

In reading my December 19 *Economist* recently, I was reminded once again of the perennial relevance of a Christian liberal arts education. That is good news at the beginning of a semester—indeed, at the beginning of a new decade. The lead essay, “Onwards and upwards: Why is the modern view of progress so impoverished?” calls attention to the failure of not only language and nationhood, but also commerce and science to live up to their expectations as the agents of perpetual human progress. The article goes on to suggest to readers that there can be no progress without “governance” and “moral sensibility.” Only where there is moral purpose can there be hope.

The article asserts only what Christian liberal arts educators have known all along. Science, business, nationalism—indeed any human enterprise is limited at best, and, at worst, dangerous when studied or practiced in a vacuum—and especially when separated from a moral and spiritual vision.

All disciplines, questions and explorations benefit from being connected to the questions and explorations of related disciplines. We are presently seeing this especially in the natural sciences. Real world issues do not fit into the disciplinary categories of a college catalogue. You can see this lived out in Houghton’s first year science honors program where students are given the task of building a vehicle powered by some alternative fuel. They have to work together in teams to figure out the relevant questions, the effective ways of answering their questions, and the way the information applies to the real work task of building a vehicle that actually moves!

Even more important than the interdisciplinary aspect of a Houghton education is the moral and spiritual foundation that supports everything else. At Houghton, we are committed to the affirmation that a person’s faith should be as rich and mature as knowledge of a discipline. For example, how can a person teach effectively without a knowledge of what makes each student valuable? How can one deal with the challenging questions of origins or bio-ethics without a well-developed knowledge and theology of scripture?

A Houghton education—as a Christian liberal arts education—protects one against the fallacies and false hopes of quick and easy solutions to both major world issues and the challenges of our personal lives. It is also the basis for the only true hope we have in this world: that God, the Creator, is actively at work in this world—restoring His image in us and inviting us to be active participants in his redemptive work in all of Creation. It is that hope that we bring to this new semester and new decade!

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