A Slippery Slope to Secularization? An Empirical Analysis of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

By Samuel Joeckel and Thomas Chesnes

The fear among those committed to Christian higher education has been variously named: the declension thesis, the slippery slope to secularization, the loss of Christian identity. Michael S. Hamilton provides an example of how such fear generates alarmist rhetoric:

One moment of relaxed vigilance—one twitch or stumble in a secular direction—and down slides the college into the tar pits of apostasy. The only thing left of its former faith would be a stately chapel building—a fossilized artifact of the college's Christian past. The process started with Harvard—once the pride of Puritanism—and has since claimed almost every once-Christian college.[1]

Hamilton's clarion call for refocused vigilance against secularization certainly has as one impetus the publication over the last fifteen years of a number of cogently argued books that document the loss of Christian distinctiveness in American higher education. Commenting on these books, Mark Noll notes that "although they move in different directions for different purposes, almost all of the important studies of which I am aware are narratives in one form or another of decline."[2]

In this essay, we explore how seriously the dangers of decline threaten institutions belonging to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU).[3] Employing a 2007 survey of over 1,900 faculty at ninety-five different CCCU institutions, we show that, though vigilance should still be exercised, these institutions are hardly descending the slippery slope to secularization.[4] Faculty participants in our survey demonstrated a strong dedication to maintaining the Christian charac-

In this essay, **Samuel Joeckel** and **Thomas Chesnes** explore whether secularization threatens institutions belonging to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. Employing a 2007 survey, they show that, though vigilance should still be exercised, these institutions are hardly descending a slippery slope to secularization. The second part of the essay argues that overzealous vigilance against secularization proves counterproductive, resulting in a theological and political homogeneity and defensiveness that militate against important aims of higher education, such a the free exchange of ideas and a charitable understanding of diversity of thought. Mr. Joeckel is Associate Professor of English and Mr. Chesnes is Associate Professor of Biology at Palm Beach Atlantic University.

ter of their colleges and universities; participants also showed overwhelming commitment to a seminal component of Christian higher education, the integration of faith and learning, all of which suggests that CCCU institutions need not summon their ideological forces in a last stand against the encroaching forces of secularization. In fact, as the second part of our essay argues, overzealous vigilance against secularization proves counterproductive, resulting in a theological and political homogeneity and defensiveness that militate against important aims of higher education, such as the free exchange of ideas and a charitable understanding of diversity of thought.

Context for Analysis

Much of the slippery-slope discourse over the past fifteen years has as its subtext George Marsden's magisterial *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Non-Belief*. (It should be noted, however, that Marsden himself does not use the phrase "slippery slope.") Tracing the "relegation of religion to the periphery of American universities" during the early twentieth century, eventuating by the 1960s in an academic life "largely freed from religious perspectives," Marsden's analysis raised awareness of the intellectual and sociological force of secularization, inspiring a host of other studies that explored the intersections between faith and learning.[5]

A quick overview of secularization theory highlights the various ways in which Christianity has lost its unifying power within the halls of academe. Reflecting on events in the nineteenth century, Nicholas Wolterstorff, for instance, points to "two mighty hammer blows that caused the reassuring edifice [of faith and scholarship] to totter and sway": Darwin's theory of evolution and German higher criticism. As a result of these events, continues Wolterstorff, evangelical colleges went "underground," emphasizing "personal piety" and evangelism.[6] Jon H. Roberts and James

[1]Michael S. Hamilton, "A Higher Education," *Christianity Today* (June 2005): 31.

[2]Mark A. Noll, "The Future of the Religious College," in *The Future of Religious Colleges: The Proceedings of the Harvard Conference on the Future of Religious Colleges*, ed. Paul J. Dovre (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 74.

[3]The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities is, as its website explains, "an international association of intentionally Christian colleges and universities." The CCCU currently includes 110 members, though at the time we conducted our empirical research, the CCCU had 105 members. See http://www.cccu.org/.

[4]During February 2007, 9,594 email invitations were sent to faculty of the 105 member institutions of the CCCU to participate in an internet-based survey. 1,907 faculty participated, representing 95 institutions. The 108 survey questions covered a variety of topics including demography, faith/Bible, philosophical issues, ethics, perceptions of students, science/environment, politics, and campus climate. Six questions were open-ended. Most responses were assessed on a five-point Likert scale. All statistics were calculated using SPSS statistical software.

[5]George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 430.

[6]Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Mission of the Christian College at the End of the Twentieth

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Turner describe how, after about 1830, science became invested with increased explanatory power, thereby marginalizing supernatural accounts of phenomena through the establishment of methodological naturalism.[7] Roberts and Turner also connect the rise of academic specialization to secularization. Specialization created the compartmentalization of knowledge, with religion beating a "retreat to ceremonial occasions and the extra-curriculum": "Hence the new specialization worked, along with other forces, to exclude religious belief as an *intellectual* tool within the university."[8] Offering a more contemporary theory of secularization, Martin Marty states that

secularization comes less from the heirs of Darwin, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, and the other bearded God-killers, or from clean-shaven federal bureaucrats, than from the "everydayishness" of sorts students will not recognize unless our religious institutions provide means for teaching discernment.[9]

What does Marty mean by "everydayishness"? The term signifies the subtle lure of materialism:

If our schools are "secularizing," they are doing so not because of a secular humanist conspiracy or a group of Supreme Court or theologically liberal subversives are leading in that direction. They are doing so unthinkingly, by adopting the material norms of a market economy. They enter a world of consumerism.[10]

Finally, Robert Benne offers a succinct theory of secularization:

