SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY: PLACE OF FAITH ON "PIETY HILL"

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Syracuse University became known in the local community as “Piety Hill” during its first 50 years.¹ Faith was at the center of life at this Methodist-founded university whose second chancellor, Dr. Alexander Winchell, once said: “All truth was divine. God was the author of science and revelation.”² By the mid-1920s, however, the university was struggling to find a place and expression for faith on campus. The student body was less Methodist each year. It was less Christian than its founders could have imagined. A 1926 survey of students revealed decreasing acceptance of an orthodox conception of God.

After decades of religious programming directed from the administrative offices of the University, student voluntarism took over with an approach that acknowledged the changing campus.³ The place of faith began to move away from the center of university power and authority.

George Marsden’s The Soul of the American University asserts that it became increasingly difficult for Methodists to maintain a distinctive heritage as they became “insiders” in the Protestant establishment. This struggle, Marsden said, was played out in higher education. “The simple fact was that once a college expanded its vision to become a university and to serve a broad middle-class constituency, the days were numbered when any substantive denominational tradition could survive.” The result was that many universities severed church ties early in the 20th century. Syracuse University maintains a formal relationship in which there is no possibility of church control.⁴

The question to consider in this study of Syracuse University’s shift in religious identity over its first six decades is one of place. In its early years,

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¹W. Freeman Galpin, Oscar T. Barck, Jr., and Richard Wilson, Syracuse University: The Critical Years (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 251.
²Dr. Alexander Winchell, speaking to the fifth session of the Central New York Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Oct. 10, 1872, Annual Conference Minutes, 22.
³Interdenominational, student-led worship, social outreach, and the development of a recommendation for a university chaplain all were part of the work of what was known as the “student church.” Marjorie Bronner Pierson, who was part of the movement, said the effort laid the foundation for the interfaith cooperation that would be highlighted in the establishment of the University’s Hendricks Chapel, which opened in 1930. Galpin, Barck, and Wilson, 254.
faith suffused the operations of the institution. Its Methodist heritage was evident in the people who occupied its boardrooms, offices, and classrooms. The religious life was directed from the Chancellor's office. Chapel was held in the Hall of Languages, the University's first classroom building. The Chancellor directed the Department of Evangelical Christianity.

Syracuse University's confidence in the compatibility of faith and learning was prominent enough to inspire its pious nickname. By 1930, religious life had moved to the newly built Hendricks Chapel, where a university chaplain led worship and classes in "practical religion." A chapel board directed operations. Religious teaching focused on historical and literary criticism of the Bible in a department that eventually would emphasize comparative religions. Trustee membership was beginning to shift. Faith, one could say, was put in its place. Or was it? The Education Committee of the Central New York Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church did not think so. In 1929, praising the University for creating the chaplaincy and giving the chaplain academic standing, the committee said: “Religion is not a lean-to by the campus gate, but becomes a normal part of well-rounded education that prepares for life.” Hopeful rhetoric? Perhaps. But Dorothy Bass reminds us that there is more than one way to look at the disestablishment of Protestant power in higher education. Bass suggests that the hope is in the "affirmations of religious and educational pluralism that would come to prominence in the later twentieth century," and in the freedom to witness and serve "on the margin." The disestablishment of Methodist power at Syracuse University did not mean the loss of a religious voice, but instead effected a change in place that offered the faith community an opportunity to be a prophetic voice unfettered by ties to denominational or institutional aims.

Early in its history, Syracuse University's Methodist heritage was evident mainly in its people—administrators, teachers, students and trustees—largely Methodists until the mid-1890s. And most of the income raised to support the university came from Methodist conferences in accordance

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3 *Central New York Annual Conference Minutes*, sixty-third session, 1930, 512, 516.
4 Galpin, Barck, and Wilson, *Critical Years*, 256.
5 *Central New York Annual Conference Minutes*, sixty-second session, 1929, 302.
7 Galpin, *Growing Years*, v.
with its charter which laid responsibility for control and patronage of the University before New York’s Methodist conferences. The University opened just three years after the Methodist Episcopal Church’s Board of Education was founded in 1868 to coordinate education efforts and work for quality control on a national scale. Earlier, annual conferences had played the key administrative role in a more decentralized system. From 1868 to 1880 the Book of Discipline had no directives about the character of institutions or the academic content they offered, but instead merely encouraged careful growth. Absent directives from General Conference, Methodist presence was accomplished through Methodist people.

