

“Resisting Secularization: What Baylor and Notre Dame can Learn from Each Other”

By David Solomon

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I was an undergraduate at Baylor University in the early 1960s and returned there as a visiting faculty member in the philosophy department for the fall semester of 1994. Since I have spent most of the intervening years on the philosophy faculty at Notre Dame, I had occasion while at Baylor to reflect on the similarities and differences in the approaches of these two great Christian universities to the secularizing influences that have transformed so many formerly Christian colleges and universities in this country. There are lively discussions going on at both Notre Dame and Baylor about these issues, and my reflections here were originally prepared for a group of faculty members and administrators at Baylor who meet regularly to discuss these issues. Since the threat of secularization is clearly much on the mind of administrators and teachers at all of those religiously affiliated universities continuing to maintain strong ties to their founding religious traditions, I thought these reflections might be of more general interest.

It is important to remind ourselves of how few such universities remain. If we restrict our discussion to institutions of higher education with a realistic chance of becoming (or remaining) research universities of the first rank, there are surely only a handful. The processes of secularization, as a number of recent studies have emphasized, have taken less of a toll on Catholic universities. Georgetown, Fordham, Notre Dame, and Boston College have all maintained rich ties to their Catholic roots, but even at these universities much concern has been expressed in recent years about creeping secularization. Among Protestant universities, the picture of course is much bleaker. Secularization in the world of Protestant universities arrived earlier and hit harder. The great



Methodist universities--Duke, Northwestern, Boston University, Southern California, Vanderbilt--maintain at most symbolic ties to religious traditions which once guided the content of their curriculum. The Ivy League universities were secularized even earlier, and at them not even symbolic ties are maintained to their former religious traditions. At times this process of secularization produces comic moments, as when the recently inaugurated president of Duke was shocked to discover that the university seal made reference in a politically incorrect manner to a Deity. She reacted as if she had discovered that the Duke Board of Trustees was packed with members of the Klan. Baylor alone among major Protestant universities has a chance both to become a research university of the first rank and also to maintain rich ties to its Protestant tradition. There are, of course, a number of outstanding Protestant colleges which continue to resist secularization--Wheaton and Calvin come to mind--but none of these is poised as Baylor appears to be to move in the direction of becoming a major research university.

First, what are the similarities between Baylor and Notre Dame that make it appropriate to compare their approaches to secularization? The most important is that Notre Dame and Baylor have maintained, against the tide of secularization, so much of their traditional religious identity. Unlike Duke and Northwestern, Baylor and Notre Dame have a religious identity, clear steps are being taken to preserve it, and a lively discussion about how to preserve it is going on at both universities. But, also, the schools are similar in that this continuity of religious identity is coupled with relatively recent moves to loosen the ties with their religious traditions. In 1992 Baylor modified its charter in order to distance itself from certain forms of direct control by the Texas Baptist Convention. This change has seemed to some as a threat to Baylor's continued Baptist identity. In a similar fashion, Notre Dame--along with many other leading Catholic universities--took steps in the mid-1960s to distance itself from direct clerical control. Two events are relevant here. At a famous conference of leaders in Catholic higher education at Land-O-Lakes, Wisconsin, in 1965, a number of leading Catholic universities affirmed a commitment to academic freedom which seemed to many persons at the time to threaten the Catholic identity of traditional Catholic colleges and universities. At about the same time, the Congregation of the Holy Cross (the Catholic religious order that founded and owned Notre Dame) turned the university over to a secular Board of Trustees. Certain forms of



control were maintained by the Congregation in this change. The president of Notre Dame, for example, is required to be a member of the Congregation, and the very highest governing body of the university (the seven member Board of Fellows), though appointed by the Trustees, is required to have a majority of Congregation priests on it unless or until this requirement is overturned by the Fellows themselves.

The combination of this handing over of Notre Dame to a broadly secular board and Notre Dame's strong commitment to academic freedom resulted in a discussion in Catholic circles not dissimilar to the discussion in Baptist circles about the charter change in 1992.

Another point of similarity is that both universities are ambitious to become centers of serious intellectual work, recognized nationally and internationally as universities of the first rank. Were Baylor and Notre Dame content to be good regional liberal arts universities, committed to good teaching with a sprinkling of research among those so inclined, issues of religious character would be less pressing. But neither university is so content. Notre Dame is a very ambitious place. Its endowment has grown from \$50 million in the late 1960s to nearly a billion dollars today. In the past two decades we have created and fully funded over 80 new endowed chairs, bringing the total of endowed chairs at Notre Dame to 105. Many of these chairs are now filled by internationally prominent scholars. Serious research involvement is expected of all Notre Dame faculty, and incentives and penalties are deployed with this expectation in mind. The rhetoric of Baylor administrators and supporters is certainly tending in the same direction. And to the extent that Baylor and Notre Dame attempt to hire new faculty and to develop policies to serve their ambitions, it becomes more difficult to preserve religious identity. The best mathematicians, social scientists, and philosophers that Baylor has a chance to hire will not necessarily also contribute to preserving Baylor's Baptist character.

