

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

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I. Introduction

Over the last two months, the national and educational press focused on the dramatic increase in enrollments at conservative Christian colleges. The lead article's title in the March 5, 1999 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported, “Enrollments surge at Christian Colleges. Students seek to avoid the lifestyles found at many secular institutions.” The *U. S. News & World Report* similarly reported, “Nearer to God, one freshman at a time.” *The Washington Post's* story, “Religion Becoming a Big Deal On Campus,” discovered similar growth of interest in religion even on public campuses. These articles report that between 1990 and 1996 undergraduate enrollment increased by 24% at the 94 members of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities compared to 4% at public institutions and 5% at private colleges. Even on public university campuses, student enrollment in religion classes has more than doubled at such institutions as the University of Virginia with young people, according to the reporter, seeking religious values and increasingly rejecting materialism, and rationalism.¹

These broader Christian college enrollment increases and growing interest in religion in public settings come at a time of enrollment difficulties for some Seventh-day Adventist colleges including La Sierra University. In the middle of these challenges, the question of hiring more non-Adventists as teachers helps focus attention on the university's identity, mission, and its long range opportunities and threats.

Does the employment of increasing numbers of non-Adventist full-time professors and part-time contract teachers and the possible granting of tenure represent an unwanted necessity, the creation of a “real” university, or a “slippery slope?”

II. Overview of Recent Scholarship

For many years I tended to minimize the loud complaints made by conservative evangelicals that American higher education had step-by-step become secularized and antagonistic to Christianity. Over the last two years, I have read ten books amounting to more than 3,200 pages of scholarship, all published in the last seven years. As a result, I have begun to take their findings and warnings more seriously than before. 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.²

A. Major Studies

Who are the major scholars studying the separation of colleges from their founding churches?

We must begin with **George M. Marsden**, a historian who is faithful to a Dutch Reformed tradition, a former professor at Calvin College and Duke University, and currently Francis A. McAnaney Professor of

History at the University of Notre Dame. Marsden's three major books published since 1992 by Oxford University Press make a strong case that pacesetting universities, all begun as religious institutions such as Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Johns Hopkins, and Chicago, have disestablished religion, resulting in a virtual establishment of nonbelief to the exclusion of religion being treated as a serious part of a university. His books include an edited volume with Bradley J. Longfield, *The Secularization of the Academy*, his seminal 444-page book in 1994, *The Soul of the American University. From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*; and a 1997 book, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*.

James Burtchaell, a member of the Roman Catholic Holy Cross order with a doctorate from Cambridge and the former chair of the Theology Department and Provost at Notre Dame, published in 1998, *The Dying of the Light. The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Colleges*. He traced how seven traditions—Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Catholics, and Evangelicals—became estranged from their colleges in a massive 852-page book. He studied such colleges as Dartmouth, Davidson, Ohio Wesleyan, Wake Forest, St. Olaf, Boston, and Azusa Pacific.

To provide another perspective, the Lilly Endowment funded a study of more successful Christian models with many of the same traditions in a 461-page book edited by **Richard Hughes** and **William Adrian**, *Models for Christian Higher Education. Strategies for Survival and Success in the Twenty-First Century*. Sample colleges include Saint John's University, California Lutheran University, Calvin College, Whitworth College, Goshen College, Fresno Pacific College, Wheaton College, Point Loma Nazarene College, and Pepperdine University.

Other studies include **Douglas Sloan's** 1994 book, *Faith and Knowledge. Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education*; **Philip Gleason's** 1995 book, *Contending with Modernity. Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*; **Ronald Wells'** edited 1995 volume, *Keeping Faith. Embracing the Tensions in Christian Higher Education*; **David Gill's** edited 1997 volume, *Should God Get Tenure?*; and **Julie Reuben's** 1996 book, *The Making of the Modern University. Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality*.³

In this paper, I will focus primarily on the work by Burtchaell, Hughes, and Marsden.

B. Critical Reviews

While their scholarship is generally respected, critics also feel that they might be overstating the case or being too dramatic. In the interest of openness, I share a series of critical reviews in *Christian Century* to provide a balancing perspective.

