

A SUTHERLAND INSTITUTE  
POLICY PUBLICATION

# Religious Contributions to Education

## Social Benefits of Religion, Volume 3

Written by William C. Duncan

April 2025





## **Mission**

We equip Americans to advance principled public policy that promotes the constitutional values of faith, family and freedom.

## **Vision**

Utah is recognized as the best state in the nation for successfully applying America's founding principles to the policy challenges of the day. And that reputation is supported by Sutherland Institute as the premier institutional voice – “making sound ideas broadly popular” – in Utah and beyond.

A Sutherland Institute Policy Publication

# **Religious Contributions to Education**

## **Social Benefits of Religion, Volume 3**

Written by William C. Duncan

April 2025

Layout and design by Spencer Williams  
© 2025 Sutherland Institute All Rights Reserved



# Table of Contents

4	Publication Introduction
5	Primary and Secondary Education
8	Higher Education
18	Policy Recommendations
19	Endnotes



# Publication Introduction

This publication is the third in a series and focuses on the contributions of people of faith and religious organizations to education in the United States. Prior reports described religious contributions to social services and to the freedoms we enjoy as Americans. Education is related to both of these,

providing opportunities for upward mobility, resources to help others, and enhancing good and productive citizenship. As with the other reports, this one is a preliminary discussion for a lay audience. Sutherland will likely return to this topic in future publications.



# Primary and Secondary Education

A sizeable minority of children attend one of the more than 30,000 private elementary and secondary schools in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Of these, “20 percent [are] Catholic schools, 12 percent [are] conservative Christian schools, 9 percent [are] affiliated religious schools, 26 percent [are] unaffiliated religious schools, and 33 percent [are] nonsectarian schools,” as a report for the National Center for Education Statistics says.<sup>2</sup>

In all, nearly 4 million U.S. children are educated at religious schools in any given year.

The social benefits of religious education, however, go beyond the number of students who are educated in religious schools.

Historically, as with colleges and universities, elementary and secondary schools in the colonial and early Republic periods were predominantly religious. In fact, many of the colonies specifically promoted religious education in their laws (including later, after they became states). In fact, “Education in America remained primarily under ecclesiastical control up to the middle of the nineteenth century until gradually state support of sectarian schools was withdrawn.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, religious organizations and churches played a significant role in “creating educational infrastructure.”<sup>4</sup>

The number of students educated by religious schools increased during the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> In an article about the trend, *The New York Times* noted:

*The median member school in the Association of Christian Schools International, one of the country’s largest networks of evangelical schools, grew its K-12 enrollment by 12 percent between 2019-20 and 2020-21. The Association of Classical Christian Schools, another conservative network, expanded to educating about 59,200 students this year from an estimated 50,500 in the 2018-19 school year.*<sup>6</sup>

Catholic schools have also recorded growth during the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these institutional contributions to education, some new research recently highlighted by the *Deseret News* points to important individual contributions.<sup>8</sup>

Ilana Horwitz, a sociology professor at Tulane University, has written a new book, *God, Grades, and Graduation: Religion’s Surprising Impact on Academic Success*, that examines the individual contribution of religion to academic success. Horwitz notes:

*Over the past 30 years, sociologists and economists have conducted several studies that consistently show a positive relationship between religiosity and*

*academic success. These studies show that more religious students earn better grades and complete more schooling than less religious peers.*<sup>9</sup>

Horwitz’s own research found that “intensely religious teens,” defined as those who “see religion as very important, attend religious services at least once a week, pray at least once a day, and believe in God with absolute certainty,” “are more likely than average to earn higher GPAs and complete more college education.” She stresses: “Theological belief on its own is not enough to influence how children behave – they also need to be part of a religious community.”<sup>10</sup>

This careful study found that this advantage existed “even after accounting for various other background factors, including race, gender, geographic region and family structure,” and even when the teens were compared with siblings.<sup>11</sup>

These advantages are particularly marked for those who come from working-class and middle-class families.

Religious schools make other important contributions. Research suggests that students educated in private schools are more likely to vote as adults.<sup>12</sup> Another study found students “educated in Protestant secondary schools are considerably more likely than other young people to continue to volunteer.”<sup>13</sup>

Patrick Wolf, a professor at the University of Arkansas, reviewed research on private schools and concluded that these schools “often enhance the realization of the civic values that are central to a well-functioning democracy,” particularly among

ethnic minorities “and when Catholic schools are the schools of choice.”<sup>14</sup>

Some religious schools also have demonstrable benefits to an even more fundamental social institution – the family. A report from scholars at the American Enterprise Institute and the Institute for Family Studies found:

- “Adults who attended Protestant schools are more than twice as likely to be in an intact marriage as those who attended public schools. They are also about 50% less likely than public-school attendees to have a child out of wedlock.”
- “Among those who have ever married, Protestant-school attendees are about 60% less likely than public-school attendees to have ever divorced. ...”
- “Catholic-school attendees are about 30% less likely to have had a child out of wedlock than those who attended public schools.”

