

Keeping the Faith: Challenges Unique to Religiously Affiliated Colleges and Universities

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Religion and education are inseparable twins. They always have been. For two millennia organized religion has founded leading institutions and reached out to new learners ahead of others. Interestingly, mainly in Europe and North America over the last fifty years or so, many scholars in higher education have assumed religion would “go away” with the advent of human progress. In the 1960’s some intellectuals proclaimed “God is dead.” They were wrong. The anticipation of a totally secular higher education enterprise will never happen, even though many intentionally faith-based colleges may face unique challenges.

In the United States today, there are 1600 private four-year campuses, of which approximately 900 self-define themselves as religiously affiliated. Many of the 1600 could be considered fragile, or on the brink. This chapter will point out some of the similarities and differences between the more faith-based and the secular campuses, although the first lesson for the learner is that the diversity among the 900 religiously affiliated is enormous.

My perspective draws on more than 40 years in and around higher education, mainly focused on policy issues working for Congress, a Governor, and two education associations. Until 2006, I had the privilege of serving as president of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, one of many faith-based umbrella organizations whose member campuses are enjoying renewed success in the twenty-first century. This role gave me many opportunities to work with and value leaders in sister organizations representing the 900 religiously affiliated colleges in the United States. Their future can be brighter than non-religious campuses if they leverage their distinctives and stay clear of unique land mines waiting for religious organizations in an increasingly pluralistic and secular society.

Context is Critical

There has always been constructive synergy between religion and formal education. For at least 3000 years, organized religion has sponsored various forms of higher education. An early motivation was to prepare clergy. When the printing press made books commonly available, and especially since the Reformation, the organized Christian church began founding colleges right and left. For several hundred years, theology was considered an essential discipline for all students. Especially in America, religious organizations drove the founding of our Colonial colleges. Harvard was founded in 1636 with a very “Jesus focused” mission statement. There was no distinction between

public and private institutions for more than a hundred years. These religious colleges set the purpose and the pace of American higher education. When government began in the mid-nineteenth century to invest in higher learning, and other private interests founded non-government sponsored campuses, religious colleges gradually moved to a supporting actor role on the larger stage of higher learning.

It is difficult to generalize about – even to classify – this collection of 900 institutions other than to say they are typically small, with a few noted exceptions. But they have a proud history and their donors and alumni will not easily give up the hope that first energized their founders. In most respects, even today’s local, state and federal politicians acknowledge their contribution to the vaunted diversity of institutions which has made American higher education the envy of the world. With all branches of government generally protecting their existence and treating them essentially like any other institution, religiously affiliated colleges have become dependent on government support for their existence. Government support is both a blessing and a warning sign for any that desire to keep faith in their distinctive.

What is Religious Higher Learning?

Unfortunately, many educators today lack an understanding of the relationship between faith and learning. For some of us, it is the most natural of partnerships – a desire to study God’s creation in all its fullness as one way to understand and honor God while preparing for a life of service. No subject is off limits because Christians believe that, in the end, “all truth is God’s truth.” Most careful observers will testify that, while the influence of small religious colleges may be waning, respect for individual scholars’ with this worldview has increased in the past fifty years or so. Certainly individual scholars informed and motivated by their orthodoxy in Catholic, Protestant and Jewish faith traditions have enriched U.S. higher education. But that encouraging, albeit still minor, trend in higher education is a topic for a different time. In this chapter, we want to look at those *institutions* whose original mission and motive was religious.

If our focus were the world, we would need to distinguish among several religions and their role in various “religious” colleges and universities. For our purposes we are focused on the U.S.A. and, therefore, it is safe to say that our history is overwhelmingly one of “Christian” higher learning. For us, “religiously affiliated” means a sector that is 95%-plus Christian. Next would come the significant contributions of campuses sponsored by the Jewish faith. Institutions sponsored by Islam or Buddhism or another religious tradition are almost unknown in America. As our nation becomes religiously pluralistic, this could change. In preparation for more diversity, we have come to use the term “faith-based” to acknowledge the role of different religions.

For institutions, then, to be “religiously affiliated” means the key elements – Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, mission statements, histories, curriculum and personnel – all include some religious purpose and presence. There are certain distinctions among faith communities, which are critical to a full appreciation of their contributions to the higher education scene. For example, one can spend a life-time

understanding the nuances among Wesleyan, Reformed and Anabaptist institutions; not to mention the various flavors of Catholicism, whether Benedictine, Franciscan, Jesuit or Sisters of Mercy. In Protestantism, the Civil War was a primary factor in the creation of various Baptist denominations and splits among Methodist and Presbyterian denominations. All told, some identify more the 2000 “denominations” in the United States today! That, likewise, is a topic for a different place.

What is the Profile of Religiously Affiliated Institutions?