From its inception, however, Syracuse University insisted its expression of faith was not tied to one denomination. At the University’s inaugural ceremonies in 1871, Dr. Jesse T. Peck, first President of the Board of Trustees, said: “‘Brains and hearts’ were to have a ‘fair chance, and we propose no narrow-minded sectarianism on the one hand, nor infidelity on the other. We are, in the words of our fundamental law, devoted to the promotion of Christian learning.’” Methodist efforts at higher education came of age during the era of university building. Unlike other major Protestant denominations, Methodists founded major universities that sought to serve a broad constituency. The broadly Christian emphasis at Syracuse and elsewhere was sometimes tied to perceived interests of the state or nation according to the minutes of the Central New York Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. “The peace and prosperity of society, the perpetuity of governmental institutions, the safety of landed estates and invested funds, the sanctity of person, property and household, the intelligence, capacity and practical power of the instruments which the church must use for the conversion of the world—all these will be in exact ratio to the amount of Christian culture which has been secured.” When the infant University received the proceeds of $100,000 in city bonds, Peck emphasized that the city was not sponsoring a denominational institution, but a school that would benefit the whole city.

During Syracuse University’s first 25 years, religion was expressed mainly in curriculum and worship. The Department of Evangelical Chris-

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12From facsimile of charter in Galpin, Pioneer Days, iii.
14Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1868, 232–233; 1872, #366–#369; 1876, #247; 1880, #254. The 1868 Discipline used did not have paragraph numbers.
15Galpin, Pioneer Days, 254. Peck, a Methodist elder, was elected bishop in 1872.
16Marsden, 276.
17Central New York Annual Conference Minutes, ninth session, 1876, 79; Marsden, Soul of the American University, 245–248.
18Galpin, Pioneer Days, 32; Central New York Annual Conference Minutes, third session, 1871. 31.
tianity taught courses such as “Christian evidence” which was part of the curriculum until 1892. An understanding, as Chancellor Winchell stated, that “God was the author of science” guided the young institution. This was not have been an uncommon attitude. The university builders who grew up under the influence of antebellum and Civil War evangelicalism commonly insisted that “religion has nothing to fear from science.”

The conference’s education committee later emphasized Methodism’s affinity for scholarship. “Our Church, beginning in a university, has always been a friend of education. We have no fear of loss because of light. Our Church encourages her philosophic sons and daughters in the profoundest thought, her scientific sons in the widest research, and her critical sons in the most thorough investigation.” Finally, the University’s ethical curriculum shows a belief that morals and ethics and their relationship to real problems were part of Christianity. A “definite attempt was made to develop an insight into the foundations of moral obligation, moral law, and conscience. ... For it will be remembered that Syracuse had been founded by men who were pledged to advance the Christian and religious life of the nation.”

Religious life included daily chapel, Sunday worship, and the increasing presence of the YMCA and YWCA. Activities were mostly directed from administrative offices and one early Chancellor established the post of university pastor, a position he and a member of the liberal arts faculty appear to have held at different times. A faculty survey of student denominations in 1881 is revealing. Of 132 students interviewed (out of a total enrollment of 156) nearly all were Protestant, and 61, or less than half, were Methodist.

Increasingly, large numbers of students found their own ways to express their religion, in the evangelical, non-denominational YWCA and YMCA, and in popular response to special events and speakers on campus. Student involvement in the Syracuse branch of the YMCA led to the founding of a campus fellowship in 1880. A YWCA was founded in 1884 and sponsored a mission in the city of Syracuse. The Central New York Conference praised the Y’s in 1892 and called the YMCA “a sleepless guardian and a versatile and vigilant conservator of the moral and spiritual interests of the young men in the University.” Campus religious life was led from administrative offices, but found its fullest expression in voluntary, non-denominational initiative or response.