Baylor and Notre Dame are also alike in that their academic ambition is partly (and perhaps largely) driven by the kind of outsider mentality characteristic of Baptists and Catholics in this country. American Catholics are classic outsiders. The myths and traditions of Catholic social life in America are rooted in immigrant experiences in large city Irish, Italian, and Polish ghettos. Chicago is not



only the third largest American city: it is also the second largest Polish and Irish city in the world. Earlier generations of Catholics struggled to succeed in police forces and local government before they turned their attention to higher education. Baptists, similarly, have been in some respects spectators on the sidelines of American culture. Southern Baptists, as southern, share a kind of cultural marginalization associated with the entire American South. But even within the South, Baptists traditionally occupied a cultural place somewhat further from the center than Methodists and Presbyterians, and much further than the well-turned-out Episcopalians. Baptists are never regarded as "mainstream" Protestants, but always as a large tributary, though a tributary that presently threatens to swamp the mainstream.

This outsider status is complicated, and in many ways transformed, by yet a further similarity between Baylor and Notre Dame supporters--their newfound prosperity. Catholics and Baptists may still be, in certain respects, outsiders, but they are now very prosperous outsiders. Catholics are now wealthier than either Protestants or Jews, and even a casual drive around any Texas town or city will demonstrate that the biggest and most expensive church in town is almost certainly Baptist. The income hierarchy in Texas towns I knew in my youth--Episcopalians the richest, followed by Presbyterians and Methodists, with Baptists lagging behind and leading only the Holiness churches--is a thing of the past. Baptists now dress as well as anybody in town and have to struggle, as Episcopalians and Methodists did in the past, with the moral temptations associated with membership in the local country club.

These similarities should not, however, blind us to important differences between Notre Dame and Baylor. Even in these ecumenical days, there are theologically related cultural and institutional differences that run quite deep. One difference with some relevance to the question of religious identity is the culture of governance at each institution. Baylor faculty, like all faculty members I have ever known, frequently complain about too much centralized and top-down management at the university. They push for more faculty oversight and involvement in administrative decisions. They may be right to make these demands, but to an outsider Baylor seems, if anything, to be too burdened with bottom-up committees. The same faculty members at Baylor who complain about centralized administration also complain about the burdens of committee work. However this may



be, governance at Baylor is much more distributed and much less centralized than that at Notre Dame, where decision-making is more hierarchical and paternalistic.

Governance at both schools tends to mimic clerical structure. For Catholics power has traditionally radiated from Rome, bishops, and clergy. Baptist organization is a kind of constrained anarchy. Baptist preachers have to earn the authority they possess in their congregations; priests have authority conferred upon them. Both Nashville and Rome attempt to exert power over their scattered congregations, but Rome starts with a decided theological advantage in this regard over Nashville.

These differences in administrative style are relevant to questions of religious identity in a number of ways, but the most important is the relation they have to techniques of institutional control. Given the more centralized control characteristic of Catholic universities, it is easier to maintain religious identity in secularizing times in such universities. This may partially explain why Catholic universities as a group have been so much more successful at resisting secularizing influences than Protestant universities have.

A second difference between Notre Dame and Baylor--and it would be especially striking to a Catholic visitor to Baylor--is the lack of religious objects and images on the Baylor campus. A visitor who walked around the campus and looked it over would have no clue that it is a Christian--or Baptist--university. Things are quite different at Notre Dame. At the entrance to the Notre Dame campus is a statue of the founder, Father Sorin, in complete clerical regalia; at the entrance to Baylor's campus is a statue of its founder, a judge, in full judicial regalia. Bells are played at Notre Dame from the tower of a French neogothic church at the center of campus: bells at Baylor are played from the tower of the administration building. At Notre Dame, the neogothic church is the architectural focus of the campus: there is no church on the Baylor campus. When alums return to Notre Dame, they frequently stroll across campus to visit (and light a candle at) a replica of the grotto at Lourdes; at Baylor, one visits the bear pit where the university mascot is housed. At Notre Dame, there is a crucifix in every classroom, a chapel in every dormitory (where Mass is said several



times a week), and religious statuary distributed around campus: at Baylor there are no religious objects of this sort to be found.