Dorothy Bass and Mark Schwehn praise Marsden's *Soul of the American University* as "a model of judiciousness . . . ambitious . . . carefully balanced and highly nuanced narrative." However, they criticize Marsden for not addressing whether it was possible in post-Civil War United States for a Christian university under Protestant auspices to survive. They suggest that while the free exercise of religion doesn't extend to the dominant intellectual centers, often due to a professor's own self-censorship, neither does the free exercise of intellect apply to dominant religious centers. This lack of freedom on both sides creates an estrangement not fully recognized by Marsden.⁴

Ralph Wood's recent review of Burtchaell's *Dying of the Light* describes the book as "huge . . . hairy . . . angry . . . with immense gifts of discernment . . . a delight to read . . . laced with racy metaphors . . . a standard reference guide." Wood argues that the religious diversity found in American universities is a result of the success of Christianity which argued for religious freedom summarized in the country's Constitution. As a Baptist, he also testifies to the strengthening of his own religious convictions by having to take classes from diverse teachers in a public university including Catholics and atheists. However, he expresses grave concerns about the current era of intellectual diversity which results, not in true pluralism,

but multiculturalism that “admits to no common core or center” with a splintering into “ever more isolated divisions.” Christian colleges can provide a unique education embodying common intellectual standards centered around the intellectual love of God. The Christian community lived out through the ceremonial and ethical life of the university will be vital to producing Christians. They should also provide a ground for sparring partners between those of various faiths including Christians, Hindus, Jews, and Moslems. The result will be more intellectually serious Christians. However, “We will not . . . serve our non-Christian constituents by abandoning our distinctive Christian purposes for the sake of a tepid tolerance.” In a university setting, Wood argues for a more open environment than suggested by Burtchaell—“Persuasion remains the only acceptable means of intellectual exchange. . . . Coercion, by contrast, is ruled out of academic court on both Christian and intellectual grounds.”⁵

A very recent column in *Christian Century* by Mark U. Edwards, Jr., President of St. Olaf College, suggests that both Burtchaell and Marsden argue for a 19th or early 20th century “glory” model that isn’t possible today. He chastises them for not suggesting a workable model for now. As a Lutheran, Edwards submits that Niebuhr’s notion of “Christ and culture in paradox” provides a more realistic model. Thus, “the Christian substance appears in the Christian calling of faculty, staff, and students and in the Christian context surrounding the academic enterprise—only rarely in the results of scholarly inquiry itself.” A Lutheran would support a “two realm” approach—secular and religious—with the two being quite separate but informed by each other. Edwards concludes his criticism with a suggestion that “God can accomplish God’s purposes despite all the human weaknesses and foolishness that stand in the way. . . . And God can be trusted to preserve the colleges of the church in the form and way that God wills.”⁶

In spite of these concerns, we can no longer dismiss the large amount of current research published by highly reputable scholars and publishers. Their findings merit serious study by universities such as La Sierra before considering changes in faculty hiring practices.

III. Defining Terms

We need to define secularization before we begin and consider a major issue raised in the scholarship.

A. Secularization

How do these scholars define “secularization?” Marsden suggests that secularization is “the transformation from 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.”⁷

Hughes 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 worldview may fall victim to the process of secularization.*⁸

Julie Reuben, associate professor, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, in her book on *The Making of the Modern University. Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality*, suggests a stronger connection between the educators’ belief in the scientific method and secularization than 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.”⁹

My friend, Al Meyer, former head of the Mennonite Board of Education, feels that the term “secularization” is pejorative and inflammatory. He prefers to focus on how and why colleges and their founding churches separate from each other. One anonymous LSU faculty member after reading one of my early papers on this topic and another paper by Meyer disagreed,

. . . as with much of what has been written on the subject re. higher education, Dick appears to assume (very mistakenly I believe) that an institution that reduces the direct control that a church organization exerts over its mission/vision/operations is ipso facto becoming secularized. I hope that you do not allow the issue to be posed in this way for the Board retreat. Not only does this use of the term “secular” presuppose a pejorative meaning (much that is “secular” is good . . .), but it makes “secular” the antonym of “church related/controlled,” while its antonym is closer to “sacred” or “religious” Institutions do become secularized, and a religious university such as ours must remain ever vigilant to the dangers inherent in such tendencies. But we must not conclude either that (1) all processes of secularization are necessarily evil . . . or (2) that changed or distanced relationships with an organized church (in our case the SDA of the Pacific Union) has anything necessarily to do with secularization (while it might have a lot to do with issues of church authority!!).¹⁰

I agree that many trends which might be considered “secular” are positive, even for church-related colleges. Accreditation agencies have forced us to build better libraries and add to our library resources, increase technology, take care of our facilities better, improve student services, prove that our mission statements are actually implemented even in spiritual areas, care for relationships between various entities such as boards, administration, faculty, staff, students, and constituents, provide for financial accountability through lower accounts receivable or better accountability, increase the professional level of our faculties, and the list could go on. However, the preponderance of evidence suggests that colleges who separate from their churches either end up with no religious commitment to the goals of the founding church or have such a generic Christian basis that aside from mentioning the history or tradition of the founding church you would never know of such a background.

B. Is a Christian University an Oxymoron?

A question posed by those creating the university ethos of the 20th century, those “temples of learning” oftentimes patterned after a German research model, was whether a real university could be Christian.¹¹ Some asked, “Is a “Christian university” an oxymoron?”

