

# Employing Non-Adventist Professors: An Unwanted Necessity, Creation of a “Real” University, or “Slippery Slope”?

**S**hould Adventist colleges and universities employ non-Adventist full-time or part-time professors and contract teachers? If so, should they grant them tenure? Will this result in a compromise of mission and the secularization of our institutions?

For many years, conservative evangelicals have been warning that American higher education has gradually become secularized and antagonistic to Christianity. At one time, all Western colleges were church-based. Today, less than one in eight students in the United States attends a church-related college.<sup>1</sup> A large body of research over the past decade by reputable scholars who have been studying these trends has warned of the consequences when colleges separate from their churches or when public universities disparage Christian perspectives. Scholarly titles like *The Secularization of the Academy*; *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*; and *The Dying of the Light. The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities From Their Christian Colleges*<sup>2</sup> clearly illustrate the direction that such scholars believe Christian colleges have taken.

## What Is Secularization?

But first, a definition of secularization from several scholars. George Marsden, the most prolific historian of these trends, comes from a Dutch Reformed tradition but has taught at Calvin College and Duke University, and currently serves in an endowed history chair at Notre Dame University. He suggests that secularization is “the transformation from

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an era when organized Christianity and explicitly Christian ideals had a major role in the leading institutions of higher education to an era when they have almost none.” This change was partially caused by a shift from a “relatively narrowly defined Christianity to a broadly defined liberal Christianity that could be equated with civilization itself.”<sup>3</sup>

Richard Hughes, a professor at Pepperdine University who has focused on successful models of Christian colleges, contends that “secularization occurs when any dimension of human activity escapes the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. From this perspective, Christian colleges or universities that fail to subordinate learning to a Christian world view may fall victim to the process of secularization.”<sup>4</sup>

Julie Reuben, associate professor at Harvard University Graduate School of Education, suggests a stronger connection between educators’ belief in the scientific method and secularization than that recognized by Marsden. “University reformers tried to modernize religion to make it compatible with their conception of science. Religion disappeared from the university because these efforts failed, not because university professors neglected religion.” Thus, she ties secularization to the broader issue of the “secularization of intellectual life in general and of the relationship of science and religion.”<sup>5</sup>

Secularization is not necessarily all bad. Many trends that might be considered “secular” are positive, even for church-related colleges. Accreditation agencies have forced us to build better libraries; utilize technology; take better care of our facilities; improve student services; show that our mission statements are actually implemented, even in spiritual areas; im-

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the same time?”<sup>77</sup> is an indication of the degree to which higher education has been secularized.

**A** study of successful Christian colleges put the question succinctly: “How is it possible for Christian institutions of higher learning to develop into academic institutions of the first order and at the same time, to nurture in creative ways the faith commitments that called these institutions into existence in the first place? More than this, how is it possible for Christian colleges and universities to weave first-class programs from the very fabric of their faith commitments?”<sup>78</sup>

Another way of putting this question might be to turn to the words of Tertullian: How can we live in Jerusalem and Athens, that is, the world of faith and of learning, at the same time?

Is “Christian university” really an oxymoron? Indeed not. Such a university can be more intellectually rigorous and faithful at the same time because all perspectives are welcome at the table of learning; whereas, as we will note later, in many universities, Christian viewpoints are frozen out of the discussion. On the other hand, some Bible colleges have so focused on indoctrination to the neglect of original scholarship, a climate of exploration, and doctorally trained professors that they offer an inferior education.

### **Outside Pressures Toward Secularization**

Two organizations helped force Christian colleges to give up their roots. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching established a pension fund for teachers in 1906 with a requirement that “no denominational test is imposed in the choice of Trustees, officers or teachers, nor in the admission of students; nor are any denominational tenets or doctrines taught to students.” These requirements caused many church-based institutions to give up their denominational ties in order to qualify.<sup>9</sup>

The American Association of University Professors, organized in 1915 with John Dewey as its first president, held that church-sponsored institutions could never be called universities. Why not? “Universities . . . were constructed for the scientific investigation of

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prove relationships between various entities such as boards, administration, faculty, staff, students, and constituents; provide for financial accountability; and increase the professional level of our faculties.

However, the preponderance of evidence suggests that the broader trend, over time, has been for colleges to separate from their churches and as a result, either end up with no religious commitment to the goals of the founding church or have such a generic Christian commitment that aside from a few vague

references to the history or traditions of the founding church, one would never recognize the connection.

