

Clear-Cut Answers to Questions about Baptist Colleges

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Southern Baptist witness in higher education antedates the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention itself. When the Convention was organized in 1845, Furman, Mississippi, Georgetown, Mercer, University of Richmond, Wake Forest, Howard (now Sanford), and Judson were already flourishing institutions. Fourteen years later Southern Baptists began their first venture in theological education with the founding of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. From this modest beginning Southern Baptist higher education has made steady progress until presently 43 senior colleges, 10 junior colleges, and 7 seminaries have an enrollment of more than 93,000.

However, it is during the past two decades that Southern Baptist institutions of higher learning have made their most remarkable progress. At the very time when the usefulness of church-related colleges is being questioned by some, those who will take the trouble to look at the facts will find the situation reassuring.

Statistics are Impressive

While we would not diminish the problems which are confronting church-related colleges and all private higher education in the United States today, this is certainly no time to assume that the church-related college has seen its best days. The prediction of the "rapid demise" of church-related colleges has been going on for years, and yet it is interesting to note that as far as our Baptist schools are concerned, there has been during this 20-year period a most remarkable growth which can be demonstrated both in terms of statistics and in the accomplishment of purpose. There are in the United States today approximately 800 church-related colleges. Roman Catholics claim 283, Methodists 110, and Southern Baptists are listed third with 53.

During the 20-year period from 1951-71, the following statistics indicate a steady growth in significant areas. In colleges the faculties increased from 3,618 to 4,828. Enrollment increased from 55,460 to 93,723. The graduate students enrolled increased from 559 to 1,616. Volumes in the library increased from 1,571,721 to 4,214,672. Total property value increased from \$87,524,000 to \$538,800,000.

Are Baptist Colleges Moving Away From The Denomination?

The answer is no! At no time in the history of Baptist colleges have administrators, faculties, and trustees been more conscious of their obligation to the denomination. This awareness is reflected in a new emphasis on denominational relations in faculty workshops, trustee orientation sessions, and in general administrative policy. Moreover, Baptist colleges are making a greater effort to keep the Baptist people informed through Baptist state papers,

their own publications, and mass media generally. In addition there is an increasing use of Baptist college facilities by the denomination for summer assemblies, retreats, workshops, programs of adult education, and other special services.

Curriculum development also reflects a new dedication to Christian purpose and objectives, indicated in the increased course offerings in Bible and related subjects, religious education, Christian ethics, philosophy, special courses for pastors' wives, and seminars in the area of social responsibility.

Baptist college faculties have also played an important off-campus role in the service of the denomination. In addition to being active in the local church many of these men and women are frequently called upon by the agencies of the denomination as teachers, writers, consultants, research assistants, and program leaders. They are used in a variety of capacities from assisting local associations to working with various boards and agencies of the Southern Baptist Convention. Professors of religion render an unusual service to the denomination—supplying pulpits, serving as interim pastors, and leading special emphases in the local church.

Involvement is a key word for many students. In addition to the traditional student activities associated with revival teams, singing groups, campus crusades, hospital and prison visitation, and work in the various programs of the local church, many new causes are being pursued.

Baptist college students are currently working with the blind, serving in mental hospitals, working in general hospitals, aiding retarded children, tutoring high school students in order to cut the number of dropouts, tutoring fellow college students, working long hours without pay in slums and ghettos, assisting in drug and alcohol rehabilitation, assisting nurses, and directing community recreational programs. Moreover, many of these students are actively working with local welfare departments in a variety of programs which touch the heart of human need.

For the most part these students have received little public recognition. Half a dozen students with signs in a picket line under the right circumstances can get national attention, but college young people doing the most menial tasks without pay in a mental hospital never make the headlines and are seldom recognized even in small print. This is not to imply that all students and all teachers are equally active in the work of the denomination, any more than we assume that all members of a Baptist church are equally dedicated and active. The proportion is about the same.