Why did the bulk of church-related colleges and universities finally disengage from their sponsoring traditions? Fundamentally, it seems to be, that disengagement took place because both parties, the school and the church, lost confidence in the Christian account of reality. At bottom this matter was a crisis of faith, or at least in faith's confidence in its own intellectual and moral potency.[11]

What safeguards are in place to insure that institutions belonging to the CCCU do not fall victim to the protean forms of secularization sketched above? To respond, we appeal to the words of Robert B. Sloan, Jr.:

If I were to offer only one (there are many) propositions for how to preserve distinctively Christian higher education, or how to preserve the character of a distinctively Christian in-

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Century," in *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*, eds. Clarence W. Joldersma and Gloria Goris Stronks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 27-28.
[7]Jon H. Roberts and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), 53.
[8]Ibid., 88.
[9]Martin Marty, "The Church and Christian Higher Education in the New Millenium," in *Faithful Learning and the Christian Scholarly Vocation*, eds. Douglas V. Henry and Bob R. Agee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 57.
[10]Ibid., 55.
[11]Robert Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith With Their Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 47.

stitution, I would maintain that it is through the faculty of that institution. The faculty members carry the intellectual freight…. Thus to preserve distinctively Christian higher education, there must be at any Christian institution a critical mass of faculty members who are committed to the proposition of Christian higher education.[12]

Our analysis has as its context the historical awareness (and reality) of secularization, raised by such books as Marsden's as well as those that follow in its wake, and the proposition that faculty constitute an integral component in the preservation of any educational institution's Christian identity. In an article in this journal, Larry Lyon and Michael Beaty brought a similar context to bear on their empirical analysis of secularization at Baylor University, the University of Notre Dame, and Georgetown College. Employing a faculty survey (as well as a regent and student survey), Lyon and Beaty conclude "that as religious universities and colleges become stronger academically, they become weaker religiously."[13] Their data corroborate the secularization model.

Lyon and Beaty also claim that their "findings are relevant to virtually all institutions of higher education in the United States who attempt to take their religious identity seriously. This is so because many of the intellectual and social forces that affect Baylor are not unique to Texas and to Baptists."[14] While the constituencies of the CCCU are well-advised to study the findings of Lyon and Beaty's analysis carefully and consider the implications those findings bear on CCCU institutions, we find the claim concerning relevance to be tenuous with respect to secularization. Unlike Baylor, member institutions of the CCCU must meet two criteria, among others: a Christ-centered mission, evident in the institution's purpose statement, and an employment policy in which only those who profess faith in Jesus Christ can be hired.[15] Though Lyon and Beaty's analysis has some application to CCCU institutions, that application is limited. Our empirical analysis will explore how the secularization model specifically influences the unique character and identity that make up the 110 institutions in the CCCU.

Assessing the CCCU on the Slippery Slope

Our data suggest that faculty at CCCU institutions are firmly committed to Christian higher education. Ninety-eight percent of survey participants either strongly or somewhat agreed that their college/university should maintain its Christian identity. In addition, 94% of participants either strongly or somewhat agreed that they have a good idea of what is meant by the phrase "the integration

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[12]Robert B. Sloan, "Preserving Distinctively Christian Higher Education," in *The Future of Christian Higher Education*, eds. David S. Dockery and David P. Gushee (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 33.

[13]Larry Lyon and Michael Beaty, "Integration, Secularization, and the Two-Spheres View at Religious Colleges: Comparing Baylor University With the University of Notre Dame and Georgetown College," *Christian Scholar's Review* 29.1 (1999): 99.

[14]Ibid., 76.

[15]See the CCCU website: http://www.cccu.org/about.

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of faith and learning." Moreover, 84% either strongly or somewhat agreed that it is not difficult for them to integrate faith and learning in their discipline (see Table 1).

Table 1: Responses in percent to questions regarding faculty commitment to Christian higher education.

My college/university should maintain its Christian identity. (+/- 2.2%)	
All Faculty (1862)	
Strongly agree	89.8
Somewhat agree	8.0
Neutral	1.5
Somewhat disagree	0.5
Strongly disagree	0.3
I have a good idea of what is meant by the phrase, "the integration of faith and learning." (+/- 2.2%)	
All Faculty (1867)	
Strongly agree	67.6
Somewhat agree	27.1
Neutral	2.5
Somewhat disagree	2.1
Strongly disagree	0.8
It is not difficult for me to integrate faith and learning in my discipline. (+/- 2.2%)	
All Faculty (1863)	
Strongly agree	56.9
Somewhat agree	26.9
Neutral	4.9
Somewhat disagree	8.8
Strongly disagree	2.5

Contrast this with the attitudes of Baylor faculty as documented in the 1999 study by Lyon and Beaty. When asked if they agreed with the statement, "If I wished, I could create a syllabus for a course I currently teach that includes a clear, academically legitimate, Christian perspective on the subject," over half of Baylor faculty (56%) disagreed.[16] One who strongly disagreed commented, "It would be absurd"; another responded, "Preposterous. Will ruin academic credibility of the course."[17] In addition, 42% of Baylor faculty agreed in the survey that faith and learning should be kept separate. One respondent from the survey remarked, "Attempts to integrate faith and learning are, at best, treacherous and often lead to dogma and intolerance."[18] Here is a more heated response: "What is a Christian college? What lunatic wrote the question?"[19] CCCU faculty members seem to have a much different attitude. According to our data, member institutions are places that succeed in cultivating faith and integrating that faith with learning. Our research corrobo-

[16]Lyon and Beaty, 81.
[17]Ibid., 81.
[18]Ibid., 83.
[19]Ibid., 84.