19Galpin, Pioneer Days, 70.
20Marsden, 118–120, 156–157.
21Central New York Annual Conference Minutes, twenty-seventh session, 1894, 134.
22Galpin, Pioneer Days, 72.
25Central New York Annual Conference Minutes, twenty-fifth session, 1892, 112.
II

Even at Syracuse University’s inauguration in 1871, speakers appear to have envisioned an institution on the cusp of a new era. They stressed the “old historical curriculum of the classics and sciences” that was to be the base of true learning, but also urged respect for modern educational trends. The faculty, one speaker said, “had neither the desire nor the intention of discarding the wisdom of the past. ... Yet all are aware that progress is the law of human society.”26 With Chancellor James R. Day’s arrival at Syracuse in 1894, the movement toward a new era was quickened and strengthened. The Chancellor was determined to make Syracuse a great national university. With this aim he sought a broader base of students and supporters, initiated a major building plan, and deepened the University’s connection with the state.27 His ambitions came at a price—years of mortgages on campus property and borrowing from endowment to meet expenses.28 Day struggled with a phenomenon affecting most, if not all, Methodist universities: growing tension over Methodist identity.29 His tenure, from 1894 until 1922, was a time of competing loyalties. Growth brought a shift in population—away from the predominance of “Methodist people”—and aggravating money troubles. At the same time, the University faced annual conference leaders who wanted to hold on to “their” university, and denominational efforts to standardize higher education, in addition to its own desire for religious identity and expression. Faith defined by “the moral principle” rather than by form or doctrine provided an outlet for this tension. The moral principle opened the way for the shift in place.

III

Even at his inauguration, Day was clear about his aims for Syracuse University. He claimed moral superiority over state or secular institutions. He said that Syracuse University:

Is to be far more Christian than denominational. ... It will be a university Christian enough to make a Hebrew as much at home as is a Christian, to afford equal facility to Catholic and Protestant. There is no creed in mathematics or in natural science. ... It will be Christian not by exclusion, but by inclusion; not by

26Galpin, Pioneer Days, 35–36.
28Galpin, Growing Years, 421–438.
29Bradley J. Longfield, “Methodist Identities and the Founding of Methodist Universities,” in Connectionalism: Ecclesiology, Mission and Identity, ed. Russell E. Richey, Dennis M. Campbell, and William B. Lawrence (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 95–113. Longfield asserts that this struggle was played out between urban, newly-rich cultural insiders who placed a priority on education for a variety of reasons, and rural, middle-class outsiders, who felt that supporting and/or attending Methodist universities was not a priority for them.
Day eventually ended formal denominational control of Syracuse University, but as he was stepping into his role as university leader he was clear that faith was important. He seems to have seen it as part of a moral understanding that allowed for differences in doctrine, continuing the "Christian" rather than "Methodist" emphasis that was evident from the university's beginnings. He was also clear about who was dominant—American Protestants. He offered his understanding of Christianity: an inclusive ethos that celebrates knowledge and contributes to it. Thus, the understanding of compatibility between faith and learning is continued and deepened with the addition of emphasis on the research ideal. This would be the Christianity that would be most prominent at Syracuse University during the Day era.

William Pratt Graham, who served as chancellor of the university from 1936 to 1942, said that Day’s aims for the University necessitated moving away from an emphasis on faith. “Syracuse is like most of the church-founded institutions—each of them was forced to make a choice—either to remain a small denominational college with formal religion very much in the foreground, or to endeavor to play a larger part in the intellectual world without great emphasis on the outward expressions of religious interest.”

To lose the “outward expressions of religious interest” would have been a major shift. Probably few mainline Protestants would have expected much church doctrine to be taught at a university, and the Central New York Annual Conference never asserted the importance of Methodist identity until the University openly began to pull away from Methodist control. However, annual conference minutes always emphasized the importance of Christian education. They describe, “Men strongly built up of the old sterling elements of piety and education ... [as] the surest safeguard against cunning and corrupt politicians and against scheming and truckling ecclesiastics.” Indeed, the conference’s educational philosophy appears to have emphasized Christian education as a unifying force for mainline Protestantism and an aid to strengthening American society. “The school without Christ is perilous. The church maintains her institutions of learning that she may keep Christ before her young people with perfect freedom. By these she seeks to conserve and promote the welfare of the Republic and help to regenerate the world.” Faith and education are intertwined. Both serve the state from their place in the center of power.