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.” Andrew Carnegie looked to a day when the inefficiencies of denominations establishing their own colleges would be stopped in the interest of creating a more unified Christianity. These requirements caused many church-based institutions to give up their church ties in order to qualify.¹² The **American Association of University Professors** (AAUP) organized in 1915 with John Dewey as its first President recognized that churches could establish institutions to support their creeds but cautioned that they could never be called universities. Why not?

Universities, on the other hand, were constructed for the scientific investigation of 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.*¹³

In other words, church colleges were “inferior exceptions to a universal rule and could never be full-fledged institutions of higher learning.” A tendency existed to see them as “backward and second-class.” Phi Beta Kappa for years denied membership to most Catholic or Christian Coalition colleges on the basis that “their religious stance inhibits academic freedom.”¹⁴

Marsden uses Harvey Cox, professor in the Harvard Divinity School, as an example. In his widely read book, *The Secular City*, he wrote in the early 1960s that the idea of Christians establishing their own colleges to counteract secularism was “medieval” with little meaning.

*The term “Christian” is not one that can be used to refer to universities any more than to observatories or laboratories. No one of the so-called Christian colleges that now dot our Midwest is able to give a very plausible theological basis for retaining the equivocal phrase Christian college in its catalogue.*¹⁵

Even today a prevalent view exists among many members of the academy that “‘religious institutions’ cannot also be ‘institutions of higher learning,’ or that any institution with a strong religious mission must inhibit higher learning . . .”¹⁶ Because many church-founded colleges functioned as Bible colleges stressing teaching and indoctrination rather than original scholarship and a climate of exploration, charges of inferiority were common.¹⁷ We must also admit that many of the teachers hired by these colleges may have been committed Christians but did not possess the academic qualifications or research skills necessary to offer an excellent, well rounded education.

The implications of these attitudes on faculty hiring when a college such as La Sierra takes on university status are evident. Can a true university only have members of one denomination teaching in order to attain the goals of a traditional university as defined by the broader academic culture? Do students need to be exposed to alternate views to Adventism, not just by Adventist teachers telling about those viewpoints, but by the actual proponents of those views?¹⁸ If La Sierra is a “real” university, are there any limits in an Adventist university to the assumptions used in teaching or in the public beliefs of the professors?

La Sierra might find help from two questions that begin the Lilly-funded study of successful Christian colleges:

*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?*⁹

Another way of putting this question might be,

How can La Sierra University live in the world of Jerusalem and Athens at the same time? The world of faith and learning?

C. Caveat—Hiring as Part of Larger Trend

By isolating faculty hiring in this paper, it would be possible to forget that this trend is only one of many elements on campuses that tend toward a growing separation between colleges and their founding denominations including,

- U impact of long term presidents
- U abolition of chapel requirements and Sunday church attendance
- U elimination of required religion courses sometimes replaced by a “religious buffet”
- U changing content of the few remaining religion courses
- U impact of pietism and rationalism
- U pressure to replace declining enrollments from among church members who choose to attend more prestigious colleges thus forcing recruitment of non-church members
- U increasingly vague mission statements designed to attract non-church member admissions and faculty
- U a decline in the prohibition of alcohol, tobacco, dancing, movie attendance, and required dress standards
- U tuition-driven budgets
- U reduction of church subsidies
- U governance structures with non-church members serving on boards, and
- U role of professional campus chaplains who can help minimize the faculty and administration’s role in spiritual development.

Many of these changes took place with the cooperation of church authorities while others happened so gradually that the full impact was not seen until it was too late for the church to recover any sense of ownership. Most were part of broader changes taking place in the surrounding culture. The result might have been an excellent research university serving the needs of a democratic society or of supplying businesses with employees, but the creation of graduates with an excellent academic training who also had a faith commitment to the founding church played a minimal, if any, role in the separated institution.

IV. Employment of Non-Members of the Sponsoring Denomination

A. Faculty as Key to Mission

In 1934 Pastor Jay T. Stocking, a female Congregationalist pastor, addressed a seminar on the decline of her church’s commitment to higher education with this statement:

The chief means on which a college must rely for the realization of its purpose are its teachers. It is Christian teachers who make a Christian college. They are not only the interpreters of facts; they are also the incarnation of interpretations. It is idle to expect men who are not Christians to help provide a Christian education.²⁰

Could we paraphrase the same for Seventh-day Adventist colleges as follows?

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.

On April 21, 1999, I had the privilege of organizing and chairing a meeting of a diverse group of educational leaders called Denominational Executives in Church-Related Education. As we planned for our biannual meeting, this group, including leaders from such denominations and organizations as the United Methodists, Presbyterians, Nazarenes, Catholics, Disciples of Christ, Mennonites, Jesuits, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, and The Council of Independent Colleges, decided to invite the two foremost scholars on how churches and colleges relate to each other. Both James Burtchaeil and George Marsden agreed to our invitation to spend six hours with our group to be joined by general church administrators we would each invite.