This is true even when a child’s socioeconomic status is considered. “About 40% of public-school attendees who grew up in financially unstable households eventually marry and never divorce. The rate is higher for Catholic-school attendees who grew up in the same unstable financial situation (53%). Meanwhile, Protestant-school attendees who grew up in financial hardship are the most likely to marry and never divorce; 72% are still in their first marriage.”<sup>15</sup>

This is consistent with other research noted in the report that “indicates that religious schooling is associated with higher rates of marriage among young adults.” Religious school students “have



lower odds of teenage births than public school students.”<sup>16</sup>

One of the authors of the AEI/IFS report, who herself benefited from a religious school education, suggested some of the reasons for these advantages:

1. “I was exposed to healthy married families with faithful dads and husbands. ...”
2. “I was taught a worldview that said every life has value and purpose, that marriage was designed by God for the good of children and society, that divorce was taboo, and sex and parenthood should be reserved for marriage.

Importantly, I saw these values lived out in the lives of my teachers and in most of the families of my peers. ...”

3. “The friends and classmates I found there helped keep me away from choices that would have derailed my future.”<sup>17</sup>

Religious schools not only set the pattern for our current school system, but they continue to benefit society by educating capable and involved students and strengthening their families, benefiting not only those students but their communities as well.



# Higher Education

Gordon College is a flagship Christian liberal arts college in Massachusetts. It was founded in 1889 as the Boston Missionary Training School. It is serious both about academics and faith. As the “faith” section of its website explains:

*Gordon is a vibrant community of believers, a place where Christian faith frames all aspects of the experience—from residence life to athletics to academics. We want students to think deeply and holistically about how their faith informs their influence in society—now and well into the future. Intentional programming and organic relationships propel students to grow in Christian character and deepen their trust in Jesus.<sup>18</sup>*

The college’s inclusive understanding of faith and scholarship was recently at issue in a case decided by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, that state’s highest court. That court specifically rejected Gordon’s vision of “integrat[ing] religious faith into instruction and scholarship” consistent with its aspiration that “Christian faith frames all aspects” of the college experience, including academics. This understanding that all of its faculty had a role in promulgating the religious mission of the school would be too broad, the court concluded. So, an employee arguing she was fired for opposing the school’s policy on sexual morality was allowed to proceed with her case.<sup>19</sup>

## Historical Role

In addition to the important issue of religious freedom, the case also highlights an important contribution that religious organizations have made to American life. In short, college students and college graduates in America today have religion to thank in no small part for the higher education that is setting them up (or has already set them up) for financial and life success and happiness.

Historically, the nation’s three earliest universities – and some of today’s leading institutions of higher education – embraced a religious mission. Half of Harvard’s initial governing board were ministers. Roger Geiger’s history of higher education in the United States notes that the “college was intended to uphold orthodox Puritanism.” Yale was formed partly by those who believed Harvard had failed in this religious aspiration and that another school should perform that function. The charter of the College of William and Mary included provision for “a school of divinity to prepare Anglican ministers.” All were initially governed by both church and state (which were not strictly separated at that time).<sup>20</sup>

A Notre Dame professor noted: “The churches sponsored higher education before there were any state-sponsored colleges or universities; indeed before there were states. For most of the

history of the nation, those Christian foundations set the patterns and carried most, then much, of the enrollment.” He specified:

*Legion are the universities and colleges in the United States founded under the auspices of the churches. Princeton, Calvin, Hanover, Tulsa, and Macalaster were founded as Presbyterian or Reformed. Brown, Baylor, Wake Forest, Spelman, and Vassar were Baptist. Haverford, Swarthmore, Earlham, Whittier, and Guilford were Quaker. Williams, Yale, Smith, Fisk, and Dartmouth were Congregationalist. Valparaiso, Saint Olaf, Luther, Hartwick, and Wittenberg were Lutheran. Duke, Emory, Northwestern, Southern California, and Syracuse were Methodist. Georgetown, Webster, Notre Dame, Manhattanville, and De Paul were Catholic. The University of the South (Sewanee), Hobart, Bard, William and Mary, and Kenyon were Episcopalian.<sup>21</sup>*

Of course, most of these universities have now become secular and abandoned any formal or informal religious mission, but it remains the case that the foundation of American higher education was religious.

With a nod to the historic shift away from religious missions in the Ivy League schools, the Gordon College website notes: “Gordon stands apart from other outstanding institutions in New England by combining an exceptional education with an informed Christian faith.” Though these other institutions have drifted away from the project of integrating faith with scholarship,

Gordon self-consciously embraces pluralism in which different visions of learning can coexist in different institutions.<sup>22</sup>

Gordon’s embrace of pluralism is now in tension with strong cultural pressures in higher education towards uniformity and conformity with a strict and often inflexibly applied set of progressive values. This is reflected in internal disagreements about its religiously motivated conduct standards that gave rise to the recent court decision. It is also reflected in the court’s decision that the college’s vision of integrating faith into all aspects of the school had to give way to state anti-discrimination policies.

