# 1943 THE FUTURE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE



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## THE FUTURE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

**MR. CLARK:** For two centuries, the liberal arts college has been a basic influence in the development of our nation. Today three factors have joined together to make the future of the liberal arts college problematical. First is the war with its unavoidable impact. Boys who normally attend college are now in the armed forces. Second, and more lasting, is the extreme difficulty experienced by the liberal arts colleges in the past ten years in securing financial aid. Third, and more fundamental still, the liberal arts colleges must justify their continued existence in terms of their present contribution to national life.

These institutions have a glorious past. It was in their classrooms that the type of American leadership was determined. Jefferson, who authored the Declaration of Independence, was such a firm believer in the liberal arts movement that he considered his two outstanding achievements to have been the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the founding of the University of Virginia. Benjamin Franklin, termed the first civilized American, was the father of the first public library, the first philosophical society and fathered the University of Pennsylvania, all in harmony with the liberal arts tradition.

Taft, Wilson, Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt were all trained in colleges and are examples of leaders from the liberal arts tradition.

The church has played a vital part in the origin and development of these colleges, such as Harvard, Yale, Brown, William and Mary, and thereby provided a moral and spiritual influence which civilized the American wilderness.

In our discussion today, it must be remembered that by the nature of its operation, no college or university is self-supporting. The tuition fees cannot cover operating expenses. Every institution, therefore, needs financial support if all the deserving young people who are qualified to benefit from higher education are to receive it. College endowments have always come from well-to-do persons whose interest in helping young people obtain higher education prompted them to extend aid. The present income tax and inheritance laws have reduced these gifts almost to the vanishing point. For example, in 1941, the educational endowments and bequests in the seven principal American cities were less than 58 million dollars. In 1942, the total was less than 12 million dollars. In other words, the money formerly given to liberal arts colleges is to a great extent being given to the Government in taxes. Under these conditions, it would seem that the privately-endowed college must either secure its help from the Federal Government or cease to operate.

Three principal issues present themselves:

[1] Can the Government justify the subsidy of liberal arts colleges with public funds when the basic idea of publicly-supported universities has usually been professional or trade schools?

[2] If the liberal arts colleges are subsidized by Government, what effect will such subsidy have on their operation?

[3] Do the liberal arts colleges demonstrate a reason for continued existence?

For the answers to these, and many other questions, we present our distinguished panel: Dr. Howard L. Bevis, President of Ohio State University, Dr. Carter Davidson, President of Knox College and Dr. Earl A. Roadman, President of Morningside College.

The first question I find here is addressed to Dr. Roadman from Dr. Thomas E. Tweito of Morningside College: What is a liberal arts college?

**DR. ROADMAN:** Defining a liberal arts college quickly is quite like the little boy who was asked to come and go swimming. He promised to come in ten minutes. He said he had a history of the world to write.

Now, a liberal arts education seeks to do primarily three things: First, increase the inquiring interest in information—information about the past history of the world, information about global geography, information about science, about people, celestial and terrestial affairs. This desire for information in all branches is a preparation for specialization. In the second place, the liberal arts education seeks to establish an eagerness for tomorrow as well as a knowledge of the past, an eagerness which is sufficient to believe that tomorrow will see the accomplishment of what ought to be done. In the third place, a liberal arts education, especially church-related colleges, are supposed to develop character that people will be good enough to want that the privileges which they have may be extended to all of the people of all the world.

Now, that is in terms of function, of course. The liberal arts college in popular mind is supposed to be a small college, usually a churchrelated college; but we know today that all universities have a department of liberal education and so the functional definition is more important than the type of definition.

MR. CLARK: Dr. Bevis, have you a comment to make on that answer?

**DR. BEVIS:** I would like to ask Dr. Roadman whether he would seriously disagree with my statement that I have on a note here as to the function of a liberal arts college—that it should aim to fit the student to be a citizen, a cultivated person, or a spiritual, or perhaps you might want to say, a religious person, and a self-supporting person. It seems to me that we can't leave that fourth category entirely out of consideration of a liberal arts college.