At our session, 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 just hires to find the academically best person, it is inevitable that the profile will be the same as the national profile for the discipline being hired. National standards will govern the selection rather than including religious commitment as an academic qualification. Burtchaell warned that once you lose a sufficient strength of the sponsoring church's faculty and then they replace each other, you face an uphill battle to turn around a college that has left its roots. A major theme of both scholars is a transfer of allegiance that took place among professors from loyalty to the church to the guild of each discipline. Bratt and Wells describe this transition as going from "professorial" to "professional."²¹ Marsden emphasized that guilds generally do not support open Christian perspectives by members but emphasize naturalism, the scientific approach, research, professional independence, specialization, publications, and methodological secularization as the basis for all scholarship. In a symbolic sense, Darwin replaced the Bible as authoritative. Professionalism became a key virtue. In this context, a Christian worldview was frowned upon, even by professors of the sponsoring churches who teach in the church's universities. Marsden's latest book, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, focuses on this dichotomy:

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.²²

Is it possible that some academics would also consider a "Christian academic" an oxymoron?

B. "Slippery Slope"

Another major theme is the concept of a "slippery slope." Do faculty hiring practices contribute to a "slippery slope" leading to secularization? One of the key elements in separating a college from its founding church involves a process going over several decades in many of these institutions from only hiring pastors to be 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 those most academically qualified to fill a position regardless of their feelings about the founding church or Christianity. While these phases take place, many other changes are also occurring with the basic result being a non-Christian educational institution focused on public service and supplying graduates for business and vocation with references to a long gone historical tradition of the founding church. This process takes place repeatedly in many of the case studies. We must emphasize that similar changes are taking place in the founding church which means this does not happen in isolation from broader systems changes.

While many examples could be mentioned, we will use Burtchaell's history of the Presbyterian-founded Davidson College in North Carolina. In 1938 all tenured faculty was required to answer a series of questions based on the ordination vows of the Presbyterian Church. In 1945 the requirements liberalized so that professors "need only 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 which resulted in the Presbyterians now "functioning 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. Dwight Moody Smith 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 only certify 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 the Statement. 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 were there a required number of Presbyterians. No longer did members of the religion department have to subscribe to the doctrines of the Presbyterian Church. As Burtchaell noted, "The only entity binding them (educators, trustees) together was a statement of purpose, which both Clarence Darrow and H. L. Mencken could perhaps have found their way to embrace."

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,

Many students have expressed to me the feeling that religious requirements for faculty are a direct contradiction of our public espousal of an open and unlimited search for truth. And I suspect that many more feel it than have expressed such a view. The pressures which this policy have put upon many individuals on the faculty are well known, and lead one to ask whether or not this requirement of religious conformity may not actually undermine the very quality of life it intends to uphold. The temptation to toss in the pinch of incense to protect one's future is a strong one. That a faculty member must satisfy administrators as to his religious convictions to secure his career cannot, in my opinion, withstand ethical examination. Finally, the administration itself is placed in a position where an uneven application of this requirement is a constant danger. . . .

I believe, however, that the most compelling argument lies in a quite different direction. That is, 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.

Davidson trustees reaffirmed in 1973 a commitment to have Christian faculty and administration. They finally adopted a bylaw amendment that would permit non-Christians to be tenured as a "rare exception:"

In view of the fact that the Christian community has always had a place for the reverent seeker, the

Trustees may in special circumstances grant tenure to a person who respects the Christian tradition without commitment to all its tenets. Within the general policy stated above, such cases will necessarily be rare. The President shall be responsible to the Trustees for being certain that each person employed as a member of the Faculty and Staff, at the time of his or her appointment, is fully aware of and supports the purpose of the college as set forth in the preamble of the Davidson College Constitution and is fully prepared conscientiously to uphold and seek to increase its effectiveness as a church-related college."

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."

Burtchaell concludes that 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.)"²³

In contrast, Burtchaell studied Dordt College in Iowa sponsored by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC). This college only allows CRC members to teach and has resisted all efforts to open the college even to the broader Reformed church community but is studying such a proposal. Among the current faculty, some have "misgivings or disbelief" about various confessional items, but there "seems to be a general understanding that such reservations are common, and to be expected." Burtchaell predicts what will happen if the door is opened to non-CRC members:

If . . . Dordt were to follow the wheel tracks of most other colleges and universities in this study and in some remarkable way entice all manner of young scholars to Sioux Center, it will become another kind of college: better in some aspects, and for a short while probably better as Christian Reformed, due to the admixture of amiable dissidents. But their parabolic trajectory would soon pass through that high, slow weightless curve of optimal function and fall down inexorably into what none of its sponsors or present scholars ever wanted. Being Reformed, and not very Pietistic, Dordt would do that with much less reductive good cheer. They would probably continue to talk as they always have, and to turn out mission statements like the one for KDCR-FM, the Dordt College radio station, which is several times as long as the Athanasian Creed. But these papers would no longer have any grip on the Dordt people's minds or imaginations.

