their professions through rigorous academic programs delivered by faculty who are obedient to the command found in Matthew 22:37 -- to love God with all of our heart, soul, and, mind -- and are called to advance the Gospel through mentoring and preparing graduates.

Christian education also provides an ideal environment for students to more fully develop character that enables them to exceed behavioral expectations of their profession such as altruism, compassion, caring, and cultural sensitivity. These dispositions are not impossible to facilitate through secular education; however, in light of the prevalence of post-modernism in the university system today, they develop more naturally and from a purposeful perspective when students are encouraged, through integration of faith and learning, to view their future patients, clients, students, or coworkers as being created in the image of God, and they allow the Holy Spirit to work through them to recognize and minister to the needs of those individuals (Dockery, 2008).

As a freshman biology major, my expectation for my educational experience, based on Louisiana College's reputation as a strong academic institution, was I would be well prepared for acceptance into the graduate school of my choice and to meet the demands at

the postgraduate level. LC did, in fact, meet those expectations; but it was what I did not anticipate about my experience that continues to have a tremendous impact on my life today.

The Christian liberal arts education I received shaped my Christian world-view in a way that provided me with a context for learning in which a secular graduate education could have meaning and purpose and prepare me for my calling as a physical therapist, and influenced my clinical practice, allowing me to minister to my patients beyond their medical diagnoses and established plan of care.

Based on my experience as a graduate and faculty member of Louisiana College, I believe the true value of Christian liberal arts education lies in the distinctive way it prepares graduates for excellence and relevance in the market place, where they serve in a positive way for the kingdom of God. I am absolutely blessed by the opportunity God has given me to return to my alma mater to be a part of equipping graduates to not only be contributors and leaders within the profession of physical therapy, but to pursue their calling in a way that changes the lives of others and brings glory to God.

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## ***Faith Matters in a Post-Modern World***



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*There are two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys, how's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and asks, "What is water?" (Wallace, 2008).*

Faith matters because a fish doesn't know it's wet. The worldviews of today represent a myriad of thoughts and philosophies that students inhabit via a multitude of mediums. William Barrett said that an age sees itself through the "looking glass of art" and anyone who would "understand the times and know what to do" must interpret the images in the looking glass (p. 63). Unfortunately, there are not clear worldview labels that categorize every song, book, lecture, commercial, movie, political decision or conversation. Therefore, without a clear means by which to test or filter what

worldview is being purported, thoughts develop...without much thought. Part of the seemingly innocuous cultural ocean, worldviews are easily taken for granted as truth and internalized. As a result, the way in which students see the world is often 'caught' rather than 'taught'.

This presents a real opportunity for liberal arts faculty operating within the Christian context to equip students with the lens necessary to recognize secular, unbiblical and often dehumanizing worldviews. Christian liberal arts education affords students with faculty who will assist them in unpacking the prevalent thoughts of the day lest they are spoiled through these philosophies (Colossians 3:10). To that end, the primary objective of this essay is to highlight the importance of a Christian analysis of dominant cultural philosophies that espouse personal autonomy above all else. It is only when faith matters that these faulty pursuits can be challenged, jettisoned and replaced by the adoption of the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5).

Unfortunately, the prevalent worldview of the day, postmodern-ism, has created a crisis of belief with the assertion that reality is a product of culture-driven social construction and that what we know to be true about the world, ethics, science, history, religion, politics, and the notion of absolute truth itself can be explained (deconstructed) by an analysis of language/culture. Therefore, knowledge is not the reflection of truth and in no way foundational to knowing "truth" but rather it is a reflection of shared cultural perspectives about "truth" (Veith, 1994). The result is, as Ward

(2003) describes it, postmodernism can be defined as the end of history, the end of man, and the end of the real.

Comparing postmodernism to other worldviews Grenz (1996) states: "in a sense, postmoderns have no worldview... postmoderns reject the possibility of constructing a single correct [unifying] worldview and are content simply to speak of many views and, by extension, many worlds" (p. 40). Here, objective Truth is reduced to interpretation. Your truth is your truth and my truth is my own, all equal (Okholm & Phillips, 1995).

