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ABSTRACT

The use of words can confuse and mislead, and making "church-related," "church-supported," and "Christian" synonymous with the nature of a college creates difficulties. What does make education extraordinary in a church-related college? Perhaps we believe that by simply adding the word "Christian" the difference is apparent. Will the college employ only committed Christians as faculty? Should worship be required on campus for all? The Christian church has problems enough with similar kinds of questions as well as semantics without making it complicated for higher education and its task. Four suggestions can be made for the faculty's role: first, faculty members should respect the college's professed conviction and uphold its right to exist; second, they should support the liberal arts thrust of higher education, just as the Church should not attempt to make a church out of the college; third, they should pursue the humanistic endeavor in their teaching efforts, accepting doubt, error, and differences, and encouraging creativity; and fourth, they should strengthen themselves professionally, with the goal of increasing our measure of rationality in the search for truth and excellence. (Author/MSE)

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"The Role of the Faculty in the Church-related College"

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of Meredith College at a Fall Retreat

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Introduction

Having grown up in a background of Church and school and having been trained to work in both institutions, I am, indeed, very much appreciative of this privilege afforded me to speak. The subject is, without question, challenging. The first workshop which I experienced in higher education attempted to deal with the issue, but, unfortunately, degenerated into unconcern and indifference. It became extremely difficult to identify and clarify meanings. I hope that our effort here will result in a clearer understanding than that which has been offered to me in the past.

I would like for us to look at two concerns suggested by the title. The first deals with the heritage of the Church-related college. The second pertains to the faculty's role within that type of institution.

The Church-related College

The use of words can confuse and mislead, and making "Church-related," "Church-supported," and "Christian" synonymous with reference to the nature of a college does create difficulties. I prefer the term "Church-related" and will indicate three influences which I believe will give us a perspective and clarification at the same time.

One influence is that of "Christian." The Council on Christian Higher Education of the North Carolina Baptist Convention has prepared a "Baptist College Reaffirmations" statement. Please note that the statement is entitled "Baptist" and not "Christian." Although most of the denomination would assume that Baptists are Christians, by no means can the converse be concluded. With respect to a liberal arts education, the following is expressed:

We reaffirm that liberal arts studies have provided the context in which the Christian view of education can make its greatest impact. However, the earthen vessel of liberal arts education, unless used to transmit the

Biblical and theological content of the Christian faith, cannot effectively serve the church or its institutions.¹

It might be worthwhile to recognize at the moment two emphases - the liberal arts studies, which we'll consider momentarily, and the Biblical and theological content of the "Christian" faith. This reference to the Christian faith through the college experience is further developed. Such an environment will "yield moral and intellectual excellence; develop responsible churchmen; produce active Christian citizens; transmit the value system of Christian ethics."² Note now the emphasis upon "Christian" rather than "Baptist."

Again, there is the suggestion that, under these circumstances, the Christian influence will "create an attitude of tolerance and understanding; affirm the dignity and worth of the individual; defend civil, intellectual, and religious freedoms."³ I would have to ask at this point whether this is the unique possession of Christian higher education. What does make education extraordinary in a Church-related college? Is it Christ? Is it a combination of Christ and other influences? Perhaps we believe that by simply adding the word "Christian" the difference is apparent.

Trueblood does not hesitate to speak of the Christian college in preference to other descriptions.

The Christian college, as developed on American soil by virtue of many powerful minds, was seldom narrowly denominational...if we require a descriptive adjective for such a college, "Independent" is far more accurate than is "private," but "Christian" is better than either one. The third adjective is more nearly accurate because what America developed providentially was not so much education in specifically Christian subjects, as education, "in all subjects," from a Christian perspective.⁴

As a Christian is one who is committed to Jesus Christ, so a Christian college is an institution of higher learning in which the Christian revelation provides the major premise for the entire intellectual operation.⁵

We are back to our issue of "Christian" and "Christ," and the fundamental question, "Who?" In terms of commitment to Jesus Christ, who is to be so characterized - Trustees? Administration? Faculty? Students? Will the college employ only professed or committed Christians as faculty? Will this necessitate the signing

of a "statement of faith," an anomaly particularly for Baptists who pride themselves on being a non-creedal fellowship? Should worship be a requirement on campus for students, faculty, and administration? The Church has problems enough with similar kinds of questions and attempting to unravel the threads of confusion over "what" (denomination) and "who" (Christian) in common parlance without making it complicated for higher education and its task.

The Baptist Statement, when considering student-teacher relationships, spells out "We reaffirm our responsibility to treat the student at all times as a person of worth; to instill in students a thirst for knowledge; to help them to develop life goals; to help students to discriminate among values."⁶ Once again, this has specific implications for any teacher regardless of religious background and who is conscious of professional obligations. The Statement, however, moves into a preferred phrase - college-student relationships - as it proceeds under the title of student-teacher interaction:

to encourage in them a Christian world view, responsible Christian citizenship, active participation in the life of the church, and the development of a sense of vocational mission...to lead students to a deeper commitment to Christ so that God's reconciling love may lead them to see that concern and involvement are the basis for the celebration of Christian faith.⁷

To conclude this section of the statement with "We reaffirm our commitment to seek and to employ the Christian teacher" is to create a situation that negates the professed goal of higher education and the liberal arts. There would be little room for a Martin Buber or any qualified non-Christian in the academic endeavors of the college.