If that change were resisted with some fire and determination, the college would have to bite the heels of its constituency and persuade them willingly to fund and people a college that would send their children home as faithful disturbers of the peace.²⁴

Are there lessons to be learned from either Davidson or Dordt that can be applied to La Sierra? Should we be fearful of a "slippery slope?"

C. "Critical Mass"

Another question posed by scholars is the amount of a "critical mass" or "leaven" needed among both faculty and students who are members of the sponsoring church to maintain the college's distinctive mission. Many of the institutions studied by the scholars begin with required high percentages but market forces and personnel needs force a greater openness to the point that even the president or other officers may not be members of the sponsoring church. In some Protestant-based colleges, the largest student enrollment may come from the Roman Catholic 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.²⁵ Gleason argues that for Catholic educators,

the crisis is “not that Catholic educators do not want their institutions to remain Catholic, but they are no longer sure what remaining Catholic means.”²⁶ Marsden who is an evangelical teaching in a Catholic university told us that Notre Dame used to try for 50% Catholic faculty members but then found that many of these supposed Catholics were products of the 1960s who were opposed to their own religion. This then forced Notre Dame to define their need as “faithful Catholics.” Many of us came through public university graduate programs at the same time period with similar concerns about Adventism.

Many denomination-based colleges have become more generic and ecumenical in their approach, viewing their goals primarily as Christian rather than sectarian or denominational. The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities is the best known consortium of Christian colleges in the United States with 94 members. This more generic approach is illustrated through two membership requirements to join the Council:

Christ-centered mission: A public mission based on the centrality of Jesus Christ, with evidence of the integration of faith in the institution’s academic and student life programs.

Employment policy: A hiring policy requiring of each full-time faculty member and administrator a personal faith in Jesus Christ.

In commenting on this requirement to me, Robert Andringa, the Council’s president, admits that since 45% of their faculties are part-time contract teachers, they are not sure how the policy is fully implemented. He further illustrates the more open approach to changing denominations:

How each campus defines “Christian” is up to them. Some have statements of faith, etc. . . . the preference may be to find a president, vice president or faculty member from within the denominations, but that is often not possible. They should, however, be asked to honor the tradition of the campus. For presidents, they are often required to affiliate with a local church of the denominational link while they are president.²⁷

I have discovered among my fellow Christian colleagues in higher education a great comfort in changing denominations frequently as they move from campus to campus. They will simply join the denomination of the sponsoring church or find a church their family enjoys within a particular community. Many have strong ecumenical goals. Cornelius Haggard, president of Azusa Pacific University from 1939-75, was a Nazarene, Quaker, Interdenominational Evangelistic Association member, Baptist, Pilgrim Holiness, and Free Methodist.²⁸ In this multid denominational setting which today typifies the very successful Azusa Pacific, a Christian of any denomination would count as being part of the “critical mass.” In a Seventh-day Adventist setting, such change of membership from Adventism would be seen as apostasy. Most of our constituency would only want members of our church being seen as the “critical mass” given Adventism’s views on eschatology and a remnant church. This means that when we study other Christian campuses the analogies may not work on an Adventist campus if you are trying to focus in your recruitment primarily on an Adventist student body with a primary goal being to produce loyal members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. If members want a broader Christian college experience, they will choose one of the many excellent, well-endowed colleges in the region such as California Baptist, Azusa Pacific, or Pepperdine. If they want a public or private education, they can choose from one of the University of California campuses, the University of Southern California, or a local community college. If they want a university stressing a more traditional Adventist approach, they can also choose from several possibilities.

V. Options for the Future

Based on these various conclusions, what can we learn from scholarship about how we should approach the future?