In practice, the proliferation of postmodernism robs Christianity of its claim to Biblical Truth giving way to the premise that man created God through language to, at worst, subjugate and, at best assist in coping with suffering and loss (Freud, 1939). Furthermore, without a Creator God Who is perfect and righteous setting forth principles and statutes that protect the innocent and weak, the god of autonomy accomplishes devious, dishonorable and deathly ends. This is made possible by the eradication of any form of conscience or consequence that accompanies a world void of Truth. Consider three brief examples: abortion, marriage and the idea of tolerance.

David Platt calls the 42 million babies aborted each year the "modern holocaust" (2015, p. 57). Couples, because of economic, familial, social or career pressure remove God from His sovereign place as the giver and taker of life (1 Samuel 2:6) in deference to their personal autonomy. This decision is aided by branches of the scientific

community that assert that their choice is not one of ending life because a collection of tissue and cells found in the mother's womb "is practically indistinguishable in appearance from a dog or pig fetus" (Arthur, 2001, n.p.). Postmodern rationalization allows for this taking of life because a human fetus as a baby is merely a social creation rather than a physical one. Faith matters because Christian professors continually answer the question "what is contained in the womb" as not something, but someone whom God knows and loves and for whom Christ died (Psalms 139:13-16).

The redefinition of marriage is another example of the influence of postmodern thought. If marriage is a social construct created by men who are working in submission to a "god" of their own design and manifestation, there is little cause for objection. Thus, the Obergefell v Hodges decision cast down by the United States Supreme Court in June of 2015 is in fact just. Justice, in this case, gives way once again to the god of autonomy. To esteem the Judeo-Christian assertion that marriage is defined as one man and one woman as paramount (Genesis 2:24) is to unjustly discriminate against a people who do not share that social reality. Faith matters because Christian professors outline how the nuclear family made up of a father and a mother has led to human flourishing throughout the centuries and that this flourishing is a direct outcome of God's sanctification of marriage (Mohler, 2015, n.p.).

The examples are truly endless and can be applied to gender, religion, substance abuse, politics, psychology, media and the list goes on. However, one of the most detrimental results of the post-modern view is how it redefines tolerance and negatively impacts Christian conviction. Historically, the term tolerance meant to recognize and respect others' beliefs, practices, etc. without sharing them. Postmodernism rejects or deconstructs any claim to a moral hierarchy, asserting that moral boundaries evolve with society (Taylor, 1984). In his book *The New Tolerance* Josh McDowell clearly outlines the redefinition and impact of the new tolerance:

*In order for a person to possess convictions about a belief, it is necessary, by definition, for the person to be convinced that his or her belief is true. But if I sincerely consider everyone's beliefs, lifestyles, and truth claims as equal to my own (even when they contradict my beliefs, lifestyles, and truth claims), I can no longer claim any genuine conviction regarding my own beliefs. The new tolerance requires me to admit that I may just as easily be as mistaken or misled as my neighbor. If no truth is "more true" than any other "truth," then there is no truth worth defending. And if there is no truth worth defending, there is no room for conviction. (1998).*

The issue vitally important to the Christian College is the development and solidification of biblical convictions as paramount to the Christian institution's mission. As Christians we are to be ready always to give an answer to every man

that asks a reason of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15). The beauty of the Christian liberal arts education is that it seeks to know God and make Him known throughout all academic pursuits. Faith matters because at every level and category of a student's career, he or she will be afforded the opportunity to clearly articulate personal Christian convictions thus furthering the cause of Christ. Faith matters because we must, as a Christian institution, make the distinction and the declaration that Christ is Truth (John 14:6).

In conclusion, faith matters because thoughts have consequences. Christian liberal arts education is formative because it offers a counter theme to postmodernism founded on the absolute Truth of Christ. It affords the opportunity to amass knowledge and hone skills that will prepare students to daily surrender to Christ. Whether in the operating room, the courtroom, the classroom, the home, the office or a foreign country, the Christian education is fully realized when students understand the complete impact of Matthew 10:39 that *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it*. Faith matters because Christ-centered education champions Truth in a world that would reduce it to myth (John 17:17). The stakes are high.

