

III. The College and the Church

WHEREVER The College of Wooster is known, an overwhelming majority of its friends recognize it as a "Presbyterian Church Related College." Many of these constituents are alumni who know from experience the meaning of the sentence that has appeared for many years in the catalogue: "At the heart of Wooster's adventure is the Christian religion."

Wooster has been a part of a galaxy of church-related colleges that have made distinctive contributions to society. Each denomination and in many instances each institution within a given church developed its own concept of its purpose and goals and its own *modus operandi* within the organized church. All along the way there was growth, but it was during the twenty years between 1920 and 1940 that many fundamental changes occurred. A large number of colleges that had been church related became "independent," and the rationale of the church relationship shifted.¹

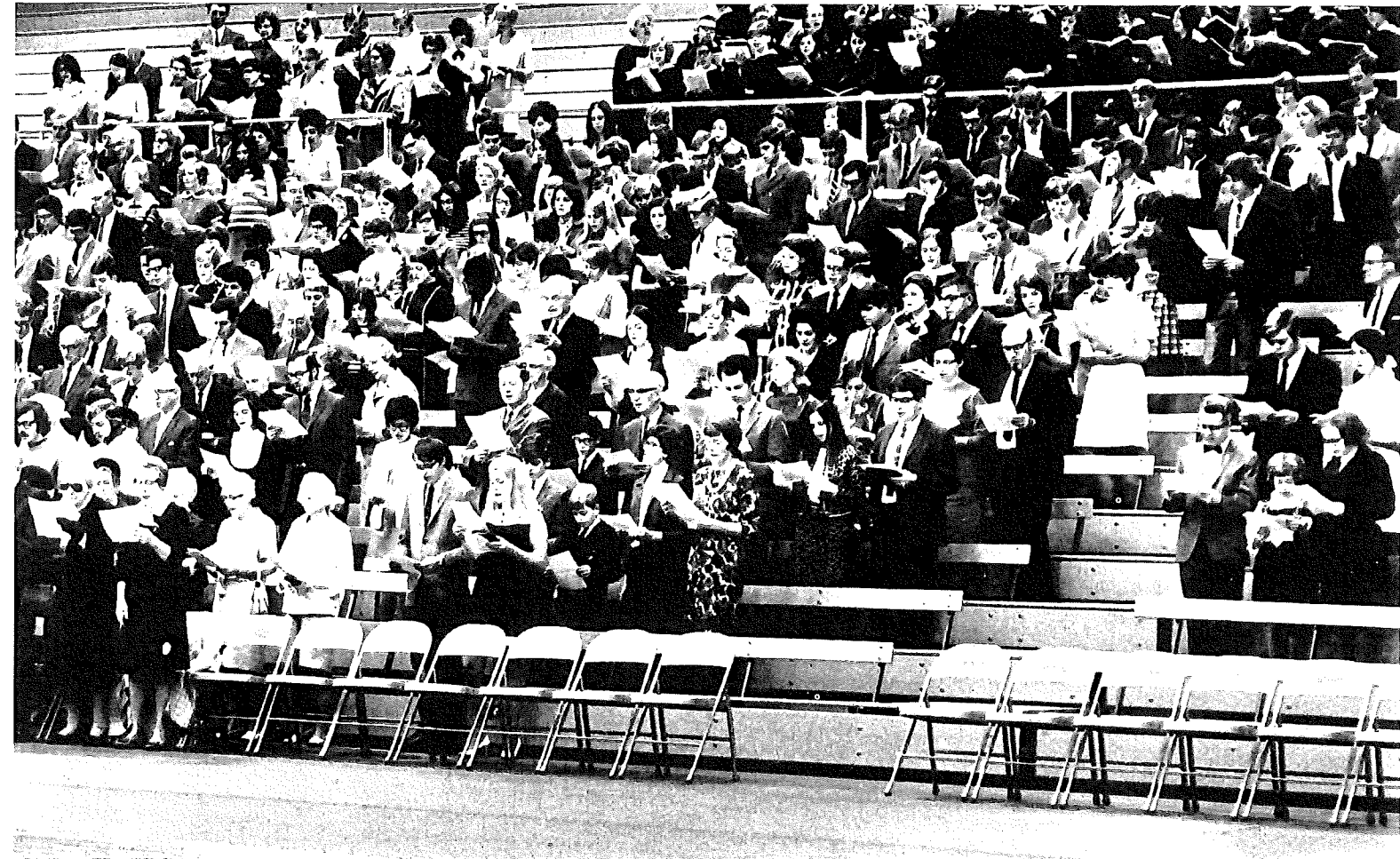
It is a truism that social institutions respond to the stimuli of various eras and, as a result, change and develop new guidelines and often new concepts and understandings of their reasons for being. Since the founding of the College in 1866, concepts of the role of higher education in society have gone through several cycles. New roles for church-related,