A. Jesuit Comparison

In the 1960s the Jesuits faced a similar problem as Adventists are currently confronting. They were operating too many colleges for the size of their membership. Not enough Jesuit priests were coming into the teaching ministry to offer a “characteristically Jesuit education.” Similarly we have 15 colleges/universities in the North American Division with a membership of 900,000 members. We have a graying professorate who have been willing and dedicated to working for several decades at low salaries. Do we have enough qualified Seventh-day Adventist professors and administrators to run such an extensive program now or in the future? Our greatest membership growth comes from lower income converts, often recent immigrants, who can least afford a Christian college. At the same time, those who have most faithfully supported the church with loyal financial support are retiring. The “baby boomers” who are in their peak giving years are more oriented to project giving than to regular tithes and offerings which provide the union subsidies for this university. The current generation of young people appear to be more overtly spiritual than their parents were at the same age but their religious commitments cause discomfort among various segments of the church due to its unconventional, non-institutionally based conservatism. In addition, La Sierra is currently suffering from a false impression in many circles around the North American Division that its long range goal is to separate itself from official church sponsorship.²⁹ How do these trends translate to the Pacific Union's ability in the 21st century to have three institutions of higher learning within its territory? Will these colleges/universities need to broaden their mission to survive?

The question for the Jesuits became, “Can you have a Jesuit college without Jesuits?”

Some of the solutions developed by the Jesuits merit study by Adventists. Robert Harvanek, S.J., a professor at the Jesuit-founded Boston College, suggested three possibilities as described by Burtchaell:

1. **As trusts to the local clientele** - . . . acknowledge that unforeseen demographics had already changed the character of their own universities irreversibly. The Society might acknowledge them as trusts owed to their local clientele, and simply continue to staff them as best it could.
2. **Staged Withdrawal** - . . . for Jesuits simply to declare the changeover from liberal arts colleges to comprehensive institutions a success. Making a virtue out of necessity, Jesuits should then affirm that laypeople would do a better job of it than they could, that clerical domination was a handicap, that moralizing by members of religious orders had led to mediocre scholarship, and that however haphazard had been the replacement of Jesuits by laypeople, it was providential. . . . the obvious outcome would be a staged withdrawal by the Society.
3. **Retrenchment** - Jesuits could concentrate themselves in colleges few enough for them to staff and cede the others to lay sponsorship. The program on their own campuses would be authentically Jesuit, the faculty actively collaborative without exception, the pastoral activity pervasive, and the result distinctive even among Catholic campuses.

Burtchaell finds that Harvanek's ideas were simply rejected by no choice being made. As Burtchaell comments with his acid wit, “The presidents dismissed Harvanek and others of similar perception as Chickens Little, in order to support a braver attitude toward their uncertain future. Their determination sometimes suggested the bravura of Willy Loman: ‘First thing in the morning, everything’ll be all right.’³⁰”

If the Pacific Union decided in the future for option three—retrenchment—and allowed this campus to operate as a public or Christian-based university, would La Sierra have a unique enough mission in the broader market to differentiate itself from some of the excellent Christian colleges in this area or the

outstanding public universities of the state? If La Sierra did not currently exist, would there be a reason to establish a college with a mission merely rooted in the heritage and tradition of Adventism? Or would it be better for this university to restrict majors to areas where only Seventh-day Adventist professors can be hired?

B. Risk Taking

Another option is to take a chance on the “slippery slope” by setting mechanisms in place to avoid a separation from the church. Ronald Kirkemo, chair of the Department of History and Political Science at Point Loma Nazarene College in San Diego, California, stresses the difference between modernization and secularism by utilizing the “S-curve” analogy.

Modernization is a change in institutional culture as a college moves from a point of indoctrination in a simplistic and exclusivist one-factor epistemology to a balanced position of holding the multiple sources of truth together in a conjunctive or integrated coherent relationship. . . . There is some secularization—that is, movement away from a tight church subculture and engaging the achievements of the broader social/intellectual world—but not secularism—which is another simplistic and exclusivist one-factor epistemology, the belief that all of life is devoid of any transcendent Christian significance. Secularism can be as dogmatic as any religious fundamentalism in its reductionism.

There is, then, a kind of S-curve that represents the move from one-factor indoctrination up through Bible-centered education, to education with the plus factor of Christianity, to a modernized liberal arts college that embodies the higher stages of reasoning and analysis. The goal for an institution like Point Loma Nazarene College is to move toward the top of the curve and remain there, supported by strong religious faith, experience, perspective, and academic integrity. The task then is to avoid rounding the top of the S-curve which would transform it into a bell curve with the other side being that ‘slippery slope’ to secularism as the institution’s faith commitments collapse and are replaced with skepticism, then value neutrality, and finally opposition to Christianity. Reaching and living at the top is risky and requires honesty, integrity, and diligence. . . . It does . . . suggest that there are stages of modernization and secularization, and that modernization is a process, one that can be aborted, can loop backwards, can be restarted on a new S-curve, or can reach and remain at a fruitful point of balance.³¹

The challenge for the La Sierra University Board and constituency is to avoid becoming reactionary against secularism at a time when we need to stress modernization and re-tooling for the church of the 21st century. What is La Sierra’s church constituency willing to subsidize for the mission of Adventist higher education to be implemented?