The Christian influence, nevertheless, in American higher education and in Church-related colleges cannot be denied. In spite of the difficulties encountered in relating the same to higher education, the heritage of these institutions has been decidedly Christian.

A second influence is that of "liberal arts." Historically, the term has suggested a liberating from ignorance or what Hutchins has called "the arts of

freedom." "In politics and education we want a rational order, rationally arrived at. We want education to cultivate intellectual honesty, the love of truth, the ability to think clearly, and moral qualities."⁸ Although the practice of the same may be in doubt today, the concept remains very much alive. Tolley, Knight and Schotten, Frankel, and Perkins have addressed themselves to the subject.

Will the university devote itself to the endless search for truth or will it be captured and used to achieve the goals of some particular faculty or student group? An institution committed to freedom of intellectual inquiry must be free from censorship and the fear of reprisals.⁹

...liberal education always has insisted upon the "liberalizing" or "liberation" of the mind from prior prejudices and youthful beliefs... It demanded the sober consideration of difficult and enduring human questions as they found expression in literature, history, politics, and philosophy... Because one can no longer say that it is the mind which must be taught and thus liberalized, the worth of the university turns on how many different subjects and diverse and innovative programs can be actively pursued... In the 1960's... Faculty and administrations alike responded by eliminating "en masse" requirements of all kinds - distributive and language, in particular, the meat of the liberal arts - and replacing them with more "relevant" electives. Now liberal education is again suspect because the notion of relevance has changed; now it is not relevant because the clientele is not prepared for work... The old liberal education produced citizens; it made few claims to produce philosophers.¹⁰

Much college teaching is indifferent or incompetent. Courses are marked by a sickly specialism not clearly related to any identifiable goals of liberal education, and remote from the problems on the student's mind.¹¹ It is that ideas should triumph... not people's interests or demands, and that ideas triumph by meeting independent standards of logic and evidence, and not by political maneuvers, opinion-management, or the pressure of the mass will.¹²

The nature of knowledge today is such that it requires minds and talents of quite a different order from those needed to make administrative decisions. And the faculty should be left as free as possible of administrative duties in order to do its work.¹³ The undergraduate curriculum... is cultural and general - a preparation for life rather than a preparation for a profession or a career.¹⁴ We might all agree that the threefold purpose of liberal education is to learn to know nature, society, and ourselves; to acquire certain skills, such as clear expression and a grasp of the scientific method and discipline; and finally, to embrace certain values such as intellectual honesty, tolerance, and the capacity for wise judgment... Liberal education will have to be adapted to its environment... may have to run on a track parallel with professional work.¹⁵

The concept of "liberal arts," then, continues to contribute to the Church-related College in terms of ends and means. There is the pursuit of truth, the search for excellence, the preparation for life. There is also the stress upon intellectual honesty, increased rationality, appreciation for scientific methodology.

The third influence is that of "humanism in education" today or what some refer to as "humanistic teaching." Historically, humanism has meant the "glorification of the human and the natural as opposed to the divine or other-worldly." Christian humanism in 1500 emphasized "the superiority of reason over faith, conduct over dogma, individualism over an organized system."¹⁶ Elements of the same can be currently observed when contemporary secularization is defined "as the liberation of man from religious and metaphysical tutelage, the turning of his attention away from other worlds and toward this one."¹⁷

Humanism in education does not, necessarily, connote this conflict or historical obligation. Iannone and Carline signify that it is demonstrated by:

- 1.) Teaching which is primarily concerned with human beings interacting with each other in a very human process;
- 2.) An emphasis upon the human qualities of spontaneity, acceptance, creativity, and self-realization (my note - familiar to those knowing Maslow's self-actualized person and Rogers' fully-functioning person);
- 3.) The continued search for greater personal understanding of self and of the learning processes of children; and
- 4.) The development of compassion for weaknesses in individuals and sensitivity to the needs of human beings.¹⁸

McGrath has implied the same in suggesting that smaller colleges are instrumental in assisting students with modest scholastic records to succeed exceptionally well academically because of the "Humane considerations implicit in the life philosophy of the members of the church-related college community."¹⁹

It should be apparent now the rationale for preferring "Church-related" as the appropriate description. The term "Christian" is too narrow in application and constitutes only one of the three influences, including "liberal arts" and "humanism" bearing upon education in a Church-related college.

The Faculty's Role

The role of the faculty can be inferred from our understanding of the influences upon the Church-related college. I would suggest that the faculty member respect the college's professed conviction and uphold the right of the same to exist.

