Introduction: A New Era for Religion and Higher Education

Over the past decade or so, American higher education has been in the throes of some profound changes. Among these are diversification of student populations (more first-generation and non-traditional college students) and proliferation of educational technology. A less visible area of transformation is the new openness to religion and spirituality evident in many areas of higher education. This development is reflected in many ways – in conferences and programs that focus on vocation, spirituality, and the integration of faith and learning; in an explosion of literature dealing with issues in religion and higher education (much of which will be discussed in this study guide); and in the appearance of new programs, workshops, and institutes.

The reasons for religion’s renewed legitimacy on campus are manifold, and the persons responsible are legion. But the main programmatic force behind this development has been Lilly Endowment Inc., and the Initiative in Religion and Higher Education it launched in 1989. Much of the literature discussed in this study guide was funded or inspired by Lilly grants, and many of the current programs, gatherings, and resources that foreground religion’s role in higher education have their impetus in the Endowment and its program staff.

Historically, a variety of agencies and groups were responsible for keeping alive questions of religion and higher education and funding the sorts of programs and literature that insured a vibrant national discussion. The interwar period in America witnessed a series of national conventions on the vocation of the Christian college (e.g., at Princeton in 1928 and Chicago in 1930), an ecumenical and international student Christian movement, the beginnings of a theological renaissance that would leave a lasting impression on Protestant Christianity, attempts to promote the academic study of religion at colleges and universities, and the founding of organizations and initiatives — including the National Council of Religion in Higher Education (1922), its Kent Fellows program for college graduates interested in professional work in higher education (1924), the
University Christian Mission (1938), the United Student Christian Council (1942), and the Faculty Committee on Religion and Higher Education (1944).

Following World War II, the forces of secularism in higher education went on the offensive. The Harvard report entitled *General Education in a Free Society* (1945) concluded ominously that “whatever one's views, religion was not now for most colleges a practicable source of intellectual unity.” However, a revival of popular religious sentiment in America inspired what would become the heyday for exploration of the connection between faith and higher education. The connection was foregrounded in conferences (such as the quadrennial Convocation of Christian Colleges in 1954, at which over 200 colleges were represented), organizations such as the Christian University Movement, the Commission on Christian Higher Education, the Faculty Christian Fellowship, and publications such as the FCF’s *The Christian Scholar*. In addition to programs sponsored by denominational agencies, the Hazen Foundation co-sponsored several Faculty Consultations on Religion in Higher Education between 1945 and 1949, and the Danforth Foundation initiated a series of summer seminars for college faculty in 1952. Led by its able director Merrimon Cuninggim, Danforth exercised a profound influence on understandings of the relationship of religion and higher education during the 1960s and 70s.

Between 1970 and 1990, however, a combination of cultural forces led to a gradual decline of serious interest in religion on American campuses. Church-related colleges were undergoing a profound identity crisis, the Protestant cultural hegemony was beginning its slow demise, the University Christian Movement and Faculty Christian Fellowship both collapsed, "Religion and Higher Education" programs at Yale and other leading graduate schools disappeared, the Danforth Foundation shifted its focus, and public education was experiencing tremendous growth.

The tide began to turn again around 1990, and Lilly responded to this perceived new opportunity with its Religion and Higher Education Initiative. By the end of the 90s, Lilly had established ongoing programs at Valparaiso University, Wabash College, and Rhodes College, and had collaborated in the creation of centers at Baylor University, Pepperdine University, and Whitworth College. The Endowment had also convened the Lilly Seminar on Religion and Higher Education, headquartered at Notre Dame University. The Seminar convened over 30 scholars and public intellectuals who met for three years to discuss the past, present and future of religion’s role in higher learning. Representatives from Notre Dame, Columbia, Yale, UC - Berkeley, Boston University, Northwestern, the New School for Social Research, and *The New York Times* participated in this high-profile seminar. Despite their diversity, the members reached consensus on several points: (1) that religion has a legitimate place in higher education; (2) that this place had been obscured by modernist notions of
the relationship of “knowledge” and “belief”; and (3) that faith commitments can play a role in scholarship.

I have observed the beginnings of this new openness to religion in higher education from a particular vantage point. Since 1989 I have taught religion at a church-related liberal arts college. And as Director of the Rhodes Consultation on the Future of the Church-Related College since 1995, I have been privileged to participate in the emergence of a national network of junior scholars who are eager to think, teach, and write as if their religious commitments make a difference. This network of scholars has, in turn, become engaged in the rich and exciting conversation that is described in this study guide.

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**Session One: Historical Perspectives on Religion and Higher Education**


**Overview:**

The past decade has witnessed a spate of historical research on the religious roots of American higher education. In *The Soul of the American University*, his landmark study of the people and processes responsible for “secularizing” America’s flagship universities, George M. Marsden argues that the roots of our present confusion over religion’s place in higher learning reach back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Marsden’s most surprising conclusion is that the de-christianization of these institutions was not an inevitable consequence of Enlightenment values or American constitutional principles. Rather, it resulted from the zeal of progressive Christian leaders – many of them college and university presidents – to be of service in the establishment and spread of American civilization.

In *Faith and Knowledge*, Douglas Sloan describes a later episode (1935-1970) in the history of the Protestant establishment’s attempt to affect the direction and character of American higher education. Sloan relates how leading Christian thinkers of the interwar period (led by Reinhold Neibuhr, H. Richard Niebuhr and Paul Tillich) sought to maintain a voice for religion in an increasingly “scientific” public discourse. To do so they embraced a two-realm theory of truth that relegated faith to a private arena where it could be protected from contradiction by more objective (that is, scientific) knowledge. Sloan’s study is both historical
and philosophical, since he is ultimately interested in epistemology, that is, the question of how human beings come to know. Sloan’s account of the people and programs that made up “the last serious, self-directed involvement of the churches with American higher education” ends with a description of the social upheavals of the 1960s that sounded the death-knell for confident Protestant involvement in the university.  