MR. CLARK: Dr. Davdison, would you like to add your comment? DR. DAVIDSON: I rather like the definition that was in The Saturday Evening Post for this week in an article by President Morley, of Haverford College, in which he said he thought that a liberal arts college had as its main function, first, the stimulating of curiosity, healthy intellectual curiosity; and, second, the stimulating of critical acumen, ability to evaluate the experiences in the things of life; and, third, the strengthening of moral character. I think those three would be a pretty good basis for building any college.

MR. CLARK: I think we understand now pretty well what a liberal arts college means. Dr. Davidson, the next question is addressed to you from Dr. William F. Peirce, of Edgewood, Maryland: "In the future, to what sources can the liberal arts college look for financial support?"

**DR. DAVIDSON:** Of course, that is one of the questions that has been making men like myself get gray-haired early; but the answer to it might be that if Americans wake up—that fits in with the title of this program, "Wake Up, Americal"—to the fact that there is a close connection between liberal arts education and the preservation of our own democracy, if we believe that strongly enough and see it clearly enough, then I think, in the main, financial support for the future will come from individual gifts from thousands and even millions of individuals, giving each a small amount, but making a great total, just as they give today to their church, to their community chest and to the war bond drive.

Now, I will agree with what our Chairman has said. If taxes and other restrictions are going to make it impossible for large fortunes to be built in America and given away to charitable enterprises, then perhaps the corporations must take their place. Our corporations are the greatest beneficiaries of our system of free competition in this country and, therefore, I feel it is incumbent upon the corporations to give the main financial support to those free institutions such as the colleges.

#### MR. CLARK: Excuse me, Dr. Roadman has a comment.

**DR. ROADMAN:** I would like to ask Dr. Davidson if he feels sure that the people of America understand that up to 15 per cent of their income is deductible from the taxable amount when devoted to colleges and charity.

**DR. DAVIDSON:** When I look over the list of gifts, I am sure most of the people in America do not understand the 15 per cent exemption. [Laughter]

#### MR. CLARK: Dr. Bevis!

**DR. BEVIS:** Dr. Davidson, you are completely leaving out of account the contribution to liberal arts colleges that is being made by the state government, I take it.

**DR. DAVIDSON:** Oh, no; lots of our liberal arts colleges are located on the campuses of our state universities; are a great part of the state universities. I wouldn't want to exclude them in any way from the picture.

MR. CLARK: The next question is addressed to you, Dr. Bevis,

from Dr. J. E. Kirkpatrick, Professor of Education, Morningside College: "What existing conditions have tended to make a need for the revitalization of the liberal arts college?"

**DR. BEVIS:** Mr. Clark, I object a little to the phrase "revitalization". It seems to assume that they are dead. I don't think they are dead; but passing that without further comment, I suspect that a good deal of the current difficulty is that of financing the smaller schools. This difficulty has been contributed to, I suppose, by the fact that easier and easier access has been had to larger institutions, perhaps to a certain overtendency to crystallize the liberal arts programs in some of the specifically liberal arts colleges; perhaps, too, to the felt need to which I referred a moment ago, the need that many students, perhaps most students, have to include something of the element of preparing themselves to make their livings as well as to live their lives. Those things, I think, perhaps have contributed to the need for revitalization, if there be such, that is now being felt.

MR. CLARK: Dr. Davidson, do you think there is a need for revitalization?

**DR. DAVIDSON:** I agree with President Bevis that we aren't dead yet. And, as a matter of fact, when I look back over the last twenty years, I ask myself if the liberal arts college isn't one of the most vital of institutions that has been in existence in this country since the last war. It is an institution which is giving birth to new members all the time, such as Bennington College and Sarah Lawrence College that have come into full growth, you might say, in the last twenty years; an institution which has been growing in total enrollment throughout the country during the last twenty years, an institution which has grown in its financial strength—it is within the last twenty years, for example, that Oberlin College in America—and an institution which is growing in ideas, such ideas as have been evidenced by the St. John's plan, the Bard College plan, the Antioch College plan and the many other plans of our liberal arts colleges throughout the country. I would say an institution that gives those evidences of vitality was very much alive.

MR. CLARK: Dr. Davidson, the next question is addressed to you, also, from Dr. M. E. Graber, Dean of Men at Morningside College: "If Government subsidizes college education, should the subsidy be given to the student or to the institution?"