A Catholic visitor to the Baylor campus would be immediately struck by the lack of sacred space on campus. Indeed, the building which houses the space with the most sacred aspect is the unrelentingly secular Armstrong-Browning Library, a replica of an Italianate villa housing research materials and memorabilia of the Brownings. The Browning Library contains much beautiful stained glass and its central room, the Foyer of Meditation, has as its focus the altar-like bronze cast of Robert and Elizabeth Brownings' clasped hands. But the reach of the Browning Library toward the sacred exceeds its grasp. It remains a temple to a dead Victorian poet. The stained glass celebrates the Pied Piper of Hamelin, not the events of the gospels; the statue of the innocent young woman that graces the front of the building is of Pippa and not of the Mother of God. The sign inside the front door of Armstrong-Browning Library reminds the visitor that this building contains the world's largest collection of *secular* stained glass. One could go on to mention the two most recognizable symbols of Notre Dame to the wider world: the statue of the Virgin Mary atop the golden dome and the ten-story-high mosaic of Jesus on the library.

One might say, of course, that these differences in the physical presence of the religious on the two campuses is the result of deep differences in the religious beliefs and practices of Baptists and Catholics. But that is to make my point.

There are a number of ways in which these differences are relevant to the larger topic of religious identity, but one is of particular importance. Secularization would be more difficult ultimately at Notre Dame than at Baylor, and this would be true just because the religious identity of Notre Dame is embodied in the physical being of the place. The faculty and students might give up any interest in things religious, but the campus would still be laid out in the shape of a cross. And it would be difficult to remove the mosaic of Jesus from the front of the library. There is an old saying at Notre Dame that "the blood is in the bricks"--meaning that the life's work of the founders and sustainers of the university course through the yellow mud bricks from which the campus buildings are constructed. But in a deeper sense, the religious traditions of the university have left their mark



on the physical structure of the place. To render Notre Dame finally and fully secular would require tearing it down and rebuilding it--*and* renaming it! Baylor possesses no such barriers to secularization. Another difference: Baylor approaches the question of its identity with a certain fear, I think, that it may be too provincial. Its slogan is, after all, "Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana." It is some measure of Notre Dame's distance from this worry that it is unimaginable that Notre Dame should paint on its seal "Pro Ecclesia, Pro Indiana" (although "God, Country and Notre Dame" has seemed to some to bespeak a nascent provincialism). Notre Dame embraces both (big C) Catholicism and (little c) catholicism. Catholics are naturally and primordially "multicultural." Baptists of course have always also been moved by a kind of universality, perhaps best expressed in their commitment to "the Great Commission." But this commitment is a commitment to evangelize the world from a particular point in it--a point perhaps some distance from its center. Catholics seem never to doubt that they occupy the center (no matter how much the world may fail to notice this) and that they are working from this center to the edge. Even in these days when it is fashionable among Catholics to disparage their triumphalist past, they remain Roman in more ways than one, taking as a metaphor for their place in the world the role of Rome in its imperial ascendancy. Baptists seem rather to approach self-understanding with the image of an Old Testament prophet before them. They speak from the wilderness but say things of the greatest importance even to those in the center of the most cosmopolitan city. How these differences in self-understanding will play themselves out in the current debate about the religious identity of universities is unclear, but there is no doubt of their importance.

I know too little about Baylor to comment in detail on how it is trying to cope with the threat of secularization, but at Notre Dame a number of policies have been adopted to address this issue. The strategies fall into five different categories.

The most visible strategy is administrative and structural, sometimes summarized as "priests in the dorms and dome." The central administration at Notre Dame is housed in the building under the golden dome. Hence, "priests in the dome" means keeping priests (and other "high-profile Catholics") not only in the presidency but in other top administrative positions. The rector of most



men's dorms is a priest, and in the women's dorms (there are no coed dorms at Notre Dame) priests play large roles both in the liturgical life of the dorm community and also its social life.

A second strategy is broadly curricular. Notre Dame requires that all undergraduates take two three-credit philosophy courses and two three-credit theology courses. Although these courses need not be, and seldom are, doctrinal, they are intended to give students initial access to that rich intellectual culture that informs Christian understanding and faith. Students would not be allowed to take a course narrowly focused on logic to satisfy this requirement, but they might take a course on environmental ethics, liberation theology, or contemporary philosophy of mind.

A third feature of Notre Dame life that is inseparable from its Catholic identity is the commitment of the university to make opportunities for service available to students. The Center for Social Concerns is a well-funded center housed in a large building near the center of the campus that serves as a clearing house for these various service projects. Service projects in this country or abroad, for a weekend or for a year, in a hospital or in a homeless shelter, are made available to students. Special efforts are also made to integrate these service projects with the broader intellectual life--of the students as well as their religious life.

