

THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH-RELATED COLLEGE*

Church-related colleges will determine their own future position in American higher education by the resoluteness with which they reaffirm their religious dedication and re-establish their collegiate character. This statement may appear to be a truism. Yet, during recent decades it is a proposition which has animated the policies and the practices of fewer and fewer institutions. Through deliberate action some colleges broke their religious links. Others permitted secular forces gradually to wear them away.

Moreover, while giving up their religious birthright, many also surrendered their educational heritage. They ceased to be true colleges of liberal arts. They undertook functions of graduate, professional, vocational, and even trade schools. These new works weakened, if they did not nullify, the colleges' traditional purpose of acquainting young people with the cultural traditions of their society and cultivating the intellectual skills of the tutored mind.

Since the nation will soon need every available classroom space, church-related colleges will unquestionably continue to exist in some form. Unless they reaffirm their religious and collegiate purposes, however, sheer economic competition will drive some to tax support. Others will decline to third- or fourth-rate privately-supported institutions. All but those who view these institutions with a deceiving sentimentalism and nostalgia must conclude that in the absence of a rededication to undergraduate liberal education within the Christian tradition, the Protestant college as such is as near extinction as the whooping crane.

*Address delivered by Earl J. McGrath, Executive Officer, Institute of Higher Education, at the annual meeting of the Council of Protestant Colleges and Universities at Denver, Colorado, January 10, 1961.

These colleges do, to be sure continue to serve hundreds of thousands of American youth. The Directory of the United States Office of Education for 1959-60 shows that during the preceding year 289 Protestant colleges enrolled 224,214 students, and 171 Catholic colleges enrolled 139,894. Thirteen Protestant and 23 Catholic universities add 62,264 and 127,431 enrolments respectively. The grand total of 553,813 constitutes no inconsiderable proportion of the nation's college and university students. Moreover, many of these institutions today maintain superior educational standards, attract students of top intellectual ability, and send out from their classrooms each year hosts of graduates who become leaders not only in their churches, but also in their vocations and their communities. In their 1952 report entitled Origins of American Scientists, Knapp and Goodrich provided an example of the social contribution of the liberal arts colleges. Among other things, they concluded:

We found the most productive class of institutions to be small liberal arts colleges with a strong commitment to general education, whereas universities, even after the most charitable adjustments had been made, were seen to be less productive.

Studies of leadership in other fields would doubtless show that in terms of their enrolments the colleges have as a group produced a disproportionately large number of eminent persons. In the aggregate, however, the relative position of these institutions in the entire enterprise of higher education has been falling.

The responsibility for the declining position of the church-related college can by no means be placed solely on themselves. The secularization of American life generally, the demoralizing effect of the depression years

¹R. H. Knapp and H. B. Goodrich, Origins of American Scientists, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1952, p. 291.

on tuition-charging institutions, the rise of industry and commerce with the accompanying demand for technical rather than general education, the steady expansion of state-supported institutions, the spectacular spread of public junior colleges, the growing hegemony of graduate and professional schools, in the commonwealth of learning, the American compulsion to be associated with anything big, and other economic, social, and psychological factors have all played their part in the eclipse of the denominational college. Against these forces, the colleges have found it increasingly difficult to contend. Hence, in spite of their best efforts to preserve their own integrity, forces over which they had little or no control have changed their essential character.

But these institutions have not uniformly, nor to the fullest extent made their best efforts, to maintain their distinctiveness. Many have allowed considerations of expediency to attenuate if not dissolve their church-relatedness. Years ago some gave up their ecclesiastical controls in order to come under the terms of the Carnegie retirement system. Under the harsh impact of the great depression, in the hope of increasing enrolments and consequently raising more revenue, they weakened their religious traditions further in order to attract students of widely varying, or of no, religious convictions. Some, under the influence of a positivistic philosophy and the application of scientific method to the whole range of the human experience, permitted relativism and an easy adaptability to events to determine institutional objectives, faculty qualifications, and student behavior.

