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# Our University – The Role of Houses of Worship

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## Our University – The Role of Houses of Worship

*Second in a series of thoughts regarding the intersection of faith and reason in university life.*

The expression of a faith perspective is critical to moral and intellectual development of students, yet adherence to one particular view at a public university has been unacceptable for decades and, during the recent past, has culminated in irreligiosity of public higher education.

For two centuries, principles of Protestantism dominated both private and public universities in our nation and included mandatory chapel, Sunday service, and bible studies.

Leadership and accompanying student, parent, and public sentiment deemed the faith lives of students important, and Protestant it was.

Berkeley at its inception in 1870, under the leadership of President Howard Durant, and Michigan under its founding president Henry Philip Tappan directed their institutions away from the protestant pervasiveness in higher education.

Driven by an intellectual perspective, not fashion or political correctness, they recognized the importance of faith and acted correctly. The concern of the day to allow different views, rather than a singular institutional view, was paramount.

Bob Dylan would have said, “*For the times, they are a changin’*”

However, public universities have abandoned engagement of faith perspectives under a misplaced notion that it is impossible to encourage full moral development without proselytization: a precarious position driven by inept offices of university legal counsel and politically motivated leadership. If not, why has the Supreme Court never found prayer at university commencement unconstitutional?

Not once, not ever.

In primary and secondary schools, such intervention may be correct but in a university, it indicates abject failure to meet purpose.

Universities must encourage people to think critically. A record 100,000 Chinese students came to America to study this year, not for the intellectual protection afforded U.S. students, but the intellectual liberties available to them. Absent freedom, the university becomes a trade school or diploma mill.

The Chinese know this and believe intellectual liberty on U.S. campuses is available, and desirable, for the excellence it promotes.

Faith is at arms' length from intellectual life: Houses of worship are reticent to wade into the reluctant waters of political correctness for the institutional intransigence demonstrated towards matters of faith.

Houses of worship should muscle up.

Universities have institutionalized agnosticism on one hand, or codified atheism on the other: Both limit intellectual freedom and critical thinking.

The Supreme Court will soon hear the case of the Christian Legal Society vs. Hastings University. The CLS did not receive campus affirmation; membership requires a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and a commitment to abstain from sexual relationships outside of the marriage covenant of a man and a woman. Why should the court need to intervene in the relationship between individual practice of faith and intellectual development?

Houses of faith were a central part of the intellectual community, now however, structural weakness, sense of purpose and fear of offense marginalize their public impact.

Ideas offend people.

Houses of worship, regardless of affiliation: Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, to name a few, should be near, and engaged in the intellectual life of students. Houses of faith should accept nothing less than direct involvement with the life of students to aid them in their intellectual, moral and spiritual development.

Leadership in the house of learning and the house of faith should openly encourage their marriage, not as a means to persuade students to believe one way or another, but to admit that faith is part of any endeavor, even science.

Faith affects discovery by design or default.

The university assists people in becoming moral. The mandate for helping people fully develop, can neither be given away, nor accomplished in isolation from specific faith views. People do not become moral by studying comparative ethics, they become knowledgeable.

No university should turn away and say morality it is not properly our concern.

It is... by design or default.