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## **An Educator's Perspective on the Holistic Approach**



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From a secular educator's perspective, one may ponder the questions, "Why the need for a Christian liberal arts education?" and "Where lies the distinct advantage?" Such questions seem valid given the primary purpose of secular higher institutions is to "educate" the student in his or her chosen field of study. However, when we narrow the purpose of higher education to only that which can be measured, we fail to engage the sides of students that must be developed for them to yield true learning from life. Without the transformational experiences gained through a Christian liberal arts education, we also increase the likelihood that students will be less engaged, question the value of education, and in many cases, drop out. In the early 1900s, Maria Montessori's educational philosophy introduced a holistic approach that valued the human spirit and supported the development of

the whole child -- physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. As Montessori recognized the need to develop the whole child, a Christian liberal arts education seeks to do the same in the realm of higher education in that it exclusively focuses on the development of the whole student in a safe environment, which enhances student development in multiple ways.

While it is extremely important to ensure these young adults graduate with the competencies needed to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century global marketplace, the Christian liberal arts faculty also recognizes that it is our moral obligation as educators to ask what qualities we want to encourage in students as they grow toward adulthood. In Lynn Stoddard's book entitled *Educating for Human Greatness*, he studies the whole child approach and interviews parents regarding the qualities they believed an education should embody and then develop in their children. They include: initiative, integrity, imagination, an inquiring mind, self-knowledge, interpersonal skills, and the ability to feel and recognize truth on different levels. These qualities are grounded in a Christian liberal arts education, and thus contribute to the distinct advantages of such. Furthermore, while all successful careers require critical thinking; teamwork; sensitivity to cultural, demographic, economic and societal differences; and political perspectives, a Christian liberal arts education provides this foundation from a biblical worldview, in which the integration of faith and learning is based on the premise that all truth is God's truth. When education is approached from this

biblical worldview, students experience education in its truest form, as they are led to a greater understanding of God's attributes and divine work in humankind through various areas of study. Regardless of field of study, these very experiences allow opportunities for God to reveal himself to our students.

James 3:1 emphasizes the higher standards/expectations God places on teachers by stating they will be judged more strictly than other Christians. A Christian liberal arts faculty can easily rise to the challenge of this calling as they embrace God's truth through the integration of faith and learning. Likewise, Luke 6:40 suggests that teachers in a Christian school are responsible for being skilled in their profession, to integrate biblical truth into their curricula, and to have a relationship with Christ that exemplifies His character.

The Christian liberal arts faculty are called to be salt and light in a society that desperately needs to see Christ modeled through relationships and through art, theatre, music, media, literature, science, education, counseling and more.

The faculty of the School of Education at Louisiana College has chosen symbolic threads or strands that, when collectively woven together in a methodical manner, weave a cord that represents a strong, well-rounded, competent teacher graduate. Its premise rests upon the fact that each strand addressed individually is relatively weak and can be broken and rendered useless. However, when the strands are woven into a strategically designed cord representing the incarnation of the total teacher, the result

is a highly competent, resilient, caring, and purposeful teacher.

This theme, "...a cord of three strands is not easily broken," is from Ecclesiastes 4:12. The strategically planned, Christian liberal arts program of study in teacher education provides the mechanism for developing the highest quality professional educators who are committed to life-long learning. Moreover, the transformational experiences found within this Christian liberal arts curriculum prepare candidates in general knowledge, professional education, special studies, reflective decision-making, and Christian service.

Within today's society, a Christian liberal arts entity clearly offers among the safest of environments in which the development of the whole person is viewed as not just important, but imperative; hence, it teaches a worldview that includes God in everything with no divide between the secular and spiritual. Christ is all in all (John 1:3; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:15-18).

As Montessori (1949) concluded in her book, *Education and Peace*: "An education capable of saving humanity is no small undertaking: it involves the spiritual development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to times in which they live." This precise conclusion recognizes the educational need for which can only be found in the truth -- that which is God's truth.

## ***Integrating Faith in Social Work Education***



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Social work is a profession that is difficult to explain and often misunderstood by other professionals as well as the general public. Upon first reflection, one might wonder how Christ and faith can be part of such a liberal discipline. But it's quite simple: God is in everything; He is the Creator of all and He is in the BIG issues and He is in the small, everyday matters. Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world filled with pain, suffering, and distress. It has been this way since the beginning of time and will continue until Christ returns. As long as there are people and as long as there are issues, concerns, and obstacles, then social workers will be needed and will hold an important role in society. Therefore, my role as a social work educator is to train future workers to see social work as a ministry as well as

a profession and that each student can show others "the Hope."

