

The Essential Educational Propositions of St. Augustine (A. D., 354-430)  
from Bernard Ramm, *The Christian University*

. . . that the university system of our civilized times stems directly from the educational task of the Christian church.

. . . that the university arose to meet needs for the church and the state in that both required scholars and professional men.

. . . that the Christian college must build its curriculum around the seven liberal arts. Augustine argues for the necessity of liberal learning since the meaning of the Scriptures cannot be grasped without it (his view is rather utilitarian). If the Scriptures are to be interpreted properly, then education in the human sciences upon which the Bible touches is necessary. Augustine's "core curriculum included music, literature, civics, history, natural history, astronomy, logic, science of numbers, rhetoric, eloquence, geography, mechanical arts, shorthand and writing, comparative religions. The seven liberal arts were (Martianus Capella, *The Marriage of Mercury and Philology*, fifth century A.D.):

The Trivium: grammar, logic, rhetoric

The Quadrivium: arithmetic, music, geometry, astronomy

. . . all truth is God's truth; wherever truth is, God is. That if pagans possess truth, they possess God's truth and any evil in pagan learning is not in the learning or truth itself but in the evil use of it. Christians have a right to truth even if discovered and propagated by non-Christians. "If those who are called philosophers, and especially the platonists, have said aught that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it" (*DDC II*, 40, 60). Just as the Israelites spoiled the Egyptians and took with them Egyptian gold and silver, so Christians should not repudiate non-Christian learning but carry away as much as is consistent with the truth.

. . . that the Christian makes **critical** use of pagan learning from a Christian perspective (2 Cor. 10: 4-6; Phil. 4: 8). The Christian who *arrogantly rejects* all non-Christian learning errs (since there are elements of truth in it--the error of fundamentalists); the Christian who *uncritically accepts* non-Christian learning errs (since there are elements of falsehood in it--the error of Erasmus). That is, embrace learning fully and completely, yet within the boundaries of divine revelation or Scripture.

. . . that if a discipline (e.g., medieval history: Latin; classical philosophy: Greek) requires competence in language for its mastery, then the scholar must learn the languages (and the corresponding study of semiotics, or signs and symbols).

. . . that liberal arts education is the best possible prerequisite for the proper understanding of the Scriptures. If a man knows only the Scriptures, he does not know the Scriptures.

. . . that there is such a thing as a genuine Christian humanism (interpretation and affirmation of human existence and activity from a biblical point of view) that integrates faith and learning, reason and revelation, mind and heart; the resulting challenge in this process is how to be thoroughly Christian and robustly academic at the same time (*pietas et doctrina*).

. . . that liberal arts education should be grounded in the Christian faith, laying a comprehensive foundation for a new Christian culture bringing all cultural, that is, human activity under the truth of the one true God and putting all knowledge in the service of faith.

. . . that the Christian college must be epistemologically humble. Since education is administered through fallible (finite and fallen/depraved) professors, students and books, a good Christian college will convey a keen sense of the fallibility of our knowledge, even in the best products of Christian scholarship. We see, but in a glass darkly.

. . . that Christian colleges must be critics of our culture and our educational world. The Christian college must engage in profound cultural and educational criticism so as not to be swept aside, but to set the pace. But such cultural criticism must never be cheap, artificial, or naive (for a good example of insightful Christian criticism, see Gordon Clark's *A Christian View of Men and Things*; H. Butterfield's *Christianity and History*).

. . . that since it is difficult to keep great minds interested in small problems, then a Christian college must maintain a great, visionary interpretation of the Christian faith (e. g., the reformational, sacramental tradition). If a faculty member or student is given a small interpretation of the Christian faith, then he will lose interest in Christianity and consider it irrelevant to most of life. If the truth of the liberal arts looks big, and the truth of the Christian revelation looks small, it will not be long before the Christian revelation and faith loses its hold on faculty and student body.

. . . hence, the Christian college must magnify the place and greatness of the Christian revelation and its message or content. Only then, will it be possible to provide a visionary interpretation of the faith. Augustine saw the greatness of Christian revelation and gave it such a great interpretation that he attracted men for nearly 16 centuries. Nothing cheap, trivial, or superficial should be tolerated in the Christian interpretation of things.

. . . hence, the Christian college must encourage its professors to study Christianity with some of the same scholarly fervor and thoroughness employed in learning their disciplines. Only as Christian professors learn the Scriptures and theology in some significant depth can they properly correlate and integrate their specializations with the perspectives of Christian revelation.

. . . that the Christian college must inspire in its students a passion for the quest for truth. But this passion follows a biblical order: faith is the beginning of understanding, that a person cannot know something until he has first loved it. Or biblically, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1: 7), resulting in the right order of the loves (*ordo amoris*). Thus, the Christian college must inspire in its students a faith in and love for God, for faith and the love of God is the precondition of knowledge of God, and knowledge of God is the precondition of true knowledge of ourselves and all things (i. e., the entire university curriculum). In other words, proper knowledge of God determines the setting and context of all other knowledge. Therefore, the relationship with God is the most important relationship. And faith which relates us to God is the precondition of adequate knowledge.

. . . that Christian college's call to faith in and love for God is also the call to the fullest possible cultivation and use of the mind in understanding God's special and natural revelation. It results in *fides quaerens intellectum*, that is, "faith seeking understanding," first of itself (which is theology), and of everything else (which is the university curriculum, or the entire circle of learning or encyclopedias). The Christian college sets forth the conditions in which the mind may truly be itself, free and capable of viewing the whole of reality, culminating in a comprehensive, wholistic biblical world and life view.

. . . that the Christian college should demonstrate that lack of faith in and love for God will place one forever at the edge of truth, at the margins of reality. One may amass accurate technical data in experimental psychology, and never know that man is made in the image of God. Scientists can unravel the mystery of the atom and never know who created it. Philosophers may know the depths of knowledge but never know truth. And to crown the stupidity, such scholars will view the edge of truth from which they see as the center. But in professing to be wise, they are in fact fools, and those deemed to be fools, allegedly standing at the margins of truth, are in fact wise!