

The Bible College: Educational Artifact or Essential Alternative

(Why Students and Parents should give the Bible College a serious look.)

David R. Nicholas, M.S., Th.D.
President, Shasta Bible College & Graduate School
Redding, CA

Deciding which college or university to attend can be one of life's most important decisions for any young man or woman and their parents. In times past, the world of higher education emphasized the "cognitive domain" (intellectual development), objectivity and critical thinking. But, over the past half century, the focus has shifted toward outcomes based education with an emphasis on the "affective domain" (values, motivation, attitudes, stereotypes and feelings). Depending on the political, religious, scientific and educational philosophy of the institution one attends, students will be influenced and encouraged to think in a manner which coincides with institutional philosophy. Institutions espousing liberal, humanistic, evolutionary, progressive and politically correct ideologies are increasingly committed to perpetuating their views. Students who differ on Biblical, philosophical or moral grounds often pay a steep academic price. At such institutions, critical thinking, common sense and objectivity are frequently sacrificed on the altar of liberal, humanistic, evolutionary and even Marxist ideology. There is a missing dimension in secular higher education – the spiritual dimension—and it takes an unusually fortified Christian to stand against the ideological tide. For Christian parents, who have done their best to inculcate spiritual and moral values in their children, the outcome of an education at a college or university ideologically contrary to what they have taught can sometimes be heartbreaking. Thankfully, there are still some conservative Christian liberal arts institutions that integrate Biblical truth and precepts into all curriculum areas so that secular humanism, so prevalent in the social and behavioral sciences, is identified and exposed by sifting its principles through the grid of Scripture. This is essential because one of the first logistics of combat is to know one's foe. Students, therefore, must be taught the fallacies of the evolutionary hypothesis and the inadequacies of philosophical systems that denigrate the Bible and God. It's the Bible Colleges, however, that offer Christian students one of the best alternatives to plunging head-long into a secular academic environment. Concentrated Biblical study buttressed by classes in apologetics, evangelism, church history, Christian ethics and even Biblical languages equips students well to confidently survive a secular university environment. Even students who don't feel they are necessarily called to vocational Christian ministry benefit greatly from this type of Biblical foundation.

Although some view Bible Colleges as artifacts from the past, such institutions have a glorious heritage dating back to Moody Bible Institute established by Dwight L. Moody and Nyack College founded by A.B. Simpson in the 19th Century. They are also surprisingly relevant to the future the way things are going theologically and educationally in America.

As the Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy raged from the early 1900's through the 1940's, groups and associations broke away from the increasingly liberal mainline denominations and their educational institutions. Among these were associations that became the GARBC, the IFCA, the Grace Brethren, Independent Baptists (BBF) and the Bible Presbyterians. They formed new Bible Institutes, many of which later became Bible Colleges and Biblically oriented liberal arts colleges, committed to equipping

future Christian leaders to contend for the fundamentals of Biblical Christian faith and extend the good news of the Gospel across America and around the world. Grand Rapids Baptist Bible College, Faith Baptist Bible College in Iowa, Cedarville College in Ohio, Baptist Bible College in Pennsylvania, Piedmont Baptist College in North Carolina, Multnomah School of the Bible in Oregon, Western Baptist Bible College and Los Angeles Baptist College and Seminary, and The Bible Institute of Los Angeles in California; Philadelphia College of the Bible, Calvary Bible College in Kansas City and a host of others were born for this very purpose. During the 1940's and 50's, they equipped and energized students who went out across America and the world as evangelists, and planters of fundamental and conservative Baptist and other Bible-believing churches, uncompromisingly committed to the Inspiration of Scripture, the Deity of Christ, the blood atonement of Christ, salvation by grace through faith and other cardinal doctrines of historic Biblical Christianity. As a result, the flood of liberalism that overwhelmed institutions like Princeton, University was effectively challenged, the church revitalized and a great harvest of souls was reaped to the glory of God. In view of the current theological and educational trends in America today, even in some evangelical circles, I believe Bible Colleges may once again be used of God to preserve doctrinal purity and energize future Christian leaders who will be focused on impacting the world for Christ.

