
The Dollar Sign In Denominational Dogma.

How the dollar sign, through endowments, can settle questions of doctrine for a non-Catholic denominational school is told by Dr. Laird T. Hites, in "The Effective Christian College." He relates (pp. 127-131) the story of one college with which he seems to be thoroughly familiar; the problem, however, must be rather general within a certain group of small denominational colleges. It is the story of the old-fashioned Protestant college that decided to catch up with the times.

This particular college, according to Dr. Hites, sought recognition by standardizing agencies in order to obtain students. Professors were imported from Chicago, from Harvard, from Germany, and from state universities. These professors, "while they were loyal to the church, every one a member," found little satisfaction in the "historic creeds" and in the "emotionalized type of religion some of the town ministers offered." Although they avoided controversy in the classroom, their beliefs colored their teachings, and their students "adopted their patterns of thought."

To pay these professors' salaries, more endowment was needed. The college "had recourse to the churches and church members of the state. To encourage gifts it was necessary to appeal to the religious motives of the givers, and, so the authorities believed, to show that the college was 'loyal' to the traditional faith. Therefore, the religion of faculty members was paraded, the high Christian atmosphere of the institution was stressed, the faithfulness of the institution to the denomination which had created and supported it was emphasized, and people, most of them conservative in theology as in all other things, gave liberally to the endowment." Then came the rub.

"They (the donors) expected conservative teaching; the tendency of instruction was liberal, therefore conflicts arose when sons and daughters of the donors returned to their homes. There was no question of Christian living; the moral tone of the college was consistently high. But heresy hunters found plenty of game upon which to turn their guns.

"The instructors in religion in this college had earned their degrees in conservative institutions, but this was not conservative enough. Through contact with other members of the faculty they had come to sense the scientific outlook and method. Suspicious attitudes from the field were turned on them, and they winced and became cautious. They had purchased homes, and had established roots in the community. They had families to support and did not want to move. They loved the college, and wanted to stand by it. One of them received bitter letters attacking him and the position he was suspected of holding."

The upshot of the matter was a new president and a new faculty of religion. The President put the professors under a sort of Protestant "oath against modernism," and imported a very orthodox minister as Bible professor. This man was gun-shy: "they all loved him, but they and he saw clearly the limitations to his freedom - he was trying to satisfy the constituency. He could not tell the whole truth, and his reputation as a teacher suffered." Enrollment in his courses dwindled, and finally he resigned. And the muddle, according to Dr. Hites, is still a muddle.

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Invincible ignorance keeps the position of this college from being as dishonorable as it appears on the surface to be. It is always dishonorable, of course, to sell one's principles for gold; it is the depth of utter degradation to sell one's Saviour for gold. Although the Light is still shining, "the darkness does not comprehend It;" the hopeless confusion into which modern biblical criticism -- received fifth- or sixth-hand from the German critics, and as fact instead of hypothesis -- has plunged present-day Protestantism, makes it difficult for a poor, dumb Ph.D. from Harvard or Chicago to know what is a principle and what isn't. Pray God to speed the day when honest "denominationalists" will see that their choice is only between the Catholic Church and Agnosticism.