**DR. DAVIDSON:** That, too, is a rather delicate question because I have seen too many fathers and mothers send money to their children in college, with the intent they should pay their college bills with it and then see it go to the soda counter. [Laughter] Although for the purposes of bookkeeping and of making sure that the money gets into education, some of the money may be made payable direct to the college business office. Nevertheless, I believe very strongly that any Government aid should be given to the student, presumably after the war, largely to war veterans, as an aid to the individual student, not to the colleges as a subsidy for the institution. The student must be free to pick his own college and the college must be left free to steer its own course.

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#### MR. CLARK: Dr. Roadman has a comment.

**DR. ROADMAN:** Well, I would like to add that I think in spite of Dr. Davidson's suggestion that some students misappropriate money sent to them, that colleges are still educating the students and not the parents and that the parents should send the money to the students. But there seems to have been so much worry in Felix Morley's article to which you have referred in *The Saturday Evening Post*, under the title, "*Can the Colleges Survive?*" Now, just in defense of that word "revitalize", I think it is a much nicer word than "survive". [Laughter] Do we know enough about post-war conditions to justify all this hysterical worry?

**DR. DAVIDSON:** When it comes to figuring out what the world is going to be like after the war, I admit that I am stuck. I feel pretty much like the old Southern uncle who said, "When I wurks, I wurks hard; when I sits, I sits loose. When I thinks, I falls asleep." [Laughter]

I agree there is no point in becoming hysterical about the post-war situation, but I always like to blueprint the future a little bit, just as I understand you, Dr. Roadman, have got a blueprint of the future development of Morningside College Campus. And I can foresee one or two things that are likely to be in the picture after the war. One is that there will be ten million Army and Navy boys and girls and even a larger number of industrial workers who will need to be retrained and reëducated for living in a peacetime economy. In the second place, I feel that there will be a huge national debt which will necessitate high taxes and result in financial problems over many years to come. Those two things, I think, are pretty well in the cards.

**MR. CLARK:** The next question is to you, Dr. Bevis, from Dr. Raymond Walters, President of Cincinnati University: "Do you believe the professional schools will continue to require liberal arts preparation for admission after the war?"

**DR. BEVIS:** I haven't any doubt of it. In the first place, it is clear to me as an ex-professional man—I used to be a lawyer when I worked [laughter]—that the training of professional men and women must be more closely related than ever to the surrounding areas of knowledge; and, in the second place, it is also becoming increasingly clear, I think, to all of us that the relation of the professional man to the public, to his general situation in the community, calls more and more for his having the kind of knowledge that will enable him not only to pursue the narrower aims of his profession but also those broader aims of citizenship and living in the community.

MR. CLARK: The next one is to you, Dr. Roadman, from Dr. Stringfellow Barr, President of St. John's College at Annapolis Maryland: "Can we hope to revitalize"—there is that word again—"the liberal arts without requiring four years of mathematics, four years of language and logic and four years of laboratory science?"

**DR. ROADMAN:** In reply, I do not wish to seem to beg the question, but I believe that the use of "four years" indicates what is wrong. We are learning in these war types of education that we can learn much, much faster than we have heretofore done. One of the boys from

Morningside College who went to the Iowa City pre-flight school came back saying that they were compelled to learn to identify planes with one-fiftieth of a second exposure. Now, he said he got forty right out of forty trials. If that is all true, we are going to have to move more rapidly in our college education and four years means nothing. Maybe we can do this in a year and a half, maybe it will take two and onehalf years.

We all agree with Dr. Stringfellow Barr, who is, we all know, performing and achieving a splendid experiment in education at St. John's College, that we must have mathematics, we must have laboratory science, we must have language and logic, but maybe we are going to have to make them more vital, if you please, and move faster.

