



BOSTON COLLEGE

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FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE
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Barack Obama to president, where you had an interesting event—interesting in the Chinese sense, I think you'd say.

Phil Ryken is the president of Wheaton College in Illinois. He is a nationally respected theologian and former pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. If you are a scholar of Presbyterian history, like I am, you will know that the pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church is sort of like being the cardinal archbishop of New York. Maybe with some more power than the cardinal archbishop of New York. He is the author of more than 30 books, and most recently, a monograph calling . So, welcome, all three of you.

I'd like to start off our conversation by picking up a question that Mark Oppenheimer asked during the last session, and that's a question about how one balances a faith commitment, a moral vision of education, with being an elite, selective higher education institution that wants to attract the very best students and scholars, and how do you balance those sort of things? So I guess I would like to hear the three of you—you're all from very different kinds of elite institutions—how one balances faith commitments with the purported ends of liberal education, which are free inquiry, allowing people to ask questions from various parts of the field. Do you want to take this, Jane?

MCAULIFFE:

ago, they were the conversational fodder upon which the foundation of Bryn Mawr was established.

to be humble, but we also want to do excellent work. So it's a searching question that we definitely wrestle with.

MASSA: Phil and I were talking just before this session, and I asked him what the makeup of Wheaton was, and he said, so many of this, so many of that, and a number of Catholics. And I was kind of surprised, and you answered, Catholics come there because they felt the Catholic alternatives weren't religious enough. Is that my recollection?

RYKEN: I think that would be true for some of our Catholic students. I said the number of Catholic students we have on campus is quite small, but they would identify themselves with an evangelical statement of faith, and they would be looking for a particular kind of Christian community, and, I think in most cases, finding it at Wheaton College.

MASSA: Good. Now we come to the nitty-gritty, terrible questions, that is, there are different ways that an institution can hold onto a religious vision or moral vision. One of the ways is an institutional culture that Jane talked about. So there's an emphasis on consensus, upon individual respect, and search for knowledge, which is very much in the tradition of the Society of Friends.

But for Catholic and evangelical schools, I think there's a larger question about—and we've all been through this in the past 20 years—questions about statements of faith. Should the institution have a statement of faith that you expect all the faculty to buy into on some level, or should a certain percentage of the student body or professorate be members of the sponsoring religious institution? Before I came to BC, I was part of a conversation at another Jesuit school where that was a very interesting and heated question. Do you want to address that? Should there be statements of faith? Should

RYKEN: Just on the subject of hiring for mission, I can hardly think of something that's more important than that for us. And for us, that includes—I review the files of anybody that's coming to campus for an interview for a position, and we do not approve a full-time hire without actually our Trustees' Academic Affairs Committee also signing off on the final candidate.

They will see brief essays from faculty members about, what is your understanding of a liberal arts education, what is your own personal commitment to Jesus Christ, also questions about scholarship and things like that. And also, in philosophy of education, how you will model for students a Christian commitment. That's all part of our hiring process, and then also part of our sequence of faith and learning seminars that we take faculty through once they've been hired. So not just the hiring, but also the enculturation into our community is very important.

MASSA: What's your sense—I say this as a historian. Historians make lousy prognosticators for the future. But what's your sense of the chances of faith-related institutions in the future? For the past 30 years we've had very smart studies like D.G. Hart and Phil Gleason and folks like that about looking, at least initially, at the Protestant institutions.

Most of the great institutions in the country were started as Protestant institutions to train ministers. They are now avowedly secular. And I think there was a fear, at least in the Catholic academy, and certainly, I think, in the evangelical section of the academy, about going that same route. How do places like Wheaton, or Notre Dame, or Boston College, or Georgetown hold onto their identity and remain true to that while navigating the treacherous rapids of being elite institutions and looking for the very best students? What would you say about the future?

RYKEN: I'll just comment on that briefly. I've been interested in that question, actually, since I was a student. I'm an alumnus of Wheaton College. I was raised in that community, raised in Christian liberal arts tradition, and I was interested in that question even as a young person, just knowing a little bit about the history of higher education and the trajectory that many institutions have been on.

I think one of the things that helps distinctively Christian institutions now is an awareness of that history, and we are also much more distinct than we would have been even 50 years ago, certainly 100 years ago. And that's part of our distinctive identity, and so it's got certain strengths and weaknesses, but that's why students and faculty are coming to us for that distinctive kind of community.

JENKINS: It's tremendously challenging, as has been said previously, for all sorts of reasons. So you just have to navigate those. I guess I would like to say something else, just to echo, again, what's been said before. I do have serious worries about the commoditization of higher education. And I've given talks before—I've said to parents who have to shell out a quarter million dollars to go to Notre Dame.

Well, why is that? Well, you can earn so much more in the course of your career if you get a really fine higher education. If you start to talk that way, then the value of education becomes simply its economic benefit. It's extrinsic. And I fear that those pressures, those market pressures, are having a greater and greater effect on how we think about higher

those tremendous pressures to give some depth and richness to concept of education that goes beyond simply kind of talk about a return on investment.