The most controversial strategy pursued at Notre Dame for retaining Catholic identity concerns hiring and admission policy. Roughly 85 percent of Notre Dame graduates are at least nominally Catholic. University admission policy is aimed at retaining the percentage at that level. The percentage of Notre Dame faculty who identify themselves as Catholic has declined significantly in recent years. Although there is clearly concern among some faculty, administrators, and alumni about this decline, it is unclear at this time how hiring policies might be adjusted, if at all, to counteract what appears to be a continuing trend. A university committee proposed recently that the university aim to maintain a faculty in which a "preponderance" of its members are Catholic. The central administration has more recently, however, seemed unwilling to commit itself even to such a loosely defined target. What is clear is that the university has been prepared to exert effort and provide money to attract a number of prominent Catholic and non-Catholic Christian intellectuals to Notre Dame. In this regard, Notre Dame has been remarkably ecumenical. The university has, for



example, collected the largest and most respected group of Protestant philosophers of religion in the world. Also, a number of its most influential administrators (e.g., Nathan Hatch and John Van Engen) are prominent Protestant scholars.

A final strategy Notre Dame has pursued is to build up particular departments and institutes that have special connections to the concerns of contemporary Christians. Given the importance of philosophy and theology in Catholic life, it is not surprising that these two departments are the two largest and best funded departments in the humanities. Notre Dame is, I suspect, the only major American university in which the philosophy and theology departments are larger than the history and English departments. A number of other institutes--the Medieval Institute, the Peace Institute, the Cushwa Center for the history of American Catholicism, and the Jacques Maritain Center--provide high profile centers for research and teaching in areas of continuing concern for Catholics and other Christians.

These various strategies followed by Notre Dame may give the impression that all is well with Notre Dame's attempt to retain its Catholic identity. But that is surely far from clear. Anyone who has observed Notre Dame closely for the last 30 years would surely agree on two things: It is a much better university than it was 30 years ago, and it is much less Catholic. How these two features are to be explained (and how related) are matters of dispute. All of the strategies discussed above have been attacked by some significant part of the Notre Dame community. Many Notre Dame faculty, for example, regard the university as too Catholic (and consequently too paternalistic in its treatment of students) and too hesitant in engaging contemporary trends in scholarship. Others regard the university as having already lost its Catholic identity and having set itself on a course that will inevitably result, in a generation or so, in Notre Dame's being another (slightly inferior) Duke or Stanford. One of the most hopeful signs is that a lively discussion has broken out among both students and faculty concerning these questions of Catholic character. Discussion groups and colloquia on these topics now take up a significant amount of time on the Notre Dame campus. This, of course, points to one more similarity between Notre Dame and Baylor, since similar discussions are beginning to take place at Baylor. (Indeed, the session at which this paper was



originally given is one of those manifestations.) But the very existence of these discussions has itself become a matter of controversy. At both Notre Dame and Baylor I sense that many faculty members fear open discussion on these matters, lest public discussion of them expose the creeping (or in certain respects, galloping) secularization of both institutions, and bring down "reactionary religious oppression." At Baylor the fear focuses on "fundamentalism," at Notre Dame, on clerical control (or, among the more fanciful, "Rome and the bishops"). These fears are surely unfounded and slightly silly, of course. Both Baylor and Notre Dame have armed themselves well to fend off "religious darkness." Secularization remains the threat.

Why is it, then, that so many faculty members at Baylor and Notre Dame almost obsessively fear religious interference more than secularization? This obsession is especially peculiar since *no* major American university has ever become more religiously oriented, while a host of such schools have become less.

Why is it that talk about retaining or strengthening the religious identity of schools like Notre Dame or Baylor makes so many faculty members nervous? Why do they see these discussions as a threat? Why do faculty members who on other occasions emphasize academic freedom and the requirement to discuss openly every issue (especially those most embarrassing to the communities that support their universities) draw a line in the sand on these issues? Why do faculty members who press for discussion of these issues come to be seen as dangerous characters? These questions have puzzled me for some time. There are a number of recurring arguments given by those faculty members who are suspicious of moves to retain or strengthen religious identity at Baylor or Notre Dame. These arguments, which are identical at Baylor and Notre Dame, and which are repeated almost as a mantra by many faculty members, are surprisingly weak.