#### MR. CLARK: Dr. Bevis has a comment.

**DR. BEVIS:** I wonder if I might stop a moment to brag. The system of teaching this recognition of airplanes was developed on our campus at Ohio State University and the teachers who went out to teach it were trained there. [Laughter]

I would like to ask this additional question though, if I might. Don't you think, too, that perhaps sitting a little looser, according to Dr. Davidson, with regard to the fixity of the content of a liberal arts program might be helpful? In other words, if we prescribe four years of this and four years of that, the number of things that we can prescribe four years of becomes necessarily limited. We know so many things and we continue to learn so many new things in this modern world that I should like to see a little more liberality on some campuses in the laying down of these programs.

**MR. CLARK:** The next question is from Deane W. Malott, Chancellor of the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, to Dr. Davidson: "Would not a liberal arts college be stronger if it attempted to teach far fewer courses to far stronger men? And, if so, can this objective be realized, and how?"

**DR. DAVIDSON:** Well, that fits in closely with the question that was just asked by President Barr. I think the two might very well get the same answer. I, in the first place, feel that four years make a good period for working. I should be sorry to see those men and women who grow so tremendously during four years, and mature during that period. have that period shortened too much. I do agree, however, that we can enrich rather than abridge that period greatly by putting a great deal more into it. However, to answer Chancellor Malott's question directly, it seems to me the vitality of the liberal arts does not rest upon any set requirements or subject matters. I think President Bevis has certainly hit the nail on the head there. It rests rather on the mental abilities which are stressed and achieved during the learning process, such mental abilities as the ability to concentrate attention, the ability to observe accurately, the ability to retain in the memory, the ability to associate ideas in many directions, the ability of logical reasoning, the ability of careful judgment, and, finally, most important of all, the ability of creative imagination. Now, President Barr's mathematics, language, logic and science are, I will agree, four ways in which these can be accomplished, if they are properly taught, of course. But they are not the only ways. History and literature and economics and music might do them just as well, if properly taught. I would rather give the individual colleges a little room for change, as President Bevis has suggested, to individualize their curricula.

Now, as to getting the stronger men, after the war we are going to have a great opportunity, for we will have many more than we will be able to accept. So let's secure these stronger men and women by careful process of selective admission and by refusal—this is a very important thing for the liberal arts colleges—of the colleges to yield to the pressure which is going to be so strong for expansion in mere numbers. Let's keep ourselves small as well as liberal.

#### MR. CLARK: Dr. Roadman has a comment.

**DR. ROADMAN:** I object to too much emphasis upon the far stronger men, because I do not believe that our testing methods are adequate to determine at the early age who may become stronger after they have had more educational opportunity. If we are going to be liberal, it is going to mean that we are going to give more opportunities to more people.

#### MR. CLARK: Dr. Bevis!

**DR. BEVIS:** I should like to put in a caveat, as the lawyers say, about "small." It seems to me that the very continued existence of democracy depends upon our having in our population, in our communities, a large enough number of people who have some conception of higher learning to do two things; one, to supply the people that the Government is having to have more and more every year to handle the growingly complex duties that Government assumes because we put them on its shoulders. And the other, and perhaps even more important, is to have a sufficiently large number of such people in the body politic to be able to appraise and give an intelligent judgment on the public questions that arise and the candidates who come before the people. I hesitate to see our university system or our college system as a whole embark too whole-heartedly on a project of small enrollment.

**MR. CLARK:** The next question is addressed to Dr. Howard L. Bevis from Dr. Everett Case, President of Colgate University: "What, in your opinion, is the most important single step for liberal arts colleges to take if they are to discharge their full responsibilities?"

**DR. BEVIS:** It would take me at least nine minutes to answer that. Semi-seriously, I would say perhaps the most important thing they could do right now is to stop talking as if they were dead. Nobody wants to belong to something that is dead. I doubt whether any single step can be labeled the most important for all colleges. In many cases the most important step for liberal arts colleges would be to liberalize their programs somewhat. In general, I should say the most immediate, if not the most important, step for each college, and for every university for that matter, is to see right now whether its curricula are the best fitted to equip its students to live the rest of their lives in their environment. This may require breaking some long-established habits. On the other hand, it may require sticking doggedly to some things in spite of current pressure for change.

MR. CLARK: The next question is from Professor Mendel Miller, Professor of Economics at Morningside College, to Dr. Roadman: "Can the liberal arts college, which was born of religious idealism, be perpetuated without a revitalization of its religious program? In other words, has the liberal arts college forsaken its religious emphasis or been forsaken by the church?"