During 2005, I worked with denominational leaders and staff of religiously affiliated higher education organizations to create a profile of what turned out to be more than 900 campuses (See Table 1). None of us knew of similar data, so we counted and re-counted. It was not easy. The meaning of the phrase “religiously affiliated” ranges on a continuum from clear and current denominational ownership and control to some historical affiliation that few on campus fully understand today. Some denominations claimed college X, but leaders at the college did not claim a relationship with the denomination. Then there is the significant presence of non-denominational colleges (e.g., Wheaton, Taylor, Gordon, Westmont, Azusa Pacific, et al) whose purposes are clearly faith-driven but are not affiliated with any denomination.

This is a very diverse group of campuses in terms of location (at least 45 states); size (100 to 30,000); endowment (many at zero and a few at more than \$500 million); local addresses (from as rural as you get to the center of our metroplexes); curriculum (a few majors related to religious vocation to the broadest program offerings imaginable); scope (associate and baccalaureate degrees only to universities with multiple doctoral programs); size of boards (12 to 60, with an average 31); source of trustees (all appointed by a church body to totally self-perpetuating boards). In addition to the 900 four-year colleges which are the focus of this chapter, there are a few accredited two-year colleges and an unknown number of small Bible institutes which are not yet accredited.

[Note: Table 1 should be shown no sooner than page three of the chapter. It is now at the end of this draft manuscript.]

Are Religiously Affiliated Colleges on the Brink?

The short answer is yes. If finances jump first to mind, then we must put them in a similar boat as 85-90% of the 1600 independent colleges and universities that have endowments of less than \$15 million. Some have more than that, of course, and also have sizeable student bodies. Notre Dame, Brigham Young, and Baylor are three well-recognized larger institutions whose faith dimension is quite prominent. Let’s assume that there are 100 such institutions whose financial future should make them competitive for years to come. This chapter will focus most on the remainder of the 800 church-affiliated or intentionally Christian non-denominational colleges whose enrollment might range from 300 to 4,000. Many are indeed fragile. Yet, when compared to hundreds of non-religious campuses, they may have some advantages in coping with the future.

Big Challenges

It would be nice if only three or four “deal breaking” variables emerged in assessing the challenges of our 800 colleges that hold their breath each fall to see if enough tuition will be generated to operate in the black. But the diversity of institutions and the interaction of numerous variables led me to this brief and overly simplified summary of a number of critical factors that need to be addressed for this vital sector to be worth their cost. Feel free to disagree!

Is it Location, Location, Location?

What is true in selling a house is true today in selling prospective students. Geography is important. And the vast majority of religiously affiliated colleges are in small, more rural towns where the founders believed students would be protected from the sins of the city. How many road signs do you see driving across country along the Interstate that announce colleges you never heard of? Some of these pastoral settings are truly the best environment to build community and allow for focused study. Unfortunately, we are told that most of today’s college students prefer an urban setting with institutional enrollments of at least 5,000. They want places to go and people to see 24/7. Jobs are also more plentiful in metropolitan areas. Recruiting faculty who often require jobs for the spouse and good public schools for the kids can also be a challenge for the rural campus. (On the other hand, recruiting faculty to Los Angeles, San Diego, Seattle, and other popular urban areas adds to the cost of doing business.) Location can be a major factor for religious colleges on the brink that are so dependent on tuition revenue.

Who Understands Liberal Arts?

Almost every religious college prides itself on being rooted in the liberal arts. The driving vision for the land-grant institutions and community colleges would find no welcome here. Yet few admissions officers engage parents, let alone students, who understand what “a liberal arts education” is all about. It doesn’t sound relevant (although it is) especially when the price tag is discussed. Of course, most of these traditional liberal arts colleges have gradually moved toward more career-oriented programs, sliding liberal arts courses into the core curriculum. Maintaining this commitment to the liberal arts is a challenge for most religiously affiliated colleges as they position and brand themselves for today’s career-minded students.

Can They Manage Church Relations?

As denominations play a lesser role in the lives of people of faith, and colleges and universities have to march to a variety of drummers, it is safe to say that the influence of denominational leaders (mainly professional theologians) and their agencies will have a diminishing role in the life of religious colleges. It is also safe to say that hundreds of

non-denominational “community churches” which are growing by leaps and bounds will affiliate with the more evangelical existing colleges or even start their own.

The majority of religiously affiliated institutions receive less than 2-3% of their operating budgets from denominational sources. Some Southern Baptist, Nazarene and Adventist institutions would be among the exceptions. Perhaps even more critical is the lack of enthusiastic promotion by pastors of “their campuses” in an age where everyone gives more attention to the so-called “elite” campuses. As a result, most denominational campuses might draw less than 20% of the student body from their affiliated denomination.

If the organized church will not put a priority on supporting their own campuses with funding and student applicants, who will? It puts these campuses in a lose-lose situation. If they brand themselves as primarily denominational, those outside that denomination will be less interested in giving or attending. If they deliberately move away from their denominational roots, the church support that is there, and the older donors who still have denominational loyalty, are likely to dry up even faster.