rates James Patterson in his 2001 history of the CCCU when he writes, "Indeed, the twenty-five-year history of the CCCU reveals that its membership has consistently carried the torch for Christ-centered higher education."[20] Forty-five percent of our survey respondents said they took a job at a Christian college/university because of their commitment to Christian higher education; 29% did so because of the opportunity to integrate faith and learning (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Faculty response to "Why did you take a job at a Christian college/university"? (N = 1867; confidence interval +/- 2.2%).
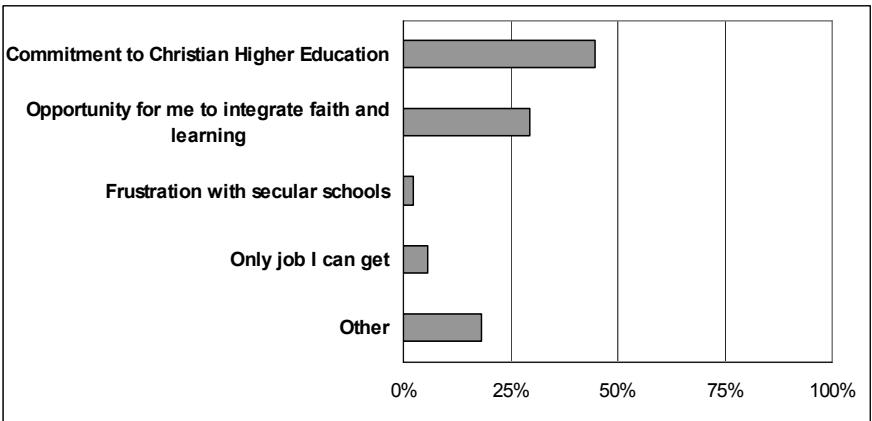
Our data also suggest that CCCU institutions are places where faith is nurtured and strengthened. Seventy-nine percent of respondents stated that, as a result of the time spent at their college/university, their faith has either become much or somewhat stronger. We find it significant that of three possible sources of faith growth—chapel, classes taught, and other faculty—classes taught and other faculty wield the greatest influence in fostering spiritual development (Table 2). Like the data on faith/learning integration, this finding indicates that faith growth occurs at the very heart of CCCU institutions: in the classrooms and among faculty. An authentic faith commitment thus seems to operate organically within the basic and fundamental operations of CCCU institutions.

Nevertheless, our survey also showed that, though the majority of respondents either somewhat or strongly disagreed that their college/university has been influenced negatively by secularism, 28% felt the opposite. More than one in four either strongly or somewhat agreed that their institution has been influenced negatively by secularism (Figure 2). These numbers indicate that perhaps secularism exerts some pressure on the faith identity of CCCU institutions, thus the need to maintain some degree of vigilance against such pressure. To delve more deeply into this statistic, we isolated for purposes of analysis all of those who either strongly

[20]James Patterson, *Shining Lights: A History of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2001), 11.

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Table 2: Responses in percent to questions regarding faculty faith.

As a result of the time I've spent at my college/university, my faith has: (+/- 2.2%)	
	All Faculty (1863)
Become much stronger	31.1
Become somewhat stronger	48.7
Stayed the same	16.5
Become somewhat weaker	3.1
Become much weaker	0.6
My faith has been enhanced by:	
Attending chapel	49.4
The class I have taught	81.7
Other faculty	85.9

Figure 2: Faculty response to "My college/university has been negatively affected by secularism" (N = 1856; confidence interval +/- 2.2%).
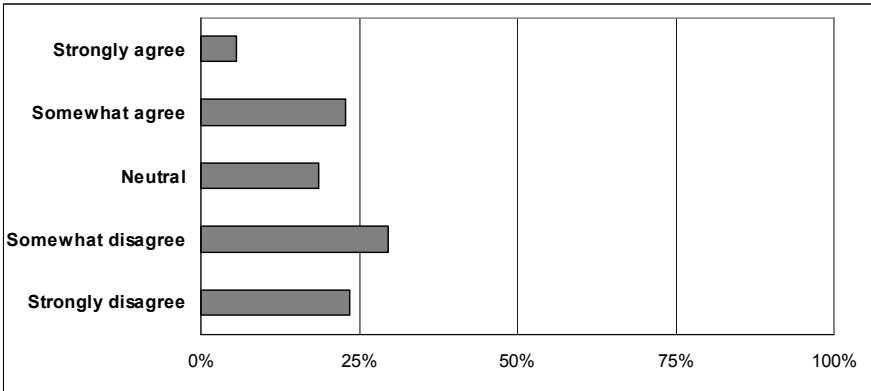
or somewhat agreed that their college/university has been influenced negatively by secularism. Who are these faculty, and, based upon their survey profile, what conclusions can we derive about perceptions of secularization?

Perceptions of Secularization

We discovered three different sets of characteristics among those who either strongly or somewhat agreed that their college/university has been influenced negatively by secularism. We found these respondents to be more theologically conservative, more politically conservative, and more epistemologically conservative (a phrase that will become clear below).

These respondents were more likely to self-identify as theologically conservative than all survey participants as a whole. These respondents were more likely to agree that the Bible is the only authoritative source of information about God. They

were significantly more likely to believe in biblical inerrancy. They were less likely to agree that practicing homosexuals should be allowed membership in a Christian church. Finally, these respondents were less likely to wish that their college's/ university's statement of faith were more generic and more broadly defined Christianity (Table 3).

Table 3: Responses in percent to questions regarding theological issues. The ISOLATE group members are those who believe their institution has been negatively influenced by secularism.