### **Is a Christian University an Oxymoron?**

Many members of today’s academia hold that “religious institutions’ cannot also be ‘institutions of higher learning.’ . . . [and] that any institution with a strong religious mission must inhibit higher learning.”<sup>76</sup> The fact that one hears the question asked, “Can a university be a university and Christian at

truth. To investigate truth; critically to verify fact; to reach conclusions by means of the best methods at command, untrammelled by external fear or favor, to communicate this truth to the student, to interpret to him its bearing on the questions he will have to face in life—this is precisely the aim and object of the university.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, church colleges were seen as “inferior exceptions to a universal rule” and could never be full-fledged institutions of higher learning.”<sup>11</sup>

### University Status and Hiring Practices

The implications of such attitudes on faculty hiring in a Christian college or university are enormous. Can a true university have members of only one denomination as teachers and yet attain the goals of a traditional university as defined by the broader academic culture? Do students need to be exposed to alternate ideas, not just by Adventist teachers who tell them about those viewpoints, but by the actual proponents of those views?<sup>12</sup>

### Hiring—Part of a Larger Trend

According to the scholars, faculty hiring is only one of various elements that can contribute to the growing separation between colleges and their founding denominations. They mention other elements, including:

- abolition of chapel requirements and church attendance,
- elimination of required religion courses, or replacing them with a “religious buffet,”
- changing content of the few remaining religion courses,
- impact of pietism and rationalism,
- pressure to replace declining enrollments when church members choose to attend more prestigious colleges, thus forcing recruitment of students who are not members of the sponsoring denomination,
- increasingly vague mission statements that are designed to attract non-church member admissions and government funds,
- a decline in the prohibition of alcohol, tobacco, dancing, movie attendance, and the

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- abandoning of required dress standards,
- tuition-driven budgets and financial exigency,
- reduction of church subsidies,
- impact of long-term presidents,
- governance structures that place non-church members on boards,
- the relegating of responsibility for religion to professional campus chaplains, thereby minimizing the faculty and administration’s role in spiritual development.<sup>13</sup>

**M**any of these changes have occurred with the cooperation of church authorities, while others happened so gradually that their full impact was not apparent until it was too late for the church to recover any sense of ownership. Most occurred as part of broader changes taking place in the surrounding culture. Although the resulting in-

stitution may be an outstanding research university that produces graduates with excellent academic training, it is unlikely that the students will leave the institution with an enhanced faith commitment to the founding church, since it played little, if any, role in their education or in the governance of the institution.

### Faculty Are Key to Preserving the Church Link

In 1934, Pastor Jay T. Stocking, a female Congregationalist pastor, made a statement at a seminar on the decline of her church’s commitment to higher education, which I will paraphrase here to refer to Adventist institutions: “The chief means on which a college must rely for the realization of its purpose are its teachers. It is Adventist teachers who make an Adventist college. They are not only the interpreters of facts; they are also the incarnation of interpretations. It is idle to expect teachers who are not Adventists to help provide an Adventist education.”<sup>14</sup>

Early in 1999, I organized a conference as co-convenor of Denominational Executives in

Church-Related Higher Education with leaders from several denominations including United Methodists, Presbyterians, Nazarenes, Catholics, Disciples of Christ, Mennonites, Jesuits, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, and the Council of Independent Colleges. We invited two of the foremost scholars on how churches and their colleges relate to each other: James Burtchaell, a priest with the Roman Catholic Holy Cross order and former provost at the University of Notre Dame, and George Marsden.

Both Burtchaell and Marsden emphasized that faculty hiring is the most crucial element in maintaining a close connection between colleges and their founding churches. As Marsden told us, once a college seeks only to find the best persons academically, the school’s profile will inevitably be the same as the national profile for the discipline. National standards will govern teacher selection to the exclusion of religious commitment as an academic qualification. Burtchaell

warned that once you lose a sufficient number of faculty from the sponsoring church, you face an uphill battle to turn around a college that has left its roots.

