

Davidson, N.C., College Rebuffs Jew

By Martin Donsky

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DAVIDSON, N.C.—Harry Proctor, chairman of the political science department at Davidson College here, was impressed with the credentials of Ronald Linden, a prospective faculty member.

Linden, 29, held a doctorate in political science from Princeton. He was about to publish a foreign policy study on Eastern Europe.

"His credentials were quite impressive," Proctor recalled. "He seemed to have the sort of personality which would have made him a productive scholar and an excellent teacher."

But Linden apparently will never teach at Davidson, a small liberal arts college about 30 miles north of Charlotte in the Piedmont section of North Carolina. The college, which is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, has told Linden that it has a long-standing policy which makes it next to impossible to grant tenure to faculty members who are non-Christians. Linden, a New York native who grew up in Boston, is Jewish.

Earlier this year, Linden was offered a teaching post by the college, after it explained its "Christian tenure" policy to him. Anxious for a job

—even if only on a temporary basis—Linden accepted, with one qualification. He told Davidson authorities he would fight what he described as a "morally repugnant, socially anachronistic and scholastically unwise" tenure policy.

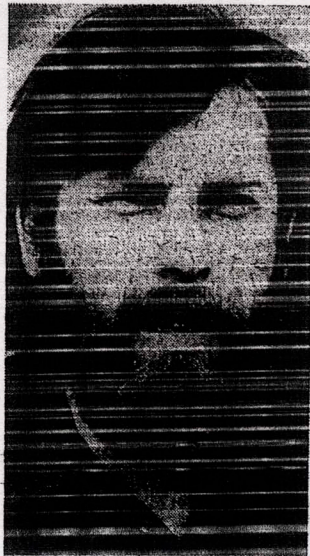
Rather than accept the challenge, which Linden said he made not to embarrass the school but to improve its academic environment, the college withdrew its offer, notifying Linden about two weeks ago. Several students and faculty learned of the action last week, and immediately began a protest.

Friday, as Davidson graduates began arriving for their annual alumni weekend, many students, joined by some sympathetic faculty members, boycotted the annual senior awards ceremony. "The students have a feeling that an injustice has been done," said Catherine Landis, editor of The Davidsonian, the college newspaper.

One faculty member described the tenure policy as an "embarrassment," and said Davidson's decision to withdraw the offer to Linden was the "wrong way to go about expressing Christian commitment."

Davidson, according to a spokesman,

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RONALD LINDEN

... a "slap in my face"

Christian College Rebuffs Jew Seeking Faculty Post

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does not have any federally funded research contracts, thus exempting it from several regulations prohibiting discrimination by government contractors.

North Carolina students enrolled at the school will receive about \$170,000 this year in public money in the form of direct tuition grants and scholarships distributed by the college.

However, state education and legal officials doubt that the financial ties could be used for any court challenge to Davidson's tenure policy because the public funds are passed on to the students and are not used by the college.

College authorities were reluctant to discuss the Linden case. Dr. Samuel Spencer, Davidson's president, issued a statement through the college news bureau outlining the Christian tenure policy. He responded to several questions through a college spokesman, but declined to talk directly to The Washington Post.

The college, founded in 1837, has about 1,300 students, including several Jews. There are, however, no Jews among its approximately 100 faculty members. Initially an all-male school—it admitted women in 1972—Davidson has during the years developed an excellent academic reputation.

Although it offers only undergraduate degrees, many in educational circles like to compare it favorably with another North Carolina college, Duke University, which with its major graduate research programs, law school and medical complex is often ranked among the top 10 universities in the country.

Davidson is not alone in its special religious qualifications for faculty members. Other church-related colleges have similar provisions. However, in recent years, many church-affiliated colleges seeking students to bolster sagging enrollments, trying to broaden their faculty composition or

fearing difficulty obtaining federal grants, have either eliminated or relaxed their restrictive provisions.

Under faculty pressure several years ago, Davidson slightly modified its tenure policy. According to its bylaws, the college still believes it can best accomplish its goals by ensuring that permanent faculty, besides their academic qualifications, also "understand and respond to the implications of their commitment as Christians."

Yet the college trustees added a "reverent seeker" clause. Recognizing that the "Christian community has always had a place for the reverent seeker," the bylaws allow the granting of tenure in rare circumstances, "to a person who respects the Christian tradition" without being committed to all its tenets.

Linden, who received his doctorate last fall, received a unanimous recommendation of the Davidson political science department faculty and was selected from a field of 170 candidates.

Neither he nor college officials dispute what happened next. He was offered the post, "in the full knowledge that he was a non-Christian," according to Spencer, the college president. Linden mulled the offer for about six weeks and then said he would accept, adding, however, that he would support efforts to challenge the tenure policy.

As Linden viewed it, the entire policy was a "slap in my face." Contacted at his home in Princeton, Linden said it was a contradiction for the school to allow a non-Christian to teach on a temporary, but not permanent basis.

More importantly, he said, it was an insult to a professional educator to be told that in granting tenure, academic credentials and performance would be outweighed by "your interpretation of God and creation."