Some of the more conservative religious colleges struggle with the history of denominational authority in appointing trustees – sometimes all trustees – when the college believes it must bring in a broader representation of the market it actually serves. Once in awhile, denominational loyalists on the governing board are tempted to interfere in matters of doctrinal purity among the faculty or other initiatives that cause friction within the institution. Others view themselves as conservators of denominational assets, perhaps reluctant to take risks to advance the mission. Again, the continuum is wide. Some denominational campuses are doing just fine with their sponsoring ecclesiastical parent and have no complaints. How denominational leaders and leaders on their affiliated campuses learn to get along is a dynamic worthy of continued study.

Who is in Charge on Campus?

As one who works with dozens of college boards, I believe the confusion between faculty leadership and strong governing boards is detrimental to making the adjustments needed for these valued campuses to survive. Boards are beginning to understand the significance of their roles and want to be responsive. But the resistance by faculty and some administrators is real. Presidents of small colleges are generally willing to be the “prophet, priest and king” when the trend is for more collaborative styles of leadership. These differences create tension when some want to ask “Why is a major continued when no more than three graduates are produced per year?” or “Who should control the trend of adding more specialized courses simply because specialized faculty want to do their thing?” or “Is tenure a relevant policy for struggling campuses in the 21st century?” To move off the brink will require institutions to sort out who decides what.

Will Politicians and Judges See It Our Way?

The “independence” of independent colleges is eroding and has been ever since the GI Bill got all campuses hooked on government aid. In 1965, Title IV of the Higher Education Act set in motion an increasing dependence on federal, and in some places, state student aid. Thankfully, in the 1972 Amendments, Congress determined that giving aid to students so they could vote with their feet made more sense than doling out taxpayer funds according to enrollments at each institution. Thankfully, again, most politicians see no constitutional issues in this form of aid, even for students attending a “pervasively” religious institution. But will it stay this way? In recent years, the so-called gay rights movement has pressed politicians to question religious colleges that hire, promote and terminate some personnel based on religious convictions. Our best estimate is that at least 400 of the 900 religiously affiliated campuses hire a few, many or even all full-time personnel using some faith criteria. To do so is the critical distinctive for hundreds of campuses and any prohibition by legislatures or the courts would seriously undermine the very values which attract students (and donors) to these unique institutions.

Has the Golden Era Ended?

Some believe that the small residential college has played out its usefulness. We are moving quickly into the digital age. State systems are the only ones with the political and fiscal might to take on new and expensive programs linked to technology. With politicians viewing higher education primarily as a “jobs creation” machine to stay competitive globally, it is difficult for most state legislatures to invest in small private institutions while their publicly created enterprises pant constantly for more funding. Enrollment increases, except in a few states, will soon be over. And the percentage of students from immigrant, racial minority and poor families increases each year. Students who grew up around malls are beginning to shop around for the best deals; an online course from college A, an introductory English course from the local and cheaper community college B, perhaps choosing to live in a dorm at college C to enjoy those benefits of campus life. I already mentioned the students’ bias toward an urban setting. Add to that the amenities required to stay competitive – single rooms for one’s own sound equipment, 24-hour snack bars, the fastest linkages to the Internet, great physical fitness facilities, top sports teams which don’t pay for themselves, mental and physical health services, and more. Where does it all end? It doesn’t. The result is small colleges that defer maintenance, take on added debt, increase the discount rate, move from full-time to adjunct faculty, and cut where they can – all to stay away from the brink.

Can we Meet New Pressures?

The federal government is pushing on institutions and their accrediting bodies to demonstrate measurement of learning outcomes. Total Quality (TQ) approaches to accreditation gives religious campuses both a challenge and an opportunity. Generally, religious colleges should welcome this, knowing that some benefits are difficult to measure. Another pressure comes from donors who want more engagement in

institutions they fund. Tuition discounts provide another pressure to compete even while most agree that the rising average that exceeds 45% is pushing the envelope. These and other “accountability” pressures are significant.

Is it All About Economics?

In the end, it is all about the economics. A friend pointed out “no money, no mission” when I asked him about the variable of hard cash. The academic model followed by almost every religiously affiliated college is that started by Harvard, whose amazing economic success can distract from facing up to the fiscal shortfalls of the model. It is labor and physical plant heavy. Even the wonderful Catholic colleges which benefited from essentially volunteer faculty are finding the need to hire and compensate scholars closer to market rates. While wanting a more socially and racially diverse student body, most small privates are becoming once again the domains of the upper-middle white class. This challenge hurts because of the Bible’s clear admonition to serve the least among us. But where will the money come from?

Table 2 is a list that was assembled collaboratively to help small college boards confront some of the realities they face in adjusting to 21st century economics. We thought of both external and internal factors that, if enough were present, could move a college toward the brink without making extremely difficult decisions. You may flip a few or think of some additional “up arrows” but most of the presidents and association leaders who helped edit the list could not. Rather than commenting on each of the variables, I leave it to the reader to conclude whether our beloved religious campuses have had their golden years.