Recently, The Reverend Eugene C. Blake observed that:

Our culture becomes increasingly secular, our civilization becomes increasingly decadent, and our world leadership becomes increasingly confused precisely because their Christian foundations are undermined and eroded. And our divided churches, all more and more sectarian in fact, are all therefore less and less Christian in influence.

What Dr. Blake says of the churches holds a fortiori for their institutions of higher education. Many church-related colleges have allowed their vision of their special purposes to become obscured by extraneous considerations. Like some of their nondenominational sister-institutions, they have allowed the control of their development to be usurped by educational and other agencies with different ends. Until these colleges clearly re-establish their peculiar mission they will have no unique service to perform. In the intensifying competition, without a unique service, they will not be able to survive as church-related liberal arts colleges.

But fortunately, institutions, like individuals, are not wholly subject to the external forces that play upon them. Those interested in preserving the church-related colleges generally accept the Christian view of the freedom of the individual within limits to determine his own destiny. By their own vision of what they can be, and by their firm resolve to shape their own fate, these institutions can now gain a large measure of independence of the forces which have adversely been affecting them.

Any institution which now wishes to escape the bondage of materialism, secularism, or philosophical eclecticism will now be able to do so. No one need any longer cite statistics to prove that soon there will be more than enough students to go around. Hence, institutions will be free economically to establish their own unique purposes and to select their students accordingly--if they wish--in terms of religious objectives. And under our political practices, the states have recognized the rights of individuals or groups to found educational institutions with a wide variety of purposes, including those expressly dedicated to the advancement of a particular religious denomination. Hence, the economic and legal basis for the reaffirmation of the purposes of Christian higher education now exist.

Moreover, the psychological time is ripe. Many parents, and their children as well, today seek a higher education founded upon a Christian interpretation of life. They earnestly desire the security and the emotional calm provided by the acceptance of a relatively stable system of beliefs. They search for moral values based on something more inclusive than a narrow positivistic conception of the world and of life, or the moral relativism dictated by an instrumentalist philosophy of emergent truth.

Though impressed with the practical benefits of research, and even though dedicated to the support of the scientific enterprise, many find science devoid of any answers concerning the ultimate meaning of existence and destitute of even a factual basis for the value-decisions which all must daily make. On the contrary, they embrace the religious interpretation of life of their fathers as a meaningful and intellectually acceptable conception of human existence in this bafflingly complex universe. Colleges grounded in Christian theology will find no difficulty in attracting students. If it ever existed, the time has passed when they have to sell their educational souls for a mess of materialistic pottage.

A reaffirmation of an institution's religious affiliation and the consequent shaping of its entire life in accordance with its declared religious purpose will give new meaning and clearer features to its program. Such actions may in fact be followed by material advantages. Some prospective religiously motivated benefactors, whose philanthropies may now be restrained by their inability to see much difference between life on a campus supported from the public purse and another sustained by private gifts, may feel assured that their money would be used for the ends they cherish. Clearly, church bodies could make a stronger appeal among their members for the financial support of the colleges serving the sons and daughters of communicants.

The moment in history has arrived when the church-related college must reaffirm its original commitment to Christian education within the framework of the liberal arts tradition if it wishes to survive. Time will not wait much longer for this decisive action. Professor Brauer has described the situation well when he said that the point had not yet

been reached where the Christian college no longer can play a distinctive and creative role in American higher education. It is dangerously close to the point of no return but has not yet reached it. The contemporary situation, like most historical situations, provides opportunities to move in either direction. The next quarter century might well determine whether the Christian college can or should continue to exist in American higher education.²

The re-establishment and the clear reaffirmation of religiously related objectives will be complicated by theoretical issues and practical problems. The bearing of theological doctrines on educational philosophy is involved. Complex relationships between revealed and derived knowledge interpose themselves. Questions immediately arise concerning the freedom of the teacher to teach as his conscience directs and the student to learn as his intelligence and personal preference dictate. The position in the faculty of those whose religious ideas and loyalties, or lack of them, may be at variance with a patron church body must be considered. Matters related to student life, such as chapel attendance and Bible study, will also require thoughtful consideration.