**DR. ROADMAN:** I think, Mr. Clark, we will all agree that there has been a serious secularization of all life. The churches themselves have been feeling this and have been seeking to revitalize their own programs for post-war days. The answer specifically to the question— Can the liberal arts college do what it ought to do without a rebirth of religious program?—must be no, it cannot We must increase through the home, through the church, through the support of the colleges, through the individuals who are interested in the colleges, the religious devotion. It is heartening to know that everywhere that Madame Chiang Kai-Shek is presented, reference is made to the fact that she was educated in a Christian college in America. This influence permeating China may well be expected to more largely influence America.

MR. CLARK: The next question is from Senator D. W. Stewart, President of the Board of Trustees of Morningside, to Dr. Davidson: "Do you believe that the sponsorship of college education by the church will assist the church in fulfilling its purpose in creating a Christian citizenry?"

**DR. DAVIDSON:** Well, when one analyzes the basic assumption of Christianity, of democracy and of the liberal arts college, one discovers that the three are really merely different aspects of one and the same thing, in other words, faith in the sacredness and importance of the individual human soul or personality. Therefore, when the church sponsors the college, it is merely expediting its own program. Now, the old school curriculum used to consist of the three R's—readin', 'ritin' and 'rithmetic. The new liberal arts curriculum might be thought of as consisting of new three R's—reason, resourcefulness and responsibility. Those are the needs of democracy. A reasonable, a resourceful and a responsible citizenry, those also are the hopes of the church in America.

MR. CLARK: Here is another question from Senator Stewart, and a good one, to Dr. Bevis: "If the Government should subsidize liberal arts colleges, what would prevent discrimination between Protestant, Catholic or Jewish institutions?"

**DR. BEVIS:** Nothing prevents the Government from doing anything except forces which have political power. That is one of the main reasons why I should hesitate to see us embark upon a program in which our education is supported by funds from the Federal Government. Personally, I hope they won't go very far into that program.

MR. CLARK: The next one to Dr. Roadman from W. J. Scarborough, Dean of Morningside College: "What lesson can be learned from what has happened to the German colleges?" **DR. ROADMAN:** In the first place, Germany had nothing comparable with our liberal arts colleges, and probably that is one reason for her great international deflection. In the second place, her colleges had compelled all students to formulate their lives after the pattern of loyalty to the Nazi state, rather than to the pattern of free thought and free discussion.

MR. CLARK: The next question is from Professor James Reistrup, of the Music Department of Morningside, to Dr. Roadman: "What are the current financial problems of the liberal arts colleges engaged in training members of the armed forces?"

**DR. ROADMAN:** The current problems are twofold; first, the plan of the Government was to operate their military programs on the campuses without cost to the colleges, but without giving them anything more than the cost. In the second place, the difficulty has been that the Government has been at least 120 days behind expenditures. The colleges have been compelled to finance the messing, housing and instruction of the military men for a period of four months before they are reimbursed.

**MR. CLARK:** The next question is from Professor Paul MacCollin, Director of the Conservatory of Music of Morningside, to Dr. Davidson: "If the hope of democracy lies in articulate as well as an educated electorate, should not the liberal arts college put more emphasis upon the duties of citizenship as an obligation to society in return for the privilege of going to college?"

**DR. DAVIDSON:** I agree we should. As I previously mentioned, a reasoning, resourceful and responsible citizen should be the outcome of college education. At my institution, we have had an interesting experience recently in trying to introduce all of our students to our middle western American life and problems, also of serving our community as the central town meeting or forum by bringing in outside speakers and local speakers to discuss current issues and trying to guide thoughtful action of the community, as well as of our own students as citizens. I would like to have all of you go out and make a check of your own community, particularly of what you would consider the intelligent citizenry of your community, and I would be willing to guarantee that you will find the percentage of liberal arts college graduates among that group will be remarkably high.

**MR. CLARK:** The next question is to Dr. Bevis from Guy E. Snavely, head of the Association of American Colleges: "Would not the incorporation into history and government courses of America's responsibilities in the future world order help to revitalize a curriculum of the liberal arts college?"