The first argument is an *argument from liberation*. It was presented at an earlier session of the colloquy at which I originally presented this paper, by the chairman of the philosophy department at Baylor. He pointed out, surely rightly, that for many of us the most rewarding and enriching university experience we encountered was the liberation from narrow and restricting intellectual vistas. We came from small towns, burdened with dogmatism and narrowness of vision. Great



teachers introduced us to ideas and perspectives we had hardly imagined existed. Our education led us out of prejudice and a pinched view of ourselves and our capacities and into a world of possibilities framed by the great thinkers in world culture.

Although this general point about liberation seems right, its connection with the larger question of the religious character of universities is not so clear. The connection is supposed to be made, I gather, by claiming that if we shape universities and their curricula in order to serve the broader aims of particular religious traditions, then universities will be less effective in liberating students from narrow prejudice than they otherwise would be. Indeed, one often gets the impression that persons who defend the liberation argument think that narrow religious belief is exactly what students need to be liberated from. If religious belief (or "narrow" religious belief) is the target of liberation, then it might seem to follow that liberation will be less effective at those universities that shape their curricula and their faculty in accord with religious aims.

This argument is a powerful one and it gains its power largely from an Enlightenment perspective that informs much of our practice at modern universities. It seems, however, in the end, unconvincing, and for two reasons. First, it is surely implausible to claim that the main disability of contemporary students at either Baylor or Notre Dame is a narrow and provincial view of their faith. Indeed, the case seems to be quite otherwise. The most salient feature of contemporary students is their vast ignorance of their faith. Their knowledge of Scripture and religious tradition is woefully inadequate, and their deepest moral commitment seems to be to tolerance and being nice. They may be vaguely aware that they are supposed to be opposed to fornication and racism, but they will almost certainly be unable to articulate any good reasons for these views which will help them actually resist fornication or racism when temptation arises.

In discussing Nietzsche's attack on the Beatitudes in a course at Baylor last fall, I discovered that most students in the class were far from clear on what the Beatitudes are. A philosopher who teaches at a religiously affiliated university has written recently about a discussion in an undergraduate class in which he explained to the students that traditional Christian belief is committed to the resurrection of the body. He later discovered that he had been reported to the administration by a



vigilant student who thought he must be a closet Mormon since no "real" Christian could believe such a preposterous doctrine.

In an earlier time narrow religious prejudice might have been a genuine danger and liberation might have been called for. With contemporary students, however, their beliefs and commitments are so thin, there really is very little to liberate them from.

A second response to the liberation argument follows quickly from the first. It is a point about the real educational needs of contemporary students. Students need less to be liberated from narrow prejudice than to be given assistance in acquiring cultural resources. And no richer cultural resources are available than the broadly Christian intellectual tradition that informs Western culture. Students need to understand that Jane Austen is as much a Christian novelist as Frank Perretti (and a much better one too) and that the often abstract and difficult conflicts among modern philosophers--from Descartes to Wittgenstein--are at bottom disputes about whether a broadly naturalistic account of the world can be sustained and, if so, whether such a worldview excludes the central claims of traditional Christianity or can be accommodated to them. Moreover, an educational scheme that attempts to introduce students to Christian culture (instead of liberating them from it) is also a tool of liberation. Though now instead of trying primarily to liberate them from narrow religious views, we will be attempting to liberate them from materialism, relativism, consumerism, technologism, careerism, hedonism, and the other snares and delusions so characteristic of modern secular culture. If this is the goal of liberation, of course, the proponents of attempts to integrate faith and learning will lead the applause.

A quite different argument against attempts to moor traditionally Christian universities more tightly to their traditions is what I call the *ignorance argument*. This argument claims that we cannot even take steps to make Baylor or Notre Dame more Christian or more Baptist or more Catholic, because no one really knows (or at least no one is prepared to say) exactly what a Christian or Baptist or Catholic) university is. One of the speakers at the last session of the colloquy at which I first presented this paper claimed that he certainly didn't know what a Baptist university was supposed to be and that no one could enlighten him on this matter. This argument is often presented as a series



of questions: How many Baptists must be on the faculty of a university in order for it to be a Baptist university? What proportion of the students must be Baptist? What must be taught in the religion courses? Can a university be Baptist while allowing dancing in the student center? These questions are, of course, frequently put forward with a mischievous intent and they are always wearying, but they have an undoubted force. If proponents of keeping Baylor Baptist (or of keeping Notre Dame Catholic) cannot give a relatively detailed account of what this might mean, surely their proposal cannot be taken seriously. What can be said about these arguments?