What Indicators do Presidents Think are Relevant?

When our co-authors, Jim Martin and Jim Samels, first released their list of indicators to help identify colleges on the brink (See Chapter ___), I asked permission to test their indicators with member presidents of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU), my former employer. Using a Web-based survey instrument,⁵ I asked one hundred presidents to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each statement as a relevant indicator of a fragile campus. Fifty-four presidents responded, using a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Here were the five indicators receiving the highest average agreement:

- Institution is on probation, warning, or financial watch with regional accreditor or a specialty degree licenser (4.35)
- Short-term bridge financing required in the final quarter of the last 5 fiscal years (4.0)
- Deferred maintenance at least 40% unfunded (3.89)
- Majority of faculty do not hold terminal degrees (3.87)
- Debt service more than 10% of annual operating budget (3.76)

In all five cases, there were at least three, and as many as seven, presidents who strongly *disagreed* that the statement was an indicator of a fragile institution. We have never had much consensus on exactly which financial variables point to financial exigency. These 54 presidents doubted that some of the proposed indicators of “on the brink” campuses were that important. Of the twenty listed in Chapter ____, my sample of presidents rated these five as having the least relevance to financial survival:

- No complete online program has been developed to date (2.57)
- Collectively, the leadership team averages more than 12 years, or fewer than 3 years, of service at the institution (2.72)
- Less than 10% of operating budget dedicated to technology (2.79)
- No new degree or certificate program has been developed for at least 2 years (3.06)
- Less than one-to-three ratio between endowment and operating budget (3.13)

Each reader will come to different conclusions on these data. The results showed a wide diversity of opinion among these more conservative Christian college presidents. Yet, except for three out of twenty indicators named by the book’s co-editors, the average rating was above 3.0, giving credibility to the list in their minds. By in large, these data pointed to economic indicators. But will they be the only key factors in long-term viability?

Who is Most on the Brink?

I also asked these same CCCU presidents to think about the list of twenty indicators as a whole and indicate what percentage of campuses in different categories of institutions they believed would be described by one-half or more of the indicators. They ranked each category given to them, from most on the brink to least, as follows:

1. All 900 religiously affiliated colleges
2. All 100+ CCCU campuses
3. All 1600 four-year private colleges
4. All community colleges in your state (tied with all four-year privates)
5. All private four-year institutions in your state
6. All public four-year institutions in your state

These perceptions showed a lower level of confidence in the strength of all religiously affiliated campuses than other types of institutions, although CCCU presidents perceived that among those weaker institutions, they were the strongest. I checked this impression in another question about whether they felt that intentionally Christian colleges were more or less able to deal positively with the indicators compared to all smaller private colleges. Thirty-eight percent felt their type of campus would be able to deal with the indicators “about the same,” although 42% felt more confident about the faith-focused campuses. Wanting to know how they perceived when, if ever, their own institutions would have been described by half or more of the twenty indicators, 60% identified the periods “Before 1955” and during 1966-1985. The percentage fell to 44%

(1986-1995), then to 23% (1996-2005), then to a low 13% for 2006. This perception is confirmed somewhat by a study the CCCU did of its members using the Consolidated Financial Index⁸, where the financial ratios were improved in the most recent years. Enrollment increases among these faith-focused schools over the past ten or 15 years more than doubled increases among all private campuses, another reason for some confidence.

What Do Presidents Say is Important?

By nature, presidents are optimists, right? Surely they need to be putting the best face possible on their own institutions. Can you imagine a president telling her largest alumni gathering that “your alma mater is on the brink and we see few solutions?” Yet, I find that presidents (and recently retired presidents) are the best source for getting at the nature of the problems facing smaller religious campuses and identifying some solutions. So I sent emails to several presidents within the CCCU who had responded to my earlier survey. I asked them three open-ended questions. Fourteen presidents responded with great insights. Rather than pick and choose a few quotes by name, I will try to summarize their responses in narrative form for each question.

Q: As you have led (or observed) institutions on the brink, what are the 2-3 strategic decisions, and by whom, that turned the institution around toward more stability and viability?

It’s about presidential leadership. Presidents have far more authority to make changes in small, private colleges than in more complex institutions. Several also mentioned getting good boards to be focused on policy governance rather than micro managing. The strategic decisions mentioned most often related to hiring the right people. New presidents often have to make difficult decisions about personnel, but the sooner those hard decisions are made, the better. Next mentioned was getting finances under control by better analysis, more transparency with key players, followed by shifting assets to reflect priorities. Another category high on their list was enrollment management. This has become more of a science and requires the integration of branding, admissions, enrollment, financial aid, retention strategies, public relations and more. The final commonly mentioned area was fundraising. No private college can depend on tuition alone and must be creative in generating multiple sources of revenue.