Would you consider yourself to be theologically conservative or liberal? (+/- 2.2%)

	ISOLATE (528)	ALL (1907)
Strongly conservative	35	22.4
Somewhat conservative	48.7	46.5
Neutral	8.3	10.8
Somewhat liberal	7.8	17.1
Strongly liberal	0.8	3.7

The Bible is the only authoritative source of information about God. (+/- 2.3%)

	ISOLATE (523)	ALL (1833)
Strongly agree	48.2	38
Somewhat agree	18.5	18.2
Neutral	2.9	5.2
Somewhat disagree	19.3	21.8
Strongly disagree	11.1	16.7

I believe in biblical inerrancy. (+/- 2.3%)

	ISOLATE (522)	ALL (1825)
Strongly agree	51.3	39.5
Somewhat agree	19.2	18.6
Neutral	11.9	13.6
Somewhat disagree	9	12.6
Strongly disagree	8.6	15.7

Practicing homosexuals should be allowed membership in a Christian church. (+/- 2.3%)

	ISOLATE (509)	ALL (1755)
Strongly agree	9	19.4
Somewhat agree	11	14.9
Neutral	9.2	10.5
Somewhat disagree	16.9	16.6
Strongly disagree	53.8	38.6

I wish my college's/university's faith statement were more generic and more broadly defined Christianity. (+/- 2.2%)

	ISOLATE (509)	ALL (1854)
Strongly agree	4.6	8
Somewhat agree	12.1	16.2
Neutral	14.8	18.9
Somewhat disagree	27.3	23.9
Strongly disagree	41.2	33

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Politically, survey participants who felt their institutions were influenced negatively by secularism were more conservative as well. They were more likely to self-identify as Republican and less likely to self-identify as Democrat than all other respondents. They were less likely to agree that the evidence for human-induced climate change is convincing. They were more likely to express moral opposition to embryonic stem-cell research. They were more likely to favor the criminalization of abortion. They were more likely to support the military campaign in Iraq. And they were more likely to support abstinence-only sex education (Table 4). Those who found evidence of secularism in their institutions also registered responses that suggest a more conservative epistemological stance. These respondents were more likely to agree that answers to moral questions are primarily black and white, not shades of gray. They were more likely to agree that truth is absolute. And they were less likely to agree that postmodernism can be compatible with Christianity (Table 5).

Those who believe their college/university has been influenced negatively by secularism are thus more likely to share certain characteristics. Their conservatism—theological, political, and epistemological—shapes their heightened wariness of secularization. Though this wariness can well-serve the CCCU, we argue in the next section that a vigorous vigilance against secularization, if inspired solely by the theological, political, and epistemological orientation sketched above, can pose significant problems, namely academic stultification and an undervalued commitment to diversity of thought.

The Dangers of Vigilance Against Secularization

Based upon the data concerning those who believe their college/university has been shaped negatively by secularism, we argue in this section that vigilance against secularization, fueled solely by the conservative orientation discussed above, leads to an ideological overcorrection, a defensive mentality standing guard against the promulgation of ideas that do not toe the conservative party line. Years ago Arthur Holmes warned against the danger of a defensive mentality, explaining that

many suppose that the Christian college exists to protect young people against sin and heresy in other institutions. The idea there is not so much to educate as to indoctrinate, to provide a safe environment plus all the answers to all the problems posed by all critics of orthodoxy and virtue.[21]

As we shall see, the "safe environment" Holmes describes might lead to a well-armored albeit shallow faith, but it also commits academic fraud.

For now, we emphasize that our argument in this section should not be taken as an indictment of conservatism, theological, political, epistemological, or other

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[21]Arthur Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 4.

Table 4: Responses in percent to questions regarding political issues. The ISOLATE group members are those who believe their institution has been negatively influenced by secularism.

What is your political affiliation? (+/- 2.2 %)

	ISOLATE (528)	ALL (1907)
Democrat	11.6	21.6
Republican	56.8	46.1
Independent	24.4	24.8
Other	7.2	7.7

The evidence for human-induced climate change is convincing. (+/- 2.3 %)

	ISOLATE (514)	ALL (1795)
Strongly agree	24.9	36.2
Somewhat agree	28.6	28.5
Neutral	14.4	14
Somewhat disagree	18.1	12.5
Strongly disagree	14	8.8

I am morally opposed to embryonic stem cell research. (+/- 2.3 %)

	ISOLATE (512)	ALL (1783)
Strongly agree	49.4	32.5
Somewhat agree	15.2	13.9
Neutral	10.4	17
Somewhat disagree	18	19.4
Strongly disagree	7	17.2

Abortion should be made illegal in the United States. (+/- 2.3 %)

	ISOLATE (509)	ALL (1760)
Strongly agree	47.7	35.1
Somewhat agree	24.6	22.3
Neutral	8.3	9.8
Somewhat disagree	10.2	15.5
Strongly disagree	9.2	17.4

I support the military campaign in Iraq. (+/- 2.3 %)

	ISOLATE (509)	ALL (1757)
Strongly agree	24	15.8
Somewhat agree	28.5	24.2
Neutral	10	11.1
Somewhat disagree	12.6	13.9
Strongly disagree	25	35.1

I support abstinence-only sex education. (+/- 2.3 %)

	ISOLATE (508)	ALL (1755)
Strongly agree	47.4	33.4
Somewhat agree	26.6	23.5
Neutral	5.9	9.1
Somewhat disagree	13.4	16.8
Strongly disagree	6.7	17.2

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Table 5: Responses in percent to questions regarding epistemological issues. The ISO-LATE group members are those who believe their institution has been negatively influenced by secularism.

