

# RELIGION

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## Teaching the Bible: A History of Kansas Bible Chair

by

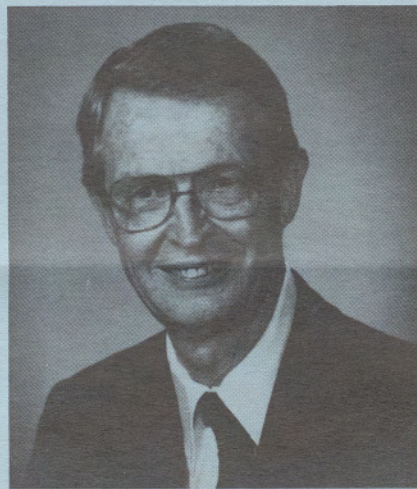
Dwight F. Metzler

**T**he Kansas Bible Chair, a teaching institution supported by the Christian Church, promoted the scholarly teaching of religion at the University of Kansas for over seventy years. In 1989, when the leaders in religion, higher education and state government are considering how religion should be financed and taught in the state university system, the Kansas Bible Chair experience has important lessons.

In addition to its relevance for contemporary issues, the history of the Kansas Bible Chair reminds us of the dedication and sacrifice of those who started and developed the chair. It embodies the contribution the Kansas Bible Chair made to higher education in Kansas and it shows the impact which it and the Kansas School of Religion made on the University and its students. The support of the University for the Kansas Bible Chair and later for the interdenominational Kansas School of Religion was strong and consistent. Its seal expressing a key religious concept—Moses at the burning bush—emphasized the faith of its founders. The success of the Kansas Bible Chair was greatly aided by the institution within which it did its work.

### A Revolutionary Idea

**L**eaders of the Christian Church, especially women, were concerned that the growing number of students attending tax-supported colleges and universities were denied the opportunity for the scholarly study of



*Dwight F. Metzler, native of Kansas, descends from a long line of dedicated pioneers in religion from the time of Kansas Territory. He completed engineering degrees at the University of Kansas and Harvard University. A veteran of World War II, he managed public health and environmental programs with service to twelve governors in Kansas and two in New York.*

*In church affairs he served as Sunday school superintendent, teacher, chair of the Board, and elder of the First Christian Church in Lawrence and continued an active role in Christian Churches in New York City and Topeka. He was president of the Board of the Kansas Bible Chair from 1959 to 1966.*

*K.U. awarded him the Distinguished Service Citation in 1970, and he was designated the K.U. School of Engineering Alumni of the Year in 1984.*

religion under competent instructors. The Christian Women's Board of Missions, Christian Church, carried out a revolutionary experiment by establishing Bible Chairs at several state universities. This was a logical extension of their belief that study of the Scriptures would lead to a national decision to follow its teaching.

In more recent years, other denominations established Bible Chairs at state universities, but the Christian Church Bible Chairs were the first and only ones which sought to unite other denominations. In this respect, the Christian Church leaders were following long-held convictions. It was the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, at an old meetinghouse at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, who made the first denominational plea for church unity on the North American continent. The time was June 28, 1804.

In Kentucky and in Pennsylvania, the founders of the Christian Church (Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Barton Warren Stone and Walter Scott) spoke out for Christian unity. A century later, these convictions guided those who established the Kansas Bible Chair at the University of Kansas.

When the Kansas Bible Chair was organized, one other Bible Chair existed. It had been started at the University of Michigan in 1894. The First Christian Church in Lawrence took the lead in gaining state approval and support for the endeavor.

In 1893, Blanche Ward came to the University from Pratt, Kansas. She met

the registrar, George O. Foster, when she was enrolling. She attended his Sunday school class at First Christian Church, and they were married in 1901.

Blanche Ward knew of the Bible Chair at the University of Michigan, and she set about, with other women from the local church, to have one at the University.

