

Can the LIBRARY  
Stunt Intellectual  
Growth?





by **DR. ABRAHAM J. MALHERBE**  
Associate Professor of Bible

*We learn to read, in various languages, in various sciences; we learn the alphabet and letters of all manner of books. But the place where we go to get knowledge, even theoretic knowledge, is the books themselves! It depends on what we read, after all manner of Professors have done their best for us. The true university of these days is a collection of books.*

So spoke Thomas Carlyle a century and a quarter ago. The universities were beginning to take on the shape we would know in our own century. As they moved into the exciting world of change and challenge their very existence was modified — and it was modified by the existence of books.

The true university was no longer made up of isolated classrooms in which an Abelard or an Aquinas touched only those individuals to whom they could lecture. Books had become plentiful and were now the primary means of communicating serious thoughts. The university that strives to fulfill its purpose has always been concerned with being a genuine marketplace of ideas. In Carlyle's day the ideas from the past and present were making their way into the lecture room through books, and they were demanding insistently that they be taken seriously. The lecture room had become part of the world, and it has never been the same since.

In Carlyle's day the modern world was only beginning to come to consciousness. He complained of what he called "the disorganized condition of society." The new world of books that impressed him so much was a natural and necessary part of that change. Today

Western society is very self-consciously concerned with the change that characterizes it, and it is no longer complaining about it. What once appeared to be permanent landmarks have vanished forever. There is a conviction abroad that change itself is the only constant. Dwight Allen of Stanford has expressed it in this way: "We are not shifting from one sort of tradition to another; we are in flux for keeps. We have to adjust institutions, attitudes, professions to the fact that change is here to stay."

In such times almost incredible amounts of information must be communicated and evaluated, and ideas must be exchanged if we are to create a new world in which we can live. The primary means through which this is done is still books. More than ever the university and the college are in the world, and to be true to their task they must be collections of good books, the vehicles of ideas.

We adjust so quickly to change that it has become trite to speak of the explosion in knowledge. But the university and the college cannot afford to become insensible to what that explosion means to them. They are professionally committed to study man and his world. As new disciplines are developed and old ones are refined it is they who must develop them and put them to use. It is their responsibility to be an active part of that community of scholars who will ultimately shape our world.

Today that community is one in which books are more important than they have ever been before. Books and journals do not only gather knowledge from the new fields of learning, but also this is as much an age of specialization in older fields as it is one in which new areas are being charted. To be concerned with learning means that a premium must be placed on having access to the sources of knowledge.

The college without a good library is impoverished, and its teaching function will show the signs of its malnutrition. It is impossible to educate young people adequately for tomorrow's world with yesterday's facts and last year's facilities. Classroom work ceases to be preparation for life in the world when there is no library that can contribute successfully to its enterprise. Under these circumstances the classroom can only too easily become a refuge from the complex life that most men have to live. The student is being stunted in his education when he cannot continue in the library the educational experience that started with the lecture.

With dismayingly consistency the fact is overlooked in some circles that the lecture itself is to a considerable extent dependent on the quality of the library. The day is forever gone — if it ever really existed — when a future teacher's graduate training would provide him with a body of comparatively static information that would not change substantially during his teaching career. Today he is more likely trained thoroughly in



the method of his discipline together with an adequate knowledge of his field which he is expected to develop personally as his area of study expands.