In a sense, Baptists have indicated, "On the basis of our Christian faith, we have raised this institution of higher education." This commitment must be honored. We should not seek to undermine it. We may not agree with this, but we acknowledge and respect it. Any deviation from this commitment will be through the Trustees and the State Convention. If we cannot live with this, we should seek employment elsewhere. This role permits, however, the Roman Catholic, the Jew, the Muslim, etc., to assume a teaching position in the institution and to make a contribution worthy of the academic enterprise.

Secondly, I would suggest that the faculty member support the liberal arts thrust of higher education. The institution of the Church should not undercut the essential principles of higher education, teaching, academic freedom, inquiry, the search for truth, etc. The Church should not attempt to make a "Church" out of the "college." If the institution is defined as an organized attempt to meet human need, and if the Church meets a spiritual/religious need and the College an educational one, the functions of the two remain separate and should not be confused. Furthermore, the liberal arts concept reminds us that we are not in the process primarily of preparing students for the world of jobs; we are striving to prepare them for a world of people, a world of relationships, a world of social maturity and citizenship.

Thirdly, I would suggest that the faculty member pursue the humanistic endeavor in his teaching efforts. We are in the business for students and education. Therefore, we will have to accept ourselves as human - we have feelings, we make mistakes, we are vulnerable, we take risks, we have needs to be satisfied. We will have to cope with differences - what people are, who they are, what they have to say, what they do. At all costs we must avoid any attempt at manipulation, that which treats people as means rather than ends. We will have to accept student feelings - this does not imply confusing feelings with thinking. An emphasis upon the latter does not mean the non-existence of the former. Although feelings predominate too much in decision-making, retreating to the other extreme of being coldly logical is unrealistic. We are human with both feelings and the ability to think. In view of the liberal arts stress upon inquiry, intellectual honesty, rationality, we will have

to accept doubt - we need to be open - open to questions, those that are self-raised and those raised by the students. We will have to encourage creativity - alternatives to the solution of problems. The tendency to be right-answer-minded will have to be cushioned by the continued revelation and discovery of new facts and new ways of arriving at them. Again, as the liberal arts concept enables us to concentrate upon logical and empirical processes, we shall have to build upon students' existing skills and assist them in developing appropriate ones. There is a great need here for faculty to be constructively, rather than destructively, critical. All of these are representative of the effort to be much more humane in our work with students.

Lastly, I would bind these three roles into a fourth; I would suggest that the faculty member strengthen self professionally. This, too, can be portrayed in the means-end relationship. We are all familiar with the means of associating with our peers, carrying on professional study, pursuing research, attending professional meetings. There is also the implication that we learn how to relate to each other functionally as opposed to positionally. A dean, a department chairman, a faculty member all have particular functions to perform; unfortunately, too often this has meant a status gained and a hierarchy established. Professionalism can suffer dramatically under such an arrangement and would be greatly enhanced if more attention were paid to functional relationships. Furthermore, in our professional endeavors, we are struggling to increase our measure of rationality in the search for truth and excellence. This pursuit constitutes our ends, and as such, they supercede loyalty to any institution. It is a well-known fact that institutions tend to perpetuate themselves long after the need has been satisfied. If the end is as crucial as the history of higher education has indicated, then we cannot be satisfied to substitute our loyalty to a specific college for the greater one. Even within a Christian context, one would not hesitate to state that loyalty to Christ is above all, even the college that bears His Name.

Conclusion

What I have attempted is to indicate contributions from three perspectives that have influenced Church-related colleges - Christian, liberal arts, and humanism in education. From these I have derived some expectancies concerning the faculty's role. There is no attempt to imply exclusiveness; the nature of this retreat is a "thinking through," a "working out," a "tackling of" the heritage and responsibilities that are ours. I hope I've stimulated and stirred you somewhat in this direction.

Notes

¹"Baptist College Reaffirmations," Council on Christian Higher Education, North Carolina Baptist State Convention, Raleigh.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴D. Elton Trueblood, "The Redemption of the College," The Southern Baptist Educator (July/August, 1976), p. 9.

⁵Ibid, p. 11.

⁶"Baptist College Reaffirmations."

⁷Ibid.

⁸Robert M. Hutchins, Education For Freedom (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1963) p. 20, 21.

⁹William P. Tolley, "The Goals of a University" (Syracuse University Alumni periodical - no other information available).

¹⁰Gary A. Knight & Peter Schotten, "Liberal Education," The College Board Review, No. 97 (Fall, 1975), p. 9.

¹¹Charles Frankel, Education and the Barricades (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1968), p. 18.

¹²Ibid, p. 78.

¹³James A. Perkins, The University in Transition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 55.

¹⁴Ibid, p. 40.

¹⁵Ibid, p. 43, 44.

¹⁶Edward McNall Burns, Western Civilizations (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1949), p. 315, 359, 360.

¹⁷Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 17.

¹⁸Ronald V. Iannone & John L. Carline, "A Humanistic Approach to Teacher Education," The Journal of Teacher Education, XXII, No. 4 (Winter, 1971), p. 429, 433.

¹⁹Earl J. McGrath, "Financing the Church-related Institution," The Southern Baptist Educator (Sept./Oct., 1976), p. 13.