A first response is to point out that some persons who raise this objection commit a well-known logical fallacy that was much discussed in the ancient world--the so-called fallacy of the heap. This fallacy takes its name from the example that was frequently used to illustrate it. Someone might argue that we are unable to say exactly how many grains of sand are necessary to make a "heap" of sand. One grain is surely not a heap, but 10,000 grains suitably piled up would be. But where is the cutoff point? Is there some number, say 322, such that collections of sand with fewer than that number of grains are not heaps, but larger collections are? One commits the fallacy of the heap if he argues that since we can't specify an exact number, a precise criterion for being a heap, then we don't know what a heap is. Of course, we know what a heap is, but in order to know this we don't have to have a fully specified criterion. Similarly, even if we can't specify with mathematical precision the percentage of Baptist faculty members necessary to keep Baylor Baptist, we still know that there is a difference between a Baptist university and a non-Baptist university. Baylor is a Baptist university and Harvard isn't. The notion of a Baptist university may have "fuzzy edges (as does the notion of a heap) but it is not without content.

But not all of those who raise the "ignorance argument" are committing a fallacy. There is a genuine question here of how specific we can be in detailing the contours of a university which is true to the religious traditions of its founders, but also capable of pursuing the goals it shares with its secular competitors. Perhaps the best way to explain what makes a university Baptist is to say that it is the kind of university one gets if one puts a lot of smart Baptists together and lets them run a university.



The critic, of course, might think this is too facile and demand that more be said about the determinate structure of a Baptist university. Here, one can only point out that many other rich social notions are similarly defined in practice. The notion of a university itself is surely so defined. No one can say timelessly and with complete specification what a university is. We have been trying to answer that question since Plato opened the Academy 2,500 years ago. The University of Paris in the 13th century, Harvard College in 1650, and the University of California at Berkeley today are alternative answers to the question. There is both continuity and development in the concept of a university and no one can predict today how universities will be thought of a century from now. In this regard, the concept of a Baptist university is no worse off than the concept of a university itself.

But suppose all that I have said in response to the ignorance argument is mistaken or inadequate. Suppose, that is, that we really don't know what a Baptist (or Catholic) university is. In this case, we need to change many more practices around universities like Baylor and Notre Dame than the critics sometimes notice. Both Baylor and Notre Dame raise huge sums of money from donors by claiming that they are Christian universities. Parents are induced to impoverish themselves in order to send their children to these universities by being told that their children will get a Christian education. If we genuinely don't know what a Baptist university is, then we need to stop raising money as if we did, and start refunding money to earlier donors. This is a simple point of truth in advertising.

A quite different argument often brought forward against retaining the Christian character of universities like Notre Dame and Baylor is what I will call the *quality argument*. This argument alleges that if we take serious steps to retain the religious character of such universities, their quality will inequality decline. I have a colleague at Notre Dame who regularly writes letters to the student newspaper alleging that if we restrict our hiring in the philosophy department to Catholics, or even to Christians, we will inevitably condemn ourselves to being second-rate. Apart from being insulting to the Church of Rome and its adherents (imagine if this claim, for example, were made about some ethnic or racial group), it is surely silly. There are almost a billion Catholics in the world. If only one in a million is "absolutely first rate," that will provide enough to staff Notre Dame, the pre-eminent Catholic university in the world. There would probably even be enough "first rate" Catholics left over to help Baylor fill its faculty ranks with Christians, if they were so needed. But surely they



wouldn't be needed. There are a lot of Baptists in the world, too, and their numbers are growing. Is it really conceivable that it would be impossible to staff Baylor with largely Baptist scholars? Since Baylor is, moreover, the only Protestant research university in this country, it would be able to draw on all of those Protestant, but non-Baptist, scholars who in earlier times (when Duke, Vanderbilt and Northwestern retained their religious character) might have wanted to teach at a Methodist university.

If the response to the quality argument is so obvious, why is this argument so frequently put forward? I suspect that it trades on two quite different issues. First, it rightly notices that Christian universities have not been very good at hiring faculty in their own faith traditions. Indeed, this is undoubtedly one of the explanations of the widespread secularization within American higher education. But part of the explanation for this, surely, is that religiously affiliated universities have not tried as hard as they might have to hire faculty members supportive of their traditional religious commitments. A comparison with the approach taken by the Mormons to this problem is instructive. The Mormon administration at Brigham Young (I am told) keeps a card index on Mormon scholars throughout the world, as well as Mormons pursuing an advanced degree with a view to teaching in higher education. When faculty vacancies come open at Brigham Young, information is available to begin a faculty search with persons likely to be favorable to the religious commitments at Brigham Young. Of course, such a cardfile cannot settle hiring decisions, but it can provide a starting point. As far as I know, no such attempt to facilitate hiring at Catholic or Protestant universities has ever been made.