Sloan’s study complements Marsden’s in interesting ways. First, Sloan observes that “in important ways, both liberal and conservative churches had gone along with, even cooperated actively in , their own removal” from the center of American higher education. Thus, as in The Soul of the American University, the contingent nature of the secularization process leads us to wonder how this history might have been different given alternative assumptions about the societal role of Christian faith and Christian institutions. Second, intrigued by a leveling of the intellectual field (issuing from a postmodern relativism that perceives the world as a field of contesting explanations none of which can claim any authority), both authors end their books with considerations of how postmodernism might mitigate religion’s near exclusion from American academic life.

Questions for the Session:

• Could the Christian men and women at the vanguard of American Protestantism during the first half of the twentieth century – university leaders and theologians alike – have responded differently to the threats presented by nationalism, scientism, and secularity?

• If they had responded differently, would the subsequent history of American higher education have been altered, or would the inexorable forces of secularization simply have been delayed?

• What implications do the historical studies of Marsden and Sloan have for those who are concerned about the role of faith in the world of higher education today and in the future? Pay close attention to the arguments each makes regarding the status of faith commitments in a postmodern academy.

Activity:

Study the history of an institution you care about. Are the historical and epistemological patterns identified by Marsden and Sloan evident there? Pay particular attention to the way well-meaning Christian leaders may have sacrificed religious identity at the altars of recognition and relevance.
Resources:


Session Two: Commitment in Teaching and Scholarship


Overview:

During the 1990s, discussions of teaching and scholarship resonated with a new emphasis on the role of individual experience and commitment. The rise of postmodernism – along with associated developments in feminism, identity politics, and the philosophy of science – engendered a new openness to advocacy in academic life. After all, if “objectivity” is only a convenient fiction rooted in the modernist meta-narrative (an overarching story that claims to order and explain all experience), if academic discourse is a jockeying for power rather than a search for “truth,” then what is wrong with scholars and teachers advocating the causes closest to their hearts?

Cultural conservatives have responded to this “assault on truth” by defending the notions of a self-evident canon and a corpus of privileged societal virtues. Classical liberal responses have reiterated the value of free debate (for example, Gerald Graff’s advice to “teach the conflicts.” While the majority of teachers and scholars resist the conclusion that reliable knowledge based on the weighing of evidence is no longer possible, the postmodern sensibility has forced acknowledgment of the inevitable influences of identity, experience, and interest on all human endeavors.

In fact, among teachers and scholars who are also persons of faith, a mild postmodern suspicion of authority and tradition have become increasingly popular. In *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, George Marsden appeals in part to the tenets of postmodernism in arguing for research and writing guided by Christian commitments. In the area of teaching, the most influential thinker to assail the reign of “objectivity” in the academic life is Parker Palmer. In *To Know as We Are Known*, Palmer states his case for an epistemology that encompasses spiritual truth, while in *The Courage to Teach* he calls teachers to explore their “inner landscape” and teach “who they are.”

Questions for the Session:

- What are the differences between teaching, advocacy, and proselytizing? How much space does academic freedom give professors in sharing their personal convictions with students?
• What is the role of self-disclosure in teaching? When does it become manipulative or even abusive?

• To what extent do personal commitments and experiences affect the approaches and conclusions of scholars engaged in research? To what extent should they?

• Is there a distinctive contribution to be made to American higher education by scholarship and teaching that reflect a specifically Christian perspective (such as Marsden argues for), as opposed to a generically religious or "spiritual" perspective (such as Palmer advocates)?

**Activity:**

Surf the web with search terms such as "Christian scholarship" or “faith and learning.” How many centers or institutes devoted to these topics can you find? When were they founded, and by whom are they supported? What sorts of schools tend to sponsor them?

**Further reading:**


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**Session Three: Church-Related Colleges: Have the Lights Gone Out?**

**Reading:**


*Merrimon Cuninggim, Uneasy Partners: The College and the Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

**Overview:**

There is no doubt that the twentieth century was an era of declension for church-related colleges and universities. In 1900, 80 percent of American undergraduates were enrolled in such institutions; by 1940 the proportion was 40 percent, and in the succeeding decades it continued to shrink as the number of Americans attending college dramatically increased. Just as troubling as the creeping hegemony of “secular” higher education, however, is the number of church-affiliated institutions that have gradually shed their Christian distinctives. These trends have led many to wonder if the church-related college is a vestige of a past age that is doomed to disappear. The question continues to be
wrestled with, although studies published during the last decade offer very different answers.

In *Uneasy Partners* (1994), Merrimon Cuninggim observed that since the 1950s many church-related colleges had fared better than their denominations, and his prognosis for these colleges’ future was decidedly upbeat. He noted that their leadership was better trained and more able than previously, their resources stronger and getting more so, and their sense of heritage less sentimental and more genuine than ever before. Cuninggim ascribed much recent criticism of church colleges – from educational and ecclesiastical leaders, secularists and neoconservatives – to a stubborn refusal to let these colleges "grow up." In fact, Cuninggim celebrated a steady evolution in the church-college relationship and identified three stages in this maturing process: at the end of the nineteenth century the church was senior partner and the college junior partner; then, sometime between the 1930s and World War II the relationship became more balanced; more recently, the college had assumed the primary position and could now act as senior partner in the relationship.