Jerry McIntosh, LSU board member, wrote with helpful comments about the “slippery slope” after our LSU Board Retreat in January, 1999:

It is my perception that the “slippery slope” is an activity no different than the Second Law of Thermodynamics. By that I mean that the “slippery slope” is the natural result of neglect. To create something of substance, we must be intentional rather than neglectful.

*I have yet another observation: business management systems that are properly developed by **all** of the individuals affected by the systems are typically healthy systems eliciting the best from those in the business system. Conversely, poorly developed systems are constantly in need of escape from the “slippery slope.” Once on the “slippery slope,” we find that good people do bad things.*

So what does the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the “slippery slope” and business systems have to do with La Sierra University? If we have a clear view of our heritage, know our future, and intentionally design a system that incorporates both, the result is that the system, rather than individuals, provides safety.

It is my belief that systems in concert with individuals will convert non-Seventh-day Adventists, whether they are professors, staff, administrators or students and even nominal (or less) Seventh-day Adventists, to a profound understanding of our faith.³²

C. Possible Safeguards

In considering the need to hire non-Adventists, La Sierra should consider the following ideas which grow out of the work of the scholars we have studied. In addition I explored various alternatives in our meeting with Burtchaell and Marsden. This list is not intended to be exhaustive or internally consistent.

- U Make sure all faculty members, whether or not they are members of the sponsoring church, support the mission of the church and university. Some Christian colleges require a written faith statement. An Adventist college must avoid a creedal approach which was rejected by the church’s founders. We also need to find a way to carry out Ellen White’s mandates on the pursuit of truth while maintaining loyalty to the church.³³
- U Have thorough and regular ongoing required seminars for full-time and contract faculty members on the mission of the university rather than a one-time brief overview by the university’s president or academic vice president when being hired.
- U Provide time for faculties to explore themes of faith and learning with an emphasis on a Christian worldview.
- U Release faculty 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.
- U Identify promising scholars at the undergraduate level who are committed to the university’s Adventist mission to disciple and sponsor for graduate training.
- U Don’t just hire recent doctoral students because they can’t find any other position except in a Christian college. Appointments you make may be with you for 30-40 years so decisions should be made slowly and deliberately with the university’s mission always in focus.
- U Insure that church subsidies stay at a significant level to avoid further separation.
- U Non-church members who teach should be seen as guests. Burtchaell told us that even the famed Mennonite ethicist, John Howard Yoder, who taught at Notre Dame in Burtchaell’s Theology Department always insisted he was a guest since he wasn’t from that tradition. Some “guests” might teach for 20 years or more but they can never fully be part of the “family” as non-members. On whether they might view themselves as “second class” citizens, Burtchaell argues that they should clearly understand when being hired of their “guest” status in a church-centered university.
- U Raise money for endowed chairs to hire faculty who are “concerned to relate their faith to their teaching and scholarship.”³⁴
- U Only allow faculty members who belong to the sponsoring church to be involved in hiring new faculty.
- U Set limits on the number of outside faculty members.
- U While both Burtchaell and Marsden would grant tenure to outside faculty members, this is another area for possible restriction to members only.
- U Limit administrators and members of the religion faculty to committed and loyal Seventh-day Adventists.

- U Work more actively on identifying potential administrators from among the faculty in order to give them adequate background and experience as preparation for broader leadership.
- U Encourage prospective and current faculty members to be shaped by deep spiritual commitments as part of their calling as Christian scholars through “communal worship, fellowship, intellectual camaraderie . . . and simple caring . . . for building up each other in the faith.”³⁵

Even with all of these safeguards in place, additional hiring of non-Adventist professors could represent the “slippery slope” toward a complete separation of La Sierra from the Pacific Union within a decade or two if other historical examples are applicable. As the Methodists discovered,

*The simple fact was that once a college expanded its vision to become a university and to serve a broader middle-class constituency, the days were numbered when any substantive denominational tradition could survive. . . . It was virtually inevitable that the religious stance of the school would be determined by a broader consensus of middle-class polite opinion, whether secular or religious. It was still appropriate on occasion to call this consensus “Christian,” but as new generations took over and informal traditions of distinctiveness faded, that term took on an increasingly ceremonial function.*³⁶

D. Conclusion

In our meeting several weeks ago with the scholars and other higher educational leaders, the group could only think of one college that has been able to reverse course. A small Catholic college in Steubenville, Pennsylvania has decided to become more Catholic-centered and is attaining some success in the process. Daniel Aleshire writing in a recent issue of *Christian Century* found it hard to imagine that a mainline Protestant denomination would choose to “highlight its denominational distinctives in higher education. And it’s especially hard to believe that a formerly Presbyterian or Congregationalist college, which has made the long journey to independence, would have any incentive to give church leaders a decisive role in hiring its faculty and creating its curriculum.”³⁷

In meeting with the Andrews University Board of Trustees in July, 1999, Al Meyer cautioned that decisions made today may not have their full impact felt for twenty or thirty years.³⁸ We may apply very strict standards and requirements when opening the door for more non-Adventists employees today, but will those who follow maintain similar stringency?