Being different, however, is not bad.

## Contemporary Contributions

Conservationists remind us that we must take great care to avoid disrupting a healthy and diverse ecosystem for fear of disrupting or losing beneficial species whose contributions we may not fully recognize or understand. New research suggests something similar in the ecosystem of higher education.

Higher education has deep religious roots. One of the nation’s foremost authorities on religious higher education explained: “The churches sponsored higher education before there were any state-sponsored colleges or universities; indeed before there were states. For most of the history of the nation, those Christian foundations set the patterns and carried most, then much, of the enrollment.”<sup>23</sup>

For more than a century, many of the most prominent schools that began with religious missions have abandoned those and become wholly secular in orientation.<sup>24</sup> Despite this, “out of eight million students enrolled in undergraduate bachelor’s degree programs in the United States in 2004, over one million were attending religiously affiliated colleges or universities.”<sup>25</sup>

Beyond numbers, in the ecology of higher education, religious universities make a distinctive and critical contribution.

A recent edition of *Deseret Magazine* focused on the unique role of religious universities, noting some of these unique contributions to areas like the liberal arts, community engagement, accessibility, and innovation.<sup>26</sup>

There is also some empirical research that points to intriguing evidence of the impact of religious higher education on students.

Cardus, a Canadian research institution, published the research of two academics on “a nationally representative sample of 1,332 college-educated US adults in their twenties and thirties” who were asked “to reflect on their post-secondary experiences.”

The research found a number of ways in which students of private religious colleges and universities experienced significant benefits compared to peers in public or private secular schools. For example, these students were:

- More likely to participate in intercollegiate sports, academic honor societies, and

political organizations (and far more likely than those at public universities to participate in community service groups).

- Less likely to become drunk, use marijuana, and engage in sexual intercourse.
- More likely to report their faculty as being in the top quartile for acting as mentors, friends, and religious counselors.
- More likely to experience a sense of belonging at the school and to feel they have faculty support.
- More likely to see directly helping others as a very or extremely important feature of a job.
- More likely to agree that caring for the environment, participating in the political process, taking action against injustice, and helping people in other countries experiencing violence and poverty are moral obligations.
- More likely to volunteer after graduation.
- More likely to be married.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, another study by one of the co-authors of this research found that “religious colleges may provide a ‘moral community’ that could reduce the risk of sexual violence.”<sup>28</sup>

Two things stand out from these research findings for public policy regarding religiously affiliated universities:

1. Despite a political narrative that connects religion and conservative values, this research suggests that religious institutions



of higher education encourage or facilitate their students to embrace both stereotypically liberal (caring for the environment and acting against injustice) and conservative (getting married and finding belonging in the community) priorities. The political narrative may be misleading the public by capturing only a part of religion or a segment of religious individuals. both stereotypically liberal (caring for the environment and acting against injustice) and conservative (getting married and finding belonging in community) priorities. The political narrative may be misleading the public by capturing only a part of religion or a segment of religious individuals.

2. This research highlights how religiously affiliated universities help contribute many things – more volunteering in the community, less substance abuse, more social capital, prioritizing helping other people, political participation, and assisting victims of violence and poverty – that benefit everyone in society. In other words, the expression and application of religion – and, by extension, protecting the expression and application of religion – improves the lives of the religious and the non-religious alike.

Other non-religious private and public schools made important contributions as well, and their graduates have better outcomes in some things than those who attended religious schools. However, the research suggests that faith-based colleges and universities make important and distinctive contributions.

As the environmentally conscious wisely remind us, disrupting an ecosystem for the sake of a specific outcome can do broad damage to every member of that ecosystem through unintended consequences that are often hard to see. The same is true in education. Policymakers, regulators, accreditors, and academics must carefully preserve the ability of religious universities to carry out their work of providing unique and uniquely beneficial contributions to the ecosystem of education.

## Marriage Promotion

One somewhat unique contribution of religious schools relates to family formation.