Since 1998, however, discussions of American church-related higher education have been dominated by the very different perspective of James Burtchaell’s *The Dying of the Light*. Although the book contains nearly 900 pages of difficult prose, it is helpfully divided into seven sections that correspond to sponsoring religious denominations (Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Catholics, and Evangelicals). While only two or three colleges are treated in each section, the analysis is so detailed and comprehensive that one can fairly extrapolate from these case studies a history of each denomination’s involvement in higher education.

Burtchaell’s thesis (which is reminiscent of Marsden’s *The Soul of the American University*) is that the spiritual flame animating these institutions has virtually extinguished. His book illumines “the dynamics and rationales at various times whereby the link of mutual patronage between college and church was severed in this century – severed, paradoxically, just at the time when the resources were first in place to allow a vital synergism, and severed by the hand of ecclesiastics and academics who saw themselves as uniting both identities within themselves, but not within their institutions”. ³

Two aspects of Burtchaell’s contribution to the debate on the future of church-related higher education are particularly significant. One is the way he perceives secularization reflected in the shifting identities and loyalties of faculty members (see session eight of this study guide on the professorate). In case after case, Burtchaell traces how faculties gradually “lose interest” in an institution’s religious tradition. While noting that “the critical turn away from Christian accountability” is typically orchestrated by pious presidents, Burtchaell never loses sight of the fact that “whatever presidents and trustees do, whatever be the market forces imposed by those who pay (students and benefactors), the inerital force of these
institutions is in their faculties.” Characteristic of Burtchaell’s prose is this description of how faculty are “the first constituency to lose interest in their colleges being Lutheran or Catholic or Congregational”:

Because stridency is usually no help to a career, the growing indifference of the professorate to the religious identity of the colleges was usually expressed by silence and absence. At first they took the religious character of the college for granted, or even as a saving grace; but it became an aspect, like the food service, which did not require their management. In that mode they might attend chapel, but no longer be called upon to lead the prayers. Later the religious aspect would take on the weight of a burden, and they would find reasons not to go to chapel. Later still, they needed no reasons. And if in early years they would be chided for it, the chiding rarefied, then ceased. Then it became a matter of indifference in the evaluation of prospective colleagues, though for some years the subject of religion might continue to be raised in the interview with the president or, later, the dean. But those exchanges quickly became stylized: the president’s question would be framed in increasingly helpful, i.e., indistinct, terminology, and would lead dialectically to an answer that was an equally indistinct affirmation. As the process worked its way closer toward its term, those conversations brought both affirmations in tones that shifted from assurance to nonchalance, to impatience, and then, to affront. By that time the requisite faculty solidarity with the character of the college would have been significantly reduced as to both noun and verb. The identity would slide from Methodist to evangelical, to Christian, to religious, to wholesome, to “the goals of the college,” which by then were stated in intangible terms. The required affirmation would devolve from active membership in the sponsoring church or denomination to nominal membership, to acceptance of the college’s own faith statement, to silent tolerance of the ill-specified purposes of the institution. 4

Burtchaell’s other important contribution is his dogged pessimism, a sentiment anchored firmly in the narratives of self-deception and cowardice that hastened the process of alienation at many of the church-affiliated institutions he has studied. Burtchaell reminds us that, by themselves, neither a “Christian” environment, nor concern for the “whole student,” nor opportunities to consider one’s “values” guarantee a distinctive future for church-related institutions.

Robert Benne’s book *Quality with Soul* (2001) offers a counterpoint to Burtchaell’s jeremiad of failure and capitulation by relating the success stories of half a dozen prominent institutions that have maintained their religious identities and achieved “quality” to boot. Benne celebrates “six ventures in Christian humanism” (Baylor, Wheaton, Calvin, Valparaiso, St. Olaf, and Notre Dame) and
offers a helpful typology of church-related institutions that distinguishes between “orthodox,” “critical-mass,” “intentionally pluralist,” and “accidently pluralist” types.

Yet the sad reality is that most church-related liberal arts colleges have felt obliged to choose *between* quality and soul, between, that is, academic “excellence” and loyalty to their confessional traditions. On many a campus, identity has become a casualty of efforts to attract students, hire faculty, or achieve national recognition. Generally speaking, in fact, academic excellence appears to be inversely related to strength of church affiliation. While most denominations can boast colleges with strong academic reputations, they tend to be the schools that have moved furthest from their religious roots. This is not to say that Christian confession is somehow inimical to strong academics (several of the colleges studied by Benne belie this notion), but that faculty and administrators *perceive* church affiliation as a barrier to their college’s quest for “excellence.” Those familiar with these colleges may wonder how, if at all, they differ from the secular schools with which they compete for students and faculty, and what need they have for the church.

**Questions for the Session:**

- Do the histories of secularization at church-related colleges tend to follow the patterns identified by Marsden in *The Soul of the American University*? Are these schools making slower progress toward the same destination only because they are less susceptible to national educational trends?

- Is the homogeneity – the conformity to national standards – that is a product of the quest for recognition a good thing for American higher education? Explicitly Christian colleges are distinctive but rarely regarded as excellent academically. Is there a middle ground for the church-related college?

- Is there a role in American higher education for “mainline” church-related institutions that accept cultural standards of excellence but seek to keep faith with their denominations? How might these “liberal” church-related colleges differ from liberal arts schools without religious affiliation?