Though these problems cannot be minimized, it seems to me that they have been greatly magnified by institutional attempts to be all things to all men. Hence, the whole college experience has come to lack a central unifying philosophy. The Christian college now has an opportunity to show how order can be restored to the present chaos in higher education by building its program on an explicit philosophy. Professor Brauer makes this

²Jerald C. Brauer, "The Christian College and American Education," The Christian Scholar, XLI (Autumn 1958), p. 234.

point forcefully in his penetrating article, "The Christian College and American Higher Education," when he says:

It seems to me that the Christian college has a positive contribution to make at this point. It seeks to provide a unifying point of view for its educational program through the Christian faith. This can be attempted in a variety of ways depending upon the interpretation of Christian faith; however, all these interpretations will build on certain common insights of the faith.

The Christian college should stand unashamedly for the belief that life involves commitment and that such commitment is to a particular point of view that seeks to make life meaningful and significant. At this point the Christian college is in the midstream of current educational discussions concerning the rule of presuppositions in so-called objective thought. To be sure this will not in itself provide a hierarchy of disciplines each inter-related through a consistent unifying principle. Nor will it necessarily commend itself to all educators as the answer to the terribly complex problem of the fragmentation of knowledge.

What it will do is provide the Christian college with a point of departure to seek out the inter-relationship between disciplines in this complicated modern world.³

Such a declaration of the principles upon which the program of a given college rests will not only provide the mechanism for organizing the entire life of the academic community. It will also assist prospective students and faculty members in deciding whether they wish to participate in such an educational program. Once the philosophy of the institution and its practices have been clearly set forth, students are free to choose or not to choose, that particular type of higher education. Prospective teachers can likewise decide whether or not they can accommodate their philosophic convictions to the body of religious principles which governs a particular academic community.

The acceptance of such a body of principles, does, to be sure, involve the danger of ~~confining~~ both teacher and student within a closed intellectual system. Institutions of higher education worthy of the name, including those

³ Ibid., p. 238.

with clearly stated denominational purposes, will not only permit but encourage the examination of ideas and doctrines inconsistent with their own. They will recognize the principle that the unexamined life is the unintelligent life. They will agree with Carlyle that, "Religion is constantly weaving for itself new vestures." Professor Alexander Miller in his thoughtful work, Faith and Learning, argues persuasively for the exposure of presuppositions when he says:

There is no theologian of any consequence, to my knowledge, who does not regard the liberal period of the university's development as a period bringing immense gains. The older premature synthesis had to be broken; and, if Macmurray is right about the contribution of Luther to the process of emancipation and the liberation of the sciences to do their work in their own way, then we may take some Christian and Protestant satisfaction in that. We have no desire, even if it were possible, to put any kind of hobbles, Christian or other, on the process of free inquiry ... but we have to accept it that the notion of an education without presuppositions is not only a hypocritical procedure, but, in so far as it can at all be accomplished, a self-defeating one. Newman was right to say that "Supposing theology be not taught, its province will not simply be neglected, but will be actually usurped by other sciences."⁴

A renewed emphasis on church-relationship will, however, not be enough to guarantee a lasting position for these institutions in American higher education. The spiritual and philosophic unity Professor Brauer contemplates as a consequence of religious reaffirmation needs to be accompanied by another form of unity resulting from a rededication to the purposes of liberal education. Some church-related colleges have wandered even further away from their educational than from their spiritual homes. The present college curriculum lacks unity and coherence. Considered as a whole it is a fortuitous assemblage of largely unrelated parts loosely held together by subject matter bartering among the constituent departments.

⁴ Alexander Miller, Faith and Learning, New York: Association Press, 1960, pp. 89-90.