After four efforts, the women were successful in organizing a special session at the state convention on the role of religion in higher education. At the annual meeting of the Kansas Christian Churches in Newton in 1899, the concept of a Bible Chair and its funding were approved. Financial pledges were received, and the Kansas Christian Women's Board of Missions requested official approval for a Kansas Bible Chair.

The Board of Missions arranged for C. P. Coler of the Michigan Bible Chair to give a series of lectures and survey the potential for a school. While in Lawrence, he also gave the morning chapel services for the University faculty and students for two weeks. He reported strong support from the University and Kansas church leaders. Both the state and the national Christian Women's Board of Missions supported the idea of the new school, and Wallace C. Payne and his wife were chosen to lead the Kansas Bible Chair in April, 1901.

That a new, high-risk, fledgling institution could attract a couple as well-qualified as Mr. and Mrs. Payne to start the work is remarkable. No doubt it was due in part to the ferment promoted by Christian Church women about the need and the opportunity for teaching religion at tax-supported colleges and universities.

The Paynes found typical youth from farms and small towns at the University who were experiencing more freedom of choice than in their home communities. Students from the cities were also enjoying new freedoms and an opportunity to test society's tolerance for unconventional behavior. In an effort to channel student energy into more acceptable activities, the University faculty and administration encouraged participation in social and religious groups. The year 1901 was a good time to start teaching the Bible and giving moral counsel to students.

After gaining state approval for the Kansas Bible Chair, the Kansas Christian Women's Board of Missions appointed a committee to spell out its goals and get the teaching started.

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At this time, both state and national Christian Church leaders spoke and wrote extensively about the role of Bible Chairs. They predicted that women would be taking leadership positions in the sciences, education, business, medicine and law, and believed that biblical teaching would provide the essential moral and spiritual values. They saw religious studies as an integral part of intellectual development. They expected that it would be helpful in the family, in the community and in the work place.

George O. Foster was instrumental in obtaining the housing for the Bible Chair. A farm-house and land were purchased adjacent to the University, within just a short walk of its buildings. One classroom was added. The funds were donated by the Beurgans of Moline, Kansas.

### In the Beginning

The courses offered by the Kansas Bible Chair were taught without denominational bias. Response by the student body was enthusiastic with one in six K.U. students enrolled. By 1903, Mr. and Mrs. Payne were also teaching classes at Haskell Indian Institute—he to fifty-five men and she to sixty-five women. The superintendent sent his carriage to provide round-trip transportation.

In 1907, Myers Hall, a new teaching facility, was built. Fifteen hundred students had attended classes in the original classroom. The new building not only provided adequate facilities for study but also became the meeting place for many religious and social groups. Soon it was overflowing and it was enlarged in 1912. It remained the center of much of the University's social life until after the Memorial Union Building was completed.

When the Paynes left in 1913, they had established a firm foundation for the scholarly teaching of the Bible. In addition, they had done missions work, counseled students and built strong ties to the Lawrence churches.

While another director was being chosen, George O. Foster taught courses and Dr. Raymond A. Schwegler, dean of the University's School of Education, served as dean of the Kansas Bible Chair.

Dr. Arthur Braden was called to be the new director. He was recognized as a fine teacher and attracted the largest classes ever held in Myers Hall. When he left in 1922, nine percent of the University students were enrolled in his classes.

### Foundations for the Kansas School of Religion

Upon his arrival in 1914, Dr. Braden began planning to bring other religious bodies into the teaching, as well as to obtain University credit for the courses. Chancellor Frank Strong and his associates supported the idea. World War I delayed the plans until 1920 when Dr. Braden organized a "Council of Religious Workers" which laid the groundwork for the interdenominational Kansas School of Religion.

Dr. Ernest K. Lindley was appointed chancellor in 1920. His special interests were in mental hygiene, ethics and the psychology of prayer. He continued the support of his predecessor, and the Kansas School of Religion started giving University credit in 1922. At this time the Kansas Bible Chair withdrew from the field of independent teaching and never returned to it. Its teachers functioned as part of the School of Religion faculty.

