

The Christian College Advantage

What I wish I had known before I chose a college



There's a particularly popular train of thought in the world today that says you have to know the darkness if you want to know the light. Obviously, it's a way of thinking that supports a self-indulgent lifestyle: sin now, repent later, and you'll be a better saint for it.

The problem is, you'll have to do an awful lot more repenting and backtracking after all that sinning than if you hadn't sinned in the first place. And there's no guarantee that all the habits and ideas that you learn in the dark are completely "unlearnable."

I say all of this because, as much as I enjoyed aspects of my secular education, I can't help but wonder what my faith would be like today if I had the benefit of a Christ-focused college experience. I want to help you answer the question you've been asking: Why choose a Christian college?

I enrolled in college straight out of high school, and I was a very confused and deeply unhappy young man. I had virtually no Christian upbringing—other than Sunday school at the local Methodist church—and college was overwhelming for me from day one. I started pursuing a degree in law, but due to my lack of purpose and direction, I dropped law halfway through college and forged ahead visionless through politics and English.

Secular teachers research the foundations of the world and instruct students accordingly, but their instruction is based upon the premise that we live in a world of relative values and absolutely no absolutes. I emerged more confused than I had been when I began—a typical product of a humanistic,

godless educational system.

Soon after graduation, I became a Christian during a time of great personal upheaval and turmoil. If it hadn't been for God breaking into my life, I would have entered the so-called "real world" with extremely shaky foundations.

I re-enrolled at the same university for a graduate course in English—for no reason other than that I had no idea what else to do. By that point, my new faith had given me the beginnings of a new set of values, which I could use to challenge the philosophical groundwork of my secular education.

Suddenly, postmodernism was interesting and informative, but clearly wrong. Political science was no longer the study of advanced political theory but simply the "ways of men" trying to out-manuever each other. I slowly began to see my education for what it was: one-sided and off-balance.

I think the key thing that a good Christian college can offer you is perspective. I say a "good" Christian college because a "bad" Christian college will invariably adopt a dangerous "us vs. them" mentality, which only breeds contempt and shortsighted fundamentalism. It's crucial that we study the ways of the world we live in, but we can see them for what they truly are only when we look at them through God's eyes.

There is much to be learned *from* and *in* the world. A Christian college offers a safe haven for you to explore in and a safety net where you can land should things get messy—as they often do. People of faith, in a faith-filled environment, can survey the world in which they live with a more Christ-like, truthful perspective.

That being said, there are potential pitfalls. A Christian college can easily become an insulated environment: an inward-focused subculture that can't provide a fallen world with the light it so desperately needs.

Much of what is wrong with contemporary Christian culture begins quietly within the confines of Christian colleges. Christian education should empower us, not indoctrinate us; it should send us into the world on fire, not aloof.

Now I know what was missing from my college experience all along: truth, reality and perspective. I also missed out on the sense of solidarity and community that many Christian colleges provide. Instead, I was taught the cold reality of “every man for himself.”

However, my first year of graduate study—the year in which I became a Christian—proved to be a very enjoyable and successful academic year, for all the obvious reasons. Something inside me just wishes I could have experienced a Christ-centered college education.

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