independent, and state-supported colleges and universities have evolved through the years. Similarly, additional roles for the Protestant Church have emerged during this same time.

The College of Wooster has not been exempt from these stimuli nor has it tried to avoid new interpretations of these relations. Rather it has in many instances been in the forefront of these landmark growth points in American colleges. For example, when the study of biology was considered at least questionable for churchmen, the College established a department for that study.

Some understanding of the history of Wooster and the Church is essential to understand the present relation. The original certification of incorporation in 1866 was for a degree-granting university to be established by the Synods of Ohio, Sandusky, and Cincinnati, of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. These articles specified that the object of the institution would be the "promotion of sound learning and education under religious influences." By Synodical reconstruction in 1870 and by consolidation in 1882, the University passed into the ownership and control of the Synod of Ohio. In 1914 the relationship with the Synod was reaffirmed and the name changed to The College of Wooster.

One original provision required that 75 per cent of the



BY PRESIDENT J. GARBER DRUSHAL

members of the Board of Trustees be members of the Presbyterian Church. Further, five of these trustees had to be resident freeholders of Wayne County, Ohio, and all members of the faculty were to belong to "an Evangelical Protestant Church." Relatively recently the requirement of the resident freeholders was abolished, although there has always been adequate representation of Presbyterians in Wayne County.

Then in 1961 the General Assembly adopted what is often referred to as the Skinner Report, which set forth the rationale for the participation of the Presbyterian Church in higher education. In Professor Alburey Castell's phrase, the Church decided to continue as a college-related denomination. In 1962 the Board of Christian Education in Philadelphia adopted what were called administrative guidelines, interpreting the Skinner Report. One of the results of this action was the change in the requirement that all faculty be members of Evangelical Protestant Churches. The individual Boards of Trustees were given wider latitude in determining the religious stance of the colleges in the denomination.

Over the years Wooster has also had, and continues to have, a contract with the United Presbyterian Church through the Board of Christian Education, which identified

Wooster as related to the Presbyterian Church and covered the subject of instruction in religion.

It should be noted here that the relationship between Wooster and the Church has been profitable and stimulating, and we believe, of mutual substantive worth. Through all of the changes and progressions there has been a cooperative aspiration for growth. Let it be further noted that there is the strong hope expressed by all concerned that this same spirit will continue to prevail. There is, of course, every reason that it should.

Brief mention should be made of two other general historical developments within the American educational scene. Although some had approached the matter earlier, after World War II state universities had a considerable increase in course offerings in religion, and it became clear that study in this area was no longer limited to church-related colleges. Further, it was believed by many that the private church-related colleges had a commitment and program which produced graduates with special ethical and moral values. Studies by Eddy² and Jacobs³ at least suggested that the degree to which character traits were built on a college campus may have been over-emphasized. These and other studies showed that the private church-related colleges were

doing some things well, but that there was considerable myth growing up about the results of technical or legal relations between denominations and colleges. The actual effect on students, it came to be believed, was due more to specific program than to any traditional but undeveloped ties.