The School's first teachers were Dr. Braden and the Baptist minister to students, Forest Emerson Witcraft. The second year, Dr. Braden taught four classes each semester and five ministers to students taught one course each. Dr. Braden was also the first dean of the new School.

A near-fatal flaw in the organization of the Kansas School of Religion was its dependence upon one denomination, the Christian Church, for the building, the operating costs and the only full-time teachers. In its first year, nine religious bodies appointed trustees to the Kansas School of Religion; but by the second year only the Baptist, Christian, Congregational, Methodist and

Presbyterian congregations remained. The qualifications of the teachers were reviewed for approval by the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Graduate degrees were required with a B.D. or Ph.D. as the minimum.

Dr. Samuel B. Braden followed his brother as the director of the Kansas Bible Chair when Dr. Arthur Braden received a call to head a school affiliated with the University of California. Soon after his arrival he was elected dean of the Kansas School of Religion.

Dr. Braden introduced several successful innovations including a one-week institute on religion for the University. Outstanding religious leaders were brought to the campus for a series of all-university convocations and follow-up discussion groups at Myers Hall. The convocation speeches were broadcast on radio for those across the state who could not attend.

## The Kansas Bible College

**S**purred by the need for educated pastors and encouraged that several students studying under Dr. Braden were entering the full-time ministry, the Christian Church upgraded the Kansas Bible Chair to the Kansas Bible College in 1928. While continuing to teach in the School of Religion, this new organization was planned to add four full-time teachers. The Kansas Bible College was to be a "standard educational institution within the state for the training of the leadership of the churches."<sup>1</sup> This dream was not to be realized, and its organization made cooperation with the other denominations more difficult until it was abandoned in 1945. The expanded faculty and scope could not be funded.

An additional difficulty was a ministerial training school which was started at Manhattan, Kansas by the Oregon Bible University. The resulting confusion further handicapped the fledgling Kansas Bible College. While support by Kansas churches would have been difficult, the simultaneous establishment of two schools for ministers within seventy-five miles of one another made obtaining such support impossible.

## The Uncertain Years

**T**he stock market crash of 1929 and the depression which followed not only prevented any program expansion, but also threatened the retention of the one existing full-time teacher.

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In 1931, national Christian Church support was withdrawn and Myers Hall was to be sold. Dr. Braden offered to serve without salary if Myers Hall was not sold, and, with George O. Foster, worked to find ways of continuing the school. When financing for the Bible College had not improved by the summer of 1933, Dr. Braden took another position.

Faced with the start of fall classes in a few days and a balance of \$2.50, the Board turned to a proposal by the First Christian Church of Lawrence. Its pastor, Seth W. Slaughter, would serve as director of the Bible College without salary or compensation, other than residence in Myers Hall. Thus the teaching of religion at the University was saved by the leadership of two members of the Bible College Board, who were also leaders in the local church: C. E. Birch and George O. Foster.

Mr. Slaughter was a popular teacher and his classes grew. But the financing problems worsened. Financing from the other members of the Kansas School of Religion was non-existent, yet University officials were promoting enrollment in the School.

When Mr. Slaughter left in 1947, his successor at the local church, Harold G. Barr, was named as director. As had been the case with Mr. Slaughter, Barr was denied the dean's position for the Kansas School of Religion. A new position of secretary of the faculty was created for Dr. Barr and the administrative work of the School was transferred to him.

Dr. Barr had an impact on the University far beyond his teaching, although he was considered one of its premier teachers. Chancellor Deane Malott depended upon Barr as his advisor on matters relating to religion, including the planning of Religious Emphasis Week and the choice of baccalaureate speakers.

## Rebuilding

**I**n 1944, Dr. Barr arranged for partial support from national Christian Church sources. The next year he led the Board to abandon the Bible College idea and return to the original Bible Chair. His next fifteen years were spent rebuilding the Bible Chair and strengthening the Kansas School of Religion as its dean.

During his twenty-three years with the Bible Chair he saved the institution. He built support and understanding among Christian churches and laid the groundwork for his successor. He strengthened the faculty of the Kansas School of Religion and increased university credit four-fold.