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30 Galpin, Growing Years, 488, quoting from James R. Day's inaugural address, June 27, 1894.
31 William Pratt Graham, from letter dated Jan. 1, 1942, to Frank Collins, 1904 graduate and editor of the San Marino, Calif., Tribune, quoted in Galpin, Growing Years, vi.
32 Marsden, 269.
33 Central New York Annual Conference Minutes, twenty-fifth session, 1892, 111.
34 Central New York Annual Conference Minutes, thirty-eighth session, 1905, 122.
Day seems to have intended to continue a broadly Christian orientation at the University. He was an ordained elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church who was known as a powerful preacher. Members of the faculty were prominent pulpit speakers at nearby churches, especially Methodist, and the Methodist conferences held a majority on the Board of Trustees. But the annual conference, even in 1899, recognized that the University’s constituency was changing. No longer were students drawn mainly from the surrounding annual conferences. Young men and women from other denominations, “and those that give allegiance to no other denominations ... are seeking its instruction.” As more students were non-Methodist, more alumni were too. That meant that the people giving money and those sitting in the alumni trustees’ seats were increasingly likely to be unconcerned with maintaining a “Methodist” tradition at Syracuse University. This shift would become obvious as Day sought great financial support from alumni. Limited to just a few seats on the Methodist conference-dominated board of trustees, the alumni by the early 20th century wanted more power and influence before they were willing to give more money. Syracuse under Day was evangelical, Christian, and especially, “moral,” but its Methodist character was changing.

As the Day era began, “Piety Hill” lived its nickname mainly in evangelical, voluntary religion. The Y’s continued to grow, as did denominational clubs, a Jewish group known as the Menorah Society, a Preacher’s Club, a Bible Society, and a group affiliated with the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The moral principle was paramount.

A multi-week revival by Billy Sunday in 1915 provides a good example of how the “moral principle” relieved some of the tensions faced by the changing institution. Hundreds met Sunday on his arrival, and people filled the seats in the “Billy Sunday Tabernacle” for weeks. He also was popular at campus meetings and services. Chancellor Day supported the revival wholeheartedly. DeWitt B. Thompson, financial secretary of the University, praised the revival in a report to trustees the following June. He quoted a recent statement by Day emphasizing the nonsectarian nature of the University, the refusal to allow proselytizing, and the University’s annual practice of sending lists of students to nearby ministers, priests, and rabbis, according to student preference. Thompson said this was why Day “could welcome to the University Billy Sunday and his party, for evangelistic effort since Protestant, Catholic and Hebrew are always benefited by their ministry. Its moral effects were seen in the improved morale of a

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36Central New York Annual Conference Minutes, thirty-first session, 1898, 112.
37Galpin, Growing Years, 415.
38Galpin, Growing Years, 444–448.
39Galpin, Growing Years, 452.
40Galpin, Growing Years, 453.
student body . . . ”  

Faced with the fact of institutional support for an unabashedly evangelical Protestant revival on the one hand, and a changing student body and official policies against proselytization on the other, administrators appealed to the “keener moral sense” as the essence of religion.

The moral principle also was played out in service to the community. Students offered religious services in the city and did work on the nearby Onondaga Indian Reservation. John R. Commons, Professor of Sociology and Civics, initiated much of this. Commons, a pioneer in American social sciences, led students into the prisons in Elmira, Auburn, and Jamesville, New York, and to welfare centers, orphanages, and hospitals in Syracuse. Commons invited political scientists, sociologists, and welfare workers to the campus to speak, including Jane Addams, founder of Hull House in Chicago, who spoke in 1896. Commons’ work was motivated by deeply held religious beliefs, as is evident in his views on the city. “The city is thus a moral organization. Its life is fundamentally religious. . . . What cities need is a religious revival. . . . But first the citizen must worship God instead of business.”

Day was not interested in pitting God against business. He viewed wealthy and successful business leaders as Christians who had made the most of their God-given opportunity. He even applied a certain Christian virtue to wealth: “God wants the rich man. Christ would have used Dives if he could have followed Him; and the rich young ruler he would have loved and shown how to get genuine happiness out of his riches.” Gradually the chancellor began to exercise tighter control over Commons’ experiments with democracy and education and by the winter of 1899 Day announced that Commons would leave early in May. Commons later said “it was not religion, it was capitalism that governed Christian colleges.” As Marsden pointed out, this raised a problem for a national university which tried to maintain a Christian identity. “Whatever one’s views on political issues, unless vaguely in the middle, they would be taken as claims regarding God’s will for the nation and thus offend constituencies with opposite views.”