**Activity:**

Peruse *U.S. News and World Report*’s most recent list of top colleges and universities at [http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/rankindex.htm](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/rankindex.htm). Look for religiously affiliated institutions in each category (particularly the top tier of national liberal arts colleges). Then go to these schools’ websites to determine
how prominently they display their religious identity. How religiously distinctive are the church-related colleges that have earned strong academic reputations?

**Resources:**

Richard N. Bender, ed., *The Church Related College Today: Anachronism or Opportunity?*, A Symposium of Papers Produced by the Council on the Church-related College (General Board of Education of the United Methodist Church, 1971).


The Lilly Fellows Program in Humanities and the Arts at Valparaiso University (www.lillyfellows.org).

The Rhodes Consultation on the Future of the Church-Related College (www.consultation.rhodes.edu).
Session Four:  “Church-Related” or “Christian”?:
Describing Religiously Affiliated Institutions

Reading:


Overview:

Are church-related colleges and universities “Christian” institutions? It depends on who you ask, and what they think you want to hear. Despite the gradual secularization of American higher education, religious institutions have hardly disappeared. According to the U. S. Department of Education, about 900 private institutions describe themselves as “religiously affiliated.” As the twentieth century wore on, however, religious colleges were increasingly reluctant to refer to themselves in ways that brought to mind “sectarianism.” For these institutions, terms such as “church-affiliated,” “church-related,” or church-founded” became preferable to “Christian.” It is as if these hyphenates came to symbolize an important intellectual and physical distance between college and denomination.

On the other hand, during the past two decades there has been a significant trend in the other direction within one group of schools. Sensing a decline in denominational loyalty among both students and their baby-boomer parents, some religious colleges and universities now refer to themselves without embarrassment as “Christian,” rather than “Presbyterian” or “Baptist.” Along with these schools are the dozens of “nondenominational” and “interdenominational” schools that do not hesitate to affirm their Christian identity. Most of these are affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, whose 101 member institutions share a “Christ-centered mission” (expressed in a public institutional mission or purpose statement and curricular and extra-curricular programs that reflect the integration of scholarship, biblical faith and service), as well as policies that obligate them to “hire as full-time faculty members and administrators only persons who profess faith in Jesus Christ” (www.cccu.org).
The typical response from many in higher education (including the church-related sector) would be to dismiss such institutions as “Bible colleges.” But CCCU membership also requires institutions to offer comprehensive undergraduate curricula rooted in the arts and sciences and to earn non-probationary regional accreditation. Calling these schools “sectarian” would also be inaccurate in many cases, since members retain a diversity of church affiliations, including American Baptist, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Free Methodist, Mennonite, and Presbyterian Church (USA).

Furthermore, CCCU institutions are attracting more than their share of the American student population. Between 1990 and 1998, for instance, enrollment at CCCU schools grew nearly 37 percent, far outpacing the national average of 5.3 percent. Compared with national averages, these colleges also boast a higher retention rate, lower tuition and fees, and a lower loan default rate.\(^5\) Whatever our view of these schools, the reality is that “Christ-centered” higher education is thriving at a time when many colleges affiliated with mainline denominations are struggling to find a niche in the landscape of American higher education.

**Questions for the Session:**

- How does an organization like the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities support its member colleges, which represent a number of different religious traditions? What could denominational higher education agencies learn from the CCCU?

- A college that is looking to widen its appeal notices that “Christian” seems to have a great deal of resonance with its target audience. Representatives of the school ask you whether it should continue to identify itself as “Southern Baptist” or replace this with the descriptor “Christian.” What do you tell them?

- Why do you think Christian colleges are experiencing such a boom in student enrollment? Is this a trend that ought to affect the marketing strategies of other religiously affiliated institutions?

- In 1961 Merrimon Cuninggim wrote that Protestant higher education could “become the conscience for the totality of higher education.” Is there any group of church-related colleges that might fulfill this role today?

**Activity:**

Make a list of changes you might see (or feel) if the church-related college or university you know best began to take seriously its claim to be “Christian.” What would be gained and lost?
Resources:


Session Five: Catholic Higher Education

Reading:


Overview:

Protestant and Catholic higher education share many commonalities. However, there are differences that justify treating Catholic higher education as a separate topic of study. In many ways, the distinct history of Catholic higher education is a function of Catholicism’s status in American society. Relative to mainline Protestantism, Catholicism has existed on the margins of American culture and has had to overcome a great deal of misapprehension and suspicion. While Catholicism has become increasingly mainstream in recent decades, this history of marginality is important for understanding certain present realities.

For instance, while many Protestant colleges prefer generality over specificity in institutional self-descriptions (“evangelical” or “Christian” as opposed to “Methodist” or “Baptist”), many Catholic schools downplay the descriptor “Roman Catholic” in favor of the more specific “Franciscan” or “Jesuit.” Part of the explanation for this is that while “Christian” and “evangelical” have no institutional denotation, the same can not be said for “Roman Catholic.” While Catholic colleges and universities maintain a variety of relationships with the Church (for example, diocesan schools vs. those founded and operated by orders) all are under some obligation to conform to an understanding of Catholic higher education acceptable to the church hierarchy.

*Ex corde Ecclesiae*, an Apostolic Constitution published in 1990, signaled the beginning of a new discussion about the Church’s influence in American Catholic colleges and universities. While the *Ex corde* debate has brought considerable attention to Catholic higher education, much of it has been less than helpful. For many, the prospect of bishops interfering in the affairs of Catholic universities is chilling. But the recent controversy over *Ex Corde* obscures the fact that Catholic-sponsored colleges and universities have flourished in this country since the nineteenth century, and that in most regards the Catholic experience parallels other segments of American higher education.
Furthermore, the fears prompted by Ex corde’s provision that Catholic theologians teaching in Catholic schools obtain a mandatum (a certificate of theological orthodoxy) from their bishops have not been realized. A recent article in The Chronicle of Higher Education noted that the June 1, 2002 deadline for obtaining written mandata passed “without the predicted uproar.” Nevertheless, the mandatum issue does illustrate the tensions experienced by many faculty at religiously affiliated institutions: “On the one hand, they do not want to appear hostile to the church. On the other, many fear that their credibility as scholars could be harmed if they are seen as beholden to church authority.” This situation could apply to teachers at any number of church-related colleges and universities.