Q: Most careful observers believe it is presidential leadership that makes the major difference in small private campuses that are fragile. What leadership decisions or styles or focus do you consider most important for a president when his or her campus is “on the brink?”

Not surprisingly, most presidents reflected their own leadership styles in their responses. However, I believe more than a few have had the experience of this president: “I had to change my leadership style from a ‘consensus-builder, cheerleader, pastor’ to a more dynamic, lead at the point, take some risks and stand and challenge the academic community to get on board and become partners in the future, rather than bemoaning the

mistakes of the past.”⁶ A summary of the fourteen responses would go something like this – Be open about problems, lay out a compelling vision, make the difficult decisions in a timely manner, encourage people at every turn, tap the best expertise possible, hire the best people you can find, take some risks, keep focused on the mission.

Q: Being intentional about faith and learning is common to CCCU campuses, but most in the academy believe that religious colleges are closer to the brink than others. Are they mistaken?

These fourteen presidents were divided on the question. Some articulated both reasons why distinctively Christian colleges are closer to the brink than others and why they have an advantage with that distinctive.

Arguments supporting the perception that the 900 religiously affiliated colleges are more at risk include the tendency for many to downplay their faith connections. It is difficult to rally around a clear mission when some trustees, donors and faculty want more integration of faith and learning and others want less. In this case, walking down the middle may have more risk than choosing one way or the other. Among those with close ties to denominations, doctrinal issues of the denomination can detract from the educational mission of the campus. Some conservative religious campuses neglect raising endowments or instilling tough-minded financial policies because leaders believe “God will take care of us.” Other presidents believe that the trend toward secularism and resistance to expressions of faith in government-supported religious campuses may lead to politicians putting curbs on tax support for intentionally religious institutions.

On the other hand, I side with the arguments that campuses that are clearly and unapologetically committed to “learning through the eyes of faith” have an advantage. We could argue about numbers, but let’s say there are 300-400 among the 900 campuses that have some religious heritage where boards, presidents and most faculty are deliberate about helping students develop their minds while also nurturing their faith. With demographic data that says the vast majority of Americans believe in God, almost half attend church regularly, and 30% or so are evangelical – there is a strong market for those who believe their faith informs all they are and do. Another supporting argument is that Christians are typically generous in giving to religious organizations. And those who feel “called” vocationally to an intentionally faith-oriented campus are willing to work for less than market rates. They are prepared to sacrifice when times are tough. And they bring an energy to their teaching and student advising that is hard to find.

As one of these respondents said, “If you base the assessment on financial statements, endowments and enrollments, one might conclude that religious colleges are closer to the brink than others. But being intentional about faith and seeking God’s guidance and blessings are factors that are hard to show on paper.” I have to agree. During my years at the CCCU, I made close to 300 campus visits. Many times I left saying to myself, “things are going much better here than one would expect.” The intangible benefits of a truly faith-based campus are hard to appreciate by people for whom faith is not a priority. But to those who believe in God’s grace, enjoy the bond of

love among those of like faith, regularly see answers to prayer, and are motivated to love others in the milieu of campus life, the future looks bright.

Before leaving this section, I need to acknowledge that my survey of presidents did not reflect the full range of 900 institutions. I highly respect and admire many Catholic higher education leaders, but I have visited fewer than ten of their institutions. There are also many fine, fine campuses among the mainline denominations, but I do not know them as well as I got to know those in the CCCU. I hope my assessment of religious colleges will stimulate others to write and that my observations will facilitate helpful dialogue among all of these institutions.

How Can We Overcome The Challenges?

In my years working in the public policy arena and during my twelve years at the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, I have given much thought to ensuring a future for small, private, religious colleges. I believe they are a valuable asset worthy of our strongest support. As a born optimist – as well as a realist – I have to believe that several hundred of our valued religious institutions will make it. But not by doing much of what is now common practice. Just as the factors are many that put these institutions on the brink, so are the strategies that need to be carefully and prayerfully considered to shed that label. Hopefully, the diversity of types and purposes of religiously affiliated institutions will increase as governing boards and presidents discover more economically sustainable strategies. Nationally, we need government and the courts to continue their generally neutral stance on religious colleges so the playing field is even. Unlike a community college system essential to a major city, however, we cannot expect any government to bail us out in tough times.

Vision and bold leadership are essential to the success of any small college today. Small successes will lead to more success. And donors like to follow success. If a campus wants to position itself as a distinctly religious institution, one key is to hire faculty who see faith as not just a private matter but one central to development of the whole person. Most of us in this sector refer often to James Burtchaell's classic book, *Dying of the Light*.⁷ One of his conclusions was that as religious institutions started hiring faculty who brought little or no faith commitments, the institution lost its faith distinctive. More specifically, he referenced campuses as dying when they moved away from their denominational founders. In my experience, I do not believe that maintaining a specific denominational link is as important as trustees who hire presidents who hire faculty and administrators all sharing faith in Jesus Christ, regardless of denominational affiliation.