Answers to moral questions are primarily black and white, not shades of gray. (+/- 2.3%)		
	ISOLATE (518)	ALL (1816)
Strongly agree	12.4	7.6
Somewhat agree	31.9	22.5
Neutral	6.6	5.9
Somewhat disagree	30.9	34.1
Strongly disagree	18.3	29.8
Truth is absolute, not relative. (+/- 2.3%)		
	ISOLATE (519)	ALL (1813)
Strongly agree	59.2	45.4
Somewhat agree	23.9	24.3
Neutral	4.4	8.4
Somewhat disagree	9.4	14.1
Strongly disagree	3.1	7.7
Postmodernism can be compatible with Christianity. (+/- 2.3%)		
	ISOLATE (520)	ALL (1808)
Strongly agree	7.1	13.2
Somewhat agree	28.1	29.3
Neutral	13.8	17
Somewhat disagree	22.9	18.8
Strongly disagree	23.1	15.4
Don't know what postmodernism is	5	6.2

wise. Instead, our argument should be read as an admonition against the creation of a homogenous academic culture that intimidates into silence those who disagree. When such a culture mobilizes the vigilance against secularization, intimidation and silence become more likely, threatening to stifle a thriving academic environment founded on open and honest conversation.[22]

This argument, of course, is not original. Anthony Campolo observes that one reason for the growth of what he calls "sectarian schools" is the "homogenous nature of their constituencies." He continues,

Their students are all of the same socioeconomic and cultural background. They hold similar beliefs in politics and theology. Their concepts of personal morality are strikingly uniform. Indeed, sociological research shows that institutions with homogenous traits grow fastest. They project no ambiguities and relate well to specific constituencies.[23]

[22]Secular colleges and universities face a similar, though inverted threat. Stanley Rothman, S. Robert Lichter, and Neil Nevitte observe that "over the course of 15 years, self-described liberals grew from a slight plurality to a 5 to 1 majority on [public] college faculties" ("Politics and Professional Advancement Among College Faculty," *The Forum* 3.1 (2005): 4). Secular institutions simply struggle with a different sort of homogeneity that threatens by intimidation.
[23]Anthony Campolo, "The Challenge of Radical Christianity for the Christian College," in

Paul R. Spickard, a former professor of history and Asian-American studies at Bethel College and now at the University of California Santa Barbara, states the following about Christian institutions: "It's a very closed intellectual and social environment where there's not much room for variety of experience or expression or gentle exploration around the edges. Anyone who didn't fit the mold ended up leaving sooner or later."[24] Leo Reisberg strikes a similar chord: "To be sure, Christian colleges will always appeal to a relatively narrow segment of the population. Students and faculty members at most of the colleges are more homogenous than they are throughout the rest of higher education."[25] Noll offers a reading of Christian schools that helps us better understand this homogeneity as well as the dangers of overzealous vigilance against secularization—a reading that harmonizes with our thesis:

> A sectarian strategy for those who . . . read the past as a relatively simple set of overwhelming secular forces and who wish to retain or restore meaningful religious convictions at a college or university would seem to be straightforward: Hire only faculty who do not question any significant aspect of the community's system of values. Raise as much money as possible from private sources in order to avoid government funds and government interference. Above all, present your college or university to prospective students and their parents as a safe place, where body, soul, and spirit can be protected through the dangerous years of adulthood.[26]

Noll acknowledges that "such a strategy is not without merit, but it also has its limits, especially where it is most successful." He explains,

> Bob Jones University possesses a wonderful art gallery, but no one outside of the immediate Bob Jones constituency attends the university or looks to Bob Jones faculty for learned guidance in art history or theories of representation. Regent University enjoys state-of-the-art media facilities, but almost no one outside of Pat Robertson's circle of influence attends Regent or looks to Regent faculty for learned guidance in communication theory or the cultural meaning of television.[27]

As Noll and these other scholars observe, institutional homogeneity compromises diversity of thought, free exchange of ideas, and academic credibility. We restate our claim: when calls for vigilance against secularization arise within such a homogenous culture, the compromises can easily snowball.

Consider now some other findings from our survey, first those concerning the

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Faithful Learning and the Christian Scholarly Vocation, 144. Campolo claims that sectarian schools are recognizable by certain key characteristics: a "doctrinal statement in which they clearly delineate a strong commitment to the authority of Scripture, to the belief in miracles, to the virgin birth, and to the visible second coming of Christ. These schools also put a strong emphasis on the integration of faith and knowledge" (141).

[24]Quoted in Beth McMurtrie, "Do Professors Lose Academic Freedom by Signing Statements of Faith?" *Academe* (May 24, 2002): A12.

[25]Leo Reisberg, "Enrollments Surge at Christian Colleges," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 5, 1999): A44.

[26]Mark Noll, "The Future of the Religious College," 89.

[27]Ibid., 90.

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issue of free exchange of ideas. Though the majority of our survey respondents (54%) agreed that professors at Christian institutions have more freedom to discuss issues and ask questions than do professors at secular institutions, 27% somewhat or strongly disagreed. Twenty-four percent strongly or somewhat agreed that they were hesitant to address certain important issues in class because they teach at a Christian college/university. These two survey questions provided us with a window into the issue of intellectual rigor. We isolated for the purpose of analysis the 30% of survey respondents who either disagreed or were neutral toward the idea that their college/university is a place of rigorous intellectual activity. We discovered that 39% of these respondents disagreed that professors at Christian institutions have more freedom to discuss issues and ask questions than do professors at secular institutions (compared with 27% of all respondents). We also found that 36% of these respondents also agreed that they were hesitant to address certain important issues in class because they teach at a Christian college/university (compared with 24% of all respondents) (Table 6). These data suggest that one cause for perceived substandard intellectual rigor is the inability to speak freely in the classroom on important issues.

