FC's Identity Shift: What the School Now Claims – and What It Refused to Honor

This timeline traces Florida College's identity shift, documented through the school's own publications, leadership statements, and court filings. For most of its 80-year history, FC and many of its supporters distinguished it from **"so-called Christian colleges"** such as Lipscomb, Harding, and Abilene. Non-institutional (NI) preachers/writers consistently argued that no human institution should be called **"Christian,"** and FC leaders assured brethren that it functions only as an adjunct of the home, **NOT** the church.

Yet in a 2021 court filing, FC identified itself as a **"Christian religious school,"** claimed **"ecclesiastical"** privilege, and asserted that a terminated faculty member had held a **"ministerial position."** In doing so, FC effectively positioned itself **alongside the church as a religious institution in its own right**. This timeline places that transformation in context and shows how it became central to FC's refusal to honor one of its employment contracts. This use of FC's new identity becomes even more troubling in light of a **striking contradiction in its legal stance**: in 2020, the school sued a borrower for $1,800, but in 2021, it argued that civil courts lacked jurisdiction to render a judgment on a dispute over one of its employment contracts.

1946 – 1963: From "Florida Christian College" to "Florida College"

- Founded in **1946** as *Florida Christian College*.
- In 1962, the highly respected NI preacher **Robert F. Turner** wrote, "The schools, therefore, are nothing more than private enterprises of businesses, operated on the same basis as farms or factories owned and operated by Christians. Their purpose is SECULAR EDUCATION." [1]
- In 1963, the school removed **"Christian"** from its name, becoming simply *Florida College*.

1964 – 1980s: Distinctions and a Warning

- The following excerpts are from four articles authored by NI writers. Each article contains the pejorative phrase **"so-called Christian colleges,"** although this phrase does not appear in every quote below:
  - One article points out, "Nowhere does the scripture speak of a **'Christian college,'** either in fact or in principle... When a college acts in such a way as to replace or supplant the work of the local congregation, it has overstepped its bounds, **whether it receives church money or not**." [2]
  - Another says, "Schools and colleges owned and operated by brethren are **not 'Christian' colleges and schools**, nor are they **'church' schools**. They are fundamentally and essentially human agencies and institutions, operating in secular, human affairs. They exist by and **are regulated by civil laws and authorities**." [3]
  - Still another praises FC for being "**in no way connected with the church**." Yet the writer warns: "Time and changes in administration have often brought about changes in concept, function, and policy of schools operated by brethren." [4]
  - The final article documents the absurd notion of **"basketball ministers."** The writer says, "An interesting part of the 'back-story' of this case is that the issue was brought to the FFRF [Freedom From Religion Foundation] by a now-retired IRS agent who is also a member of a local Church of Christ. He became disturbed upon discovering that, in 1970, some **so-called 'Christian Colleges'** (including Abilene Christian University and Pepperdine), claiming to be 'integral agencies of the church,' had sought tax-exempt housing allowances for many of their staff personnel (including athletic coaches identified as **'basketball ministers'**)." [5]

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[1] Robert F. Turner, "*Educational Institutions Among the Brethren," Preceptor* magazine, Apr 1962. Turner's first of six related articles from Apr-Oct 1962. ALL CAPS supplied by Turner. These articles have been compiled by the La Vista Church of Christ and are entitled *"The College Issue."* The series is available on the church's website: weblink

[2] Wayne S. Walker, "Christian Colleges," Guardian of Truth Magazine, Oct 1983. Truth Magazine archives. *[Bolding mine]* weblink

[3] Bill Cavender, *"Christian Colleges,"* Guardian of Truth Magazine, Apr 1984. Truth Magazine archives. *[Bolding mine]* weblink

[4] Brent Lewis, *"Does the College Threaten the Church?"* Truth Magazine. July 1966. *[Bolding mine]* weblink

[5] Steve Wolfgang, *"Challenges to Tax-Exempt Housing Allowance for Ministers,"* Truth Magazine. Feb 2019. *[Bolding mine]* weblink

1990s – 2010s: The "Adjunct of the Home" Founding Identity

- **FC's prior president** wrote: "The Board of [Florida] College is a group of Christians who have established a non-profit business, an educational institution guided by the principles of Jesus Christ, our Lord, just as many other business men and women have established other kinds of businesses founded on the principles of Christ. Florida College functions as an adjunct of the home, not the church." [6]
- The phrase that Florida College is an **"adjunct of the home"** has been often repeated to reassure brethren that FC was in harmony with its NI heritage and values, and with God's Word.[7]

2020s – Present: Identity Shift to "Christian College" and Failure to Honor Their Word

- In its **2021 Court Filing,[8] FC**:
  - Claimed it is a **"Christian religious school"** and a **"religious organization."**
  - Asserted a terminated faculty member had been in a **"ministerial position"** because the school had granted him **tenure**, a special academic employment contract.