It is amazing, isn't it, that a model of higher learning designed to meet the realities of life several hundred years ago remains the norm. Most private colleges still cling to the notion that we must bring students, faculty and books into one location for an experience in liberal learning. But times have changed. Higher education is just beginning to realize that external variables, the economic and political realities of each state, access to new technologies, and a market of learners with vastly different needs and preferences can open new possibilities. To thrive and not just survive, I believe more

risks need to be taken by religious institutions in shaping their futures. With sixty-five percent of high school graduates going on to college, and adults coming back to formal learning, we need more models that work.

I encourage every religious college leader to at least consider one or more of the following ten new models. Some are not so new but they have been under utilized just when society seems ready for them. There is no silver bullet. But ponder whether the religiously affiliated campuses you know might be strengthened in their general mission of transforming lives by pursuing some of these models. While we will see a few brand new institutions each year, most of the re-engineering will come from existing campuses that see the need for change before it is too late. As you read the brief description of each non-traditional model, think of which institutions could *add* such a model to their existing programs. Weaker institutions might consider *switching* from the traditional model to one or more of the new models. Also, as you quickly reflect on each suggestion, think of whether donors would get excited about helping a marginally strong institution make the transition.

Across the Street Model

Why not purchase or build Christian living/learning centers “across the street” from major public universities? Offer the benefits of residential housing, but with Christian spiritual formation mentors, a specialized library, plus classes approved and in the university’s catalog or otherwise accredited and easily transferred to the university for graduation purposes. Retain a couple “star” faculty, but mainly tap Christian faculty at the public university who yearn to teach more openly from their Christian worldview. Let the public university provide the majority of courses, the main library, science labs, performing arts, physical fitness centers, competitive athletics and other things most students do want. Leave the funding headaches of the amenities arms race behind.

In the Marketplace Model

Create coop-education programs for 18-24 year-olds that require students to work/learn in the community, resulting in a resume with a degree plus meaningful job experience. Even “guarantee” a job for the first year out of college for those who do not land one on their own. Tap committed alumni/friends who support this concept to provide those jobs. Or refund the senior year’s tuition if one is not placed in a job within six months. Build the program around a solid general education core, but offer degrees and certificates that reflect the region's economic future and student career interests. Be open to partnerships with large employers in your community.

Across the World Model

Since 50% of all incoming freshmen today say they want to study abroad (3% actually get that opportunity), a US campus could grow by partnering with the right foreign campus (or build one from scratch) to provide most of one’s education living and learning in another culture. Many Christian campuses have strong missions

organizations/churches with whom they could collaborate. This may not be for everyone, but a few of these intercultural campuses would draw students from around the world. It fits with the increasing globalization of almost everything.

Work to Learn Model

While Berea, College of the Ozarks and only a couple others still exist today, the work college model has many pluses (especially in the minds of donors!). Reduce the non-teaching payroll. Let students learn by building and maintaining campus facilities, managing businesses, and growing food. Working and learning under Christian adults who model character and bring both practical experience and teaching abilities onto this campus could make it a “destination campus” for those attracted to such a model. Many retired professionals could be attracted to live and work in this environment. Try this message on prospective students: “leave campus without debt and a unique resume!”

The System Model

Many denominationally compatible campuses should explore merging into multi-campus “systems” that share one strong board, central administration, cooperative purchasing capacity, easy transfer for students, faculty mobility among the campuses, leveraging of technology, specialized majors and centers of excellence on each campus. If it works for public universities, maybe we need more multi-campus Christian universities. Some of the stronger Christian campuses are already creating satellite campuses in other states or even overseas. So some of the knowledge about multi-campus management is currently available.

The All-Tech Model

Since the Church is growing most rapidly in the southern hemisphere, we need one or more Christian universities that are entirely distributed learning institutions with a global reach. Major cities could have “study groups” to bring people together, using churches as gathering places, but the instruction would be delivered via the Web with paid or volunteer “course mentors” scattered around the globe and staying in touch with students via email. We are moving in that direction with fully online and with blended programs being offered as supplemental offerings. Might some institution focus exclusively on this delivery method?

The For-Profit Model

To realize the efficiencies and focus on working adults similar to the University of Phoenix and 800 other fully accredited, degree granting for profit campuses, we need Christian investors and educators to provide adult degrees from a Christian worldview in this market. Currently, Grand Canyon University (Phoenix) is the only one we know. A stronger model, however, is for an existing nonprofit campus to create or purchase a subsidiary for-profit so the profits would go to the parent nonprofit institution rather than to private investors. Many Christians are squeamish about education being a

“business,” but more exposure to for-profit institutions may reduce the skepticism. With more than 125 million formal learners in the U.S., and only 17 million of those counted as enrolled in “higher education,” the market is huge. And some educators have the skills and instincts to take a responsive, entrepreneurial model to new markets of learners. Most nonprofit college leaders admire and court business leaders who have succeeded in life. Some of them should focus their talents on learners who might not otherwise get a chance at a Christian higher education.