Another unfortunate result of the popular interest in potential showdowns between theologians and bishops is that it does little to focus attention on the rich Catholic intellectual tradition or the voluminous literature analyzing Catholic higher education in America. This literature describes the Catholic struggle with modernity, the various models of sponsorship, governance and accountability that are employed in Catholic colleges and universities, the pioneering role of religious orders in founding colleges for women, the role of Catholic institutions in educating immigrant populations, and the distinctive campus ethos that is often the product of a founding order’s “charism.”

The literature also reminds us of formal similarities between the Catholic and the Protestant experience in higher education – for instance, struggles with the cultural forces of secularity, the quest for “excellence” and recognition, the desire to be viewed as nonsectarian (and thus eligible for federal funds), the need to balance commitment to the tradition with academic freedom, religious illiteracy among students, the marketability of Catholic identity, and the challenge of retaining institutional mission in graduate and extension programs.

One particular aspect of Catholic higher education from which Protestants can learn is the way identity is embodied on campus – in material culture (e.g., crucifixes on classroom walls), ritual (mass held in the chapel and in dormitories), and the distinctive presence of priests and/or members of the founding order. Many mainline Protestant schools, lacking such tangible signs of religious identity, struggle for ways to embody their church affiliation. In this case, the sacramental character of Catholic institutions poses an attractive model.

**Questions for the Session:**

- Have Catholic schools been less susceptible to the forces of secularization in academe because of Catholicism’s traditionally marginalized status in American culture?

- Can academic freedom flourish in an environment where a sponsoring church reserves the right to certify the orthodoxy of faculty members?
Activity:

Take a tour of a Catholic college or university in your area. What reflections of the Catholic tradition are evident on campus – in statuary, architecture, dress, ethos?

Resources:


David J. O’Brien, From the Heart of the American Church: Catholic Higher Education and American Culture (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994).


Tracy Schier and Cynthia Russett, eds., Catholic Women’s Colleges in America (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 2002).

Guidelines Concerning the Academic Mandatum in Catholic Universities (Canon 812) Approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (www.nccbuscc.org/bishops/mandatumguidelines.htm).


International Federation of Catholic Universities (www.fiuc.org).
Session Six: Campus Ministry

Reading:

*Michael Miller, “Ministry in Higher Education: Where the Culture Meets the Future, A Workbook for Developing Congregationally-Based Campus Ministry Programs” (Austin, TX: Center for the Church and Higher Education at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1999).


Overview:

In The Church Follows its Students (1938), Clarence P. Shedd drew attention to a trend that already had been evident for some time – the growing focus of the church's ministry at public institutions of higher learning. Observing that the first student YMCAs were founded at state universities in the 1850s, Shedd noted that "beginning about 1900 the church awoke to the fact that the majority of its students were in tax-supported institutions...[and] evolved through a process of trial and error a wholly new student ministry, the university pastorate." 6 Shedd chronicled the origins of this movement, which he regarded as "equal in importance and significance to the church-related college."

Shedd's assessment raised a question that American Christians would be forced to wrestle with for decades to come: Where should churches direct their limited resources for ministry in higher education? Particularly since the 1960s, mainline churches have answered this question by taking advantage of opportunities for outreach on the campuses of large universities. There remain nearly 60 religious denominations that sponsor institutions of higher education. But as denominational loyalty continues to wane, church colleges look elsewhere for customers and denominations follow “their students” to the larger campuses. As the authors of Vital Signs: The Promise of Mainstream Protestantism concluded in 1996, “we are convinced that the evangelism strategy for mainstream Protestants should include a renewed focus on campus ministry.” 7 Thus, despite continued nominal support for small denominational colleges, the
financial and administrative efforts of many mainline churches are now dominated by campus ministry at secular institutions.

Campus ministry today takes many forms. A minority of schools continue to employ chaplains. Public and private universities have campus ministry teams that are ecumenical and even interfaith (typically, they include representatives of both the Roman Catholic and Jewish communities). A number of Christian parachurch organizations – including InterVarsity, Campus Crusade, and Young Life – are active on most large campuses. And churches in proximity to colleges and universities offer various levels of outreach to their campus communities.

As one might expect, there are also a wide variety of activities that reside under the umbrella of “campus ministry.” During the 1990s, service became the hallmark of many programs. But (perhaps because service has increasingly gained academic respectability as “service learning”) campus ministries have increasingly begun to combine prophetic and pastoral ministries – to supplement social outreach with traditional gatherings focused on worship, prayer, and Bible study. Small groups and denominational circles have recently made a comeback, and servant leadership and other discipleship courses are popular on many campuses. While most campus ministers retain an ecumenical outlook, they seem to be becoming more confident in what they have to offer students, less embarrassed by the presumed exclusivity of their message.

Questions for the Session:

• Why have denominations tended to shift their resources from church affiliated colleges to campus ministries at larger universities?

• What activities have churches in your area undertaken to minister to local college students?