All indications point to the fact that Baptist colleges are moving closer to their denomination. A Baptist college president said

recently, "Baptist schools cannot survive without a constituency—Southern Baptists are our constituency."

Dr. Cameron P. West, head of the North Carolina Board of Higher Education and a prominent Methodist layman, says, "Baptist schools have stayed closer to their people than institutions of other denominations and are therefore receiving better support."

Are Baptist Colleges Different from Public Colleges?

Some say that they are not. Nothing could be further from the truth. If this were so, the great dual system of which we have been so justly proud would have no meaning.

In attempting to answer this question we have cited many times chapel services, religious activities, spiritual atmosphere, required courses in religion, and personal commitment and dedication of faculty members and administrators as differentiating factors. All of these are important, but back of all these are much deeper presuppositions which are the distinguishing marks of a Christian school.

Baptist colleges are different in at least three major respects: in the exercise of freedom, in the understanding of truth, and in the commitment to particular values. In their exercise of freedom, Baptist colleges can teach religion, not as a comparative smorgasbord in which no religion is held to be any more true or valuable than any other religion, but as revealed truth in the person and work of Jesus Christ, by Scripture, and through God's redemptive witness in history. A public college by its very nature and by constitutional and statutory limitations cannot do this. The distinguishing characteristic is that a Christian college is committed to religious truth.

This distinction then points to an even more significant difference: an understanding of how man can know ultimate truth. From a secular stance, whatever truth man can discover, he discovers on his own initiative, and by his own power through reason, observation, and experiment. The scientific method is supreme.

While Baptist colleges are dedicated to reason and make full use of scientific method, they have a prior understanding through faith. In the nature of this faith is the recognition of man's limitations and the certain belief that apart from God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ man is hopelessly and eternally lost. Moreover, there is recognition that the recurring crises in human affairs are predictable results of man's unwillingness through pride and ignorance to recognize either the nature or extent of his sin.

In the third place, Baptist colleges are committed to the basic presupposition that there are values which are timeless and that the two greatest documents on human conduct are

the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. This commitment is diametrically opposed to the idea that all moral and ethical values are relative, growing out of culture, and that nothing is ever really right or wrong except for a reason. The Ten Commandments, like all divine truths, are God-given. They cannot be repealed, modified, or amended, and are not optional in whole or in part. They are simple in language, clear in meaning, and without parallel as guides to human conduct. When we understand the mind of Christ, especially through the Sermon on the Mount, the Ten Commandments are not burdensome legal obligations but guidelines to a joyous and fruitful way of life that has eternal significance.

One of America's most distinguished educators once said that the mark of an educated person is the ability to think clearly, communicate effectively, make relevant judgments, and to discriminate among values. In an age which is best characterized by a confused, if not nonexistent, value system the Baptist college offers to students a different and needed option.

Are Baptist Colleges Training Church Leadership?

Baptist colleges are also making greater effort to recruit and train young people in church vocational ministries. Of the approximately 7,000 students preparing in Baptist colleges for a Christian calling, almost one half have chosen a Christian vocation other than the pastoral ministry itself. Current seminary enrollment follows much the same pattern.

Of the approximately 6,500 students enrolled in undergraduate studies in Southern Baptist seminaries, 38 percent are pursuing a vocation other than that of the pastoral ministry. Twenty years ago only a handful of students in college and in seminary were seeking vocational training for anything but the pastoral ministry.

The vast increase in the number of students, both in college and seminary, who are choosing a Christian vocation other than that of being a pastor is one of the most significant developments in Southern Baptist higher education. There is little doubt that the diversification in ministries with a broader base and broader understanding of what constitutes a person's call to special church service has contributed to the remarkable growth and prosperity of Southern Baptist churches. Baptist colleges deserve a good share of the credit for this development. In many cases the college curriculum reflects this growing trend.

Are Baptist Colleges Second-Rate?

They are not. Baptist Colleges have made great strides academically. One of the most

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