To learn the reactions of individuals who had studied under Dr. Barr or his successor, Dr. William J. Moore, four percent of the 4,000 students from 1950 to 1970 were queried in 1988. Slightly more than forty percent responded, many with written comments praising Dr. Barr as a teacher, a counsellor and as a "beautiful person."

In a full consultation with Dr. George Waggoner, dean of the College, the Bible Chair chose Dr. Moore, a New Testament scholar from Drake University, as the next director. He was also named dean of the Kansas School of Religion upon his arrival in August, 1960.

Concurrent with Dr. Moore's arrival, Dr. W. Clarke Wescoe was elevated to chancellor. The two men worked well together. Dr. Moore analyzed the Kansas School of Religion problems as having only part-time teachers, lack of support from the denominations and an old, inadequate building for the teaching.

When the Kansas School of Religion was established in 1921, each denomination had promised to support one full-time teacher. In November, 1960, Dr. Moore convened a two-day meeting with church leaders to discuss their interest in, and ideas about, the teaching of religion. Out of this meeting grew a plan for an expanded curriculum, the offering of graduate courses, funding for additional full-time positions and expansion of financial support. Even with the increased contributions which the Kansas Bible Chair had negotiated, the non-Disciple denominations paid \$600 in 1960-1961—less than ten percent of the School's operating costs. The remainder came from the Christian Church.

Chancellor Wescoe supported the expanded teaching program and called a meeting of church leaders in June, 1961. Dean Waggoner presided. After reports by several who had been studying the matter, Dr. Wescoe summarized the needs and challenged the church leaders to meet them. The Baptist, Christian, Congregational, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist and Presbyterian churches were participating. Seven other denominations attended the meeting.

The Bible Chair pledged one full-time teacher/dean and a new building—rent-free. The Lutherans agreed to underwrite a second full-time teacher. A third was pledged by the Episcopalians and another by the Methodists. A fifth full-time teacher was added in 1966-1967 from other church contributions.

The Bible Chair Board started to plan for a new building to house the Kansas School of Religion, and agreements were worked out for the School to pay for the maintenance. Christian Churches in Kansas put the new building in their budgets and the Bible Chair expanded its fund-raising to include individuals.

While this arrangement would meet the housing needs, the program needs of the School required more funding than promised by the churches. In 1964, the fund-raising of the Bible Chair was expanded by action of the Bible Chair and School trustees to include a joint fund-raising effort.

The Bible Chair brought its own successful campaign and significant assets to the project. The School of Religion, with no money for fund-raising, brought the appeal of a growing ecumenical cause. Unfortunately this appeal did not result in substantial gifts. The only large gift to the School came from Irma Smith, who gave \$100,000 in land. Since her gift was not needed for the building, it went to program needs of the School of Religion. Mrs. Smith was a member of the Christian Church, Macksville, Kansas, and the new building was named for her.

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*The promise of the Kansas Bible Chair to provide a modern building for the teaching of religion was complete.*

The Bible Chair trustees voted to incorporate the University seal of Moses at the burning bush in the new building design. Charles Marshall designed the burning bush window for the library with plans for the statue of Moses in a small garden outside the window. Professor Eldon Tefft later created the ten-foot bronze figure of the kneeling Moses which beckons all to come and be aware of God's revelation through study.

Irma Smith Hall was dedicated on October 8, 1967, with over forty religious leaders and the University deans in academic robes. Chancellor James W. Moudy of Texas Christian University and Dr. Wescoe gave major addresses. More than 500 people attended.

The remainder of the Will Moore decade was given to consolidating the gains which had been made. The furniture was selected and the library expanded. The 1960's were indeed a golden age of cooperation among the denominations. The natural concerns of each had been set aside by the patience, understanding and skillful negotiation of Dr. Moore in the 1961-1964 period. He brought the state organizations of the participating churches into the decision-making and added representatives from Jewish, Roman Catholic and the Reorganized Church of the Latter Day Saints to the corporation. He also held consultations with the Southern Baptists, Nazarenes and Unitarians.