Although many of these institutions have become regionally accredited universities, most remaining Bible Colleges are accredited by either the Association of Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) or the Transnational Association of Christian Colleges and Schools (TRACS), both of which are CHEA approved, and are more affordable than other educational alternatives. Plus they are characterized by the same passion for ministry as the early Bible Institutes. Here's why I'm convinced students and their parents should give Bible Colleges a serious look:

Most Bible Colleges, including Shasta Bible College & Graduate School (founded in 1971), make an intentional effort to include more than just Bible Survey classes in the lower division curriculum. For example, in addition to basic Old and New Testament Literature classes, additional core curriculum requirements include classes in Bibliology (Doctrine of Scripture), Spiritual Life (sometimes called Spiritual Formation) and hermeneutics (basic Bible Interpretation). These classes are foundational to a student's understanding of the Bible's origin, accuracy, authority, interpretation and application. Why are such classes so important to a student's educational future? Because they give students a basic understanding of why they believe what they believe about the Bible, its interpretation and application to life. When students understand the foundation upon which their faith is built, they are better equipped to incorporate Biblical precepts as they make those important life choices and cope with temptation and today's anti-Biblical cultural influences.

Let me illustrate this from personal experience. As a college freshman in 1959 I attended a well-known, highly regarded Christian Liberal Arts College which had graciously awarded me an academic scholarship and was situated in one of the most beautiful locations on the West Coast. Having grown up in a pastor's home and exposed to sound Biblical preaching and teaching during my teen-age years, I never anticipated that my belief in the literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of Scripture would be challenged in both in my Zoology and Old Testament Introduction classes. But I remember well the day when my highly esteemed zoology prof. with a Ph.D. from Rice University taught us his version of theistic evolution. He called it "threshold evolution" and explained that at appropriate times in the evolutionary process, God stepped out on the threshold of creation and made the needed creative adjustments to the evolutionary process. I raised my hand and asked how he explained Gen. 2:7 "And

the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life and man became a living soul.” His answer was that we shouldn’t take the Genesis account literally, since the evidence indicates that God initiated the process of evolution.

Another challenge to what I believed came in Old Testament Introduction class from the most popular prof. on campus who earned his Ph.D. at St. Andrews University in Scotland. His attitude toward creation was: “It’s not important how God created, but that God created.” Then, when addressing the authorship of the Pentateuch, he was ambivalent about attributing it to Moses and taught us the Graff-Wellhausen (JEPD theory) of multiple authors as a viable alternative. He was also unwilling to refute our textbook’s position that the Children of Israel didn’t actually cross the Red Sea but rather the Sea of Reeds or Lake Timsah, shallow marshy areas with about two feet of water. My question: “How could a wall of water be created or the pursuing Egyptians drown in two feet of water?”

Of course, both these ideas have been soundly refuted by conservative scholars, but my point is that impressionable freshman from Bible-believing Christian homes and churches can have their faith challenged even at the most “prestigious” Christian colleges and universities. That’s why it’s mandatory to carefully examine and be satisfied with the doctrinal statement of any Christian college or university. And, even more importantly, verify that faculty members are required to annually sign the institution’s doctrinal statement without mental reservation. My experience motivated me to explore what conservative scholars with equivalent credentials had to say before I bought what I was being taught.

Christian students who choose secular colleges and universities face a far greater challenge. Absent any Biblical, spiritual input, many students become prime targets for atheistic, liberal/progressive agenda-driven professors who take delight in helping unsuspecting Christian students “read between the lines of the good book Jesus.” Some debunk the Bible as just another moralistic book written by human authors containing anachronistic, archaic ideas about everything from creation to its influence on the U.S. Constitution. Biblical moral absolutes like the Ten Commandments, the condemnation of homosexuality, lesbianism, and same-sex marriage and the right of God’s chosen people, the Jews, to the land of Israel as revealed in Gen. 12:1-4 and 15:17-19 are viewed as “out of touch.” So the question college-age young people and their parents must ask is this: “Am I, or is my son or daughter, sufficiently fortified, Biblically and spiritually, to challenge, deflect or withstand an anti-Christian, Bible denigrating faculty and student culture found so often on secular campuses?”

If not, SBC&GS offers students the needed Biblical theological foundation to survive on a secular campus. A year or two on the campus of Shasta Bible College & Graduate School prior to enrolling in a secular college could be the difference between spiritual survival and spiritual disaster. Just e-mail <registrar@shasta.edu> and request an application.