IV

Day’s feeling about Methodist involvement in the University appear to have depended on his audience. By 1894, he had begun to agitate the conferences for more money. He even planned to send a list of clergy alumni who owed money to the University to their presiding elders. In response to alumni requests for greater representation on the board, Day appealed to

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41“Trustees minutes,” (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University, June 13, 1916), 48, typewritten.
42John R. Commons, from an article in which he contrasted the cooperative theory with the business theory, Syracusan, Jan. 12, 1898, quoted in Galpin, Growing Years, 456.
43Galpin, Growing Years, 473–474.
44Galpin, Growing Years, 473–474.
45Marsden, 287.
loyalty to the church, saying in 1913: "This body is not sectarian, but it is important that some Christian body should be responsible for this organization. This simply opens the way to throw this institution out of the hands of the church that founded it inside of five years."  

While the annual conference Minutes are filled with pledges to assist the University in its appeals, however, the depth of the problems, combined with Day’s determination to build a national university, encouraged the Chancellor to look for help beyond area Methodists. After an emergency appeal in 1912 to John Dustin Archbold, a Standard Oil executive who was a major benefactor of the university, Day wrote, "We must find men who will be willing to share the burden." When Day turned to J. D. Rockefeller, Jr. for help in 1916, he emphasized Syracuse’s "non-sectarian" heritage. In a letter to Rockefeller, Day said: "We know no man after the flesh or sect or nation here. We welcome Jew, Gentile, Protestant and Catholic. We will not have atheists and free thinkers on our faculties to sow seeds of infidelity in young minds, but we are no sectarian propagandists." In a 1921 letter to alumni, seeking reconciliation and money, Day blamed the University’s money problems on the Methodist church, the war, “outmoded” university administrative practices, and the alumni themselves.  

While Day struggled to walk a fine line between the denomination and the broader constituency he courted for assistance, the annual conference became increasingly clear about its feelings of ownership toward the University. In 1904, the education committee said, “Although our University has become great, it cannot afford, nor does it desire to be independent of its ancestry or oblivious to the traditions and the just claims of the great Church that gave it being. ... it will remain a University standing within the shadow of the cross of Jesus Christ uplifted by the hands of Methodist faith and loyalty.” In 1909 Day spoke on the University’s loyalty to the denomination, a statement the conference “heartily endorsed.” In 1912, a statement praising the Methodist church’s role in higher education introduced a call for funds to boost Syracuse University’s growth.  

Methodism is the product of her ideals. She has felt the tug and the lift of lofty purposes and has been obedient to her vision. But no less conspicuous than these characteristics has been her interest in and her effort on behalf of the truest culture. In the number of her schools and colleges, the great company of students in her halls and in the quality of instruction given, the Methodist Church has not been surpassed.  

The report remarked on the “denominational and national patriotism” it saw in Methodist schools, praised the denomination’s work toward stan-

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46Galpin, Growing Years, 415, n.8.
47Galpin, Growing Years, 421–431.
48Galpin, Growing Years, 415, n.7.
49Galpin, Growing Years, 441.
dardization, and pleaded with pastors to encourage people of means to help Syracuse University. The 1915 report emphasized the importance of the "denominational college" to the church, saying that the college was as important for producing devoted "laymen" as it was for producing loyal ministers. By 1919, in the aftermath of World War I, the report said it was the denominational schools that "must furnish the shock troops that shall hold the line against any and all the attacks of those who would wreck the civilization of the new world as they have sought to wreck the civilization of the Old World." Suddenly, it seems to have mattered very much that the University be Methodist as well as Christian. The report continues: "We are, and should ever remain, denominational ... we must ever remember that they were founded in the faith, and by the prayers and efforts of our Methodist fathers ..." In 1920, the Board pledged its constant attention to Syracuse University's endowment. By that point, the university had taken its biggest step away from the "control and patronage" of Methodism.

V

This paper began with the question of place: the place of religion in education. Early in its history, the faith-life of the place called Piety Hill was directed from its administrative offices. Faith was lived as a harmonious companion to scholarly study. The denominational identity of that University was lived out in the people who occupied its offices, and taught and studied in its classrooms. But change came swiftly. The University became filled with people of other faiths, or no faith. Questions arose: Whose faith was to be lived? What should happen when that faith was in tension with some of the goals and practices of the University? Growth, and the desire for it, engendered tensions. Eventually, that tension would move the place of faith out of the administrative offices and classrooms of the University and into a special location, a particular body of people, and a new field of study.