Americans are less likely to get married than they have in the past. A Pew Research Center article explains: “The share of adults ages 25 to 54 who are currently married fell from 67% in 1990 to 53% in 2019.... The share who have never been married has also grown – from 17% to 33%.”<sup>29</sup> There is reason to worry that the situation will get worse. The National Center for Family and Marriage Research “reports that the expectation to marry among high school seniors has declined – from 75% in 2017 to 71% in 2020 (down from a high of 81% in 2006).”<sup>30</sup>

This decline has implications for more than just wedding professionals. Marriage has important benefits for spouses. A recent study of Millennials found that those who were married

*were more likely to report satisfying and stable relationships compared to Millennials in other types of committed relationships; were more likely to have*

*better access to health care, retirement benefits, and insurance compared to unmarried Millennials; reported better health and more regular exercise than those who weren't married; were significantly less likely to report depression than single Millennials.*<sup>31</sup>

Other research demonstrates significant benefits to married mothers: “Thirty-three percent of married mothers ages 18-55 say they are ‘completely satisfied’ with their lives, compared to 15 percent of childless women 18-55.”<sup>32</sup>

This same article noted that marriage helps with financial stability as well, explaining that “a recent Wall Street Journal story reported...that ‘median net worth of married couples 25 to 34 years old was nearly nine times as much as the median net worth of single households in 2019.’”<sup>33</sup>

So, what can be done to encourage marriage?

One possibility is to encourage religious participation. A recent longitudinal study “found that those in the strongly religious group were significantly more likely to be married” at the end of the study period than the non-religious or generally religious but not active groups. “This was particularly true for the men in the study: 97% of highly religious men were likely to be married by their mid-40’s, compared to only 65% of non-religious men.”<sup>34</sup>

An intriguing article highlights a very specific setting for promoting marriage – religious schools.

The article notes that college “is a great place to get married.” Some colleges are better than others. The article found that “the top 25 schools [in the share of married graduates] are almost all religiously affiliated.” The top schools “are Orthodox Jewish Yeshivas, and all but two of the remaining have an explicit religious affiliation.” The two exceptions are Utah schools, Bridgerland Applied Technical College and Utah State University. Utah has the nation’s “fourth-highest marriage rate,” and the author suggests these two schools might have done well in the rankings because of a disproportionately large share of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the student body.<sup>35</sup>

This is not to say that religious schools necessarily create marriages, but the combination of two factors for marriage – religiosity and college education – make religious colleges a fruitful site for meeting a spouse.

## **Solving Problems in Higher Education**

Higher education in the United States is an important and influential industry. State and local government spending on higher education in 2019 was \$311 billion (Utah has the second-highest per-capita spending). A college degree increases average earnings and reduces unemployment.<sup>36</sup>

Higher education, though, is facing some challenges.

Higher education is not accessible to everyone, particularly for those who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Indeed, college may be unaffordable for many people. The National College Attainment Network says that only “24% of public four-year colleges/universities were affordable,” along with only 40% of community colleges. The “amount of unmet financial need[] at four-year institutions was \$2,627.”<sup>37</sup>

For many students, college graduation is not attainable either. Large percentages of students do not graduate within the normal time frame for the completion of their degrees.<sup>38</sup>

In January 2023, a special panel at the American Council on Education in Washington, D.C., addressed these concerns with accessibility, affordability, and attainability – from a unique angle.

The event was called “The Fate of the Religious University,” but the subtitle explains the link to the challenges to higher education: “How Religious Identity Can Address the Crises Facing Today’s Higher Education System.”

The event discussed “how distinctive religious identity can help address the most vexing issues facing today’s higher education system.”

The speakers at the event were presidents of religious colleges and universities like the College of the Ozarks, BYU-Hawaii, Catholic University, Dillard University, Yeshiva University, and BYU, along with the president of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities, and the former president of BYU-Idaho and BYU-Pathway.

These schools are all pursuing innovative ways of addressing the challenges facing universities and their students, including work-study and scholarship programs to allow students to pay for college, cost-savings programs that decrease costs to students, and connectedness initiatives that help students stay in school.

In 1905, Andrew Carnegie launched the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The aim of the Foundation was to provide pensions for retiring college teachers. In addition to helping teachers, the pension fund would be used to incentivize improvements in higher education. The fund, however, specifically excluded religious schools from participation.<sup>39</sup>

This exclusion was described at the ACE event. Council president Ted Mitchell mentioned the exclusion in his opening remarks but explained why excluding the more than 900 religious colleges and universities is shortsighted.<sup>40</sup>

Specifically, religious schools have an important part to play in addressing some of the most significant challenges facing higher education.

Panel discussions highlighted innovative ways religious schools are demonstrating ways to solve these problems.

The College of the Ozarks, for instance, was founded by a Presbyterian minister in 1906. Its remarkable model addresses the serious concern of affordability of higher education:

*The institution provides the opportunity for full-time students to work at one of more than 100 campus jobs or industries*

*to help pay for part of their tuition. The remaining portion of the students' expenses is covered through scholarships provided by gifts and contributions from donors who believe in and support the programs and policies of the College. These student work programs and donor contributions allow C of O students to graduate debt-free.*<sup>41</sup>

College president Brad Johnson explained how this works, as quoted in the Deseret News: “At College of the Ozarks, students don’t pay tuition,” Johnson said. “They never see a tuition bill. Rather, students work 15 hours a week and two, 40-hour work weeks throughout the academic year.”<sup>42</sup>