A foundational aspect of Louisiana College's Social Work Program is derived from Galatians 6:10a, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people." This is the basis for our program's motto: "Empower others through offering H.E.L.P and compassionate caring," where H.E.L.P. means to offer Hope to Every Living Person. Without hope, what does one have? We must show this Hope to others. A quote from the movie "Unconditional" puts it this way: "No storm can keep the sun (SON, my emphasis) from shining!" He is our Hope.

Training students to carry out such a calling cannot skirt issues such as abortion, marriage, alternative lifestyles, sexual orientation, homelessness and different religions. Instead, students are encouraged to look at these issues from a Christian/biblical perspective and critically think through the many diverse perspectives floating around in society today. To do this, the history of social work and social welfare must be examined. What is presently a liberal profession did not begin this way. Diluting faith in this profession has not always been the case. It was very strongly rooted in ministry and service to others especially to those who were less fortunate. Often, we believe we invented programs and services over the past 200 years, but it is critical our students understand many of these services began in biblical times. For instance, it is important that students recognize that the origin of the welfare system. Deuteronomy 14:28-29 states: "At the

end of every three years, bring a tenth of all your produce for that year and store it within your gates. Then the Levite, who has no portion or inheritance among you, the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow within your gates may come, eat and be satisfied..."

God was serious about helping those less fortunate: Deuteronomy 15:1, "For there will never cease to be poor people in the land that is why I am commanding you, 'You must willingly open your hand to your afflicted and poor brother in your land.'"

Not only must the history of the profession be examined, but also the core values of social work must be explored as well by our students by comparing and contrasting them with Christian values and worldview. What are these core values? They consist of 1) service—to others above self-interest, 2) social justice—challenge social injustice, 3) dignity and worth of the person—treat respectfully, 4) importance of human relations—can lead to change, 5) integrity—behave in trustworthy manner, and 6) competence—practice within area of expertise. When the social work values are examined closely, students find there is not a conflict between these values and Christian values. For instance, the value of service in no way goes against Christian values because we know Christ commands us to love others and help those who are in need, weak, hurt and imprisoned. Deuteronomy 27:19 states, "The one who denies justice to a foreigner, a fatherless child, or a widow is cursed." God expects us to take care of those who are vulnerable in our society just as Christ did during His time

on earth. He expects us to be just in our treatment of others. We also are instructed in Matthew to treat others as we would want to be treated (the Golden Rule) which relates to the social work value of dignity and worth of the individual. In addition, we also know each person is "fearfully and wonderfully made," which again reinforces the concept of respect for one another.

Students are taught to love and respect the person no matter the choices they have made. Respecting does not mean advocating. Jesus loves us and accepts us as we are despite our many issues/sins. God created us to be relational. Through these relationships we have the opportunity to help others. The adage is true: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care," and it falls perfectly in line with the social work value: the importance of human relations.

Finally, there is integrity and competence. God instructs us as His followers to speak truth and let our "yes be yes and our no be no." If we are truly practicing this, we will be serving with integrity and competently because we do not want to present any falsity. We must be genuine.

Throughout the social work curriculum, students examine in-depth the person-in-environment (PIE) perspective. This perspective is concerned with working with the whole person (physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual components of an individual) in the context of the environment they live and interact in. What better way to help someone than working with the entire package and being able to do so

ethically? Isn't this what Christ did during his time here? In fact, isn't it fair to say Jesus was the first social worker? So, just as He addressed the different needs of people, we should follow His example. Students are taught and encouraged to include the spiritual component in their work with people. In fact, they are given spiritual assessment tools to incorporate in their interactions with any person. And it is unfortunate to say to our students that some clients will not want any part of this aspect, but many will welcome it. We cannot separate the spiritual from the rest. It all goes hand in hand. It is the way we are created.

In conclusion, Christocentric threads are quite easily incorporated into social work education despite its imported liberal trappings. The reality is this is a service oriented profession, where helping others before ourselves is the basic tenet which aligns with God's commands to us. It just takes one person to be willing to be the change that can make a difference to people in need.

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### ***Humble Beginning and Humble Ending***



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When I graduated from high school, my great uncle offered to pay for my education if I would attend the University of Mississippi. He wanted me to major in medicine because of my grade point average throughout high school. I didn't feel led to pursue a medical degree. In fact, I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life. My mother and father shared that they would help me get a formal education if I knew at least generally my desired career path. Not knowing that yet, and knowing that paying for college would be a sacrifice for my parents, I decided to enter the public workforce until I had more direction concerning my life.