The quality argument is also driven, I suspect, by the view that religious commitment on the part of scholars interferes with their scholarly objectivity. This view suggests that one's religious beliefs are themselves threats to the quality of one's work. A priest friend of mine was once giving a paper (while wearing his clerical collar) at a scholarly meeting on Galileo's philosophy of science when he was interrupted from the floor by another philosopher of science who claimed that no Catholic--and especially no Catholic priest--could treat Galileo's view fairly. He demanded that my friend stop reading his paper. This is only an extreme instance of an attitude that is frequently expressed in less extreme form. This attitude treats religious commitments as introducing a kind of prejudice into



scholarly discussions whereas broadly secular and naturalistic views of the world are treated as neutral and without bias. This view is deeply related to other features of Enlightenment thinking and is unlikely long to survive the general critique of the Enlightenment *prejudice* embodied in it. It is important, for now, however, that when this attitude is encountered the point be made in response that secular and naturalistic approaches to the world are themselves *points of view*. There may continue to be disputes about whether there is some neutral point from which our view of the world is nonperspectival and without interference, but even if there is such a point it is far from clear that the viewpoint of secular scientific naturalism is that point.

A fourth consideration that makes many persons hesitate to endorse strong measures to preserve the Christian character of universities like Notre Dame and Baylor concerns a commitment to pluralism. This *argument from pluralism* frequently begins by emphasizing the importance of pluralism in a culture as diverse and multicultural as our own. There is good reason to believe that our most fundamental political institutions were designed precisely to deal with the kind of cultural conflict characteristic of religious disagreement. In the New World, our forefathers were escaping the religious wars and general religious intolerance that characterized early modern Europe.

This beginning of the argument from pluralism can hardly be faulted. It is surely correct to call attention both to the multicultural nature of American society and to the features of our political life designed to mitigate the ill effects of this diversity. The difficulty with this argument is not, then, at all with this beginning, but rather with its conclusion: the claim that this concern with pluralism is somehow in conflict with a commitment to preserving the religious character of schools like Notre Dame and Baylor. On the contrary, pluralism demands precisely that Baylor remain Baptist, Notre Dame remain Catholic, Brandeis remain Jewish, Brigham Young remain Mormon, and Liberty Baptist remain fundamentalist. How does the argument for this position go?

The mistake made by the pluralist argument is well exemplified in an editorial in the Waco newspaper that appeared the week before I originally gave this talk. The editorial was entitled "The Big Tent," and criticized Baylor for being too provincial in its hiring policy. It seemed to imply that if Baylor attempted to hire predominantly Baptists (or even Christians) in order to preserve its



religious character, it would be offending against the very pluralism that, as we have seen, is so essential to our national health.

Why should we agree that, in order to preserve an appropriately pluralistic society, all of the universities in it should be, in their internal arrangements, pluralistic? It would be as plausible to argue that all the families in a society must be internally pluralistic (father, a Muslim; mother, a Christian; baby brother, perhaps, a secular humanist) if the society is to be pluralistic.

Trying to staff every university in America, with exactly the same proportion of members of racial, ethnic, or religious groups would not contribute to pluralism and diversity, but rather to sameness. It is surely important for genuine pluralism that there be scholarly communities in which relatively likeminded scholars can work in a supportive atmosphere. Notre Dame, for example, is the only philosophy Ph.D. program in this country, ranked in the top 20 philosophy departments, in which a predominant number of the faculty is Christian and in which the research in the department is self-consciously pursued by a significant number of faculty members as an instance of Christian philosophy. Preserving the character of this department by trying to hire other Christian philosophers who share (to some extent) its goals is surely not to reject pluralism, but to promote it. This is especially true given the unrelentingly secular character of almost all of the major research universities in this country. No one familiar with the atmosphere at our most prestigious research universities could possibly deny that there is a general air of hostility toward religion at them. In the name of pluralism, then, Notre Dame and Baylor surely have an obligation to continue to pursue hiring policies that will preserve their distinctive characters.

A point was made by a Baylor faculty member at one of the earlier sessions of the colloquium at which I read this paper which illustrates in a different way the complexities of the demands of pluralism. This faculty member mentioned, in a tone of voice betraying his pride, that the course in psychology he taught at Baylor could just as easily be taught at the University of Texas and that nothing about it would betray its origin as a course at a Baptist university. If this attitude toward courses at Baylor were universal, then all that is most valuable about Baylor (and the same point holds for Notre Dame) would be lost. It is not the job of Baylor or Notre Dame to offer courses that



are indistinguishable from those at the University of Texas--or Duke, Stanford, or Princeton. Surely, what Baylor and Notre Dame have to offer to the rich pluralistic culture of the U.S. is sufficient self-confidence and integrity to be the best Christian universities they can be. If they go the secular way of Duke, Vanderbilt, Harvard, and Yale (as, of course, they are almost certain to do in the course of the next half century unless serious measures are taken to halt the slide toward secularism at both schools), pluralism in higher education in this country will not be enhanced, but dealt a serious blow. The argument from pluralism then turns out not to be an argument against the religious distinctiveness of Baylor and Notre Dame, but instead a powerful argument for it.