Both Burtchaell and Marsden stress that a transfer of allegiance takes place among professors—from allegiance to the church to loyalty to the guild of each discipline. Bratt and Wells describe this transition as going from “professorial” to “professional.”<sup>15</sup> Marsden emphasizes that guilds generally do not support Christian perspectives but instead emphasize naturalism, the scientific approach, research, professional independence, specialization, publications, and methodologi-

cal secularization as the basis for all scholarship. Professionalism becomes a key virtue. The Christian worldview is frowned upon, even by members of the sponsoring denomination who teach in the church’s universities. Marsden writes: “It is the puzzling phenomenon that, among so many academics who are professing Christians, all but a tiny minority keep quiet about the intellectual implications of their faith. Why are there in mainstream academia almost no identifiable Christian schools of thought to compare with various Marxist, feminist, gay, post-modern, African-American, conservative, or liberal schools of thought? If one compares,

for example, the number of Marxists in America with the number of Christians, the disparity in their visibility in mainstream academia is truly remarkable. . . . Even though many academics are religious, they would consider it outrageous to speak of the relationship of their faith to their scholarship . . . our dominant academic culture trains scholars to keep quiet about their faith as the price of full acceptance in that community.”<sup>17</sup>

### “Slippery Slope”

Do faculty hiring practices contribute to a “slippery slope” leading to secularization? Such a slope is often invisible because it re-

## A Case Study of Secularization

**B**urtchaell’s history of the Presbyterian-founded Davidson College in North Carolina offers a classic example of the secularization of a Christian college. In 1938, all tenured faculty were required to answer a series of questions based on the ordination vows of the Presbyterian Church. In 1945, the professors only had to be a “member of an evangelical church. No individual need be Presbyterian, but three-quarters of the professorate had to be, and all those in Bible and philosophy.”

In 1957, the earlier vows were dramatically simplified so that Presbyterians now functioned “like one among several denominations, rather than as the host.” In 1964, the board voted that incoming faculty would be asked new questions on whether they agreed with the revised purpose of the college, “what evangelical church they belonged to; and the Scriptures would now be ‘the revelation of God’s will, the final guide’ instead of ‘the Word of God, the only infallible guide.’” Protests were raised to these affirmations in the public press and among alumni. Some argued that “it was not necessary or desirable for every faculty member to believe in ‘the fundamental teachings of evangelical Christianity’. . . . Any ‘loyalty oath’ would betray ‘a fear and lack of confidence in one’s own religious convictions,’ and make it ‘more difficult if not completely impossible’ to recruit or train competent faculty persons.”

After these objections, the board acquiesced by having the administrators certify simply that permanent appointments to the faculty would be committed Christians and members of a Christian church. Contract and part-time teachers only had to comprehend the college’s Statement of Purpose with the intention to promote it. However, a majority would still have to be Presbyterians.

A 1965 Religious Life Committee reported that “students thought there was entirely too much Christian commitment at the college and that it was downright tiresome: ‘the College’s posture produced an over-homogenous faculty; the cross fertilization of religious exotics and nay-sayers was lacking. There

were several who castigated what they called Christian moralism, as manifested by the College’s opposition to drinking, gambling, and promiscuity.”

Another major change took place in 1972, when the board changed the bylaws so that only tenured faculty had to be active members of a Christian church and that the remaining faculty had to be aware of the college’s purpose and be “prepared conscientiously to uphold and seek to increase its effectiveness as an institution of Christian learning.” No longer was there a required number of Presbyterians, and members of the religion department did not have to subscribe to the doctrines of the Presbyterian Church.

In 1973, the religion department urged the college to eliminate the requirement that faculty members “need to be Christian or even religious in any way.” Alexander J. McKelway, chair of the department, wrote, “It is precisely in a Christian college where one ought to find both an openness for and cordiality to instruction from a non-Christian perspective. The Christian man is not called to a life of pious isolation, but is both freed and challenged to participate in the world of men and ideas openly and fearlessly. Nor does the Church exist in the world as a fortress, protecting itself from disbelief. Rather, it opens itself to criticism, engages in free and honest dialogue with its antagonists, and joyfully embraces those who reject its creed but share its concern for men.”

In 1973, Davidson trustees reaffirmed their commitment to having a Christian faculty and administration. They finally adopted a bylaw amendment that would permit non-Christians to be tenured as a “rare exception.”