The Two-Year Model

Half the freshmen in the United States attend a community college. Many people, especially those who prefer to work and learn at the same time, have educational goals that could be completed through a certificate or associate’s degree program. If 30-40% of American adults are evangelical, and a high percentage of them want only a 6-month certificate or a two-year degree, where can they go today where faculty and administrators see them as the primary student body and offer what they want at a price they can afford? Maybe such a campus would offer only a portion of the credits, while the student also attended the public community college a few miles away.

The Merger Model

This model has some history, but mergers have proven to be difficult. Some campuses are near one another and should consider merger for the future of both. Other campuses are owned by the same denomination and could merge while treating the smaller or weaker campus as a satellite of the larger or stronger one. Every day we read about businesses that read the signs of change and merge while there still are win-win options? Campuses tend to wait too long, when they bring to the table a negative balance sheet and a run-down physical plant. This is an area in need of further study. Perhaps philanthropic organizations could be helpful in convening and funding a careful process where several institutions could discreetly explore this option.

The Entrepreneurial Model

Some campuses are becoming more entrepreneurial, but few take many risks or attempt to go beyond what is accepted by faculty and others. This model would take many shapes. It might include operating several businesses, Christian schools, nursing homes, a publishing house or other enterprises that could tap student workers, alumni interests and make better use of campus buildings. Many religious campuses own hundreds of unused acres of land. More should develop the land in partnership with organizations that would create long-term educational and financial benefits.

Do These Optional Models Have a Chance?

Would any of these new models “save” an institution on the brink? The only reasonable response would be “it depends.” People not affiliated with a current institution might pursue one of these models on their own. But institutions already

accredited with a critical mass of professionals interested in change might have a better chance for success. Unfortunately, the gravity pull toward the traditional is very strong in most private colleges. For example, one former Christian college president wrote that he was trying to help another institution explore some of these ideas but that “I am finding a surprising tendency at (name of institution) to be the best of what is rather than to take up the challenge of setting the pace for what could be.”⁹

With almost everyone acknowledging that the future of America is linked to the quality of our education and that more and more learners need something beyond the high school, the market is there. IF people can afford it. Unfortunately, most private colleges are pricing out many of those they most want to serve.

A very positive factor for all campuses is that students today are interested in spirituality. Thanks to the Spirituality in Higher Education Study at UCLA, linking with their longitudinal study of freshmen, 79% of incoming students say they believe in God and another 15% are not sure.¹⁰ While at the CCCU, we planned on realistic estimates that only one in seven or eight evangelical Christians who made life choices based on their faith commitments entered an intentionally Christ-centered college. If only a few more were inclined to apply and could afford one of these colleges, there would be no room. Like most students, these more evangelical high school graduates made choices in the lower cost public sector.

I hope the creativity of trustees and campus leaders in the coming decade will not restrict themselves only to the “old” model of delivering faith-informed learning. After all, the business we should be in is learning, not just college as we know it. And there is every reason to believe that a large number of students would be attracted to models where the reality of God was taken seriously.

The Faith Factor

We have been looking at the wide array of religiously affiliated campuses in America, some of which have neglected the faith dimension of their heritage for too long to regain it. But they will face the same academic and economic challenges of their more faith-oriented sister institutions. Having worked for more than 170 campuses that are unapologetically and intentionally “Christ-centered,” I know how the Spirit of God leads and blesses and brings the levels of trust and unity so necessary for a college to thrive. These institutions, more conservative theologically, have been enjoying a couple decades of enrollment growth because there are few like them for learners who want spiritual formation along with academic excellence. In my opinion, these more evangelical institutions have an edge that is both human and divine. But the economic realities for them are no less urgent.

Bottom Line

America is indebted to the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish communities of faith who founded and nurtured for the public good hundreds of colleges. For almost four centuries they have modeled excellence on many fronts. Today most of them are fragile and their model is under pressure for many reasons. We need to understand more of their uniqueness and honor the value and character that they have instilled in men and women who lead our nation today. The academy may say “we don’t need them,” but I suggest that they are not only part of a heritage worth sustaining but part of the hope which the world so desperately needs. Visionary leadership can keep them from the brink.

End Notes

1. An interesting book on early schools is *A History of Christian School Education* by Paul A. Kienel, founder and president emeritus of the Association of Christian Schools International, the publisher of the book in 1998.
2. For those interested in the history of religiously affiliated colleges, I suggest *Religious Higher Education in the United States: A Source Book* edited by Thomas C. Hunt and James C. Carper, published in 1996 by Garland Publishing, Inc. A more current history is *The Christian College: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America*, Second Edition, by William C. Ringenberg, published in 2006 by Baker Academic.
3. This table was circulated by me through much of 2005 among colleagues in the informal network called Executives in Church-Related Higher Education, then chaired by Rev. Charles Currie of the Association of Jesuit Colleges. Another listing of 722 institutions by religious affiliation appears in the *2005 Higher Education Directory* by Higher Education Publications, Inc., Falls Church, VA. It is very likely that different people on some campuses, responding for the institution, classify their institutions differently than someone else might, depending on the question or the use of the information.
4. I created this table from my own observations, but added to it several times later as I tested it with colleagues in campus and association leadership roles.
5. SurveyMonkey.com was used and the input came mostly in November, 2006.
6. Email from Jay Barber, President of Werner Pacific University, Portland, OR.
7. This 1998 book by Eerdmans, *Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches*, by James T. Burtchaell, received much acclaim with its profiling of several campuses.