Seventeen years passed before I received further direction concerning my life. The Lord had been working in my heart about surrendering to the Gospel

ministry, and on January 6, 1993, my wife and I knelt to pray, surrendering to take the Gospel of Jesus around the world. Surrendering to the ministry came easy. However, preparing sermons on a weekly basis grew increasingly difficult.

While sitting on the porch of my first pastorate, I shared with my chairman of deacons that I thought God wanted me to pursue some type of education with an emphasis in the Bible. He told me that I should think about Blue Mountain College, since it was only 30 minutes from the church and affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

My pastor took me to the college and introduced me to Dr. James Travis, the Chair of the Bible Department, who described the advantages of a liberal arts education with an emphasis in Bible. As I prepared to leave his office, he prayed with me. I knew from that very moment that the Lord was calling me to attend BMC, a small liberal arts college founded in 1873 by Civil War Brigadier General Mark Perrin Lowrey. who wanted to provide women a place for training to teach school and prepare for the job market, which meant that ministerial students could attend the college only by invitation. Dr. Travis had invited me only because he believed that the Lord wanted to prepare me for ministry and to prepare for ministry.

Dr. Travis introduced me to Mrs. Anna Quinn, my English instructor. The first class was horrible. We began to review subject and verb agreement, and I didn't remember the difference between a subject and verb, since I had been out of school so long. Mrs. Quinn noticed that I was struggling and asked to me stay after

class. She told me not to worry about being behind in the class that the Lord had put on her heart to help me excel in English. Her attitude provided me the basis for encouragement and determination that proved to be a key component in my humble beginning.

Even though Mrs. Quinn continued to encourage me, I relied heavily on Dr. Travis for direction as my faculty advisor. Therefore, I mourned the forced retirement of my first spiritual mentor. A stroke had prohibited him from continuing his teaching career. The last visit that I had with Dr. Travis ended with him sharing, "Caples, God has called you to get an education to invest into the lives of other people within the Kingdom." This challenge led me to develop an appreciation for the fine arts.

Music Appreciation class the Lord used to broaden my understanding and appreciation for liberal arts. I learned to appreciate Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, and even the rich tradition of our Baptist hymns. Mr. Ludlow brought energy to the classroom that caused students to love his class and the subject matter. He also empowered students to expand their horizon. He challenged me to attend my first theater production while attending BMC. When I drive back on the campus of BMC periodically, my mind always reflects on these great leaders that invested in my life, but also I reflect on the continual impact of my liberal arts degree.

For example, my liberal arts degree in Bible and English prepared me for seminary. I entered seminary with almost 24 transferring from BMC in Greek and other practical courses, which shortened

my time there by one semester. And, my liberal arts degree taught me how to interact with different people from different parts of the country, which made adapting into various ministry contexts simpler for my family and me.

My liberal arts education also prepared me for teaching at Louisiana College. When talking with a friend of mine who graduated from LC, we often exchange stories that are so similar about lasting friendships made during our college days. The biggest advantage that we always discuss is how our liberal arts education prepared us for the rest of our life. Moving to LC was a challenge and a blessing for my family and me. We left behind good friends at the seminary along with 18 years of pastoring churches to begin a teaching career.

While I must admit that the job opportunity brought us to this institution, knowing that Justin, my youngest son, would complete his college degree at a liberal arts education was another major point of consideration for us. Now six years later, I rejoice to be part of the LC family. I cannot imagine being anywhere else other than among the Louisiana Pine trees that surround our beautiful campus. I have many wonderful memories at LC, including my son proposing to one of our daughters-in-law by the fountain near Guinn Auditorium.

I asked my oldest grandchild the other day, while walking on campus with him, the following question. Hayden, "Do you think that one day you will attend college on this beautiful campus?" Hayden replied, "Papa, probably not because I am already about tired of school and I am only in the first grade." While I laughed at

his reply, I have high hopes that all of my grandchildren will attend LC because getting a liberal arts education provided me a humble beginning that one day will conclude with a humble ending in the presence of Jesus.

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*“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”*

*2 Corinthians 10:5.*