The present rank growth of courses is an unnecessary evil. It is divisive in the education of the individual student. The proper education of American youth demands the meaningful reassembly of the present fragmented elements which now make up the liberal arts curriculum. For the small independent college, financial solvency also demands an appropriate reorganization.

One who asks colleges to rededicate themselves to the purposes of liberal education ought to define what he means by this ancient term. I for one would be quite willing to accept the definitions on page 17 of What is a Christian College? published under the auspices of the Commission on Higher Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. But I have attempted to set forth in some detail elsewhere⁵ the proper aims of liberal education. In brief, I consider them to be:

(1) the introduction of the student to the basic facts, principles, theories, and recent developments in the three major branches of study customarily included among the liberal arts and sciences, namely, the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities, including the fine arts;

(2) the cultivation of the processes of reasoning and communication which characterize the tutored mind;

(3) the nurturing of a reasoned philosophy of life including the stable traits of personality and character that normally accompany a relatively permanent set of values.

All three of these objectives could be more fully achieved than they are at present by needed reforms in the program of the liberal arts college.

⁵ Earl J. McGrath, Liberal Education in the Professions, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1960.

Much of the instruction now offered could be dropped with a real gain in effectiveness in providing a sound liberal education. Many colleges now offer instruction which belongs in a vocational or professional school. Several years ago one church-related college studied by the Institute of Higher Education offered specialized programs in more than twenty fields other than the usual liberal arts subjects such as history, physics, and sociology. Though this is an extreme case all the liberal arts colleges studied had established a number of vocationally oriented curricula. Even if these services are educationally justifiable in a liberal arts college, the resulting small enrolments in the upper years are obviously an unsupportable economic liability.

An equally questionable activity of many liberal arts colleges, which imposes prohibitive financial burdens, is their offering of an extensive range of highly specialized advanced instruction in the usual liberal arts subjects. Some of these institutions grant masters' degrees at least in a few departments. But a deceptive situation occurs where an undergraduate college officially makes no pretense of offering graduate instruction, but permits departments to multiply their advanced, specialized courses far beyond the needs of undergraduate students. Today this is almost universally the case. The availability of such instruction splinters what purports to be a liberal education, and needlessly raises the cost of operation.

The superfluity of such instruction is suggested by a study now nearing completion. In this inquiry the departmental offerings of a small but representative group of liberal arts colleges were analyzed. This analysis revealed a wide variation in the number of credit hours of instruction provided by the same departments in different institutions. Take English, for example. The English department in one college with

1,117 students offers only 45 hours of instruction while another with only 916 students apparently believes that 113 hours of English are necessary. These figures include only courses in which there were registrants. They omit other unattended courses listed in the catalogue for at least two years. Similar ranges in variety of instruction were found in the other disciplines, and there was no relationship between total enrolments and total offerings. Yet each college professes to give a complete undergraduate education. The heads of the departments with relatively few courses were asked whether they considered their present program satisfactory. They stated almost without exception that they considered their modest departmental programs adequate to the purposes of a sound liberal education. Moreover, they testified that their students had no difficulty in gaining admission to, and succeeding in recognized graduate schools. Obviously if some of these departments can provide a satisfactory undergraduate education with forty or fifty hours of instruction, others often with fewer students which offer over 100 hours, must be operating at a great financial disadvantage.

Quite aside from the question of the educational defensibility of permitting students to take highly specialized courses prior to the graduate years, the financial consequences of this practice must now be seriously considered by all those who wish to preserve the liberal arts colleges. In one of the colleges studied, in which the average student credit hours taught per faculty member was 556, and in another where it was 382, the cost per hour was \$9.39 and \$15.80, respectively. In the former, 21.4 per cent of the classes had fewer than 11 students, and in the latter 42.4 per cent, almost double the former. The enrolment was essentially the same in both institutions, and though the average salary was lower in the institution with the lower teaching expense, the corrected cost in terms of the salary

differentials still left the low-cost institution at \$10.70 as compared with \$15.80 in the higher.