    NOTE: The former FC faculty member taught Business and PE classes. He was also Director of the school's Intramural Sports program. By asserting he had been in a **"ministerial position,"** the school echoed the same legal logic used by **"so-called Christian colleges"** to assert that some of their staff were **"basketball ministers."**
  - Why did FC make these claims that stand in such stark opposition to decades' worth of statements made by previous school leaders, supporters, and NI preachers? The school made these assertions as part of its legal position that the Court lacked jurisdiction to ***render a judgment*** regarding FC's contractual obligations under an employment agreement that FC had authored, signed, and given to the faculty member. A point made perfectly clear in FC's Filing: "The Court lacks subject matter jurisdiction pursuant to the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, as follows: the **ecclesiastical** abstention doctrine precludes the Court from adjudicating an employment dispute between a **religious organization** and an employee occupying a **ministerial position** with that organization." *[bolding mine]*
    - FC's Personnel Manual guaranteed tenured faculty continuing employment except for specific cases, such as immoral behavior, and guaranteed the right to an appeal hearing in the event of dismissal. *Following the faculty member's termination in February 2015*, FC did not grant the required appeal, despite the FC Board having formally approved the Tenure Policy."[9]
    - FC's employment agreements, given to faculty at that time, stated, "Your signing this agreement constitutes a legal contract." This gave faculty every indication that the agreement was legally binding. **How is it moral and ethical for the school's leaders, who profess Christ, to later invoke constitutional immunity to prevent legal adjudication of an alleged breach? At a minimum, doesn't Christian integrity require that one's word be honored, especially when carefully written as a contract, signed, and given to a fellow believer?**

      Our Lord and Savior said, **"But let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no.' Anything more than this is from the evil one."** (Mt 5:37 CSB). The psalmist David wrote that the godly "**keep their promises even when it hurts**." (Ps 15:4b NLT)
  - FC's actions resulted in significant spiritual, reputational, emotional, and financial hardship for the former faculty member and his family. This should prompt a serious, good-faith examination of FC's legal and ethical integrity. FC's behavior also potentially brings reproach on our Lord's good name.

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[6] Buddy Payne's essay *"Church Support of Human Institutions"* in the book, *"Pursuing the Pattern: A Careful Examination of New Testament Practices*," editor Jim Deason (2017). Page 113. *Underlining supplied by Payne.*

[7] Don Martin, *"If the College is an Adjunct of the Home, Then…"* weblink

[8] Case Number: 16-CA-001986 – Hillsborough County, FL Clerk of Circuit Court. https://hover.hillsclerk.com/

[9] FC's 2014-2015 Personnel Manual - 7.04 Tenure (pages 117-119). Quote at the conclusion of the Tenure section: "[*Note: Tenure Policy Approved & Adopted – Board of Directors Meeting, September 24, 1993.]"* This document is not available online.

- FC argued the US Constitution prevented the Court from adjudicating the former faculty member's breach of contract lawsuit. *When the Pharisees used a similar* ***technicality to not honor their oaths,*** *Jesus condemned them for it. (see Mt 23:16-22)*.
- In addition, FC has sued others in Court when it wants one of its agreements enforced. For example, in 2020, one year before invoking ecclesiastical abstention to block the former faculty member's breach of contract claim, FC sued a woman for a modest $1,800 promissory note she had failed to timely repay. [10]
- *Thus,* ***FC sought judicial enforcement in one instance, yet argued the Court lacked jurisdiction in another****. This sharp contrast is reminiscent of Jesus' parable of the Unmerciful Servant (see Mt 18:23–35)*.

  NOTE: During Buddy Payne's FC presidency, he was FC's Registered Agent with the State of Florida, including the years 2020–2021. Therefore, it is difficult to believe that he was unaware of these two filings.
- Because these were **official Court Filings** made through FC's attorneys, the claims reflect a position the school authorized and adopted before the Court. Even if FC's leaders chose not to review the legal wording, their lawyers acted as their agents, and the responsibility for those claims still rests with **FC's leadership** – its president and Board of Directors.

- FC quotes its new president online as saying one of his long-term goals for the school is that "we'll seek to be widely recognized as Tampa Bay's **Christian college**…" [11]
- Beginning with its 2023-2024 Catalog, FC started referring to itself as a **"Christian liberal arts college."** [12] This stands in marked opposition to the longstanding concerns of NI writers (see page 1), who have consistently argued against applying the word **"Christian"** to schools. Furthermore, it directly reverses FC's own 1963 decision to remove this Scripturally designated word from its name. The reintroduction of this holy word – in its institutional publications and formal court filings – signals a deliberate and substantial redefinition of FC's organizational identity. This rhetorical and legal repositioning carries significant implications: it challenges the institution's historical claim to strict separation from the church, raises questions about its NI values, and invites scrutiny of the consistency and integrity of its self-presentation.