Table 6: Responses in percent to questions regarding academic rigor and freedom. The ISOLATE group members are those who either disagreed or were neutral toward the idea that their college/university is a place of rigorous intellectual activity.

My college/university is a place of rigorous intellectual activity. (+/- 2.3)

	ALL (1736)
Strongly agree	19.1
Somewhat agree	50.7
Neutral	10.7
Somewhat disagree	14.9
Strongly disagree	4.6

Professors at Christian institutions have more freedom to discuss issues and ask questions than do professors at secular institutions. (+/- 2.3)

	ALL (1737)	ISOLATE (522)
Strongly agree	24.1	14.9
Somewhat agree	29.7	27.4
Neutral	19.1	18.8
Somewhat disagree	18.9	23.4
Strongly disagree	8.2	15.5

I am hesitant to address certain important issues in class because I teach at a Christian college/university. (+/- 2.3)

	ALL (1737)	ISOLATE (520)
Strongly agree	5.6	11.7
Somewhat agree	18.7	23.7
Neutral	7.3	7.3
Somewhat disagree	28.1	28.7
Strongly disagree	40.4	28.7

Consider now some of our qualitative data. One question of the survey asked, "What is the most difficult part about being a professor at a Christian university?" When collecting these data, we organized responses into categories. The largest category was "heavy workload," a category that totaled 344. A category we labeled "compromised intellectual rigor" numbered 128. Here are some samplings from this category: "I think that at a Christian University students can be less open to new ideas, especially when it challenges their belief system." "It can be a challenge to escape the spiritual smugness that sometimes arises in the classroom or campus atmosphere: a spirit of 'we have it all figured out and don't need anything more.'" "The homogeneity of the students and their life experiences which brings a great deal of confidence in the 'rightness' of their own lives and actions and an unwillingness to question, think deeper, or try to imagine the goals and values and meanings of the lives of others." "Enabling students, many of whom are from socially and religiously conservative backgrounds, to expand their horizons in such a way as to make informed and honest evaluations of the alternatives (and their likely consequences) from the perspective of a well-considered values orientation." "Opening closed minds and filling them with a love of learning—be it from a bad conservative background that discourages free inquiry or from the lack of curiosity and the utterly pragmatic bent bred into today's coddled youth." "Sometimes there is a feeling that everything needs to be taught in line with a specific, possibly narrow-minded, interpretation of what Christianity is and is not." "The parochialism, close-mindedness, and lack of curiosity displayed by many students. Their unwillingness to engage the difficult questions, either out of laziness or out of fear that their faith will be weakened." "Making sure that honest inquiry or disagreement does not get covered up by Christian superficiality." "Some ideas, concepts, events are 'outside' the religious box and don't nicely fit into any kind of integration attempt.

    There is an expectation of some faculty and students that everything should have a verse to support it or it's bad, or secular, which means it is not to be discussed. The environment here can be too sheltered from the real world to the detriment of the student's education." "While I am free to discuss anything in the classroom I am not free to take a strong position on several politically related issues. We have freedom to discuss, but not freedom to voice dissenting opinion." This response registers a fear for job security, a fear mentioned by a number of respondents as well. For example: "The most difficult part about being a professor at a Christian University is always having to hide any beliefs that are a little more liberal than is official policy at the institution, for example re: abortion, homosexuality, dancing." "Being afraid that at some point, the denominational convention and our convention-appointed trustees will decide some of us are not Christian enough for them, and will try to shove us out." "The feeling that I cannot address some very 'real' world problems, topics in the classroom for fear of losing my job." "Inability to freely express my liberal (and vital) faith to students and colleagues without fear of harsh scrutiny and dire consequences." And finally, this response:

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"The narrow and rigid ideological framework—suspicious of the world and even ideas themselves—that most students bring to their university education makes the difficult task of teaching them even more difficult. It becomes a delicate and high-stakes balance of helping them maintain/preserve their faith while simultaneously helping them open their worldview up to new ideas and ways of thinking as educated persons."

Diversity Within Unity

Based upon our data, we conclude that the dangers of secularization, insofar as they apply to the CCCU, have been overstated. Survey participants overwhelmingly endorse the Christian identity of their institutions; participants also understand and practice the integration of faith and learning. In short, survey respondents are committed to Christian higher education in both theory and practice, even experiencing faith growth as a result of their work. We therefore resonate with the words of Rodney J. Sawatsky, who, in the prologue to *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation*, contends that "this myth of declension has cramped our thinking and narrowed our reflection on the nature and character of Christian scholarship."[28] As our data suggest, the nature and character of Christian scholarship—and here we use the term "scholarship" in an expansive sense, including both research and teaching—are often defined too narrowly, resulting in an academic environment that can compromise intellectual inquiry and frustrate Christian scholars. When calls for vigilance against secularization originate from

[28]Rodney J. Sawatsky, "Prologue: The Virtue of Scholarly Hope," in *Scholarship and Christian Faith: Enlarging the Conversation,* eds. Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 13. There exist other reasons to believe that the secularization thesis has been overstated. For instance, the conditions that enabled the secularization of Christian institutions in the last century—a narrative richly told in tomes by Marsden, James Burtchaell, and others—no longer obtain. Obviously we must simplify those narratives here, but in the early twentieth century, many colleges with Christian identities hitched a ride on intellectual juggernauts known as logical positivism and scientific progressivism. As we now know, the hubristic confidence in these intellectual movements was ill-placed. But for those Christians who followed their path, these movements rendered their faith untenable. However, as Marsden explains, the nails have been firmly driven into the coffins of these intellectual movements: "Perhaps it is true that traditionally religious schools will lose their distinctive identities. We should not underestimate the forces that push for a more standardized and secularized culture…Much the same thing could happen, of course, but there is one very large difference that might make us hope otherwise. We now live in the aftermath of an era that began with the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century and ended with the decline of progressive scientific humanism in the last third of the twentieth century. For the first time in three centuries, the ideal that human progress will be achieved by ever-wider applications of scientific models to almost all of life seems passé" ("Beyond Progressive Scientific Humanism," in *The Future of Religious Colleges*, 37-38.) Additionally, over the last twenty years or so, Christian scholarship has blossomed into increasing sophistication and academic legitimacy. In short, Christian scholars possess a much larger understanding of the intersections of faith and reason, an understanding that would, at the least, make difficult the widespread fall into the "pits of apostasy" witnessed in the twentieth century.