**DR. BEVIS:** Why, yes; anything that brings the liberal arts college to grips with the times in which its students live will help.

MR. CLARK: The next one is from Dr. Hamilton Holt, President of Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida, to Dr. Davidson: "Is the specialist to supersede the liberally educated man in the post-war era?"

DR. DAVIDSON: I certainly hope not, because although I am the

son of a surgeon who was a specialist and I deal constantly with specialists, it seems to me that former Chancellor Bruening of Germany put his finger on the main trouble with the German people and with the German civilization preceding Hitler, and that was that the nation had become a nation of highly trained specialists and that there was no liberally educated citizens in the country who knew enough about the problems of the other man to really understand what was going on. I agree with what has been said by several supporters of liberal education, that although it is possible to take a liberally educated man and give him an intensified course to make a specialist, or an operator of a highly technical instrument, such as a tank or artillery or something of that sort in a short time, it is practically impossible to take a highly trained technical specialist and overnight make him into a liberally educated citizen.

MR. CLARK: Dr. Roadman, the next one is to you from W. J. Scarborough, Dean of Morningside: "Sources of professional leadership have been greatly restricted during the war period. How may superior men and women be directed into education today?"

**DR. ROADMAN:** It has already been mentioned in this broadcast that we must improve our methods of testing as a means of admission. I think what we mean there is that the testing methods must be broadened. We must include not only a testing of the intelligence quotient but also the social quotient, the manual quotient. I suppose we all have in mind here that a recent review of Lieutenant General Mark Clark's life at West Point revealed that he was not among the highest fifty per cent of the students there, but he certainly is proving himself to be among the highest in generalship on the field. Now, if we can increase our testing to include a broader base, we will improve the quality of those who are to be educated. We must bring them in regardless of their ability to pay, perhaps with Government assistance or local assistance. We must increase the observance of both the social and mental capacity of the students while they are in college.

MR. CLARK: The next question is to Dr. Davidson from Professor J. A. Coss, Professor of Chemistry, Morningside: "What would become of the liberal arts colleges if the Government should enter the educational field on its own account by establishing military schools throughout the country?"

**DR. DAVIDSON:** Of course, the Government has been in the educational business at West Point and Annapolis for a good long time. Their example has been healthy for the rest of us rather than of any great danger to us. But to answer the question as I believe it is intended, after the war I should expect our Federal Government to try to reduce expenses rather than trying to increase them. However, I can see that maybe the lust for spending may be hard to throw off and if the Government wants to spend a lot of money, that would be a good way to do it by setting up a whole system of military schools throughout the country. But I don't believe that that will come about. More likely would be the continuing of some form of military training, such as we have in the R.O.T.C. institutions throughout the country, spread over most of our institutions of higher education. You might ask the same question here

in another way: What would become of American industry if the Federal Government should decide to run all the factories? Well, it would be pretty bad for us. It would be pretty bad for the colleges if the Government decided to freeze us out, but I don't believe they will.

**MR. CLARK:** Dr. Roadman, we have just a couple of minutes left here. Would you, as our gracious host today, like to summarize what we have spoken about today?

**DR. ROADMAN:** I should be very happy, Mr. Clark, to say just a word in reminding ourselves that we have probably had the finest definition of liberal education given by Dr. Davidson in his requirement for reason, resource and responsibility upon the part of individually educated citizens. There has been a constant emphasis throughout upon the close relationship between education and democracy. I believe that we all want to add the close relationship between Christianity, education and democracy. We sometimes lose sight of the fact that the one who may be denied education votes and his vote counts just as much as the Ph.D. graduate's. Therefore, we cannot have a voting citizenry that is intelligent or that is Christian in its global thinking unless we have an education that is adequate.

**MR. CLARK:** Gentlemen, I am sorry, we are at the end of our time here. I want to thank you Dr. Bevis, you, Dr. Davidson, and you, our genial host, Dr. Roadman, on behalf of the American Economic Foundation and the Blue Network for your splendid contribution to this important subject today.



## NEXT WEEK

### DOES NATIONAL EMERGENCY JUSTIFY A FOURTH TERM?

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