But by 1984, no mention of faith was made in the tenuring process. Davidson’s Statement of Purpose was now generalized to “Christian tradition” with “openness to and respect for the world’s various religious traditions.” Today, Davidson “is no longer either a community of sponsorship (a providing church) or a community of membership (a believing faculty) or a community of discipleship (a faithful student body).”<sup>16</sup>

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sults from a lengthy, drawn-out process. Over several decades, it might go from hiring only pastors as teachers, to adding dedicated laypeople from the founding church, to employing those of other Christian faiths who respect the views of the founding church, to hiring Christians with no questions asked, and finally to employing the most academically qualified, regardless of their convictions about the founding church or Christianity. Simultaneously, many other changes also occur, with the school ultimately becoming a non-Christian educational institution focused on public service and supplying well-trained graduates for a variety of vocations. (See the sidebar on page 30 for the historical process at one college.)

**“Critical Mass”**

Another question that merits discussion is how much “critical mass” or “leaven” is needed among both faculty and students to maintain the college’s distinctive mission. Many institutions began by requiring high percentages of church members as teachers, but market forces and personnel needs often force them to move toward a greater openness—to the point that even the president or other officers may not be members of the sponsoring church. Hughes describes the “stabilizing factor” of a “critical mass” as “more illusory than real.” Due to the “growing diversity and fragmentation within the churches,” this notion may not be such a great safety factor.<sup>18</sup>

Many denomination-based colleges have become more generic and ecumenical, viewing their goals as primarily Christian rather than sectarian or denominational. This ap-

proach is illustrated through two requirements for membership in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, the best-known consortium of Christian colleges in the United States: (1) A Christ-centered mission based on the centrality of Jesus Christ, with evidence of the integration of faith in the institution’s academic and student life programs; and (2) an employment policy requiring that each full-time faculty member and administrator have a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

**I**n commenting on this requirement, Robert Andringa, the council president, admitted that since 45 percent of their faculties are part-time contract teachers, they are not sure whether the policy is fully implemented. He added: “How each campus defines ‘Christian’ is up to them.”<sup>19</sup>

I have discovered among my Christian colleagues in higher education no great aversion to changing denominations as they move from campus to campus. They simply join the denomination of the sponsoring church or find a local church that their family enjoys. Many have strong ecumenical goals. In a generically Christian college, membership in any Christian denomination would qualify an employee as part of the “critical mass.” In a Seventh-day Adventist setting, however, such an approach would be seen as problematical. Most of our constituency would want to allow only members of our church to qualify as part of the “critical mass,” given Adventism’s theological views. This means that comparisons to other Christian campuses may not work on an Adventist campus if the church wants to enroll mainly Adventists, and embraces as a primary goal the producing of loyal members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. If members want their children to have a broader Christian college experience, they can choose one of the many private Christian colleges or universities.

**Options for the Future**

Based on these various conclusions, how should we approach the future? I suggest the following thoughts on hiring non-Adventist faculty. The list is not intended to be exhaustive, nor is it necessarily internally consistent.

- Make sure all faculty members and contract teachers, whether or not they are members of the sponsoring church, support the

mission of the church and university.<sup>20</sup> Some Christian colleges require a written faith statement. An Adventist college must avoid the credal approach, which was rejected by the church’s founders. However, we need to find a way to carry out Ellen White’s mandates on the pursuit of truth while maintaining loyalty to the church.<sup>21</sup>

- Have thorough, ongoing required seminars for full-time and contract faculty members on the mission of the university rather than a one-time brief overview at the time of hiring by the university’s president or academic vice-president.

- Provide time for faculties to explore themes of faith and learning that emphasize a Seventh-day Adventist Christian worldview.

- Give faculty release time to attend seminars on the integration of faith and learning offered by the Lilly and Pew Foundations, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, and the General Conference Department of Education.

- Identify promising scholars at the undergraduate level who are committed to the university’s Adventist mission. Disciple and sponsor them for graduate training. With the graying of the professoriate and the need to find many new professors with doctorates, such sponsorships may become increasingly important.<sup>22</sup>

- Don’t hire recent doctoral students just because they can’t find any other position except in a Christian college. You may have to live with your appointment for 30 to 40 years, so decisions should be made slowly and deliberately, keeping the school’s mission always in mind.

- Ensure that church subsidies remain at a level that is adequate to prevent further separation.