Let’s return to our original question. Does the possible employment of increasing numbers of non-Adventist professors represent an unwanted necessity, the creation of a “real” university, or a “slippery slope?” In varying degrees the La Sierra board, administration, and faculty are probably looking at a combination of all three reasons. This serious decision must consider all the risks and be made after a commitment to asking for the Lord to guide this board in the outcome.

1. "Why Christian Colleges are Booming," 26 April 1999, *Christianity Today*, pp. 26-7; Carolyn Kleiner, "Nearer to God, one freshman at a time," 26 April, 1999, *U.S. News & World Report*, p. 60; Leo Reisberg, "Enrollments Surge at Christian Colleges," 5 March 1999, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, pp. A42-44; Eric L. Wee, "Religion Becoming a Big Deal on Campus," 22 April 1999, *The Washington Post*, pp. B1, 4.
2. Albert J. Meyer, Book Review of Hughes *et al*, *Models of Christian Higher Education*, published in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 14 January 1998.
3. Marsden, George M. and Bradley J. Longfield, eds., *The Secularization of the Academy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Marsden, *The Soul of the American University. From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); James Tunsted Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light. The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Colleges* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998); Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian, eds., *Models for Christian Higher Education. Strategies for Survival and Success in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997); Douglas Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge. Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994); Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity. Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Ronald A. Wells, ed., *Keeping Faith. Embracing the Tensions in Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996); David W. Gill, ed., *Should God Get Tenure? Essays on Religion and Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997); Julie A. Reuben, *The Making of the Modern University. Intellectual Transformation and the Marginalization of Morality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).
4. Schwehn, Mark R. and Dorothy C. Bass, "Christianity and Academic Soul-Searching," Review of Marsden, *Soul of the American University*, in *Christian Century*, 15 March 1995, p. 4.
5. Wood, Ralph C., "Rest Not in Peace: The Death and Possible Rebirth of Christian Colleges," Review of Burtchaell, *Dying of the Light*, in *Christian Century*, 3 February 1999, p. 125.
6. Edwards, Jr., Mark U., "Christian Colleges: A Dying Light or a New Refraction?" *Christian Century*, 21 April 1999, p. 5.
7. Marsden, *Secularization*, pp. 4-5.
8. Hughes, *Models*, p. 5.
9. Reuben, *Making of a Modern University*, p. 13.
10. Lawrence T. Geraty e-mail to Richard Osborn, 28 October 1998, reporting on one faculty member's reactions to papers by Osborn and Al Meyer.
11. Reubens, *Making of a Modern University*, p. 4; Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*, pp. 4, 15-6, 22.
12. Burtchaell, *Dying*, pp. 39, 79-80, 144; Marsden, *Soul*, p. 282.
13. Marsden, *Soul*, p. 298.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 437-8.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 438.
17. Gleason, *Contending*, p. 202.
18. Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 99.
19. Hughes, *Models*, p. 1.
20. Burtchaell, *Dying*, p. 59.
21. Bratt, James D. and Ronald A. Wells, "Piety and Progress," in Wells, *Keeping*, p. 37; Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 90.
22. Marsden, *Outrageous*, pp. 8-9.
23. Burtchaell, *Dying.*, pp. 201-239.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 807.
25. Hughes, *Models*, p. 452.
26. Gleason, *Contending*, p. 320.
27. Robert Andringa e-mail to Richard Osborn, 25 January 1999.
28. Burtchaell, *Dying*, p. 751.
29. The most recent example of this allegation can be found on the forum of "Adventists Online" sponsored by the General Conference Department of Communication. On 11 May 1999 Alison Agins posted in the news section the question, "Is It True About La Sierra University?" In her message, she asked, "Is it true that they want to remove the U. from OUR church system and go their own way?"
30. Burtchaell, *Dying*, p. 581; Gleason, *Contending.*, pp. 178-9.
31. Ronald Kirkemo, "Point Loma Nazarene College: Modernization in Christian Higher Education," in Hughes, *Models*, pp. 348-9.
32. Jerry McIntosh to Richard Osborn, 26 February 1999.
33. Schwehn and Bass, in "Christianity and Academic Soul-Searching," 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."
34. Marsden, *Outrageous Idea*, p. 106.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

36. Marsden, *Soul*, p. 287.

37. Daniel Aleshire, "Formation and Reclamation," *Christian Century*, 3 February 1999, p. 2.

38. 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, 16 July 1998.