President Keoni Kauwe described BYU-Hawaii’s religious commitment that has allowed it to make important advances in ensuring affordability for students: “We believe every person on earth deserves a chance to magnify their talents.” Thus, the school:

*offers a work-study program called IWORK to help students from Oceania and the Asian Rim afford an American higher education. Students work 19 hours a week during school and 40 hours a week during breaks and receive housing, food, tuition and fees and a stipend. The program funds about half of students, Kauwe said, with a goal to reach two-thirds of students. ...*

*BYU-Hawaii serves 3,000 students from 60 countries, 62% of whom are low-income students. While students in the*

*IWORK program are from what Kauwe said are backgrounds correlated with poor outcomes, their GPAs and graduation rates are the same as students without financial need.*<sup>43</sup>

Another significant challenge in American higher education is the failure of many students to complete their degrees. One example of how religious colleges and universities are addressing this concern came from Peter Kilpatrick, president of The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Kilpatrick said that students who don’t engage in any of the university’s campus ministries graduate about seven or eight percentage points below average. “Students who engage in five or more of our campus activities graduate or persist at a rate 15 points higher,” he said, “and 92% of our students persist if they get engaged (in ministry).”<sup>44</sup>

Religious schools may actually have an advantage in creating a feeling of belonging because shared religious commitment – even when personal religious affiliation varies – provides an initial unifying factor for a student body and even extends to faculty and staff.

People of faith sometimes struggle to respond to charges that acting on their beliefs is unfair discrimination. As the American Council on Education event made clear, the differences that set apart people of faith and religious organizations are often the source of great strengths and contributions to society. That does not mean that everyone has to agree with – or



even understand – the beliefs and practices of the schools; they should only be open to the unique contributions they may make.

Among the most memorable observations at the D.C. event was made in the opening remarks. Ted Mitchell said that an education without values is a valueless education. Religious schools can make a unique contribution because they begin with this premise. By pursuing their religious missions, they contribute to resolving systemic challenges in ways that could benefit all schools and students. In this way, the protection of religious pluralism benefits far more than religious schools and religious students. It benefits society generally.

Eboo Patel, president of Interfaith America, was a keynote speaker at the event. He summarized the messages of these schools well: “The secular world might not understand all of what we believe and every reason we do what we do, but can’t you see the results? The least you can do is affirm that our religious identity is an asset. It is what drives our commitment and results in our excellence.”<sup>45</sup>

## Promoting Tolerance

It is a tragic reality that, for centuries, many people tried to justify their antisemitism with religious beliefs.<sup>46</sup> This may explain a reaction reported by Naomi Shaefer Riley, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, in a *Deseret News* article published in 2023:

*“Be careful,” my elderly aunt admonished me before I left New York City 22 years ago to visit a number of Christian colleges*

*across the country for research on a book I was writing.*

*She and others in my Jewish extended family were genuinely worried about my physical safety, with one even muttering something about lynching. They warned me about antisemitism and cautioned me to watch my back.*

*Sadly, university campuses have become more dangerous for Jewish students, particularly since the savage attack on Israel in October.<sup>47</sup>*

A recent report from the Anti-Defamation League and Hillel International found that “73% of Jewish college students surveyed have experienced or witnessed some form of antisemitism since the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.” Since the Oct. 7 massacre in Israel, the percentage of Jewish students in the United States who said they “felt comfortable with others knowing they’re Jewish” dropped from 63% to 38%. The percentage who “said they felt ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ physically safe on campus” dropped from 66% to 45% since October.<sup>48</sup>

A Brandeis University study surveyed 2,000 Jewish university students from 51 college campuses, chosen because they had large populations of Jewish students. These students expressed more concern about “antisemitism coming from the political left than from the political right on their campus,” occasioned by anti-Israel criticisms.

To be clear, it is not that students felt others were just criticizing Israeli policies. These students

reported “a general climate of antisemitic hostility at their school.”

In fact, a large portion of the Jewish students surveyed “had unfavorable views of the Israeli government,” and a large portion characterized themselves as politically liberal. However, these students also reported that they were concerned about antisemitism on their campuses. Most of the antisemitism came from fellow students, though “at the most hostile schools,” 30% of surveyed students “reported encountering hostility toward Israel from faculty.”<sup>49</sup>

In the Brandeis study, the schools at which Jewish students experienced the greatest fear were secular schools. This, of course, does not necessarily mean that religious schools are safer. Perhaps those schools have fewer Jewish students and so were not surveyed in this study.

There is some anecdotal evidence, however, that suggests that support for Israel and opposition to antisemitism is embraced by people of faith.