Activity:

Compare the religious environments at two or more secular and church-related schools. How does campus ministry differ at these different sorts of institutions? How does the religious ethos of the institutions differ, if at all?

Resources:


*Empowered by the Spirit: Campus Ministry Faces the Future: A Pastoral Letter on Campus Ministry Issued by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops November 15, 1985* ([www.nccbuscc.org/education/highered/empowered.htm](http://www.nccbuscc.org/education/highered/empowered.htm)).

*Church and College: A Vital Partnership; Volume One: Affirmation: A Shared Commitment for Creative Renewal; Volume Two: A Shared Vision of Educational Purpose; Volume Three: Accountability: Keeping Faith with One Another; Volume Four: Exchange: The National Congress on Church-Related Universities* (Sherman, TX: Center for Program and Institutional Renewal at Austin College, 1980).

Catholic Campus Ministry Association ([www.ccmanet.org/ccma/index.html](http://www.ccmanet.org/ccma/index.html)).

The Ivy Jungle (“a loose association of men and women who minister to collegians”) ([www.ivyjungle.org](http://www.ivyjungle.org)).

Higher Education Ministries Arena ([www.higheredmin.org](http://www.higheredmin.org)).

National Association of College and University Chaplains, Inc. ([www.nacuc.net](http://www.nacuc.net)).
Session Seven: Religion on Campus

Reading:


* Margaret. A. Jablonski, ed., The Implications of Student Spirituality for Student Affairs Practice, New Directions for Student Services 95 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

Overview:

Because it points to robust church-affiliated institutions with clear identities, Benne’s book Quality with Soul implicitly challenges the secularization thesis that informs the work of Marsden, Sloan, and Burtchaell. Indeed, even apart from colleges that have remained close to their Christian roots, there is evidence that religion is alive and well on American campuses. For instance, during the 1960s, the same decade that traditional expressions of campus religiosity were disappearing, the academic study of religion began a terrific expansion. Between 1964 and 1969, for instance, enrollment in religion courses increased 150 percent at public institutions. More recent signs of an upsurge of religiosity among college students include record enrollments and student-led revivals at Christian colleges, newly vibrant chapel programs at a number of schools, and the popularity of parachurch and denominational groups on campuses in every region of the nation.

Religion on Campus by Conrad Cherry, Betty DeBerg and Amanda Porterfield is the product of an ethnographic study of four American representative universities undertaken to test the adequacy of “secularization theories as measures of the importance of religion on the contemporary campus.” During sustained periods of residence on these campuses, the authors found more evidence of “declericalizing, de-denominationalizing, and, in some cases, de-Christianizing of campuses” than secularization or the marginalization of religion.

Religion on Campus points to new forms of religious vitality in American higher education, though these are decidedly more optional and pluralistic than in the past. American students remain interested in religion (or at least, “spirituality”), and take advantage of many opportunities in developing this interest, including courses in non-western religion, student-led Bible studies, meditation groups, and service projects. In the language of social science, today’s college students are spiritual seekers rather than religious dwellers, questers untroubled by theological contradiction as they engage in spiritual bricone.
conclude from their study that “it is possible that young people in American culture have never been more enthusiastically engaged in religious practice or with religious ideas.” 10

But to observe that there is still plenty of “religion on campus” obscures some of the important shifts in where and how faith is expressed at colleges and universities. Throughout the twentieth century, in fact, university-sponsored religious life steadily waned. As the chapel programs common at both public and private institutions became voluntary, YMCAs took over the burden of sustaining student religious life. And as the academic disciplines developed, faculty became less likely to express their religiosity in professional venues.

The best example of this change is the story of the Faculty Christian Fellowship. A broadly ecumenical body with origins in the Commission on Higher Education of the National Council of Churches, the FCF was founded at Berea College in 1952. The group’s mandate was to “uncover the basic presuppositions of the various academic disciplines and to explore the tensions between them and those of the Christian faith.” 11 But although its membership peaked about 1964, this vibrant movement of religiously committed faculty all but disappeared three years later under the pressure of sweeping societal changes. Less than a decade later the same forces led the Society for Religion and Higher Education to change the operative term in its title to “Values,” a change Sloan describes as symbolic “of the full extent of the collapse of the church’s engagement with twentieth-century American higher education.” 12

The bifurcation of faith and learning that triumphed in the failure of the FCF and similar movements is in evidence today among faculty and students alike. In fact, American college and university campuses are now structured in ways that encourage this bifurcation. As if to fill the void left by academics who are uncomfortable with or unavailable for mentoring, student affairs staff (chaplains/Deans of Chapel, campus ministers, counselors, resident advisors, and Deans of Students) have acquired a new sensitivity to students’ spiritual development. The contributions to The Implications of Student Spirituality for Student Affairs Practice (2001) provide ample evidence of this.

Thus, faith-based concerns are relegated to the realm of student affairs so the classroom can become a religion-free zone. Precisely parallel to the epistemological exile of faith from the public realm of knowing to the private realm of believing (analyzed in detail by Douglas Sloan) is the structural transfer of religiosity from the curriculum to the division of student services (confirmed by the authors of Religion on Campus). Betty DeBerg, in fact, describes the Campus Ministers Association at the public university she studied as “an informal religious establishment” (31), which enjoys a special arrangement with the Admissions Office, takes referrals from the Student Counseling Center and participates in new student orientation – areas of student life in which faculty once commonly participated. 13
While it is certainly encouraging to observe public and private institutions alike claiming to serve the “whole student,” it is troubling that structural divisions within our institutions of higher education subtly encourage students to divide their intellectual and spiritual selves.

