

Educators Hopeful Over Future of Christian Colleges

Christian higher education finds itself in a spiritual fight because of an America that's becoming increasingly secular.

These schools face hostility, apathy and tough economic times, but **Christian educators** are optimistic about the future.

Grand Canyon University

Steve Green, president of the Hobby Lobby arts and crafts chain, was all smiles when he announced his family's gift of the historic New England campus founded by legendary evangelist D.L. Moody to Grand Canyon University.

Little did he know that the Arizona-based Christian school would back out of the deal a month later.

When Moody founded the Northfield campus back in 1879, he wanted to provide an education for the less fortunate.

The president of Grand Canyon University, Dr. Brian Mueller, said the mission of his school models the vision of Moody. While Mueller thought the campus was a good fit for his school, unexpected expenses and conflicts with city leaders led Grand Canyon to return the gift.

"We really had trouble with the city of Northfield ... (and the town) was concerned that growing the campus to 5,000 students would alter the basic culture and the basic feel of the area," *Religion News Service* reports Mueller as saying.

Over time, the region has become known for academia and secular liberalism.

"This is a progressive valley, a liberal valley; we're in the Northeast," Alex Stewart, the leader of a town committee

monitoring the gift of the campus, told CBN News. "People are concerned that the college not be close-minded, but open-minded."

Winning Business Model

American culture is growing increasingly cold to Christianity. Add the high cost of tuition in a troubled economy and that raises the question, what does the future hold for Christian higher education?

Although Mueller passed on the Northfield school, he says Grand Canyon University is flourishing. Around 6,500 students attend classes at its Phoenix campus, and about 42,000 study online.

Forbes recently ranked the for-profit Christian school as the No. 2 small company in America. Mueller credits the university's business model.

"We actually went public in November of 2008 and got a \$254 million infusion of funds as a publicly traded company," Mueller told CBN News. "Investors liked our business model."

Mueller says that investment model kept the school, which at one time faced \$20 million in debt from closing its doors. Going public has also kept tuition down.

"The average student at our traditional ground campus in Arizona only pays \$7,800 for tuition after academic scholarships, which is less than they pay at a state university," Mueller explained.

Bright Future for Christian Ed?

Dr. Carlos Campo, the president of Regent University, applauded the Grand Canyon business model.

"I think there's no question that higher education has to solve the tuition riddle, and no one's done it perfectly, and I think Grand Canyon has given us a solution," Campo said. "I

think it's one really good approach."

Campo is optimistic about Christian higher education and points to the condition of secular schools as one indicator.

"Harvard Business School is changing its curriculum because it didn't think it had a strong enough ethical piece," Campo said. "That tells me that there is a place for Christian higher ed."

"We have to be unabashed but be winsome in our approach – show folks that we are not just preparing you, which we are, at a very high level for whatever your discipline is, whatever career you're going to study, but also preparing you for life," he added.

According to , there are 929 Christian colleges and universities in the United States.

Dr. Shirley Hoogstra of Calvin College foresees a growth phase out of the need for alternatives to secular public education.

"Christian higher education has a particularly deep idea of service and sustainability and creation care, and then, living your life for something bigger than yourself," Hoogstra said. "This is what young people today want, and Christian higher education offers that."

Hobby Lobby's Green told CBN News, "We see some of the great colleges that are very antagonistic toward a Christian worldview, and so I believe that there is a great need in our country to have the Christian education that is friendly to the Christian biblical world view."

The Green family hopes the Moody campus will help fill that need sooner rather than later. But they acknowledged finding the right recipient could take some time.

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