such an environment, fostered by a homogenous culture, those outside the culture—though equally committed to Christian higher education—can be marginalized too easily.

Calls for vigilance against secularization should therefore be tempered by an awareness of its often exaggerated imminence and danger. More, when the calls are issued, they should rise from a plurality of diverse voices: diversity with respect to theology, politics, and epistemology. Of course, such diversity must respect the faith and mission statements of individual institutions, though we believe these statements should be open to revision. Nevertheless, most faith and mission statements have some degree of flexibility built into them, enabling relatively diverse theological orientations and even more diverse political and epistemological positions. According to its website, the CCCU has as its mission statement the following: "To advance the cause of Christ-centered higher education and to help our institutions transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth."[29] Those on both sides of the theological, political, and epistemological spectrum can unite in supporting this mission, realizing that the ways of wedding scholarship and service to biblical truth are multifarious.

Though the conclusions of this study are generalizations based upon empirical data on ninety-five institutions, we must also emphasize that diversity stretches across the institutions belonging to the CCCU. More nuanced analyses of our data reveal not only this diversity but also some exceptions to the generalizations made in this essay. Factors of diversity such as setting, age, size, and denominational affiliation of institution constitute sources of statistical significant differences of opinion regarding perceptions of secularization, intellectual rigor, and openness to ideas. An overview of some of our more nuanced analyses will eliminate some of the slack in our argument and sharpen the analysis, highlighting not only the diversity within the CCCU but also suggesting ways in which CCCU institutions can learn from each other.

Using the four variables of setting, age, size, and denominational affiliation of institution, we ran data analyses using all survey questions in Figure 2 and Table 6, for the questions therein drive our argument.[30] Do any of these variables significantly influence responses to these questions? The factor of university setting yielded one divergent response of statistically significance. Faculty at urban schools were significantly more likely to disagree than faculty at rural schools that their college/university has been influenced negatively by secularism; professors at institutions in the city are less likely to perceive secularism as a threat than their counterparts in the country. Age of institution yielded three divergent responses of statistical significance. Faculty at younger schools (defined as less than 100 years old)

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[29]See http://www.cccu.org/about.

[30]Information used to determine institutional groupings were compiled from the CCCU website, *US News and World Report* (see http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/college), and the individual institution websites. Mean values of Likert scale responses were compared using a one way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

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were more likely to disagree than faculty at older schools (older than 100 years) that their college/university has been negatively influenced by secularism. This finding seems counterintuitive: one might find it commonsensical to conclude that older institutions, having long established a faith-based tradition, are more secure in their Christian identity than younger institutions. This commonsensical conclusion is borne out by another instance of statistical divergence: faculty at older institutions are significantly more likely to disagree than faculty at younger institutions that they are hesitant to address certain important issues in class because they teach at a Christian college/university. In addition, faculty at older institutions are significantly more likely to agree than faculty at younger institutions that their college/university is a place of rigorous intellectual activity. The factor of size yielded one divergent response of statistical significance. Using undergraduate enrollment as an index of faculty size, we placed universities into one of three categories: undergraduate enrollment under 1,000, between 1,000 and 2,500, and over 2,500. Faculty at schools with undergraduate enrollment under 1,000 are less likely to agree that their college/university is a place of rigorous intellectual activity. Finally, the factor of denominational affiliation yielded two divergent responses of statistical significance. First, faculty at institutions affiliated with the Church of Christ are significantly more likely than faculty at institutions with other denominational affiliations to agree that their college/university has been influenced negatively by secularism. Second, faculty at institutions affiliated with the Christian Reformed Church are significantly more likely than faculty at institutions with other denominational affiliations to agree that their college/university is a place of rigorous intellectual activity. Whether due to its history, theology, or attitude toward scholarship, the Reformed tradition is perceived by its adherents to form a strong foundation for rigorous intellectual activity (Table 7).

By highlighting some of the exceptions to the generalizations made in this article, these data reveal avenues for future research. Setting, age, size, and denominational affiliation do indeed influence perceptions of secularization and intellectual rigor. While the purpose of this article is to develop a thesis on secularization as it applies to the CCCU as a whole, future analyses of these variables will provide us with more nuanced insights into secularization theory, insights that will enable us simultaneously to flesh out and qualify our thesis, illustrating how diversity exists within the unity of the CCCU. In addition, these data suggest ways in which CCCU institutions can learn from each other, mutually reinforcing an institutional ethos that insures that perceptions of secularization and intellectual rigor do not contradict the idea of a Christian university.

Conclusion

United behind a commitment to Christian higher education, CCCU institutions as well as professors with diverse views will undoubtedly disagree. But as Harold Heie explains,

Table 7: Variations in response based on institutional groups. Values given are mean responses to questions based on the following Likert scale: 1- strongly agree, 2- somewhat agree, 3- neutral, 4- somewhat disagree, 5- strongly agree. Different letters beside mean values represent statistically significant differences; similar letters indicate no significant difference between means.