From the point of view of The College of Wooster, two contemporary developments must be noted. Following the merger of the two Presbyterian bodies, the Synod of Ohio set out to reconstruct its own constitution and bylaws, and was in fact a kind of experimental approach to Synod organization in the denomination. To achieve this, various task forces and commissions were established whose reports resulted in the new structure for the Synod. Because the new denomination and Synod now had two colleges in Ohio with similar traditions though different legal backgrounds, a Synod Task Force was appointed to review the relation between Muskingum College and The College of Wooster and to bring a recommendation to the Synod on the future relation of the colleges and the church.

Before this Task Force concluded its work, the Presbyterian College Union adopted a resolution in January of 1968 urging that the Synods of the United Presbyterian Church relinquish their control of the trustee election for all of the colleges and that the individual boards be given autonomy in this area. In the General Assembly of May 1968, reaction to this recommendation was as follows:

The position established by the General Assembly and the Board of Christian Education points toward the wisdom of the Synods divesting themselves of the particular responsibilities for direct election or confirmation of trustees, or the exercise of other responsibilities that represent latent powers over the governance of the college. The capacities for a responsible action by both Synod and college seem to be enhanced when the autonomy of each is recognized and when a mutual working agreement becomes characteristic of the relation.⁴

The action of the Presbyterian College Union and the General Assembly came while the Synod of Ohio College Task Force was in the midst of its work under the capable leadership of Dr. Hugh Bean Evans. Each college was represented on this Task Force by the Chairman of the Board and by the President. The Moderator appointed other laymen and additional clergymen to the group. The report was given to the Synod sessions in Columbus on April 25 and 26, 1969, and adopted at that time. A brief summary of these resolutions is important here.

The Task Force began by asking three questions. (1) Do we /the representatives of the Synod and the colleges/ want a relationship to continue? (2) If so, where and how will the relationship take place? (3) What will be its form?

There was very early agreement that the Synod was eager to be part of a college-related church and that the colleges were as desirous of being church related. Therefore, there remained the problem of the nature of the relationship. Five recommendations of the Task Force were adopted.

The first of these recommendations is given in its entirety:

As long as the Colleges of Muskingum and Wooster are United Presbyterian institutions of higher education located within the bounds of the judicatories of our church, there already exists a relationship between the Synod of Ohio and the two colleges. This relationship cannot be eliminated unless our form of government is changed, or unless the colleges cease to be Presbyterian. We therefore recommend that this relationship be recognized as one in which the Synod of Ohio has the power of review regarding "the status of religion" on the campuses and in which the two colleges are recognized as part of the Synod of Ohio in the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., having responsibility to the mission and ministry of the church as determined by the judicatories. We further recommend that this relationship be deemed adequate and sufficient.

It was clearly understood that the "relationship . . ." described as "adequate and sufficient" discontinued the right of the Synod to elect the trustees of the college, and such a provision was included in the Minutes of that meeting. It was also clearly understood that the Synod still retained the legal right and responsibility to approve any changes in the Charter of the corporation of each college.

The second recommendation was that the Synod of Ohio continue its financial support through the mission causes program.

The third recommendation dealt with the name of the agency through which the Synod of Ohio would work and through which it would fulfill its responsibilities to the two church-related colleges.

The fourth point explained the annual review of the "status of religion" and provided that it would be through the Synod Department of Mission through institutions.

The final provision authorized the Synod to enter into "any such contractual agreement being necessary...between each of the two colleges and the Synod of Ohio..." This contract has been signed by the representatives of The College of Wooster.⁵

This somewhat lengthy review of the historical growth to our present position has been necessary because there has been a great deal of misunderstanding about the recent denominational and Synod statements as they affect the college. It should now be clear that The College of Wooster still remains a church-related institution of the United Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., and that this relationship is expected to grow and develop through the years.

One conclusion is inevitable in all studies of this subject. It is not enough simply to establish the legal pattern. There must be commitment and program. What of these for Wooster?