For instance, the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention issued a strong statement in the wake of the October attacks, including a forthright repudiation of antisemitism: “The Jewish people have long endured genocidal attempts to eradicate them and to destroy the Jewish state. These antisemitic, deadly ideologies and terrorist actions must be opposed.”<sup>50</sup>

In a recent Sutherland Institute Defending Ideas podcast, Rabbi Chaim Zippel contrasted the widely reported hostility towards Jewish students on some campuses with Brigham Young

University’s positive efforts to support its Jewish students.<sup>51</sup>

Rebecca Sugar, a columnist writing in *The Wall Street Journal* prior to October, said: “Institutions that honor the Judeo-Christian tradition and celebrate Western civilization tend to resist the academic decay, and attendant anti-Semitism, now plaguing many first- and second-tier campuses.” She points to data from the Israel on Campus Coalition on “anti-Semitic and anti-Israel events across 1,100 campuses nationwide, during the 2021-22 academic year” which found that “only two of the 225 incidents recorded took place on Christian campuses. Neither was violent.” She also points to positive examples from schools such as Notre Dame, Hillsdale, Pepperdine, Loyola Marymount and Wake Forest.<sup>52</sup>

Indirectly, the existence of religious schools is, in itself, an important protection of religious minorities. The pluralism that allows Christian schools to flourish allows Jewish schools like Yeshiva University to flourish as well.

What might make universities with strong religious identities more, rather than less, supportive of religious minorities who do not share their faith?

It may be that religious identity is an important resource for fostering tolerance and a sense of belonging on college campuses. These universities share the commitment of other universities to pursue truth and provide education to students, but they typically often have additional commitments that reflect a sense

of accountability to God, including for the way they treat others.

Perhaps as religious commitment generally wanes across society, those who believe are finding more in common with other believers despite differences in the specifics of those beliefs.

As with other significant challenges facing higher education,<sup>53</sup> religious colleges and universities may have something important to offer in the effort to end antisemitism.

# Policy Recommendations

States could implement the following policy recommendations to secure the unique benefits of religious education.

First, states could enact legislation to protect the religious character of religious schools. The U.S. Supreme Court has recognized that the Constitution precludes state interference with decisions about who will represent religious schools in promulgating their teachings and promoting their mission.<sup>54</sup> The selection of personnel is probably the most significant decision an institution must make in order to preserve and carry out its mission. Constitutional protections of such decisions are critical, but as a practical matter, will often have to be invoked in litigation, which is costly and can be

protracted. So, legislatures can codify the rule that religious schools must be free to choose their own leaders, teachers, and other employees. This can be done with a specific provision stating the rule or, perhaps even more simply, by exempting religious schools from provisions that ban discrimination on the basis of religion and other grounds.

Second, states should not exclude religious schools from support available to other schools. This principle is also a constitutional command, repeatedly recognized by the Supreme Court.<sup>55</sup> For the reasons described above, it is important for states to repeal current laws or abandon policies that exclude religious schools from otherwise applicable grants, scholarships, and similar programs.





# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “School Choice in the United States: 2019” National Center for Education Statistics, [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/schoolchoice/ind\\_o3.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/schoolchoice/ind_o3.asp).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> James E. Wood, Jr., “Religion and Public Education in Historical Perspective” *Journal of Church and State* 14(3):397-414 (Autumn 1972), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23914603>.

<sup>4</sup> “How religion may affect educational attainment: scholarly theories and historical background” Pew Research Center (December 13, 2016), <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/12/13/how-religion-may-affect-educational-attainment-scholarly-theories-and-historical-background/>.

<sup>5</sup> Louise Secker, “Christian schools see record enrollment growth, outperform public schools during pandemic” *The Lion* (November 1, 2021), <https://readlion.com/christian-schools-see-record-enrollment-growth-outperform-public-schools-during-pandemic/>.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Graham, “Christian Schools Boom in a Revolt Against Curriculum and Pandemic Rules” *New York Times* (October 19, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/19/us/christian-schools-growth.html>.

<sup>7</sup> “Catholic Schools’ Good Covid Year” *Wall Street Journal* (February 17, 2022), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/catholic-schools-good-covid-year-enrollment-increase-national-catholic-educational-association-11645139852>.

<sup>8</sup> Kelsey Dallas, “A religious upbringing may fuel academic success. Here’s how” *Deseret News* (February 19, 2022), <https://www.deseret.com/faith/2022/2/19/22938476/how-a-religious-upbringing-could-fuel-academic-success-parenting-kids-faith-school/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ilana Horwitz, “What do students’ beliefs about God have to do with grades and going to college?” *The Conversation* (February 14, 2022), <https://theconversation.com/what-do-students-beliefs-about-god-have-to-do-with-grades-and-going-to-college-172748>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick J. Wolf, “Civics Exam” *Education Next* 7(3), <https://www.educationnext.org/civics-exam/>.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan P. Hill & Kevin R. den Dulk, “Religion, Volunteering, and Educational Setting: The Effect of Youth Schooling Type on Civic Engagement” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52(1):179-197 (March 2013), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jssr.12011>.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick J. Wolf, “Civics Exam” *Education Next* 7(3), <https://www.educationnext.org/civics-exam/>.