- Make sure that non-church member teachers are seen as guests. This status should be made clear at the time of their hiring.<sup>23</sup>

- Raise money for endowed chairs to hire faculty who are “concerned to relate their faith to their teaching and scholarship.”<sup>24</sup>

- Allow only faculty members who belong to the sponsoring church to participate in hiring new faculty.

- Set limits on the number of non-Adventist faculty members.

- Restrict tenure to church members only.

- In hiring administrators and religion faculty, choose only committed and loyal Seventh-day Adventists.

- Work more actively to identify potential administrators from among the faculty. Provide them with adequate background and experience as preparation for broader leadership.

- Provide frequent opportunities for prospective and current faculty members to enhance their spiritual commitments in connection with their calling as Christian scholars through “communal worship, fellowship, intellectual camaraderie . . . and simple caring . . . for building up each other in the faith.”<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

Because the faculty represents the most crucial element in carrying out the mission of an Adventist college, personnel decisions need to be made that keep the clear implications of recent scholarship in focus. All of these factors may come into play—an unwanted necessity, the creation of a “real” university, or a “slippery slope.” For an Adventist college to remain true to its mission, these three factors must always be recognized to avoid following the trend of many other colleges—separating from the church or becoming secularized to the exclusion of the church’s goals in establishing and operating institutions of higher learning. ☞

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3. Marsden, *Secularization*, p. 5.
4. Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian,

eds., *Models for Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publ. Assn., 1997), p. 5.

5. Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 13.

6. Ibid., p. 4; Douglas Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 4, 15, 16, 22.

7. Burtchaell, *Dying*, pp. 39, 79, 80, 144; Marsden, *Soul*, p. 282

8. Marsden, *Soul*, p. 298.

9. Ibid., pp. 437, 438.

10. Ibid., p. 438.

11. Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 99.

12. Hughes, *Models*, p. 1.

13. These trends have been gathered from many of the sources mentioned in this paper with special help from Mennonite leader Albert J. Meyer, “Trends in the Secularization of American Higher Education That Should Have the Attention of Christian University Boards,” Paper to Andrews University Board of Trustees Retreat, July 16, 1998.

14. Cited in Burtchaell, *Dying*, p. 59.

15. James D. Bratt and Ronald A. Wells, “Piety and Progress,” in Ronald A. Wells, ed., *Keeping Faith. Embracing the Tensions in Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ. Assn., 1997), p. 37; Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 90.

16. Burtchaell, *Dying*, pp. 201-239.

17. George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 6, 7.

18. Hughes, *Models*, p. 452.

19. Robert Andringa E-mail to Richard Osborn, January 25, 1999.

20. Burtchaell and Marsden mentioned the problem Notre Dame has experienced in hiring many professors who were Roman Catholic in name only. Many such professors had come through the 1960s when all institutions were being questioned and held a very negative attitude to-

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ward their church, which carried over into the classroom. Ironically, in an Adventist setting, some non-Adventist Christian teachers might be more faithful to the college’s mission than some professors who experienced similar attitudes to those found in the Catholic professors.

21. Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass, in “Christianity and Academic Soul-Searching,” Review of Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, in *Christian Century* (March 15, 1995), p. 4, suggest that society is looking for places to learn how to “see life steadily and to see it whole.” A Christian college devoted to the nurture of excellence can fulfill this need. For these goals to be attained, “these schools must construe their existence as an interminable struggle between faith and reason rather than as the articulation of settled, clear positions. They should be identified more by the questions they keep alive than by the answers they give. And they must attend as much to the formation of character as to the cultivation of intelligence. To paraphrase Whitehead, Christian colleges must seek Enlightenment and then distrust it.”

22. Richard Osborn, “Planning a Seventh-day Adventist Higher Education Remuneration System for the 21st Century,” Paper given to North American Division Year-End Meeting, Silver Spring, Maryland, November 2, 1999.

23. Burtchaell told our conference that even famed Mennonite ethicist John Howard Yoder, who taught at Notre Dame in the theology department when Burtchaell served as chair, always insisted that he was a guest since he wasn’t from that tradition. Burtchaell suggests that some “guests” might teach 20 years or more, but could never fully be part of the “family” as long as they were non-members. On the question of whether they might view themselves as “second-class citizens,” Burtchaell argued that from the time they are hired, they should clearly understand their “guest” status in a church-centered university.

24. Marsden, *Outrageous Idea*, p. 106.

25. Ibid., p. 107.