The place of faith became a sharp issue as efforts to standardize higher education developed. The Methodist University Senate, founded in 1892, served "to establish academic standards, to apply them to individual institutions, to determine which schools qualified according to those standards and as Methodist, to identify Methodist institutions, to visit and investigate, to give counsel and guidance, and to play a role in distribution of resources." The result was that the years from the 1890s to the middle of the 20th century

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5 Central New York Annual Conference Minutes: 1904, 106; 1909, 127; 1912, 113; 1914, 114; 1915, 97; 1919, 97–98.
6 Beth Adams Bowser, Living the Vision: The University Senate of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church, and the United Methodist Church 1892–1991 (Nashville: Board of Higher Education and Ministry of The United Methodist Church, 1992), 7–43, quoted in Richey, 343.
became an era of national connectionalism for higher education in the church. There was now a denomination-wide push for more specifics about what it meant to be a Methodist institution. The Senate arose in response to a sense that Methodism had become too complex and too institutionalized to run higher education institutions by periodic conferences. It was the first national standardizing body in the country. 53 While Day criticized some aspects of the church’s centralization of higher education, 54 he was a member of the Senate from 1900 to 1924, and was its President from 1908 to 1916, a time when academic standards were scrutinized. 55

While the University Senate was a Methodist effort to bring consistency among Methodists schools, the Carnegie Foundation was a national philanthropic effort that by its policies and practices aided the disestablishment of denominational control in higher education. The weight of the foundation came in its power to give: $10 million to support professors’ pensions donated by Andrew Carnegie in 1904. Foundation administrators decided to use the money as a tool to scrutinize institutions. Only those that could serve as models for the Foundation’s standards could receive it. Among other requirements, denominational institutions were excluded. 56 The Foundation appears to have blamed denominational control for “the backward state of American higher education.” 57 Within four years, twenty schools severed denominational ties and got funding. 58

Despite the policy against denominational institutions, Day requested aid from the fund in 1906. He was denied, the foundation saying that Syracuse “has stood so consistently and so vigorously before the country as distinctly a Methodist institution that it would seem to involve us in a marked inconsistency.” The Chancellor began to bargain. He said that although the University’s charter called for a majority of trustees to be chosen by the patronizing Methodist conferences, this did not necessarily mean the selections had to be Methodist. He was denied again. He soon asked Henry Smith Pritchett, President of the Carnegie Foundation, if a charter revision transferring the current majority of one from the conferences to other trustees would work. Pritchett called the proposal “evasive.” Day grew angry. Rather than defend the University’s relationship to the denomination, Day said the University resented the charge of evasion, then added: “You may leave us off your pension list. We certainly will not be craven and we will not repeat the request to be placed on that list, but we will protest most vigorously against your branding us as sectarian and denominational for it is not true of us ...” However, Day was not quite ready to be left off the list. The foundation said the university would have to end all denominational

53Richey, 342–344.
54Galpin, Growing Years, 441.
55Bowser, xi, 4.
56Bass, 3–5.
57Marsden, 281–283.
control to receive any pension money. The University asked if the Foundation would reconsider if the conferences only received five trustee seats out of a total of thirty-three. The Foundation wouldn’t back down and the issue was quiet for two years. Soon, Day’s temper arose again. In April 1910 he wrote an article for *The Post-Standard* (Syracuse), saying that the university was not a “sectarian” institution.

Other colleges may do as they please. If they wish to crawl in the dirt for such a price, that is their privilege. But no university can teach young people lofty ideas of manhood and forget its self-respect and honor or sell its loyalty and faith for money that Judas flung away when in remorse he went out and hung himself. It is an insult for such a proposition to be made to a Christian institution. “Thy money perish with thee” is the only answer to it.