**Questions for the Session:**

- When colleges or universities are structured so that academics and so-called extra-curriculars become the province of different persons with different professional training and little interaction, how can we expect students to grow into whole persons, to make the connections between learning and life that higher education claims to foster?

- Because service is in vogue, it is possible for colleges to highlight their service traditions without thinking through what makes their approach to service distinctive. Is it possible that in an era when service is valued in American higher education, it can become a proxy for a college’s religious tradition, rather than a genuine expression of that tradition?

**Resources:**


Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2000).

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**Session Eight: The Vocation of Teaching**

**Reading:**


*L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, eds., *The Shape of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

**Overview:**

Douglas Sloan reminds us of how dramatically the American professorate grew during the second half of the twentieth century: “In the twenty years from 1940 to 1960 the size of faculty doubled from 147,000 to 244,000; in only ten years after that, faculty ranks nearly doubled again by more than 200,000 to an estimated 509,000 in 1970. There were more new positions filled in the 1960s than the total number of faculty slots existing in 1950.”

In 1968, Christopher Jencks and David Riesman placed these changes in qualitative perspective by analyzing the “academic revolution” underway at that time. Since the revolution’s main elements were the rise of the modern research university and the secularization of the church-related college, one would expect the new academic culture to have profound implications for the role of faculty. As Larry Lyon and Michael Beaty put it, the model of “educator-as-character-developer” was gradually replaced by the “scientist-as-researcher” (“Making Sense of a ‘Religious’ University”).
What implications does this transformation of the American professorate have for the living out of an academic calling? Is the professor’s life better conceived in terms of “science” or “vocation”? These are among the questions posed by a few provocative studies published during the 1990s.

Mark R. Schwehn begins his reconsideration of the academic vocation in *Exiles from Eden* (1994) with an incident that dramatizes how far American academics have distanced themselves from the traditional roles of teacher and mentor. Schwehn recalls sitting with a group of colleagues from the University of Chicago and other area institutions in the spring of 1982. As they waited for other members of the group to arrive, someone asked those present how they had responded to the occupational question on their federal tax return. The answers were predictable: “sociologist,” “anthropologist,” “historian,” “psychologist.” Schwehn himself, admitting that he had identified himself as a “college teacher,” was greeted by what he describes as “a combination of mild alarm and studied astonishment. I felt as though I had suddenly become, however briefly, an informant from another culture.”

Schwehn goes on to cite a familiar lament, heard from time to time among academics: “Because this is a terribly busy semester for me, I do not have any time to do my own work.” In any other occupational group, Schwehn observes, this complaint would be incomprehensible. Among members of the professorate, however, it is expected. “Never mind the number of classes taught, courses prepared, papers graded, and committees convened,” Schwehn writes. “Indeed, the more these activities increase, the more deeply the depressing conviction sets in: ‘I’M NOT DOING ENOUGH OF MY OWN WORK.’” These anecdotes reflect the modern conception of the academic vocation as *Wissenschaft*, or the creation of knowledge, a conception that is undergirded by systems of reward and recognition that emphasize professional expertise and downplay *Bildung*, or character formation.

Indeed, as far as faculty influence on students’ spiritual development is concerned, the most important developments of the past half-century are shifts in faculty identity and loyalty. Prior to 1970, college teachers identified to a large degree with their institutions (and they often spent their entire careers at small, struggling colleges). Members of the academic generation that is now reaching maturity, however, have tended to find identity in the academic guild or in a particular discipline. And because today’s professors are often members of two-career couples with child care responsibilities, proximity and accessibility to students are diminished. Further, pressures to publish and otherwise “look beyond the campus” for validation detract from the time and incentive to assume the traditional roles of mentor and spiritual advisor. Add the greater difficulty of securing a permanent teaching position, and it is understandable why younger professors often view themselves as freelance scholars whose prospects are independent of a specific institution.
But there are encouraging signs that the professorate of the twenty-first century will be more friendly to a conception of vocation informed by moral and spiritual influences. Chief among these is *The Scope of Our Art* edited by L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, in which influential scholars of religion explore the vocational implications of writing, reading, teaching, and the academic career. Also promising is a recent study conducted by Alexander and Helen Astin at the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. In *Meaning and Spirituality in the Lives of College Faculty* (1999), the Astins demonstrate that college faculty in many fields share a longing for work that is informed by their ultimate commitments.

**Questions for the Session:**

- Is it desirable to restore aspects of faculty identity that have disappeared over the past generation or so? Is it possible? If so, how can the faculty role be reconceived without giving up gains in professional competence?

- How can hiring and orientation for mission be made priorities at religiously affiliated institutions whose distinctive character depends on the presence of sympathetic faculty?

- How can junior faculty be mentored into the skills—including caring for students’ moral and spiritual development—that make for well-rounded teacher-scholars?

**Activity:**

If you know a retired faculty member who began teaching in the 1950s or early 1960s, discuss with him or her how college teaching—and their understanding of teaching as a vocation--changed over the course of their career.

**Resources:**


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**Session Nine: The Academic Study of Religion**

**Reading:**


**Overview:**

Religion has been studied (as opposed to being practiced or inculcated) in American colleges and universities since the early decades of the twentieth century. Interestingly, the first departments of religion were at church sponsored colleges where church-state entanglements were not a concern. But since the landmark U. S. Supreme Court decision in *Schempp v. Abingdon* (1963) the academic study of religion has flourished in every sector of American higher education. Not only have large public universities added religion departments,
but graduate programs at these institutions now train many of those who teach at smaller colleges.