MCAULIFFE: Let me do a take on this from the position of a secular liberal arts college—yes, religiously founded, but currently a secular liberal arts college. And I would echo something that Andrew Delbanco said in the first panel, which is, of course, religion is coming back to campus. As a scholar of Islam, I'm very well aware of the fact that often the resurgence of interest in departments other than the religious studies department, in political science, in sociology, is driven by a sense of religion as pathology. There's no question about that.

But on the other hand, there's a real upsurge in an effort on the part of students and faculty to get a stronger grasp about the way religions operate as cultural forces more generally. It just seems impossible in this day and age to imagine graduating students for, to use the current term, global citizenship, without their being well-informed and having reached a certain level of religious literacy. So these are for

MCAULIFFE: Mark, are you asking me? [laughter] I am five years from being dean at Georgetown, and

that having already acknowledged the challenge for us, and the need for intentionality about exposing our students to other religious traditions, which I think is just part of being well liberally educated.

MASSA: The word here that's come out, that I think it's the important word, is intentionality. You're saying that Georgetown's very intentional about its Catholic nature. And, of course, as Julie mentioned in the previous panel, we're in a historical context. We're not creating things from the beginning, that we're in the middle of things.

How do you get faculty buy-in to a vision of moral leadership, or a certain vision of liberal arts education, or a certain vision of the importance of God in religion, in the formation of the individual and the individual conscience? How do you do that, given the fact that all three of your institutions have been around for a while, and there's been a long tradition, and you're trying to get—just to judge by the number of graduate schools in the United States, most people come from secular or public graduate schools when they come. Except, say, for a handful of graduate schools that are explicitly religious, most prospective faculty come from places that are avowedly secular, as did I—as did, I think, all of us. So how do you do that? How do you get faculty buy-in?

MCAULIFFE: Well, I would not get faculty buy-

component of what the faculty responsibility is. So this is one area where I think we have an advantage in something that's very important in liberal education, and it's this character formation.

JENKINS: I would say, I think the Jesuits, here at Boston College and other institutions, are doing much better at this. I know you have done a lot working with faculty and helping them reflect on the institution, and Jesuit ideals, and I think we have a lot to learn from you.

For us, I think there are elements of a broad Catholic vision that people can relate to who aren't Catholic. I mean, service to people in need is something that our students embrace. The Center for Social Concerns—Bill Lies ran that—is something that directs students to service, and faculty are very excited about that. Ethics across the curriculum is something that faculty could buy into. I think there are elements of the vision. Faculty may not buy into the whole or be Catholic, but they can become enthusiastic about certain elements.

MASSA: I think of the Georgetown statement called centered pluralism, which is a very smart sort of thing, where the center is Jesuit and Catholic, but there's overlapping circles, and hopefully all faculty buy in on some level of that kind of thing. But how do you hold onto a religious and moral vision and not be perceived as sectarian?

The one and only college hockey game I've ever attended was last year, the Beanpot here in Boston, and Boston College was playing Boston University, and Boston University started chanting, Sunday school, Sunday school, and the BC students started chanting safety school, safety school. [laughter] How do you hold onto that—or, in a place like Bryn Mawr, is there a perception that places like BC or Notre Dame are in some way sectarian that's problematic, or unfaithful to the liberal ends of higher education? Or not? Or is that a dated view?

MCAULIFFE: No, I don't think there is that perception. These are very prominent and very research-driv

RYKEN: But to me, an important question would be, not just, are we a sectarian school, which of course we are. Are we charitable in our relationships with others? Do we value academic freedom? And are we interested in engaging a much wider world of ideas than simply what comes from the Christian tradition? Those are all important values for us in terms of curriculum, in terms of classroom, in terms of research, in terms of the connections that our faculty have in the wider scholarly community. So I think there's a right kind of sectarianism in a pluralistic context, and probably wrong kinds of sectarianism as well.

MCAULIFFE: I'll add one small point, and admittedly, it's a little bit controversial. But from the perspective of a women's college, the track record of religions around women is an issue. Certainly—and here I would put, in some ways, Islam and Roman Catholicism on an equal plane. There is some skepticism around why would an intelligent woman continue to be a Roman Catholic if she is really interested in women's leadership? If she's trying to train the next generation of women's leaders, then how could she possibly intellectually remain associated with, affiliated with a tradition that does not do that?

RYKEN: You don't need to leave evangelicalism out of your list either. [laughter]

MASSA: This is confession time.

RYKEN: Basically, I think some of the best principles in all of those traditions—certainly I think that of the Christian tradition—recognize the dignity of all persons, and desire women to flourish as much as men, and it's a matter of recovering and grasping onto those principles, sometimes in spite of the history.

JENKINS: I would only say—I agree with you, Jane, and it's a tremendous challenge. If institutions of higher education aren't there to provide a different voice, it's not going to get better. That's why I think the connection between an institution of higher education and ecclesial bodies is an important one.