The issue with the Carnegie Foundation was not fully settled until after Day retired.59

The charge of sectarianism also arose as Day sought to strengthen Syracuse University’s relationship with the state. When the New York State University College of Forestry was established at Syracuse University in 1904, some in the state capital said that because Syracuse was a Methodist university, it should not be entitled to state funds. In spring 1919, the state grew reluctant to provide scholarship aid on the grounds that Syracuse was a sectarian institution. In May, Day wrote to the Assistant Commissioner of Education, Augustus S. Downing, saying, “I have never known a solitary instance since I have been here in which the Methodist Church has assumed any authority, religious or otherwise. ... The University has been left to itself entirely, without the meddling of the church.”60 In 1920 a bill was introduced in the state legislature to amend the University’s charter making its Board of Trustees non-sectarian. When the bill ran into trouble in the Assembly, Day claimed that the “friends of Cornell” [University] were trying to hurt Syracuse by forcing it to retain the sectarianism Day for years had claimed did not exist. “Sectarianism as everybody knows is odious. ... Does this legislature ... wish to compel us to retain it because it is an odium and because it can be used... to our great harm?” Responding to allegations that the University was seeking to obtain state funds, Day added: “There is no covert attempt to get money. That is not our motive though if we were to ask for money it would seem as though that question might stand upon its own merits.”61 The bill passed the legislature in March 1920. The new charter stated that the Board of Trustees was to be non-sectarian. Four seats were shifted to alumni, giving them and the trustees at-large a majority of one.62

58 The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Second Annual Report of the President and Treasurer* (1907), 53–54, quoted in Marsden, 261–263.
60 Galpin, *Growing Years*, 415–419.
How did the conference respond? In 1921, Day asked the Central New York Annual Conference for help with the University’s emergency fund. The conference answered the request by demanding that the University continue a “definitely Christian program.” The education committee’s report from that year also offered more specific convictions about the University than were evident in any other annual conference report from that committee in the University’s history. Faculty were to be Christian men from evangelical churches who understood the University’s aim to extend Christianity through higher education. The YMCA and YWCA were to be guaranteed adequate space and support, and the University must adopt a more comprehensive religious program. There must be a Bible department teaching “a basis of Christian living and service.” Evangelists should visit regularly and receive university support. Social life should be deemphasized and dancing forbidden.

Day saw this as a personal endorsement. In his last baccalaureate address in 1922, he returned to the moral principle as the measure of religion. “The very first appeal made to you as friends … is to the moral principle and it would be disastrous if in all your accumulations of intellectual discipline and knowledge you have failed to put the emphasis on your moral character. Your religion is to be measured by your morals.”

VI

Syracuse University always insisted it was not tied to the interests of one denomination. Yet it was also known for its piety, a piety so prominent it inspired a nickname. “Piety Hill” lived its nickname in institutional worship, in community service, in student voluntarism, and in revival, and when the University was incorporated, it was natural to assume that this piety was an expression of an evangelical Protestant faith. In this, the University simply reflected the larger culture. But the larger culture was changing and as the University grew and “sought to serve a broad” culture, as Marsden has observed, it also changed. The people who led Syracuse University in its early years were filled with a passion to serve the nation through education. This passion meant that they ultimately would not have an overwhelmingly Methodist community on Piety Hill. A changing student body, changing alumni, and the financial needs of a growing institution meant religious direction must move away from the center of power or risk imposing one faith upon people of many diverse faiths. Did faith disappear at Syracuse University as the University grew and changed? No. At Syracuse University, the “denominational tradition” counted as lost by Marsden was not one and the same with faith. Instead, by 1930, the religious life of the University

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63Central New York Annual Conference Minutes, fifty-fourth session, 1921, 39.
64Galpin, Growing Years, 459.
community moved to a chapel built purposefully as an interfaith space for all where a diverse board of students, faculty, staff, and administrators would direct operations and chaplains of all faiths would serve the community. In fact, in this move it could be said that the University fully expressed one denominational tradition: that of tolerance for other beliefs. Theodore Runyon describes John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, as a "surprisingly ecumenical figure," who "would seem to demonstrate that the richness of the Christian gospel cannot be exhausted by any one denominational tradition." To be convinced of the unique goodness of Christ would be Wesleyan. To establish that belief as the "standard" and thus impose it on a diverse university community would not. James R. Day may have pulled away from Methodist control of Syracuse University mainly because of his passion for growth, but in this shift, the University began to live an important Methodist tradition. The legacy of Syracuse University is not a story of losing faith. It is, instead, the beginning of a shift in place, the development of a pluralistic vision that would open new opportunities for people of faith at the University.