Reactions from some FC Supporters

- Several supporters of the school, when confronted with some of the recent claims made by the school and its two most recent presidents, showed **unquestioning loyalty** to the school:
  - One highly regarded NI preacher told me he didn't believe FC would ever make such claims. But when confronted with indisputable evidence, he *sighed* and made no further comment.
  - Another NI preacher argued that the new president's language was just *harmless marketing* and didn't mean the school actually believes it is a **"Christian college."** Remember that the four NI writers on page 1 do not grant schools such as ACU and Pepperdine this generous interpretation; instead, they *derisively* refer to them as **"so-called Christian colleges."**
  - When presented with an offer to read documented evidence regarding FC's unjust treatment of the former faculty member, a fellow Christian (and longtime FC supporter) whom I have known for decades, responded that they had already made up their mind about Dr. Payne's character, and didn't want to read anything that might change their view of him. This explicit preference for **loyalty over even considering evidence of unjust behavior** demonstrates the depth of institutional protection FC enjoys among some of its supporters.

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[10] Case #20-CC-002569 – Hillsborough County, FL Clerk of Circuit Court https://hover.hillsclerk.com/

[11] "Q&A WITH PRESIDENT JOHN WEAVER," Florida College News. Aug 3, 2022: weblink. *[Bolding mine]*

[12] "Florida College Catalog 2023-2024," page 22, weblink. The same language is in FC's catalogs from 2024-2025, page 23 (weblink) and 2025-2026, page 23 (weblink).

Final Thoughts – FC's Identity Issue

I acknowledge that **many Christians have been strengthened** through their time as students at FC, including me in the mid-1970s. However, I have **three goals** for laying out the facts in this timeline paper:

1) Trace the historical record using the College's own words, leadership statements, and court filings.
2) Highlight the contrast between past assurances by various writers and the school's present language.
3) Show that FC and its leaders failed to honor their written agreement with a former faculty member.

Some may dismiss all of this as misrepresentation, legal language, personal bias, or some other questionable motive. However, the core facts presented here are established by direct quotes from court filings, official FC publications, and leadership statements – all of which remain publicly verifiable. If these facts are uncomfortable, it is not because they are false but because they raise questions that deserve honest consideration.

As previously noted, Robert F. Turner, in his 1962 series called by some "**The College Issue**," emphasized that schools such as Florida College exist for the purpose of "**SECULAR EDUCATION.**"[13] Turner further warned: "We must love the Lord and His church enough that when we see a school encroach upon and overshadow the Lord's own institution, **we will renounce the school**..."[14]

Contrary to Turner's wise guidance, Florida College has transitioned from functioning as an **adjunct of the home** to rebranding itself as a **Christian college** that **claims ecclesiastical privilege**. The school also asserts it is a **religious organization**, thus making it comparable to the church. In addition, FC claims a former tenured faculty member had occupied a **ministerial position** at the school. This permitted the school and its leaders to avoid legal scrutiny by asserting that the Court could not render judgment on a **legal contract** they themselves had authored, signed, and issued to the faculty member.

These assertions render the **college nearly indistinguishable from the church**, both structurally and functionally. This current stance directly *contradicts* earlier descriptions by NI writers, such as Steve Wolfgang, who observed over 45 years ago: "those in its [Florida College's] official employ have taken pain, indeed, bent over backward... To make sure that there is **no connection, either in substance or appearance, between the college and the church.**"[15]

Another NI preacher, in reference to an article written by a friend of his, **"Let the Church be the Church,"** suggested that a better article to write would be **"Let the College be the College."**[16] His point was that the present danger was not churches acting like colleges, but colleges imitating churches. This is a valid concern and is highly relevant to FC's present claims and self-identity.

FC's claim to be a **Christian religious school** contradicts decades of NI teaching and the school's own words. Those who have historically defended Florida College as carefully avoiding identification with the church will likely find this shift deeply troubling. But setting that aside, using that claim to escape civil accountability for a contract that FC leaders authored, signed, and issued is *indefensible by any standard*. The latter reveals whether the school's professed values are genuine or merely a legal convenience. This document is **not about destroying FC and its leaders** but calling them **back to honesty, accountability, and consistency**.

The facts in this document leave us with a final question: Will **faithful Christians** and **FC supporters** be willing to **confront and hold the school accountable,** as Scripture demands, or will the institution and its leaders' actions continue to be **ignored, excused, or defended**?

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[13] Robert F. Turner – see Footnote 1. *ALL CAPS supplied by Turner.* Same Apr 1962 article as Footnote 1. *[Bolding mine]*

[14] Robert F. Turner, "*A Close Look at 'Our' Colleges,"* Oct 1962. Turner's last article from his 1962 series: weblink. *[Bolding mine]*

[15] Steve Wolfgang's article, *" 'Sommerism',"* Truth Magazine. July 1979: weblink. The quotation is from his description of Florida College's posture at that time. *[Ellipsis in quotation mine, as well as the bolding.]*

[16] Tim Haile, *"Response to Ron Halbrook's 'Brief Observations on Brother Haile's Objections to Florida College'," Bible Banner, 2011:* weblink. *[Bolding mine]*

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