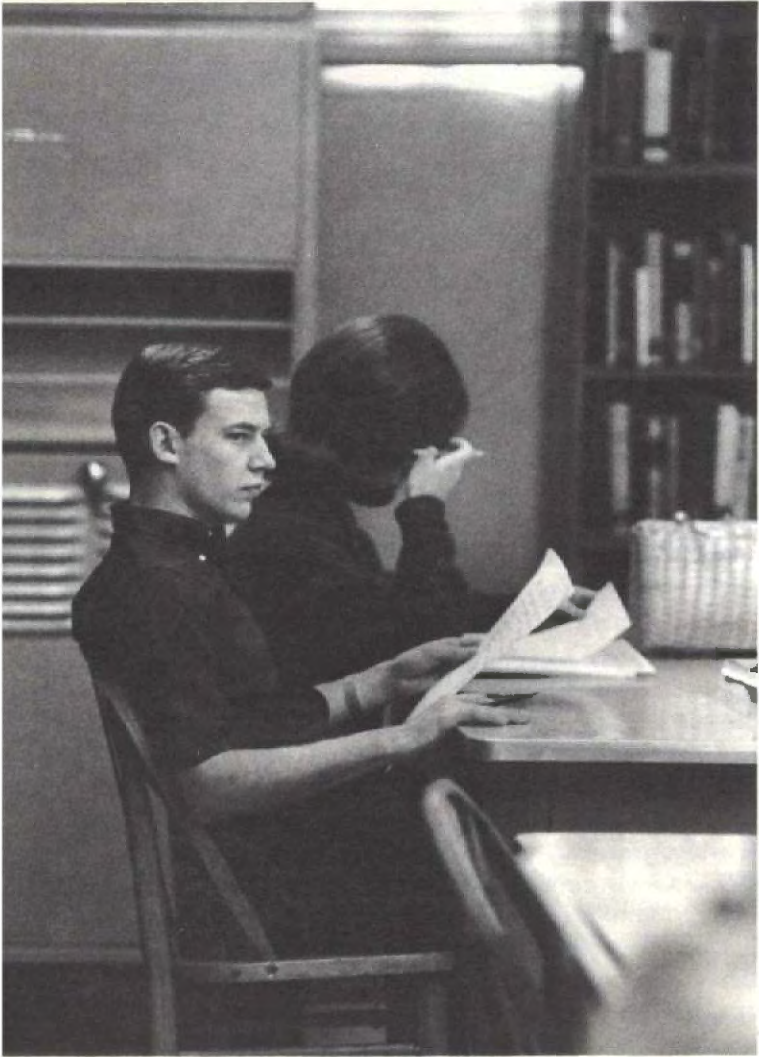
As a teacher he will soon realize that he must continue his own development if he is to perform his function well. The professor who feels a responsibility to his students is forever trying to catch up with the rapidly receding frontiers of knowledge. If he is in the least conscientious he will keep those frontiers in sight. If he is most fortunate he will work under circumstances that will allow him to help in pushing them back. But to be at all adequate as a teacher, he will have to have at hand the resources that will make it possible for him to continue to learn, and that means that he must have a good library available. If he does not, like his students, he too will become stunted in his growth.

The teacher's first responsibility is to his students. But he is also responsible to himself, to his endowed potential, to his training, and to the possible good that he can accomplish. The Christian teacher who takes his vocation seriously sees this as a matter of stewardship. His teaching cannot be taken lightly. He is profession-

ally concerned with God's truth, both in learning and teaching it. As Elton Trueblood points out, this understanding places special demands on the Christian teacher:

*Other things being equal, the Christian scholar is likely to be a better scholar because of the nature of his motivation. . . . Every good investigator wants to learn the truth, if he can, but the Christian has an added motive in that his intellectual task is a sacred task because it is God's truth that he is trying to learn. For the devout man, dishonesty in research or in reporting the results of research is worse than bad science; it is also blasphemy. The Christian faith, when it understands itself, is the sworn enemy of all intellectual dishonesty and shoddiness.*

The teacher who feels this way about his work will consider the regular reading of scholarly journals and books in his field an absolute necessity. It is in a good library that he and his colleagues and their students will deepen their commitment as Christian stewards of God's truth, in whatever disciplines they may be engaged. *(Continued)*





It is obvious that a good library must be the heart of any academic community worthy of the name. But there is another aspect to the matter that is not concerned with the purely academic enterprise. The rapid change in the world does not involve only new facts and the burgeoning literature that deals with them. What may ultimately be as significant, if not more so, is the change in attitudes and values. It is very disconcerting to anyone who knows today's college students that they seem to have so little sense of continuity with the past. They have only lived this side of World War II, and their eyes have always been on today's flux as it is swallowed up by tomorrow. A recent *Time* magazine essay, discussing the subject in terms of the change in attitude toward tradition, expresses the suspicion that "tradition — the sense of continuity that is part faith, part convention and part habit — is disappearing altogether from the American scene."

