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## Is a Catholic College Really Catholic? Is Baylor Really Baptist?

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Manhattan College claims to be a Catholic institution, and the Archdiocese of New York lists the school as a Catholic college. Nevertheless, all this has not impressed the National Labor Relations Board, which recently ruled that the college could not prevent adjunct faculty from unionizing because, as G. Jeffrey MacDonald of Religion News Service reports, “the school’s core purpose isn’t religious enough to trigger a labor law exemption.”



Isn’t religious enough? Manhattan College does not require its faculty to profess Catholicism. Actually, it is unclear just how the school functions as a Catholic institution. As the NLRB found, the college’s “stated purpose does not involve the propagation of a religious faith, teachers are not required to adhere to or promote religious tenets, (and) a religious order does not exercise control over hiring, firing, or day-to-day operations.”

That finding — that faculty “are not required to adhere to or promote religious tenets” — seems particularly important.

Michael Broyde, a church-state expert at Emory University, told MacDonald, “There are more and more — particularly Catholic institutions — that are broadening their missions profoundly so that you’ll have an institution where neither the students nor the faculty are Catholic.”

Meanwhile, *The Baptist Standard* reports that the board of regents of Baylor University “voted Feb. 11 to amend the university’s bylaws, allowing members who are active in Christian—but not Baptist—churches to comprise up to 25 percent of the board.” Even as that announcement drew protests from the Baptist General Convention of Texas, the explanation offered by Dary Stone of Dallas, regent chairman, is even more revealing.

As Marv Knox, editor of *The Baptist Standard* reported: “*Changing our governance is in great part an accommodation to obvious demographic changes in church labels and affiliation,*” he said. *For example, the composition of the freshman class is slightly less than one-third Baptist, and the majority of the overall student body is non-Baptist.* I wonder how many Texas Baptists knew that the student body of Baylor reflected such a minority status for Baptists?

The secularization of religious colleges and universities is now an old story, but it does have interesting new developments. Though no one should celebrate a government entity acting to classify colleges according to relative religiosity, the government must be able to detect *something* legitimately religious about a religious college or university that claims religious exemptions. The bare fact that an institution was founded by a religious group can be totally irrelevant to the way the school now operates. The American landscape is littered with institutions that were once distinctively Christian, but certainly are no longer.

This paragraph from the RNS report is particularly interesting:

*Religious colleges are being warned, observers say, to show their core purpose is to “propagate religious faith” or else be treated as a secular enterprise. That could pose a special problem for liberal religious organizations, which seldom require students and faculty to endorse specific creeds or doctrines.*

I couldn't have said it better myself.

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G. Jeffrey MacDonald, “Catholic College Faces Crisis of Faith, Labor Laws,” *USA Today*, Friday, February 11, 2011. Religion News Service release.

Marv Knox, “Baylor Regents Vote to Allow Non-Baptists on Governing Board,” *The Baptist Standard*, Friday, February 11, 2011.

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