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Our Universities: Transparency

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Our Universities: Transparency

H.G. Wells' Invisible Man, Griffin, demonstrated the chimera of ultimate transparency in his novella of 1897. Over and over we see leaders, in universities specifically but in corporate and public life generally, who act as though they can control which of their actions can be noticed. Actions produce reactions though, and always leave traces or chasms behind.

"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?"

Jesus Christ, Book of Matthew, chapter 7, verse 16 The New American Standard Bible

Leaders from all walks of life are eventually judged by the fruit of their leadership. Jesus Christ states this for the ages with a simple admonition that "You will know them by their fruits." Whether or not you believe that Christ was/is God's Son, has not one scintilla of impact on the simple law - we are "known by our fruits."

Isaac Newton postulated in his first law that "an object at rest stays at rest and an object in motion stays in motion with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an 'unbalanced force.'" You need not know anything about Newton to recognize that this law is in effect in the universe. It is the way the world works.

Political leaders who believe obscurity in human machination is possible, and carry out dastardly deeds of any dimension quietly or invisibly, may know the physics of Newton but demonstrate no understanding of the metaphysics of Christ.

Leaders of universities are known by their ideas and actions and for the products and outcomes created by those same ideas and actions.

Unfortunately, in too many public leaders of every stripe, leadership for better or worse is anything but invisible. Illinois provides live theater in which to view thespians at work in grand efforts to cover their tracks. But as surely as dead people vote in Cook County, Christ's law is at work in Illinois too. Rod Blagojevich and George Ryan appreciate the full impact of the laws of the universe, physical and metaphysical.

Laws are laws.

Some university leaders believe they can beat the system... that they can become transparent. Leadership is transparent; it doesn't become transparent, and time always tells the truth, even if leaders don't.

If a university leader, in an act of skullduggery, provides a contract for a friend or relative, it will be known.

If a university leader attempts to manipulate public opinion through an act of chicanery, he can fool Joe Six-pack or Paula Ph.D. for a while, but fruit is fruit.

If a university leader takes credit for something she did not do, or an idea not hers, she can hide behind a cloak of obfuscation for a season. However an “unbalanced force” will affect the path of doer and deed.

Newton knew it. Jesus Christ knew it.

I teach a course in university leadership for graduate students of higher education administration. A fundamental tenant in that course, because of the high bar set by Harvard over three centuries ago with its powerful but simple idea, **Veritas**, (truth) still rules. Integrity is the leadership characteristic that matters. The system will not be beat.

The overseers of Harvard, at a gathering on Jan. 6, 1644, did not see its idea of **Veritas** as a slogan or shibboleth. Rather, those early educators, in the fullness of their human frailty, recognized the laws of God and man. **Veritas** was and is an honest expression of the motivation and result -- read fruit -- as the only significant work the institution could or should carry out.

That kind of clarity is very difficult to see in the politically-charged, greed-defiled, personal-gain-fueled, higher education environment in which we find ourselves. Our universities, if they are to ever again to be something other than commoditisers of course content and reconstituted concepts, better get the picture. This is not high-mindedness or hollow proclamation but the transparent stuff of places of study.

And people know it and vote with their feet, unlike the corpses of Cook County confined by six feet of earth and the mirage of voter registration records.

Leaders better lead and knock off the Griffin charade portrayed by H. G. Wells in *The Invisible Man*. It can't be sustained and damaged institutions pay the cover charge for the next generation.

Jesus Christ knew that. So did Isaac Newton. And Rod Blagojevich now knows it. But some of our university leaders don't get it. Our universities deserve better.