Group: Setting of University
      My college/university has been negatively influenced by secularism.
         Rural (413)   3.26 [a]
         Suburban (767)   3.44 [ab]
         Urban (634)   3.49 [b]   (F=3.172, p=0.023)

Group: Age of Institution (Average Age of CCCU Institutions is 97.1 years)
      My college/university has been negatively influenced by secularism.
         < 100 yrs (795)   3.49 [a]
         = 100 yrs (1068) 3.37 [b]   (F=4.579, p=0.032)

      I am hesitant to address certain important issues in class because I teach at a Christian college/university.
         < 100 yrs (795)   3.72 [a]
         = 100 yrs (1068) 3.85 [b]   (F=4.467, p=0.035)

      My college/university is a place of rigorous intellectual activity.
         < 100 yrs (795)   2.49 [a]
         = 100 yrs (1068) 2.23 [b]   (F=24.104, p<0.001)

Group: Institution Size (Based on undergraduate enrollment)
      My college/university is a place of rigorous intellectual activity.
         < 1000 (212)   2.55 [a]
          1000 – 2500 (1084) 2.34 [b]
         >2500 (534)   2.23 [b]   (F=6.245, p=0.002)

Group: Denominational Affiliation
      My college/university has been negatively influenced by secularism.
         Assemblies of God (95)   3.62 [a]
         Christian Reformed Church (100) 3.56 [a]
         Southern Baptist (178)   3.48 [a]
         Free Methodist Church (92)   3.41 [ab]
         Presbyterian Church-USA (80) 3.35 [ab]
         Church of Nazarene (133)   3.28 [ab]
         Churches of Christ (100)   2.94 [b] (F=3.407, p=0.003)

      My college/university is a place of rigorous intellectual activity.
         Presbyterian Church-USA (84) 2.54 [a]
         Church of Nazarene (138)   2.52 [a]
         Churches of Christ (95)   2.45 [a]
         Southern Baptist (182)   2.43 [a]
         Assemblies of God (87)   2.42 [a]
         Free Methodist Church (98)   2.18 [a]
         Christian Reformed Church (102) 1.64 [b] (F=8.162, p<0.001)

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The tragedy is not that Christians disagree with each other on some critical issues. In fact, such disagreement can be the bedrock of good education. The tragedy is that we find it increasingly difficult to talk to each other about our disagreements, so that we can learn from each other.[31]

The contours of the academic community that our data sketch can lead too easily to the tragedy that Heie describes; we miss too many learning opportunities through the preemptive silencing of disagreements often due to the fear of recrimination. In addition, the cultivation of an academic community in which professors with diverse views can freely exchange ideas might also lead not only to disagreements but also to few instances of consensus. Theological, political, and epistemological diversity, along with the disagreements that it creates, fosters an academic environment in which truth is not so easily perceived, testifying to its complexity—in contrast to a community in which disagreements are risky, in which agreements are therefore encouraged or coerced, and subsequently a community in which facile, yet intellectually dishonest, justifications of truth claims are almost algorithmic. In the former community, intellectual inquiry proceeds with humility and provisionality; the endpoint of the inquiry is not always clear. Such an inquiry stands in stark contrast to what Parker Palmer identifies as the detrimental effects of a "spirituality of ends":

A spirituality of ends wants to dictate the desirable outcomes of education in the life of the student. It uses the spiritual tradition as a template against which the ideas, beliefs, and behaviors of the student are to be measured. The goal is to shape the student to the template by the time that his or her formal education concludes. But that sort of education never gets started; it is no education at all. Authentic spirituality wants to open us to truth—whatever truth may be, wherever truth may take us. Such a spirituality does not dictate where we must go, but trusts that any path walked with integrity will take us to a place of knowledge. Such a spirituality encourages us to welcome diversity and conflict, to tolerate ambiguity, and to embrace paradox.[32]

To state the matter more succinctly in the words of Arthur Holmes, the Christian worldview is an "open-ended exploration."[33] Holmes adds that Christianity is "not a closed system, worked out once and for all but an endless undertaking that is still but the vision of a possibility."[34] Christian higher education conceived as "authentic spirituality" or an "open-ended exploration" can be risky, but do we not admit that the risk is worthwhile? Providing what we consider to be a good model for Christian scholarship, NicholasWolterstorff explains how faith serves as the control beliefs that shape our theorizing. But Wolterstorff is also bold enough to admit that our theories might influence our beliefs. He writes,

[31]Harold Heie, "Integration and Conversation," in *The University Through the Eyes of Faith*, ed. Steve Moore (Indianapolis, IN: Light and Life Communications, 1998), 69.
[32]Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1993), xi.
[33]Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, 4.
[34]Ibid., 58.

196 The scholar never fully knows in advance where his line of thought will lead him. For the Christian to undertake scholarship is to undertake a course of action that may lead him into the painful process of revising his actual Christian commitment, sorting through his beliefs, and discarding some from a position where they can no longer function as control. It may, indeed, even lead him to a point where his authentic commitment has undergone change. We are all profoundly *historical* creatures.[35]

The open-ended inquiries to which these scholars allude are not possible when the outcomes of those inquiries are foregone conclusions. Consequently, though the stentorian exhortations against slipping down the slope to secularism have long echoed across CCCU campuses, perhaps it is time to sound warnings against a different, inverse danger: the formation of a university so vigilant against secularization that it stifles the spirit of open inquiry and underestimates the value of diversity of thought. If exhortations against secularization persist, the Christian institution of higher learning will have avoided what our research suggests is a minor threat, though at a major cost.[36]