The vitality that has come to the Catholic Church from having universities from the 13

MASSA: Our ironically-titled –

MCAULIFFE: Religion and the Liberal Aims of Private, Elite Higher Education is really what we've

MASSA: All three of you have touched on this, so I guess my last question—and then we'll turn to the audience—is, the religiously- or faith-based institutions that seem to be thriving are the ones that have the largest percentages of people who are disappointed applicants—which we'll set as sort of an inverse measurement of your success—seem to be ones that are quite elite, and take a small percentage of the applicants they receive.

Is it possible to have a network of religiously- or faith-based institutions that are successful at holding onto their religious vision and financially viable simultaneously? Is that possible, or, in a sense, is it a question of there can only be a very small percentage of faith-affiliated schools that do well across the board, and then the other ones are just fated not to, for all kinds of—not necessarily for religious reasons, but for market reasons. What do you think?

MCAULIFFE:

MASSA: So do you have any questions? Yeah, why don't we start right in the front here.

PATEL: Eboo Patel, Interfaith Youth Core—Phil, you can't say the right kind of sectarian or the wrong kind of sectarian and not get asked about that. So I'm going to do the honors and ask about that. Just a couple of key characteristics of the right kind and the wrong kind. What pressures do you face from the broader community to be what you might consider the wrong kind, and what role do you think Wheaton and other faith-based institutions have been playing in leading their broader religious communities towards the right kind?

RYKEN: The wrong kind would be—and you can press me a little more on it, Eboo—wrong kind

I've been struck by the defensive tone of all of your comments, posing liberal arts education as opposed to the concerns of parents who don't want to spend \$50,000 a year for something that's not going to get their kid a job. I'd like to hear what the panel has to say about maybe just the advisability of saying, we are providing something very valuable. If you don't want to come, you don't have to. You all have many more applications than you can take in. Obviously there are people who think it's important.

And I'd also like further comment on something that Dr. Hatch alluded to briefly last night. You're all taking care to talk very respectfully of this digital education, which I personally consider a consumer fraud, both as somebody who's an atheist and somebody who's interested in liberal arts. (applause) So I'd like to hear more about what you can say, not in defense of yourself, but just for yourself, and to hell with all of those people who are giving you trouble.

MASSA: Now, to be clear, I didn't put her up to this. [laughter]

JACOBY: No! I don't even know you. [laughter]

MCAULIFFE: I think we do spend so much time speaking about what we deeply believe is the formative value of a liberal arts education. I mean, that's why we've dedicated ourselves to the presidencies of institutions that, in fact, do form not just intellects, but whole people in their undergraduate years, and in the cases of a number of our institutions, well beyond that. I have not heard the defensive tone that you've picked up, Susan, in today's panel.

But I have heard the concern, and in some ways it goes back to the statistics that I've often quoted, and Andrew Delbanco did this morning, that, in fact, liberal arts colleges, if you think of the selective liberal arts colleges, are a tiny, tiny spectrum of American higher education. Most undergraduates do major in business, and communications, and are on a job track, and it is extremely important that we continue to raise our voice about education as preparation for human flourishing, for a lifetime of human flourishing. And I think, as presidents of these institutions, we do that.

But I'm not the president of Arizona State, a huge, huge, huge university, and consequently, my voice, I think, does not get the same play. But I don't know any president of any institution that considers its undergraduate education to be a genuine liberal arts one who is not talking, and talking constantly, about the value, because they see the value. They see the value in the graduates, they see the value in the alumni who do, in fact, benefit from both the breadth and the depth that characterize liberal arts education.

I'm not going to dismiss new forms of online education quite as cavalierly as you have,

this. I'm certainly not going to ignore it. I'm going to look at it. I'm going to look at it critically and carefully, and I'm going to begin to wonder if there are forms in which certain parts of this could be an enhancement to what we currently do in our very intensive kind of education, where we have an eight-to-one faculty-student ratio, and where everything is around student-faculty engagement. So I'm keeping a pretty open mind on MOOCs and everything else.

JENKINS: I think digital technology is just a tool. How you're going to use it, what you're going to use it for, that's an interesting discussion. But it's not a panacea, and I think it's just—a lot of the rhetoric is about that. I say, yeah, about our defensiveness, I haven't heard it either. But I think we have to—this group has to—talk to parents who are making

our lives into the educational journey of our undergraduates? Is that something that's just done in a sort of ancillary fashion, or is it woven into the entire fabric of the curricular and co-curricular journey that our students take?

In terms of the specifics of indicating an area of possible major interest or not on an application form, I think there's so much else within the way the applications are put together for our kinds of colleges and universities that do raise some of those larger questions. Why does this particular school interest you? What are the kinds of things you hope to secure as part of your educational journey in this site, at this place? So if they're not raised as explicitly as you would suggest, I do think they are embedded in much of the admissions work that we do.

RYKEN: I agree with that. I agree with the comment—we like to see our students move in the