The full implications of this complex study have not yet been determined. It is manifest, however, that institutions with almost identical enrolments offer greatly varying amounts of instruction, that in almost all there are many small classes, that the heads of the more compact departments do not generally believe their students to be handicapped by an inadequate curricular offering, that a significant proportion of present instruction is vocationally oriented, that much of it is also of an advanced specialized character more appropriate to a graduate school than a liberal arts college, and that even when the salaries are held constant among institutions the cost of teaching, and consequently the cost of operation, varies widely.

To alter a curriculum, a faculty, or a study body is slow business. Yet over a period of years with planning it can be done. The future of the independent liberal arts college, especially those with a church relationship, since many are institutions with small enrolments, will be determined to a considerable degree by the dispatch, the determination, and the intelligence with which it brings the size of its offerings, its faculty, and its student body into their proper proportions.

The significance of these balances emerged in a recent study among presidents of liberal arts colleges. Many reported increasing difficulty in recruiting new staff members. They agreed almost unanimously that the shortages will grow worse in the early future. One reason for their trouble in finding properly prepared teachers, perhaps the most important, is the difference between the salary scales in large universities and in the small colleges. The prospective additional income from gifts seems unlikely to close the existing gap. Hence, the smaller independent colleges will have

to use every device available to increase salaries and the other perquisites of colleges teaching if they are to survive and make their unique contribution to American higher education.

Several steps can be taken toward this goal. Present curricular offerings can be reviewed to determine whether they are proper and needed. Many colleges can increase their enrolments to some such figure as 1200 while reducing the range and variety of instruction provided. They can organize large elementary classes in which several hundred students meet at one time, perhaps before a television screen. As Ruml showed, some small classes, in fact individualized tutorial instruction, can be provided even when the average size is raised. Hence, by eliminating unnecessary and inappropriate instruction, the typical class size could be increased, salaries could be raised, and teaching loads reduced. Thus the profession of college teaching could be made more attractive. These actions would strengthen rather than weaken undergraduate liberal education. Its earlier unity, commonness of purpose, and concern with values might thus be restored. Moreover, in colleges with a church affiliation the unifying influence of the Christian faith would buttress these other forces working toward a revitalization and redirection of American higher education.

There is another measure, suggested by the Reverend Eugene C. Blake's proposals for the unification of American churches, by which the church-related colleges could improve their lot. This is not the place to discuss church unions. It is fitting to observe, however, that some of the church-related colleges might well consider either an outright joining of their corporate bodies and resources, or at the least a common use of their staffs and facilities. The consolidation of three Presbyterian institutions in North Carolina, Flora McDonald College, Peace College and

Presbyterian Junior College provides a striking example of what could be done elsewhere. For in some places several denominational colleges exist within commuting distance of one another, sometimes across the street, each of which has too few students, too little working capital, inadequate physical plant, and underpaid staffs. Because they sometimes have very small student bodies, often fewer than 500, a merger would involve no loss in the intimacy of life or in individualized treatment. Much would be gained in increased facilities, stronger staffs, and consequent enriched education. Moreover, though some doctrinal differences may exist in the supporting denominations, merging should be possible without violation of the fundamental religious convictions of their students or proselytizing of communicants. In fact, an objective examination of variations in doctrine and practice should result in a reasoned strengthening of faith and an enlightened acceptance of denominational differences, desirable outcomes of a Christian liberal education. Indeed without such a free inquiry into the bases of belief it is a question whether the student has had a liberal education at all.

The eventual joining of Protestant church bodies seems to me inevitable and desirable. In this movement their educational institutions might well be the vanguard. Even without corporate unification, however, they could make common use of many of their facilities such as libraries, laboratories, gymnasiums, and large classrooms. Where advanced specialized instruction is offered in small classes, as it almost universally is, students from two or more institutions could study under the same instructor in common classes. Where geographic separation prevents such an arrangement the teacher could commute. We would do well to remember in this connection that the automobile has now made unnecessary the duplication of

academic services essential in a frontier society made up of relatively self-contained communities separated by distances now covered in a few minutes.