## In Conclusion

Over 2,000 students attended Dr. Moore's classes. A sampling of the opinions in 1988 yielded high praise for him as a teacher, scholar and one who made a difference in their lives. In the decade Smith Hall was built, the Christian Church gave \$154,184 to support the teaching program and, with individual members, gave over \$500,000 in capital. The full-time faculty of the School of Religion was increased five-fold, credit hours allowed for an A.B. degree grew from twelve to twenty-five, and a master's degree program was started.

Two post-1970 events should be mentioned. They include the naming of the library and setting the Moses statue. From the start of planning for a new building, the library was considered its most essential element. It was named the William J. Moore Library on November 10, 1978 in a ceremony led by Dr. Robert A. Langston. Dr. Langston, minister of West Side Christian Church, Topeka, represented the Christian Church in Kansas.

The dedicatory address was given by Chancellor Archie Dykes who said,

He encouraged his faculty members in their teaching and research efforts, and helped to see that the faculty recruited for the school came here with impeccable academic credentials.<sup>2</sup>

Professor Tefft was selected as the sculptor for the statue of Moses in 1965. The filigreed bronze figure was completed in 1982. On May 12, under the glow of a warm Kansas sun, the Moses statue was dedicated. Allyn Laybourn spoke as donor of the window and the contributions of the Harry Miller family of Tonganoxie toward funding the statue were acknowledged. The promise of the Kansas Bible Chair to provide a modern building for the teaching of religion was complete.

<sup>1</sup> Articles of Incorporation, Kansas Bible College, Topeka, Kansas, November 2, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> *Lawrence Journal World*, Saturday, November 11, 1978, p. 3.

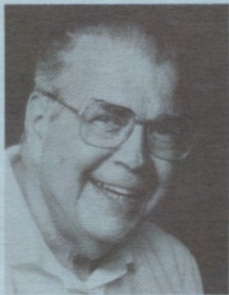
Editor's Note: Mr. Metzler's more extensive account will soon be published in hard cover under the title of *Bible on Mt. Oread: History of the Kansas Bible Chair*. Pre-publication price before May 1, 1989, is \$6.00; after that date, \$8.00. Interested persons may send orders to Christian Church in Kansas, 2914 MacVicar Avenue, Topeka, Kansas 66611.

# CURRENT NEWS

## Memorial For Dr. Lynn Taylor To Be Announced Soon

Plans for the Memorial for Dr. Lynn Taylor, dean of the Kansas School of Religion from 1970-1977 and its Executive Director from 1977 until his death in 1988, will be announced following the KSR annual meeting in March. The many contributions sent for this Memorial from friends and supporters of KSR are greatly appreciated.

Discussion of the variety of activities of KSR during the 1970s and 1980s will be included in a subsequent issue of *Religion Journal*.



## Lyle E. Schaller to Discuss "A New Generation of Young Adults?" at KSR Annual Meeting, March 8, 1989

Lyle E. Schaller, a Parish Consultant at Yokefellow Institute in Richmond, Indiana, will present the annual KSR lecture for 1989 on "A New Generation of Young Adults?" This address will be at the annual KSR banquet at the Adams Alumni Center of the University of Kansas on Wednesday, March 8, scheduled from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Author, city manager, Methodist minister, and Church consultant, the Reverend Schaller has four academic degrees from the University of Wisconsin, including a master's degree in city and regional planning, and his B.D. degree from Garrett Theological Seminary.

Author of three dozen books and over 800 articles, he is currently the General Editor of the thirty-six volume Creative Leadership Series being published by Abingdon Press. Among his published books are *Planning for Protestantism in Urban America* (1965), *Community Organization: Conflict and Reconciliation* (1966), *The Impact of the Future* (1969), *Understanding Tomorrow* (1976), *Multiple Staff and the*

*Larger Church* (1980), *The Middle Sized Church* (1985), *Getting Things Done* (1986), and *It's A Different World* (1987).