<sup>15</sup> Albert Cheng, “The Protestant Family Ethic” *American Enterprise Institute/Center for Family Studies* (2020), <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/FINAL-IFS-ProtestantFamilyEthicReport-1.pdf?x91208>.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy E. Uecker & Jonathan P. Hill, “Religious Schools, Home Schools, and the Timing of First Marriage and First Birth” *Review of Religious Research* 56:189-218 (2014), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13644-014-0150-9#page-1>.

<sup>17</sup> Alysse ElHage, “Christian School Can Change the Trajectory of an At-Risk Student’s Future Family Life” *Family Studies* (October 1, 2020), <https://ifstudies.org/blog/christian-school-can-change-the-trajectory-of-an-at-risk-students-future-family-life>.

<sup>18</sup> “Faith,” *Gordon College*, <https://www.gordon.edu/faith>.

<sup>19</sup> *DeWeese-Boyd v. Gordon College*, 487 Mass. 31 (Mass. 2021).

<sup>20</sup> Roger L. Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education* (2016).

<sup>21</sup> James Tunstead Burtchaell, “The Decline and Fall of the Christian College” *First Things* (April 1991), <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1991/04/the-decline-and-fall-of-the-christian-college>.

<sup>22</sup> “About Gordon College,” *Gordon College*, <https://www.gordon.edu/about>.

<sup>23</sup> James Tunstead Burtchaell, “The Decline and Fall of the Christian College” *First Things* (April 1991), <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1991/04/the-decline-and-fall-of-the-christian-college>.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Beaty, Review, “The Dying of the Light, by James T. Burtchaell” *The Journal of College and University Law*, 27:177, <https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/offices/mission/pdf1/ra9.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Alan L. Wilkins & David A. Whetten, “BYU and Religious Universities in a Secular Academic World” 51(3):5-52 (2012), <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/byu-and-religious-universities-in-a-secular-academic-world/>.

<sup>26</sup> Clark G. Gilbert, “Dare to Be Different” *Deseret Magazine* (September 14, 2022), <https://www.deseret.com/2022/9/14/23319209/elder-clark-gilbert-religious-universities-should-dare-to-be-different/>; Philip Ryken, “Life worth living” *Deseret Magazine* (September 14, 2022), <https://www.deseret.com/2022/9/14/23319213/philip-ryken-wheaton-college-a-life-worth-living/>; Ari Berman, “The consumer vs. the covenant” *Deseret Magazine* (September 14, 2022), <https://www.deseret.com/2022/9/14/23319231/ari-berman-yeshiva-university-the-consumer-vs-the-covenant/>; John S.K. Kauwe, “The purpose driven university” *Deseret Magazine* (September 14, 2022), <https://www.deseret.com/2022/9/14/23319227/john-kauwe-byu-hawaii-the-purpose-driven-university/>; Henry J. Eyring, “The innovative university” *Deseret Magazine* (September 14, 2022), <https://www.deseret.com/2022/9/14/23319239/henry-j-eyring-byu-idaho-the-innovative-university/>.

<sup>27</sup> Albert Cheng & David Sikkink, “What Do They Deliver? A Report on American Colleges and Universities” *Cardus* (February 10, 2020), <https://www.cardus.ca/research/education/reports/what-do-they-deliver/>.

<sup>28</sup> James R. Vanderwoerd & Albert Cheng, “Sexual Violence on Religious Campuses” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 47(2):1-21 (2017), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1154105.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Fry & Kim Parker, “Rising Share of U.S. Adults Are Living Without a Spouse or Partner” *Pew Research Center* (October 5, 2021), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2021/10/05/rising-share-of-u-s-adults-are-living-without-a-spouse-or-partner/>.

<sup>30</sup> Alysse ElHage, “Do Today’s Teens See Marriage and Children in Their Future?” *Family Studies* (October 12, 2022), <https://ifstudies.org/blog/do-todays-teens-see-marriage-and-children-in-their-future>.

<sup>31</sup> Brian J. Willoughby, “Marriage is Increasingly an Institution of the Highly Religious: Why That Might Be a Problem” *Family Studies* (September 13, 2022), <https://ifstudies.org/blog/marriage-is-increasingly-an-institution-of-the-highly-religious-why-that-might-be-a-problem>.

<sup>32</sup> Brad Wilcox & Alysse ElHage, “Why Conservative Women Report Being the Happiest—and How You Can Be, Too” *Newsweek* (October 4, 2022), <https://www.newsweek.com/why-conservative-women-report-being-happiest-how-you-can-too-opinion-1748894>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Brian J. Willoughby, “Marriage is Increasingly an Institution of the Highly Religious: Why That Might Be a Problem” *Family Studies* (September 13, 2022), <https://ifstudies.org/blog/marriage-is-increasingly-an-institution-of-the-highly-religious-why-that-might-be-a-problem>.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Fain Lehman, “The Mr. & Mrs. Degree: Which Colleges Have the Highest Marriage Rates?” *Family Studies* (April 25, 2022), <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-mr-mrs-degree-which-colleges-have-the-highest-marriage-rates>.