These various efforts and others would do much to reduce both capital expenditures and the cost of operations in the cooperating colleges. They would also affirmatively influence donors, both individuals and corporations, who increasingly examine the efficiency of management of their prospective institutional beneficiaries. Moreover, though the philanthropies of some narrowly sectarian givers may be restrained by such joint efforts among denominational colleges, gifts from the wider circle of those of more general religious interest should be attracted to these unified institutions.

In this conflicted world in which two ideologies strive for the minds and the hearts of men in the third of the peoples as yet uncommitted to either, the church-related college is peculiarly equipped to render a service to our own nation and to the entire free world. It has the privilege and the freedom to prepare men and women to exemplify in their lives and to carry the basic concepts of the Christian faith and of democratic life to underprivileged peoples. The secular institutions, prevented as they are by law or by custom from expounding Christian doctrine, are not able to perform this function except indirectly.

The essence of what I wish to express in this connection is found in Mark 12:31 where Christ, when queried by the scribe, remarks, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." He places one's love of neighbor second only to the love of God, and as the Interpreter's Bible points out, the word "love," as used in the original Greek scripture, "does not mean personal liking, a sentimental affection, but active good will . . . It is good will, boundless and aggressive, extended to those who may have no

personal charm for us, and may be beyond the boundaries of family or tribe or nation." In the context of life today this admonition refers to all those in Africa and Asia, for example, who though they differ from us in many respects, are alike in their essential humanity. Moreover, in terms of communication and transportation they are in all reality our very neighbors.

These people to whom we have attempted to appeal through governmental programs with almost every material benefaction, such as military aid, agricultural and medical assistance, and advice on how to live more fully in a material sense, basically crave our understanding, our affection, and our neighborly regard as free and equal human beings.

If they are suspicious of our national motives as expressed through government programs as many are, perhaps it is because they fail to find in our actions the admonition which Christians accept in principle, namely, that they shall love their neighbors as themselves. Yet they find in one of our founding documents words reflecting this Christian recognition of the equality of all men and the pledge to be concerned about their freedom and their welfare regardless of station in life. For in the Declaration of Independence our forebears expressed the basic concern for our neighbor in the statement that we hold it to be self evident that all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To give substance and truth to their declaration beyond mere words, the founding fathers mutually pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

Nothing could do more to enhance the status of our nation and advance the unity and brotherhood of mankind than the embodiment

of these words of Christian belief and democratic convictions in our national policies and practices. Such policies and practices can be realized only among a people who are not only familiar with the religious derivation of our treasured civil institutions, but who are also imbued with the emotional force necessary to make these canons of freedom vital in our domestic life and our international relations.

The church-related college has an unusual opportunity to produce men and women acquainted with the religious basis of our democratic way of life and capable of interpreting it to the millions who search for guarantees of dignity and freedom in the several prevailing ideologies from among which they are now so insistently pressed to choose. These activities should involve no particular missionary evangelism or national chauvinism, both of which have become suspect in the minds of many whom we would like to welcome into the great community of free men and women. The foreign policy of all nations is, and perhaps in the short run must be, motivated by self-interest. Yet in terms of the long future, mutual understanding and world peace require an unselfish concern for the well-being of all mankind. Only through such a concern can we achieve the national security and personal self-fulfilment which all free peoples earnestly desire for themselves and for their children.

These are my views concerning the future of the church-related college. In conclusion I restate my main thesis. Church-related colleges will determine their own future status and influence in American higher education by the resoluteness with which they reaffirm their religious dedication and re-establish their collegiate character. Nothing you do could be more closely connected with our individual welfare and our national destiny. Without such actions, nothing you do will in my judgment prevent

the ultimate disappearance of the church-related college from the American scene. The task of preserving these colleges is worthy of the most dedicated and unremitting efforts of the Council of Protestant Colleges and Universities.