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Remarks Regarding the Secularization of Lindenwood College

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Remarks made by The Reverend George E. Sweazey at the meeting of the Board of Directors and Board of Overseers of Lindenwood College October 23, 1970.

I regret more than I can tell you the necessity of having to resign from the Board of Directors because I am moving too far away to be of much service. This connection has been the source of great satisfaction and pride. I am endlessly grateful for the heart-warming associations, which I have so much enjoyed.

There is some sadness in knowing that the time of my connection with church colleges has been the period of the decline and fall of this sort of education, and I am pleased that Lindenwood has resisted this deterioration far better than have most church schools. I have believed very ardently in the purpose of higher education in church-related institutions. This purpose has not been hard-line indoctrination. Its intention was to offer students an understanding of existence as one possible system to which their growing knowledge could be related. It proposed the Christian faith as one way by which the massed up learned about the world and human life and thought could make sense. As the raw materials for living were dumped into the students' minds, church sponsored education also suggested a blueprint by which these could be put together in a structure that would be a worthy dwelling. The students were not to be dragooned into accepting this basic system of belief, but they were to learn what it is as a possible choice.

There were several means by which a church college proposed to do this:

1. The most important is the character and personality of the faculty. They were to embody the attitudes and style of life the Christian faith produces. Thus, the professor of mathematics might be more

courses has declined.

influential than the professor of Bible. What Mark Hopkins taught mattered less than what he was. I must admit I was shocked at the reason the President of a Presbyterian college gave in urging the trustees to abolish the rule that members of the faculty be, by intention, at least, Christians. His reason was that administration had ignored this rule for so long that it might as well be off the books. No one would want a standardized faculty. The conspicuously irregular professor, or the atheist in residence, can be needed stimulation. But there should in a so-called Christian school be a type for whom these are the exceptions, and not just a nondescript faculty melange.

2. The next most important source of the Christian character of an institution is the administration. Those who make the decisions should have a consistent philosophy back of them. Inspirations and leadership should spring from an identifiable style of life and thought.

3. The character of the board of trustees was supposed to be the final line of defense. If the trustees were right, nothing could go too seriously wrong. The Church expressed its ownership of the college primarily through its selection of trustees. This slid into the practice of having the boards self-perpetuating, with church bodies giving formal approval to new trustees who often were already on the job. Now any connection at all between the Church and the selection of trustees has been largely dropped.

4. Required courses made sure that the students at least learned what Christianity has to say about a world-view, and history, and ideals for persons and society. Two generations ago the professors of philosophy, and Bible, and ethics, and Christian sociology were likely to be the faculty giants. More recently, the intellectual rigorousness of such courses has declined.

5. The students were to be introduced to experiences of religion. Inspirational speakers were brought to assemblies. Special times of worship attempted to keep the mystical side of Christianity from being unknown. For a school with a specific Christian purpose, this was as much expected as was some exposure to military matters at West Point. There are many reasons for the passing of church sponsored higher education:

1. The demand for intellectual freedom seemed to be against it. Education with a built-in bias was held to be distorted education. One could argue that students who have been exposed to a clear point of view are better able to exercise their intellectual freedom than are those who have been offered no point of view at all. The idea of freedom is not as simple as it seems to the slogan users.

2. The Church was not able to support its colleges when the needed equipment multiplied in cost. College administrators for years have been telling church assemblies that if the Church wants to call the tune, it will have to make it financially possible. There is some confusion here about how the Church supported its colleges. Never in history has a major share of that support come from current church funds, which ultimately means from the Sunday morning collection plates. But a great deal of their other support has come to the colleges because of their church connection. Individual donors and legacies were largely inspired by the traditional belief in a connection of religion with education.

3. Government support in several ways was seen as the only hope of survival. The government cannot require Jews to pay taxes for the teaching of Christianity.

4. Secular ideals of respectability made church sponsored education embarrassing. The ablest professors were likely to be scornful of "a Sunday School with dormitories."

5. Modern student tendencies have been sharply against the essential purpose of church colleges. Reasoned questioning of establishment and authority, and sophomoric fads and outrages, have induced church colleges to minimize their special purpose.

What is left now is talk of a Christian "presence" or "covenant," which are empty words, used to soften the blow of a lost cause. So I am sad. I see all of this as a disastrous loss. I still believe that there is nothing our future and our world needs more than the infusion of well trained and equipped young minds with some understanding of the Christian point of view. I am proud that Lindenwood has resisted the decline so well. The President, and the members of the Boards of Directors and Overseers, and some of the strong faculty members still represent the traditional intention. But there is no longer any specific reason to expect this to continue. It is like the fading smile that lingers after the Christian cat has disappeared. There is not much reason to believe that, after about two more administrations, education at Lindenwood College will not be as featureless and indiscriminate and nondescript as that at any public institution. Some provisions that are not now in view will have to be made if this is not to happen.

Notes: (1) Tuition income based on 535 full-time financial equivalents.
 (2) Endowment assumes additional \$55,000 resulting from endowment investment switch into higher yielding investments.

* Number of full-time students enrolled as of September 1970. Due to number of students graduating and/or dropping out this will reduce to 535 full-time students over the total fiscal year.