Since the 1960s, religion has mirrored other academic disciplines in undergoing a process of professional standardization. In 1964 the National Association of Bible Instructors was renamed the American Academy of Religion, and the AAR and the Society of Biblical Literature are now the dominant professional organizations in the field. Concomitant with the movement of religion into the public sector and the abandonment of such ambiguous titles as “Bible instructor” has been widespread acceptance of the notion that religion can and should be approached in a neutral, nonconfessional atmosphere from which questions of truth have been bracketed. This is regarded as the methodological price for religion’s admission into the academic arena. But in a field where “objectivity” and “nonsectarianism” are highly prized, the status of those who teach in religiously affiliated institutions (including seminaries) can be problematic. This despite the fact that, according to a recent census of the field by the American Academy of Religion, over half of all those who teach religion (including Bible) do so at Protestant or Catholic institutions.

One noteworthy development in the academic study of religion over the past decade is a new emphasis on teaching. During the 1990s, with support of the Lilly Endowment and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Academy of Religion sponsored a series of year-long workshops for junior faculty focusing on the unique opportunities and challenges accompanying the teaching of religion. Pioneered by Raymond Williams of Wabash College, four such workshops were convened on a regional basis between 1992 and 1996. In her analysis of these gatherings in Variations on a Teaching/Learning Workshop, Linda Barnes provides an account from the perspective of a participant-observer. Barnes’ book reflects the value of helping young scholars reflect on the practice of teaching, as well as the tensions and conflicts inherent in a field that brings together practitioners with such different training, experience, loyalties, and commitments.

What has been gained and lost with the emergence of religion as a discipline among others, a discipline that must establish its credentials on the same terms as chemistry or business? The gains have included the enhanced academic credibility that accompanies full membership in the guild and the “liberation” that many students experience as they critically encounter their own religious traditions. The losses have included the idea that it might be possible to integrate religion as a field of study with religion as commitment to a tradition or worldview, and the sort of pastoral interactions between faculty and students that once attended the teaching of religion. Douglas Sloan writes that as the study of religion was professionalized during the 1960s “the young teacher seeking to be a proper academic professional could not also serve unambiguously as the pastor and spiritual guide many students were looking for.” ¹⁷(90). This is no less true today.
**Questions for the Session:**

- On what basis do some scholars of religion argue that the AAR has become “too theological?”

- What has been gained and lost with the emergence of religion as a discipline among others, a discipline that must establish its credentials on the same terms as chemistry or business?

- To what extent have U.S. Supreme Court decisions affected the way religion is taught at public institutions? At private institutions?

**Activity:**

If you know a retired religion faculty member who began teaching in the 1950s or early 1960s, talk to him or her about how and when he or she experienced changes in the teaching and study of religion. In what organizations and institutions have they been active over time?

**Resources:**


**Session Ten: Ongoing Challenges**

**Reading:**


**Overview:**

In 1996, a group of twelve outstanding faculty members at church-related colleges from across the country convened in the initial meeting of the Rhodes Consultation on the Future of the Church-Related College. One of their tasks was to pursue research projects on issues they regarded as central to the survival of religiously affiliated institutions of higher learning. These projects were published in 2002 as *Professing in the Postmodern Academy*.

The book includes studies of religion and the curriculum by Marcia Bunge, of “conversation and authority” by Richard Kyte, of postmodernism and the future of the church-related college by Paul Lakeland, of international education at church-related colleges by Keith Graber Miller, of “the erotic imagination” and the Catholic academy by John Neary, of teaching as vocation by Elizabeth Newman, of academic vs. confessional approaches to the Bible by Julia O’Brien, of eucharistic pedagogy by Dominic Scibilia, and of “teaching the conflicts” by Timothy Beal.

There are, of course, issues at the broad intersection of religion and higher education that are not treated in the book or this study guide, issues that represent ongoing challenges and invitations for further study. Among these are the special relationship between Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and African American churches, the matter of how church-related institutions can move closer to their founding denominations while at the same time seeking campus diversity, and the way that adult degree programs affect the
religious missions of undergraduate colleges. The resources below represent
the beginnings of exploration in these areas.

Questions for the Session:

• What should be the role of faculty, administrators, students, or churches in
discussions of religion and higher education in America?

• What areas within the broad field of religion and higher education have been
ignored or understudied?

Activity:

Interview someone associated with American higher education who also has a
professional interest in religion. Find out what they regard as the fundamental
challenges facing people of faith in American colleges and universities in the
twenty-first century.

Resources:

Haywood Strickland, “An Inquiry onto Contemporary Issues in Religion and Black
Higher Education from the Perspective of Three Constituent Groups: An

Richard Hughes, "Getting It Together: The Role of Cultural Diversity in a
Christian University," in Steve Moore, ed., The University Through the
Eyes of Faith (Indianapolis, IN: Light and Life Communications, 1998),
123-135.

Programs at Faith-Based Colleges”(Princeton: Center for the Study of
Religion, 1999).

Elizabeth Hunter, “Tug o’ Religion: Wartburg College Chapel Renovation

1 Douglas Sloan, Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher
2 Ibid., 22.
3 James Tunstead Burtchaell, The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and
Universities from their Christian Churches (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), ix.
4 Ibid., 829-830.
5 Kevin S. Trowbridge, “The State of Christian Higher Education: Thriving,” page 1 in
Colleges and Universities/About Us/ The State of Christian Colleges and Universities]
10 Ibid., 295.
11 Sloan, Faith and Knowledge, 84.
12 Ibid., 189.
13 Cherry et al, Religion on Campus, 31.
14 Sloan, Faith and Knowledge, 181.
16 Ibid., 4.
17 Sloan, Faith and Knowledge, 90.