This disjunction with the past should not have the effect of only filling us with nostalgia. It is far more significant *Time* says because it is a "break with intellectual and moral tradition, a questioning not of a particular authority but of the concept of authority itself. A nation needs a sense of history as much as it needs a sense of the future; it needs tradition not as a soporific, but as a means of measuring itself." The problem involves more than the reexamination of the past that is the prerogative of the young. It is closer to being a denial that the past is worth reexamining at all.

Carlyle had already noticed this tendency in his own day. For him the past was to be cherished. As we are concerned to preserve the values and lessons of the past we can learn from his insight:

*In books lies the soul of the whole past time; the articulate audible voice of the past, when the body and material substance of it has altogether vanished like a dream. . . . All that mankind has done, thought, gained or been: it is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books. They are the chosen possessions of men.*

The college library has a function to perform here that cannot be performed as well anywhere else. It can help to mediate the past meaningfully if it occupies a place of honor in the life of today's student. If it is to have such a place it must be the heartbeat of the campus. It will have to be the influence that gives a richness to the experience of college that will continue to last.

What does this mean to Abilene Christian College? It means, if we are to become the cutting edge of Christian witness in our society, that we shall engage our day in vigorous dialogue, bearing Christian witness to the nature of man and God. It means that we shall be at least as creative in our grappling with knowledge and with the problems of the world as secular education is. If we maintain a proper perspective as we move into the future, we shall do so only if we listen to the voice of the



past and allow ourselves to be instructed by it. For our present interest it means that our teaching and learning will mature only with the aid of an outstanding library.

Great strides have been taken in the last decade, but the library of Abilene Christian College is still not adequate. A new day must dawn for it. We must all come to understand and appreciate the importance of the library, the center of the College, for the total purpose of our endeavor. It is surely the ideal of our College that its enterprise shall be so creative and dynamic that it shall attract and hold the most outstanding men and women on its faculty. Unfortunately, to many our efforts do not appear in that light, and they never will until the library is vested with honor. It is surely our ideal to provide an outstanding faculty to educate promising young men and women. But too many exceptionally favored young people pass us by because they do not believe that the life of the mind is taken seriously by Christian colleges — and they point to the struggling library for their proof.

The Design for Development program of the College provides planning that will upgrade the library. Of the \$25.7 million program, \$2.3 million is designated for library purposes — \$1.2 million for a building, \$1 million for library endowment, and \$100,000 in operational supplementation. The new library will be the academic heartbeat of the college. The case for a spacious new library building at Abilene Christian Col-





lege is formidable. Chambers Hall, originally built in 1929 as a dormitory and dining hall building, is grossly inadequate in terms of seating capacity, acoustics, and lighting, according to minimal standards set by the American Library Association. More than three times the present floor space is needed for the 250,000 and more volumes the College hopes to have within a few years. Demands of the Graduate School and the rapid increase of knowledge and technology combine to emphasize the seriousness of the need for the new library. With a special lecture hall, carefully planned record and listening rooms, and exhibition space, the new library will enhance many intellectual aspects of college life.

Abilene Christian College dare not be insensitive to the challenge that the changing world presents to her as she strives to realize her purpose for being. As she prepares men and women for life in the world she must at least understand the world of which she is part. That world offers both threat and challenge, and the true college will relate to both. The real threat to the Christian college is not primarily the threat to its existence, but that it will not be taken seriously at all. If this happens it will be because it has not fulfilled its real purpose. Abilene Christian College has affirmed that she is committed to excellence in education. A sign that she is fulfilling her commitment will be that, among other things, she will also be a collection of good books — a true college of these days.

**H**