8. This is a commonly used financial tool best explained in *The Small College Guide to Financial Health: Beating the Odds* by Michael K. Townsley, published in 2002 by the National Association of College & University Business Officers. Dr. Michael Williams of the Austen Group did the research on the CCCU institutions.
9. Email from Dr. David Gyertson on January 1, 2007.
10. This research is conducted at the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles. More information can be found at www.spirituality.ucla.edu.

Other Resources to Consider Listing at the Back of the Book

NOTE TO EDITORS: I could list 10-25 good books focused on Christian higher education, but I assume the bibliography at the end of the book will have many. Let me know if you want suggestions. rca

Table 1. Approximate numbers of accredited institutions participating in federal student aid programs by their primary religious affiliation.³

Number	Best Attempt at Non-Duplicative Numbers by Primary Affiliation (April 2005)
220	Roman Catholic (in Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities)
108	United Methodist (confirmed)
65	Presbyterian (USA) (confirmed)
56	Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools (confirmed)
55	Association of Southern Baptist Colleges and Schools (confirmed)
36	Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (confirmed, including 8 self-standing seminaries)
21	Churches of Christ (confirmed)
19	Episcopal Church (confirmed)
17	Christian Church/Disciples of Christ (confirmed)
16	American Baptist (confirmed)
16	Christian Churches/Churches of Christ (confirmed by ABHE)
14	Assemblies of God (confirmed)
14	Friends (confirmed)
14	Seventh Day Adventist Church (confirmed)
12	Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod (confirmed)
11	Mennonite Denominations (confirmed)
10	Church of the Nazarene (confirmed)
8	Church of God
5	African American Episcopal
5	Reformed Church in America (confirmed)
5	Free Methodist Church (confirmed)
5	Wesleyan Church
96	Est. from 20+ other denominations/org. with 4 or fewer accredited campuses
828	Sub-Total
	Estimates of Non-Denominational Religious Campuses NOT Included Above
26	In the Association for Biblical Higher Education (total 83;confirmed)
20	In the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (total 129;confirmed)
26	In the Association of Theological Schools (total 150; confirmed)
72	Sub-Total
900	Best Estimate of Separate, Accredited Self-Described Religious Institutions at Which Students Receive Federal Student Aid Benefits

Table 2. Variables That All Smaller, Residential Private Colleges Must Consider When Planning Their Future ⁴

Impact on Most Campuses	Variables	
↓	1	Tendency for colleges to increase tuition price considerably faster than the CPI
↓	2	The uncertain long-term implications of deep tuition discounting (ave. = 47%)
↓	3	The “arms race” to provide more that is deemed necessary to compete for students
↓	4	Threatened government action to hold tuition levels down
↓	5	Outlook for funding of federal student aid programs in era of competition/deficits
↓	6	Outlook for funding state student aid programs in most states
↓	7	Outlook for increasing numbers of donors willing to invest in private colleges
↓	8	Growth of endowments to contribute to operating expenses
↓	9	Underpaid and over-loaded faculty and staff
↓	10	Legal threats to traditional tax-exempt benefits of all nonprofits
↓	11	The protectionist impact of tenure on timely curricular/employment adjustments
↓	12	The inefficiencies of “shared governance” in making timely decisions
↓	13	Declining denominational support (money and students) for their campuses
↓	14	Increasing costs of health care, energy, construction, and technology
↓	15	Threatened denial of government benefits to “pervasively sectarian” campuses
↓	16	Backlog of deferred campus maintenance
↓	17	National decrease in high school graduates after about 2010
↓	18	Increasing share of 18 year-olds who are poor, immigrants and racial minorities
↓	19	Decreasing numbers of international students coming to the US to study
↓	20	Increasing competition from for-profit, degree-granting institutions
↓	21	Uneven distribution of learners by geographic region
↓	22	Trend of most students wanting larger, urban and lower-cost campuses
↓	23	Trend of students taking courses from multiple campuses for cost/convenience
↓	24	Lack of trustee comprehension/boldness in making adjustments
↓	25	Decreased parental savings for college and willingness to sacrifice for their kids
↑	26	Increasing willingness of small private campuses to meet needs of adult learners
↑	27	The attraction of some students to the faith distinctives of some private colleges
↑	28	Public’s understanding that postsecondary education is key to economic growth
?	29	What is missing for your campus???