The banquet will be held in the Summerfield Room of the Adams Alumni Center, beginning at 6:00 p.m. Cost is \$12.00 per person. Reservations are needed by March 1.

Reverend Schaller will make three other presentations while in Lawrence. Interested persons are invited to attend any of these meetings without charge except for meals that are scheduled.

### Wednesday, March 8

11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. "The Emergence of the Megachurches." Address at a luncheon at the Ecumenical Christian Ministries, 1204 Oread Avenue. Reservations can be made by calling 913-843-4933.

### Thursday, March 9

9:00 a.m. "The Changing Role of the Christian Day School and Home Schooling." Classroom lecture to University of Kansas students, 211 Blake Hall.

11:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. "Demands for Post Seminary Training for the Clergy." Discussion at a luncheon sponsored by the Lawrence Ministerial Association, Adams Alumni Center. Reservations can be made by calling 913-864-4672.

For further information about these meetings, please contact the Kansas School of Religion, 1300 Oread Avenue, Lawrence, Kansas 66045. Telephone: 913-843-7257.

## Review of KSR Now In Process

The Board of Trustees authorized at its called meeting in November, 1988, a review of the programs and activities of the Kansas School of Religion that will result in recommendations for possible alternatives for the future. The review is being conducted by Professor Phil McKnight of the School of Education of the University of Kansas with plans for its completion by the time of the annual meeting on March 8, 1989.

The review will provide information drawn from contacts with several interested and participating groups about their perceptions and recommendations. Responses will be obtained both by interviews in person or by telephone with selected individuals and by written questionnaires to a larger group. Among those to be contacted are the Board of Trustees, Board of Governors, Burning Bush Society, Fellowship of Moses, K.U. administrative officials, faculty and students of the Department of Religious Studies, school teachers in the seminars on Religion and Public Education, KSR Conference Committee, Kansas Judiciary Leaders, and other interested persons.

The report to the Board of Trustees in March will provide a summary of information obtained and its interpretation by the reviewer. It will also identify alternative future directions and activities for the Kansas School of Religion with an accompanying discussion of possible advantages and disadvantages to each alternative.

# Essay Contest Winners To Be Announced At Annual Meeting

The state winners of the KSR essay contest for high school students on the topic of "Religion and the Economy" will be invited to the annual meeting of KSR on March 8, 1989.

Essays were submitted to county ministerial groups in January and county winners forwarded to KSR in February for the judging of state winners. Each county winner receives \$25. The first place state winner is awarded \$300; second and third place winners receive \$200 and \$100 respectively.

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## 1988 in Religion and American Society

Robert N. Minor  
Professor, Chairperson of Religious Studies  
University of Kansas

The major religious events of 1988 were not significant for their lasting impact. Instead they reflect the road, begun long ago, on which America is traveling.

The support for clergy as presidential candidates reminded us that religion and politics have seldom been separated anywhere at any time, in spite of modern and American attempts, and that constituencies united on beliefs often differ in application. One-third of the voters interviewed by ABC news in November said the recurring abortion issue was most important in choosing George Bush.

The February confession of Jimmy Swaggart that he had visited a prostitute added to 1987 televangelist scandals to confirm that human beings in all fields have "feet of clay." The distribution of Whisenant's *On Borrowed Time*, which set the rapture of the Church for September 11-13, later revised for October 3, and now fall 1989, was another in numerous predictions. In October, the Shroud of Turin, venerated by many as the burial cloth of Jesus, was scientifically declared "forged between the years of 1000 and 1500."

The assertiveness of religious conservatives increased. They called attention to an undistinguished film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, while numerous abortion protests culminated in 300 arrests in late October on a national Day of Rescue. In Israel, an attempt to tighten the definition of an acceptable Jew to exclude those converted by Conservative and Reform congregations caused additional soul-searching among American Jews about their relationship to that state.

Finally, the millennial celebration of the introduction of Christianity to Russia raised hopes that Glasnost would be applied to religion.

### RELIGION

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