The College continues to have as one of its fundamental assumptions that the Church has something to say to young people today; that in Professor Phillip H. Phenix's (Columbia University) phrase, we have an increasing involvement "in religion as comprehensive life-orientation."⁶

To use the words of Samuel D. Proctor, we hold that the study of the Christian religion "enlarges our margin of freedom." He goes on to say:

In higher education the Christian university has the opportunity to give new direction in our time. This is no time for us to be engaged in insipid imitation of what goes for normal in the culture, for one look at the world and we can see that it is the season for revival on every hand.⁷

The College of Wooster intends that its program shall provide the opportunity for students to enlarge their own borders of freedom to come to grips with the challenge of the Christian faith.

The Department of Religion is an active, viable force on the campus, and students are required to have this exposure. However, this is not the only nexus of faith and reason. Through lectures in the chapel convocation series, through special worship services, and through a variety of student organizations, there are opportunities for students to have this confrontation within themselves.

Perhaps most important of all is the existence of a congregation of the Presbyterian Church which meets in the chapel on the campus. The leadership of the pastor is a significant part of the commitment to the church by the college.

One further comment should be made. Some take the rather pessimistic stance from which they argue that the church has changed so drastically and is "flying off in all directions" with so much uncertainty that no college could possibly reflect with any accuracy what the church is doing today. If the church itself does not know where it is going and what its mission is, so the argument runs, why should a college make any pretense of commitment to so multifaceted and uncertain a conglomerate?

It is of course true that the church is in many ways reorienting itself in terms of its mission. In spite of the diverse manifestations of direction, the church still remains the main channel of the gospel and the great agency through which the individual may come to know the full meaning of what Jesus Christ was trying to teach. For this reason, a church which wishes to be college related has the advantage of having

within its family those campuses where these concerns can help articulate the goals of the church and provide leadership for it. For the campus which remains church related, it has the exciting opportunity of being part of the dynamism of the forward movement of the church in its ministry particularly to the youth of today. Such a position is consistent with quality and excellence for both.

Perhaps there is no more exciting focus for this religious and denominational thrust than the college campus. Here at Wooster there is a thriving congregation-in-residence, so to speak. From such a center the church can be inspired and gain a sense of direction for the contemporary man. At such a college the student can search, often in a kind of personal experimentation, for the meaning of Christianity in his own life.

With roots deep in the tradition of the best of Protestantism through the Presbyterian Church, The College of Wooster then takes strength from these historical tap lines to provide new opportunities for the young people of today. It will continue to build upon the foundation of one of the centennial statements of its Board of Trustees:

We are a Christian college. We believe that the life and teachings of Jesus Christ set forth a way of life essential to the future of mankind. We receive all religions and creeds into our educational fellowship, but our educational experience has been, is now, and shall be rooted in the deep conviction of Protestant Christianity. Ω

1 For a complete study of this development see Manning M. Patillo, Jr., and Donald M. MacKenzie, *Church-Sponsored Higher Education in the United States, 1966*. American Council on Education, Washington, D.C.

2 Edward D. Eddy, Jr., *The College Influence on Student Character, 1959*, American Council on Education, Washington, D.C., 185 pp.

3 Phillip E. Jacobs, *Changing Values in College, 1954*. Harper and Bros., New York.

4 *Minutes of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., Seventh Series, Volume II, 1968, Part 1, pp. 163-4.*

5 *Copies of the Synod contract and the contract with the Board of Christian Education are available to anyone interested.*

6 *The Study of Religion on the Campus of Today, Papers from the Stonybrook Conference on Religion as an Academic Discipline*, Karl D. Hartzell and Harrison Sasser, Editors, Association of American Colleges, Washington, D.C., 1967, p. 7.

7 *Challenges of Change to the Christian College*, Eliot D. Allen, Editor, Council of Protestant Colleges and Universities, Washington, D.C., 1966, p. 9.