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Our University – Faith and Reason

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Our University – Faith and Reason

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

I am a Christian. I hold faith, founded on principles laid out in the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible, which I believe to be the inspired Word of God without equivocation, qualification or apology. I share this with you so that any peculiarities of my Christianity, any predisposition they might create, any conception or world-view associated with this caste, are confessed.

One of the failings of contemporary universities is that they nearly insist on a separation of spiritual and intellectual life, faith and reason. No university leader with any sense of self-preservation would ever say such a thing, but if you watch carefully, you can see it. This allows and encourages the address of important issues of the day from a perspective limited by the fact that an individual's faith life is not cogent to the presentation of ideas, evidence, thought, or knowledge. As if reason and faith are not cousins.

Mindlessness incarnate.

One troubling day, a person came to see me in my office and suggested that I would find a better fit at a Christian college or university. I had recently expressed a personal perspective driven by my faith that he, and others, saw as inappropriate. This man was an acquaintance, and the tragedy of the day was that he believed secularization of thought possible.

Uninformed and irrational.

In mock sincerity I responded by saying that I thought it was a good idea. I should go to a Christian university, he should go to a Jewish university - my friend is Jewish - our Muslim colleagues should go to a Muslim university, our Atheist friends should go to an Atheist university and so on, until a serious discussion of how faith affects thinking is excised through a stagnating homogeneity of thought. Secular bliss of a fashion, but he was offended.

He felt faith was acceptable, as long as it was acceptable.

This political correctness is profound in its narrowness, anti-intellectual by definition, and fundamentally opposed to the true nature of a university as a place of maturation and intellectual growth. Sharing ideas, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable, is the work of a university.

Faith is an idea.

Sharing an idea does not require acceptance, except in the limited view of some who believe that those who do not hold a similar faith perspective are wrong, limited, narrow, or ignorant.

We work to relegate faith to an idiosyncrasy or bias to be checked at the university gate upon arrival in the morning, and retrieved in the afternoon when we depart.

Like six-shooters in a saloon.

May God save us from ourselves.

The limitations and lost opportunities of such thinking are numbing and counter-productive to the true purpose of the university.

Consider this observation by Isaac Newton, who lived three centuries ago but surpasses even Albert Einstein among the most important scientists, according to a survey by Britain's Royal Society: *"There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history."*

In the mid-nineteenth century, an iconic American newspaper editor, Horace Greeley, said, *"It is impossible to enslave mentally or socially a Bible-reading people. The principles of the Bible are the groundwork of human freedom."*

Newton and Greeley seem reasonably intelligent by rigorously demanding historical standards.

The value and impact of a particular faith view is not at issue here...that question should be left to seminar rooms seasoned with the power of reason, observation, empiricism, the good will of intelligent people, and civil discourse.

A question of faith and reason.

A question that universities should openly encourage and entertain in every aspect of university life.