- <sup>36</sup> “Higher Education Expenditures” Urban Institute, <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/state-and-local-finance-initiative/state-and-local-backrounders/higher-education-expenditures>.
- <sup>37</sup> “Equity indicators report reveals systemic barriers to college access and success for low-income and non-traditional students” Penn Graduate School of Education (May 19, 2021), <https://www.gse.upenn.edu/news/press-releases/higher-education-equity-indicators-report-2021>.
- <sup>38</sup> “Undergraduate graduation rates” National Center for Education Statistics, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40>.
- <sup>39</sup> Daniel W. Lang, “The Carnegie Foundation and the Shaping of Canadian Higher Education” *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 52(1):108-122, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1350852.pdf>.
- <sup>40</sup> Tad Walch, “The case for faith-based college education and what other universities can learn” *Deseret News* (January 12, 2023), <https://www.deseret.com/2023/1/12/23548705/the-case-for-faith-based-college-education-from-notre-dame-byu-yeshiva/>.
- <sup>41</sup> “About CofO” College of the Ozarks, <https://www.cofO.edu/About>.
- <sup>42</sup> Tad Walch, “The case for faith-based college education and what other universities can learn” *Deseret News* (January 12, 2023), <https://www.deseret.com/2023/1/12/23548705/the-case-for-faith-based-college-education-from-notre-dame-byu-yeshiva/>.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> Eboo Patel, “The fate of the religious university and why it matters” *Deseret News* (January 18, 2023), <https://www.deseret.com/2023/1/18/23559765/the-fate-of-the-religious-university-higher-education-interfaith-america/>.
- <sup>46</sup> “Why the Jews: History of Antisemitism” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://www.ushmm.org/antisemitism/what-is-antisemitism/why-the-jews-history-of-antisemitism>.
- <sup>47</sup> Naomi Schaefer Riley, “Why Jews can count on American Christians in terrible times” *Deseret News* (October 11, 2024), <https://www.deseret.com/2023/10/11/23911456/israel-hamas-american-christians-jews-evangelicals/>.
- <sup>48</sup> Center for Antisemitism Research, “Campus Antisemitism: A Study of Campus Climate Before and After the Hamas Terrorist Attacks” Anti-Defamation League (Nov. 29, 2023), <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/campus-antisemitism-study-campus-climate-and-after-hamas-terrorist-attacks>.
- <sup>49</sup> Graham Wright, et al., “In the Shadow of War: Hotspots of Antisemitism on US College Campuses” Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University (December 2023), <https://www.brandeis.edu/cmjs/antisemitism/hotspots-2023-report1.html>.
- <sup>50</sup> “Evangelical Statement in Support of Israel” The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention (October 11, 2023), <https://erlc.com/policy-content/israel/>.
- <sup>51</sup> “Antisemitism in America: Rabbi Chaim Zippel on the aftermath of the Hamas attack in Israel” *Defending Ideas* (Nov. 21, 2023), <https://sutherlandinstitute.org/antisemitism-in-america-rabbi-chaim-zippel-on-the-aftermath-of-the-hamas-attack-in-israel/>.
- <sup>52</sup> Rebecca Sugar, “Christian Colleges Can Be Good for Jews” *Wall Street Journal* (March 23, 2023), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/christian-colleges-can-be-good-for-jews-bds-anti-semitism-israel-prayer-infrastructure-hostility-conversion-dda8a0aa>.
- <sup>53</sup> William C. Duncan, “How religious schools help tackle key higher education challenges” Sutherland Institute (January 19, 2023), <https://sutherlandinstitute.org/how-religious-schools-help-tackle-key-higher-education-challenges/>.
- <sup>54</sup> *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church & School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, 565 U.S. 171 (2012); *Our Lady of Guadalupe School v. Morrissey-Berru*, 591 U.S. 732 (2020).
- <sup>55</sup> *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Comer*, 582 U.S. 449 (2017).



For more information, visit [SutherlandInstitute.org](https://SutherlandInstitute.org)

To learn how to support work like this, visit [SutherlandInstitute.org/donate](https://SutherlandInstitute.org/donate)



Religious schools not only set the pattern for our current school system, but they continue to benefit society by educating capable and involved students and strengthening their families, benefiting not only those students but their communities as well.



Sutherland Institute  
420 E. South Temple  
Suite 510  
Salt Lake City, UT 84111

Office – 801.355.1272  
[si@sifreedom.org](mailto:si@sifreedom.org)  
[sutherlandinstitute.org](http://sutherlandinstitute.org)

