

The Growth of Christian Colleges

Evangelical Christian Colleges, where the belief that the Bible is inerrant is woven into academic and social programs, are becoming increasingly popular in some countries. Enrolments have surged during the 1990s, dramatically outpacing the average increase at secular institutions.

Officials at Christian colleges point to factors to explain their growth. The first is demographics Christian elementary and secondary schools, home schooling, and youth ministries are all thriving. The second is a desire by students (many from home schooling or church-run schools), to avoid the life styles found at secular institutions.

Some experts think that the lack of diversity stifles student's critical thinking skills. Richard T. Hughes, a professor of religion at Pepperdine University, has stated that "Some of these smaller, really conservative schools look more like a church than a university. If you're a student there, you haven't been exposed to the larger world, and more importantly, you may never have been force to think through issues that really challenge your faith and intellect." In a speech at a conference in San Diego in February 1999, Mr. Hughes said that hundreds of institutions had tried, but failed, to synthesize faith and learning. "Some of these schools succeeded wonderfully well as outposts of Christian conviction, but never amounted to much academically." Still, Hughes notes, a few Christian colleges have been able to successfully "open the door to more serious academic inquiry and radical kinds of questioning."

Calvin College is a case in point. One of the best-regarded-and least traditional Christian colleges in the council, Calvin allows its students who are of legal drinking age to consume alcohol (although not on campus). It has no prohibitions on smoking (except in buildings) and allows openly gay students to enroll and also has support groups for them. Thomas E. McWherter, vice president of enrolment and external studies, says "The watchword here is responsible freedom." He also notes that "a lot of the colleges within the Christian college orbit have gotten better in the last 15 or 20 years, if you look at the percentage of faculty with Ph.D. degrees and the success of graduates in both career and graduate school placement."

Source

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