A final argument that has been of great importance in these matters is the *argument from corruption*. This argument alleges that if we attempt to enforce guidelines in hiring and curriculum in order to maintain religious identity at Baylor and Notre Dame, we will actually corrupt both the religious and scholarly life of those at the university. We will corrupt religious life by encouraging hypocrisy and Pharisaism, and corrupt scholarship by making it difficult for scholars to approach their research and teaching with a genuinely open mind. Religious life will become shallow and insincere and research will be guided by considerations extrinsic to the untrammelled pursuit of the truth. There might be dangers of this sort at universities like Baylor and Notre Dame if a certain sort of religious conduct were required of faculty *after* they are hired. This is one reason why Notre Dame, wisely I think, does not attempt any oversight of the religious beliefs or practices of its faculty. Such attempts at the regulation of behavior and belief would not only tend to corrupt religious practice but it would also offend against the most elementary tenets of academic freedom--tenets to which Notre Dame and Baylor are committed.

However, there is every reason why Christian universities should take steps to make sure that at least a significant number of the faculty members they *hire* are friendly to the religious commitments that provide the identity of the university. And in this practice it is difficult to see how there would be any special risk of tempting faculty members to religious hypocrisy.

But what about the second part of the corruption argument: the claim that scholarship would be corrupted by the special incentives at a Christian university to steer research in the direction



of *Christian* truth? There are genuine dangers in this area, but it is not clear that the dangers are any greater than those associated with other pressures on scholars extrinsic to the pursuit of truth. Career pressures on contemporary scholars are frequently very heavy. There are pressures to publish early and a lot; there are pressures to turn one's research in a particular direction in order to secure funding (indeed, funding agencies design their eligibility criteria precisely in order to entice scholars to work in areas they might not be naturally inclined toward); and universities hire "grantspersons" in order to assist faculty members in "describing" their research in such a way as to secure funding. The possibilities of research being corrupted by these different pressures are manifold. Indeed, my former colleague at Notre Dame, Alasdair Macintyre, has argued that institutions (e.g., universities) always tend to corrupt social practices (e.g., scholarship). Just as the innocent childhood game of baseball becomes transformed when it comes up against agents, television contracts, and commercial opportunities, all human practices are prone to corruption when they become embodied in institutions. However these larger disputes about institutions, and practices are resolved, I am unpersuaded that scholarship is more likely to be corrupted by the atmosphere of a Christian university than it is by an opportunity offered by the NEH to spend a summer in Florence. And Christians have an advantage over secular scholars in these matters in that, given their commitment to the doctrine of original sin, they are well aware that opportunities for corruption are all around them. Forewarned in these matters, as in others, is surely to be forearmed.

The above five arguments brought against efforts to preserve and enhance the Christian character of universities like Notre Dame and Baylor are surprisingly weak. They do not comprise even a *prima facie* case against continued efforts to preserve the few remaining Christian research universities in this country.

With regard to the general questions of secularization of higher education in our country, those of us who think it is important to preserve the distinctiveness of Christian universities have reason to be both pessimistic and optimistic. The past record of Christian universities like Notre Dame and Baylor suggests that almost all is lost that decline into full secularization is almost inevitable, and that in 50 years Notre Dame will be indistinguishable (except for that peculiar cruciform campus and the fading mosaic on the library) from Purdue, and Baylor indistinguishable from S.M.U. On the other



hand, there may be some reason for optimism. All is not well with the secular citadels of higher education in this country. The idealism of the young is unlikely to be satisfied for long by the pallid political correctness that has been substituted for a genuine Christian concern for social and political justice, nor by the hedonism and relativism served up by the gurus of postmodernism. Perhaps the most hopeful sign for our future is the very colloquium in which I was invited to give this paper. Baylor and Notre Dame have a distinct advantage over Duke and Vanderbilt in that we can reflect on what befell them. They literally never knew what hit them. All recent studies of secularization at these universities demonstrate that they were led along the secular path by well-intentioned and deeply religious university leaders. We, of course, while having the wisdom provided by this knowledge, also have inherited the responsibility that attends such knowledge. Those faculty members and administrators at Duke and Vanderbilt who are responsible for the secularization of those universities can plausibly argue before their final judge that they didn't know it would turn out the way it has. We will not be permitted the luxury of such a plea.

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